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Exposition *of the* Bible

A SERIES OF EXPOSITIONS COVERING
ALL THE BOOKS OF THE OLD AND
NEW TESTAMENT

BY

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		CHAPTER XIX.	
Hannah's Faith and Trust,	7	Jonathan's Exploit at Michmash,	58
CHAPTER II.		CHAPTER XX.	
Hannah's Faith Rewarded,	10	Saul's Wilfulness,	61
CHAPTER III.		CHAPTER XXI.	
Hannah's Song of Thanksgiving,	12	The Final Rejection of Saul,	64
CHAPTER IV.		CHAPTER XXII.	
Eli's House,	15	David Anointed by Samuel,	67
CHAPTER V.		CHAPTER XXIII.	
Samuel's Vision,	18	David's Early Life,	70
CHAPTER VI.		CHAPTER XXIV.	
The Ark of God Taken by the Philistines,	21	David's Conflict with Goliath,	73
CHAPTER VII.		CHAPTER XXV.	
The Ark among the Philistines,	24	Saul's Jealousy—David's Marriage,	76
CHAPTER VIII.		CHAPTER XXVI.	
Repentance and Revival,	26	Saul's Further Efforts against David,	79
CHAPTER IX.		CHAPTER XXVII.	
National Deliverance—The Philistines Subdued,	29	David and Jonathan,	82
CHAPTER X.		CHAPTER XXVIII.	
The People Demand a King,	32	David at Nob and at Gath,	85
CHAPTER XI.		CHAPTER XXIX.	
Saul Brought to Samuel,	35	David at Adullam, Mizpeh, and Hareth,	88
CHAPTER XII.		CHAPTER XXX.	
First Meeting of Samuel and Saul,	38	David at Keilah, Ziph, and Maon,	91
CHAPTER XIII.		CHAPTER XXXI.	
Saul Anointed by Samuel,	41	David Twice Spares the Life of Saul,	94
CHAPTER XIV.		CHAPTER XXXII.	
Saul Chosen King,	43	David and Nabal,	97
CHAPTER XV.		CHAPTER XXXIII.	
The Relief of Jabesh-Gilead,	46	David's Second Flight to Gath,	100
CHAPTER XVI.		CHAPTER XXXIV.	
Samuel's Vindication of Himself,	49	Saul at Endor,	103
CHAPTER XVII.		CHAPTER XXXV.	
Samuel's Dealings with the People,	52	David at Ziklag,	106
CHAPTER XVIII.		CHAPTER XXXVI.	
Saul and Samuel at Gilgal,	55	The Death of Saul,	110

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL.

BY W. G. BLAIKIE, D. D., LL. D.

CHAPTER I.

HANNAH'S TRIAL AND TRUST.

I SAMUEL I. 1-18.

THE prophet Samuel, like the book which bears his name, comes in as a connecting link between the Judges and the Kings of Israel. He belonged to a transition period. It was appointed to him to pilot the nation between two stages of its history: from a republic to a monarchy; from a condition of somewhat casual and indefinite arrangements to one of more systematic and orderly government. The great object of his life was to secure that this change should be made in the way most beneficial for the nation, and especially most beneficial for its spiritual interests. Care must be taken that while becoming like the nations in having a king, Israel shall not become like them in religion, but shall continue to stand out in hearty and unswerving allegiance to the law and covenant of their fathers' God.

Samuel was the last of the judges, and in a sense the first of the prophets. The last of the judges, but not a military judge; not ruling like Samson by physical strength, but by high spiritual qualities and prayer; not so much wrestling against flesh and blood as against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. In this respect his function as judge blended with his work as prophet. Before him, the prophetic office was but a casual illumination; under him it becomes a more steady and systematic light. He was the first of a succession of prophets whom God placed side by side with the kings and priests of Israel to supply that fresh moral and spiritual force which the prevailing worldliness of the one and formalism of the other rendered so necessary for the great ends for which Israel was chosen. With some fine exceptions, the kings and priests would have allowed the seed of Abraham to drift away from the noble purpose for which God had called them; conformity to the world in spirit if not in form was the prevailing tendency; the prophets were raised up to hold the nation firmly to the covenant, to vindicate the claims of its heavenly King, to thunder judgments against idolatry and all rebellion, and pour words of comfort into the hearts of all who were faithful to their God, and who looked for redemption in Israel. Of this order of God's servants Samuel was the first. And called as he was to this office at a transition period, the importance of it was all the greater. It was a work for which no ordinary man was needed, and for which no ordinary man was found.

Very often the finger of God is seen very clearly in connection with the birth and early training of those who are to become His greatest agents. The instances of Moses, Samson, and John the Baptist, to say nothing of our blessed Lord, are familiar to us all. Very often the family from which the great man is raised up is among the obscurest and least distinguished of the country. The "certain man" who lived in some quiet cottage at Ramathaim-Zophim would never probably have

emerged from his native obscurity but for God's purpose to make a chosen vessel of his son. In the case of this family, and in the circumstances of Samuel's birth, we see a remarkable overruling of human infirmity to the purposes of the Divine will. If Peninnah had been kind to Hannah, Samuel might never have been born. It was the unbearable harshness of Peninnah that drove Hannah to the throne of grace, and brought to her wrestling faith the blessing she so eagerly pled for. What must have seemed to Hannah at the time a most painful dispensation became the occasion of a glorious rejoicing. The very element that aggravated her trial was that which led to her triumph. Like many another, Hannah found the beginning of her life intensely painful, and as a godly woman she no doubt wondered why God seemed to care for her so little. But at evening time there was light; like Job, she saw "the end of the Lord;" the mystery cleared away, and to her as to the patriarch it appeared very clearly that "the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

The home in which Samuel is born has some points of quiet interest about it; but these are marred by serious defects. It is a religious household, at least in the sense that the outward duties of religion are carefully attended to; but the moral tone is defective. First, there is that radical blemish—want of unity. No doubt it was tacitly permitted to a man in those days to have two wives. But where there were two wives there were two centres of interest and feeling, and discord must ensue.

Elkanah does not seem to have felt that in having two wives he could do justice to neither. And he had but little sympathy for the particular disappointment of Hannah. He calculated that a woman's heart-hunger in one direction ought to be satisfied by copious gifts in another. And as to Peninnah, so little idea had she of the connection of true religion and high moral tone, that the occasion of the most solemn religious service of the nation was her time for pouring out her bitterest passion. Hannah is the only one of the three of whom nothing but what is favourable is recorded.

With regard to the origin of the family, it seems to have been of the tribe of Levi. If so, Elkanah would occasionally have to serve the sanctuary; but no mention is made of such service. For anything that appears, Elkanah may have spent his life in the same occupations as the great bulk of the people. The place of his residence was not many miles from Shiloh, which was at that time the national sanctuary. But the moral influence from that quarter was by no means beneficial; a decrepit high priest, unable to restrain the profligacy of his sons, whose vile character brought religion into contempt, and led men to associate gross wickedness with Divine service,—of such a state of things the influence seemed fitted rather to aggravate than to lessen the defects of Elkanah's household.

Inside Elkanah's house we see two strange arrangements of Providence, of a kind that often moves our astonishment elsewhere. First, we see a woman eminently fitted to bring up children, but having none to bring up. On the other hand, we see another woman, whose temper and ways are

fitted to ruin children, entrusted with the rearing of a family. In the one case a God-fearing woman does not receive the gifts of Providence; in the other case a woman of a selfish and cruel nature seems loaded with His benefits. In looking round us, we often see a similar arrangement of other gifts; we see riches, for example, in the very worst of hands; while those who from their principles and character are fitted to make the best use of them have often difficulty in securing the bare necessities of life. How is this? Does God really govern, or do time and chance regulate all? If it were God's purpose to distribute His gifts exactly as men are able to estimate and use them aright, we should doubtless see a very different distribution; but God's aim in this world is much more to try and to train than to reward and fulfil. All these anomalies of Providence point to a future state. What God does we know not now, but we shall know hereafter. The misuse of God's gifts brings its punishment both here and in the life to come. To whom much is given, of them much shall be required. For those who have shown the capacity to use God's gifts aright, there will be splendid opportunities in another life. To those who have received much, but abused much, there come a fearful reckoning and a dismal experience of "the unprofitable servant's doom."

The trial which Hannah had to bear was peculiarly heavy, as is well known, to a Hebrew woman. To have no child was not only a disappointment, but seemed to mark one out as dishonoured by God,—as unworthy of any part or lot in the means that were to bring about the fulfilment of the promise, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." In the case of Hannah, the trial was aggravated by the very presence of Peninnah and her children in the same household. Had she been alone, her mind might not have brooded over her want, and she and her husband might have so ordered their life as almost to forget the blank. But with Peninnah and her children constantly before her eyes, such a course was impossible. She could never forget the contrast between the two wives. Like an aching tooth or an aching head, it bred a perpetual pain.

In many cases home affords a refuge from our trials, but in this case home was the very scene of the trial. There is another refuge from trial, which is very grateful to devout hearts—the house of God and the exercises of public worship. A member of Hannah's race, who was afterwards to pass through many a trial, was able even when far away, to find great comfort in the very thought of the house of God, with its songs of joy and praise, and its multitude of happy worshippers, and to rally his desponding feelings into cheerfulness and hope. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the health of His countenance." But from Hannah this resource likewise was cut off. The days of high festival were her days of bitter prostration.

It was the custom in religious households for the heads of the house to give presents at the public festivals. Elkanah, a kind-hearted but not very discriminating man, kept up the custom, and as we suppose, to compensate Hannah for the want of children, he gave her at these times a worthy or double portion. But his kindness was inconsiderate. It only raised the jealousy of Peninnah. For her and her children to get less than the child-

less Hannah was intolerable. No sense of courtesy restrained her from uttering her feeling. No sisterly compassion urged her to spare the feelings of her rival. No regard for God or His worship kept back the storm of bitterness. With the reckless impetuosity of a bitter heart she took these opportunities to reproach Hannah with her childless condition. She knew the tender spot of her heart, and, instead of sparing it, she selected it as the very spot on which to plant her blows. Her very object was to give Hannah pain, to give her the greatest pain she could. And so the very place that should have been a rebuke to every bitter feeling, the very time which was sacred to joyous festivity, and the very sorrow that should have been kept furthest from Hannah's thoughts, were selected by her bitter rival to poison all her happiness, and overwhelm her with lamentation and woe.

After all, was Hannah or Peninnah the more wretched of the two? To suffer in the tenderest part of one's nature is no doubt a heavy affliction. But to have a heart eager to inflict such suffering on another is far more awful. Young people that sting a comrade when out of temper, that call him names, that reproach him with his infirmities, are far more wretched and pitiable creatures than those whom they try to irritate. It has always been regarded as a natural proof of the holiness of God that He has made man so that there is a pleasure in the exercise of his amiable feelings, while his evil passions, in the very play of them, produce pain and misery. Lady Macbeth is miserable over the murdered king, even while exulting in the triumph of her ambition. Torn by her heartless and reckless passions, her bosom is like a hell. The tumult in her raging soul is like the writhing of an evil spirit. Yes, my friends, if you accept the offices of sin, if you make passion the instrument of your purposes, if you make it your business to sting and to stab those who in some way cross your path, you may succeed for the moment, and you may experience whatever of satisfaction can be found in gloated revenge. But know this, that you have been cherishing a viper in your bosom that will not content itself with fulfilling your desire. It will make itself a habitual resident in your heart, and distil its poison over it. It will make it impossible for you to know anything of the sweetness of love, the serenity of a well-ordered heart, the joy of trust, the peace of heaven. You will be like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. You will find the truth of that solemn word, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

If the heart of Peninnah was actuated by this infernal desire to make her neighbour fret, it need not surprise us that she chose the most solemn season of religious worship to gratify her desire. What could religion be to such a one but a form? What communion could she have, or care to have, with God? How could she realise what she did in disturbing the communion of another heart? If we could suppose her realising the presence of God, and holding soul-to-soul communion with Him, she would have received such a withering rebuke to her bitter feelings as would have filled her with shame and contrition. But when religious services are a mere form, there is absolutely nothing in them to prevent, at such times, the outbreak of the heart's worst passions. There are men and women whose visits to the house of God are often the occasions of rousing their worst, or at least very unworthy, passions. Pride, scorn, malice, vanity—how often are they moved by the

very sight of others in the house of God! What strange and unworthy conceptions of Divine service such persons must have! What a dishonouring idea of God, if they imagine that the service of their bodies or of their lips is anything to Him. Surely in the house of God, and in the presence of God, men ought to feel that among the things most offensive in His eyes are a foul heart, a fierce temper, and the spirit that hateth a brother. While, on the other hand, if we would serve Him acceptably, we must lay aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies, envies and all evil speakings. Instead of trying to make others fret, we should try, young and old alike, to make the crooked places of men's hearts straight, and the rough places of their lives plain; try to give the soft answer that turneth away wrath; try to extinguish the flame of passion, to lessen the sum-total of sin, and stimulate all that is lovely and of good report in the world around us.

But to return to Hannah and her trial. Year by year it went on, and her sensitive spirit, instead of feeling it less, seemed to feel it more. It would appear that, on one occasion, her distress reached a climax. She was so overcome that even the sacred feast remained by her untasted. Her husband's attention was now thoroughly roused. "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" There was not much comfort in these questions. He did not understand the poor woman's feeling. Possibly his attempts to show her how little cause she had to complain only aggravated her distress. Perhaps she thought, "When my very husband does not understand me, it is time for me to cease from man." With the double feeling—my distress is beyond endurance, and there is no sympathy for me in any fellow-creature—the thought may have come into her mind, "I will arise and go to my Father." However it came about, her trials had the happy effect of sending her to God. Blessed fruit of affliction! Is not this the reason why afflictions are often so severe? If they were of ordinary intensity, then, in the world's phrase, we might "grin and bear them." It is when they become intolerable that men think of God. As Archbishop Leighton has said, God closes up the way to every broken cistern, one after another, that He may induce you, baffled everywhere else, to take the way to the fountain of living waters. "I looked on my right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."

Behold Hannah, then, overwhelmed with distress, in "the temple of the Lord" (as His house at Shiloh was called), transacting solemnly with God. "She vowed a vow." She entered into a transaction with God, as really and as directly as one man transacts with another. It is this directness and distinctness of dealing with God that is so striking a feature in the piety of those early times. She asked God for a man child. But she did not ask this gift merely to gratify her personal wish. In the very act of dealing with God she felt that it was His glory and not her personal feelings that she was called chiefly to respect. No doubt she wished the child, and she asked the child in fulfilment of her own vehement desire. But beyond and above that desire there arose in her soul the sense of God's claim and God's glory, and to these high considerations she desired to

subordinate every feeling of her own. If God should give her the man child, he would not be hers, but God's. He would be specially dedicated as a Nazarite to God's service. No razor should come on his head; no drop of strong drink should pass his lips. And this would not be a mere temporary dedication, it would last all the days of his life. Eagerly though Hannah desired a son, she did not wish him merely for personal gratification. She was not to make herself the end of her child's existence, but would sacrifice even her reasonable and natural claims upon him in order that he might be more thoroughly the servant of God.

Hannah, as she continued praying, must have felt something of that peace of soul which ever comes from conscious communion with a prayer-hearing God. But probably her faith needed the element of strengthening which a kindly and favourable word from one high in God's service would have imparted. It must have been terrible for her to find, when the high priest spoke to her, that it was to insult her, and accuse her of an offence against decency itself from which her very soul would have recoiled. Well meaning, but weak and blundering, Eli never made a more outrageous mistake. With firmness and dignity, and yet in perfect courtesy, Hannah repudiated the charge. Others might try to drown their sorrows with strong drink, but she had poured out her soul before God. The high priest must have felt ashamed of his rude and unworthy charge, as well as rebuked by the dignity and self-possession of this much-tried but upright, godly woman. He sent her away with a hearty benediction, which seemed to convey to her an assurance that her prayer would be fulfilled. As yet it is all a matter of faith; but her "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Her burden is completely removed; her soul has returned to its quiet rest. This chapter of the history has a happy ending—"The woman went her way and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

Is not this whole history just like one of the Psalms, expressed not in words but in deeds? First the wail of distress; then the wrestling of the troubled heart with God; then the repose and triumph of faith. What a blessing, amid the multitude of this world's sorrows, that such a process should be practicable! What a blessed thing is faith, faith in God's word, and faith in God's heart, that faith which becomes a bridge to the distressed from the region of desolation and misery to the region of peace and joy? Is there any fact more abundantly verified than this experience is—this passage out of the depths, this way of shaking one's self from the dust, and putting on the garments of praise? Are any of you tired, worried, wearied in the battle of life, and yet ignorant of this blessed process? Do any receive your fresh troubles with nothing better than a growl of irritation—I will not say an angry curse? Alas for your thorny experience! an experience which knows no way of blunting the point of the thorns. Know, my friends, that in Gilead there is a balm for soothing these bitter irritations. There is a peace of God that passeth all understanding, and that keeps the hearts and minds of His people through Christ Jesus. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

But let those who profess to be Christ's see that they are consistent here. A fretful, complaining

Christian is a contradiction in terms. How unlike to Christ! How forgetful such a one is of the grand argument, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" "Be patient, brethren, for the coming of the Lord draweth near." Amid the agitations of life often steal away to the green pastures and the still waters, and they will calm your soul. And while "the trial of your faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, although it be tried with fire," it shall be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER II.

HANNAH'S FAITH REWARDED.

I SAMUEL i. 19-28.

IN all the transactions recorded in these verses, we see in Hannah the directing and regulating power of the family; while Elkanah appears acquiescing cordially in all that she proposes, and devoutly seconding her great act of consecration,—the surrender of Samuel to the perpetual service of God. For a moment it might be thought that Hannah assumed a place that hardly belonged to her: that she became the leader and director in the house, while her proper position was that of a helpmeet to her husband. We are constrained, however, to dismiss this thought, for it does not fit in to the character of Hannah, and it is not in keeping with the general tone of the passage. There are two reasons that account sufficiently for the part she took. In the first place, it was she that had dealt with God in the matter, and it was with her too that God had dealt. She had been God-directed in the earlier part of the transaction, and therefore was specially able to see what was right and proper to be done in following up God's remarkable acknowledgment and answer of her prayer. The course to be taken came to her as an intuition,—an intuition not to be reasoned about, not to be exposed to the criticism of another, to be simply accepted and obeyed. As she gave no heed to those impulses of her own heart that might have desired a different destination for her child, so she was disposed to give none to the impulses of any other. The name, and the training, and the life-work of a child given so remarkably were all clear as sunbeams to her godly heart; and in such a matter it would have been nothing but weakness to confer with flesh and blood.

And in the second place, Elkanah could be in no humour to resist his wife, even if he had had any reason to do so. For he was in a manner reproved of God for not being more concerned about her sadness of spirit. God had treated her sorrow more seriously than he had. God had not said to her that her husband was better to her than ten sons. God had recognised the hunger of her heart for a son as a legitimate craving, and when she brought her wish to Him, and meekly and humbly asked Him to fulfil it, He had heard her prayer, and granted her request. In a sense Hannah, in the depth of her sorrow, had appealed from her husband to a higher court, and the appeal had been decided in her favour. Elkanah could not but feel that in faith, in lofty principle, in nearness of fellowship with God, he had been surpassed by his wife. It was no wonder he surrendered to her the future direction of a life given thus in answer

to her prayers. Yet in thus surrendering his right he showed no sullenness of temper, but acted in harmony with her, not only in naming and dedicating the child, but in taking a vow on himself, and at the proper moment fulfilling that vow. The three bullocks, with the ephah of flour and the bottle of wine brought to Shiloh when the child was presented to the Lord, were probably the fulfilment of Elkanah's vow.

But to come more particularly to what is recorded in the text.

1. We notice, first, the fact of the answer to prayer. The answer was prompt, clear, explicit. It is an important question, Why are some prayers answered and not others? Many a good man and woman feel it to be the greatest trial that their prayers for definite objects are not answered. Many a mother will say, Why did God not answer me when I prayed Him to spare my infant's life? I am sure I prayed with my whole heart and soul, but it seemed to make no difference, the child sank and died just as if no one had been praying for him.

Many a wife will say, Why does God not convert my husband? I have agonised, I have wept and made supplication on his behalf, and in particular, with reference to his besetting infirmity, I have implored God to break his chain and set him free; but there he is, the same as ever. Many a young person under serious impressions will say, Why does God not hear my prayer? I have prayed with heart and soul for faith and love, for peace in believing, for consciousness of my interest in Christ; but my prayers seem directed against a wall of brass, they seem never to reach the ears of the Lord of hosts. In spite of all such objections and difficulties, we maintain that God is the hearer of prayer. Every sincere prayer offered in the name of Christ, is heard, and dealt with by God in such way as seems good to Him. There are good reasons why some prayers are not answered at all, and there are also good reasons why the visible answer to some prayers is delayed. Some prayers are not answered because the spirit of them is bad. "Ye ask but receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." What is asked merely to gratify a selfish feeling is asked amiss. It is not holy prayer; it does not fit in with the sacred purposes of life; it is not asked to make us better, or enable us to serve God better, or make our life more useful to our fellows; but simply to increase our pleasure, to make our surroundings more agreeable. Some prayers are not answered because what is asked would be hurtful; the prayer is answered in spirit though denied in form. A Christian lady, over the sick bed of an only son, once prayed with intense fervour that he might be restored, and positively refused to say, "Thy will be done." Falling asleep, she seemed to see a panorama of her son's life had he survived; it was a succession of sorrows, rising into terrible agonies,—so pitiful a sight that she could no longer desire his life to be prolonged, and gave up the battle against the will of God. Some prayers are not answered at the time, because a discipline of patience is needed for those who offer them; they have to be taught the grace of waiting patiently for the Lord; they have to learn more fully than hitherto to walk by faith, not by sight; they have to learn to take the promise of God against all appearances, and to remember that heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's word shall not pass away.

But whatever be the reasons for the apparent

silence of God, we may rest assured that hearing prayer is the law of His kingdom. Old Testament and New alike bear witness to this. Every verse of the Psalms proclaims it. Alike by precept and example our Lord constantly enforced it. Every Apostle takes up the theme, and urges the duty and the privilege. We may say of prayer as St. Paul said of the resurrection—if prayer be not heard our preaching is vain, and your faith is vain. And what true Christian is there who cannot add testimonies from his own history to the same effect? If the answer to some of your prayers be delayed, has it not come to many of them? Come, too, very conspicuously, so that you were amazed, and almost awed? And if there be prayers that have not yet been answered, or in reference to which you have no knowledge of an answer, can you not afford to wait till God gives the explanation? And when the explanation comes, have you not much cause to believe that it will redound to the praise of God, and that many things, in reference to which you could at the time see nothing but what was dark and terrible, may turn out when fully explained to furnish new and overwhelming testimony that "God is love?"

2. The next point is the name given by Hannah to her son. The name Samuel, in its literal import, does not mean "asked of the Lord," but "heard of the Lord." The reason assigned by Hannah for giving this name to her son is not an explanation of the word, but a reference to the circumstances. In point of fact, "heard of the Lord" is more expressive than even "asked of the Lord," because it was God's hearing (in a favourable sense), more than Hannah's asking, that was the decisive point in the transaction. Still, as far as Hannah was concerned, he was asked of the Lord. The name was designed to be a perpetual memorial of the circumstances of his birth. For the good of the child himself, and for the instruction of all that might come in contact with him, it was designed to perpetuate the fact that before his birth a solemn transaction in prayer took place between his mother and the Almighty. The very existence of this child was a perpetual witness, first of all of the truth that God exists, and then of the truth that He is a prayer-hearing God. The very name of this child is a rebuke to those parents who never think of God in connection with their children, who never thank God for giving them, nor think of what He would like in their education and training. Even where no such special transaction by prayer has taken place as in the case of Samuel's mother, children are to be regarded as sacred gifts of God. "Lo, children are the heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward." Many a child has had the name Samuel given him since these distant days in Judea under the influence of this feeling. Many a parent has felt what a solemn thing it is to receive from God's hands an immortal creature, that may become either an angel or a devil, and to be entrusted with the first stage of a life that may spread desolation and misery on the one hand, or joy and blessing wherever its influence reaches. Do not treat lightly, O parents, the connection between God and your children! Cherish the thought that they are God's gifts, God's heritage to you, committed by Him to you to bring up, but not apart from Him, not in separation from those holy influences which He alone can impart, and which He is willing to impart. What a cruel thing it is to cut this early connection between them and God, and send them drifting through the world like a ship with a for-

saken rudder, that flaps hither and thither with every current of the sea! What a blessed thing when, above all things, the grace and blessing of God are sought by parents for their children, when all the earnest lessons of childhood are directed to this end, and before childhood has passed into youth the grace of God rules the young heart, and the holy purpose is formed to live in His fear through Jesus Christ, and honour Him for evermore!

3. Hannah's arrangements for the child. From the very first she had decided that at the earliest possible period he should be placed under the high priest at Shiloh. Hannah's fulfilment of her vow was to be an ample, prompt, honourable fulfilment. Many a one who makes vows or resolutions under the pressure and pinch of distress immediately begins to pare them down when the pinch is removed, like the merchant in the storm who vowed a hecatomb to Jupiter, then reduced the hecatomb to a single bullock, the bullock to a sheep, the sheep to a few dates; but even these he ate on the way to the altar, laying on it only the stones. Not one jot would Hannah abate of the full sweep and compass of her vow. She would keep the child by her only till he was weaned, and then he should be presented at Shiloh. It is said that Jewish mothers sometimes suckled their children to the age of three years, and this was probably little Samuel's age when he was taken to Shiloh. Meanwhile, she resolved that till that time was reached she would not go up to the feast. Had she gone before her son was weaned she must have taken him with her, and brought him away with her, and that would have broken the solemnity of the transaction when at last she should take him for good and all. No. The very first visit that she and her son should pay to Shiloh would be the decisive visit. The very first time that she should present herself at that holy place where God had heard her prayer and her vow would be the time when she should fulfil her vow. The first time that she should remind the high priest of their old interview would be when she came to offer to God's perpetual service the answer to her prayer and the fruit of her vow. To miss the feast would be a privation, it might even be a spiritual loss, but she had in her son that which itself was a means of grace to her, and a blessed link to God and heaven; while she remained with him God would still remain with her; and in prayer for him, and the people whom he might one day influence, her heart might be as much enlarged and warmed as if she were mingling with the thousands of Israel, amid the holy excitement of the great national feast.

4. Elkanah's offering at Shiloh. When Elkanah heard his wife's plan with reference to Samuel, he simply acquiesced, bade her remain at Shiloh, "only the Lord establish His word." What word? Literally, the Lord had spoken no word about Samuel, unless the word of Eli to Hannah "The God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him" could be regarded as a word from God. That word, however, had already been fulfilled; and Elkanah's prayer meant, The Lord bring to pass those further blessings of which the birth of Samuel was the promise and the prelude; the Lord accept, in due time, the offering of this child to His service, and grant that out of that offering there may come to Israel all the good that it is capable of yielding.

The cordiality with which Elkanah accepted his wife's view of the case is seen further in the am-

ple offering which he took to Shiloh—three bullocks, an ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine. One bullock would have sufficed as a burnt-offering for the child now given for the service of God, and in ver. 25 special mention is made of one being slain. The other two were added to mark the speciality of the occasion, to make the offering, so to speak, round and complete, to testify the ungrudging cordiality with which the whole transaction was entered into. One might perhaps have thought that in connection with such a service there was hardly any need of a bloody sacrifice. A little child of two or three years old—the very type and picture of innocence—surely needed little in the way of expiation. Not so, however, the view of the law of Moses. Even a newborn infant could not be presented to the Lord without some symbol of expiation. There is such a virus of corruption in every human soul that not even infants can be brought to God for acceptance and blessing without a token of atonement. Sin has so separated the whole race from God, that not one member of it can be brought near, can be brought into the region of benediction, without shedding of blood. And if no member of it can be even accepted without atonement, much less can any be taken to be God's servant, taken to stand before Him, to represent Him, to be His organ to others, to speak in His name. What a solemn truth for all who desire to be employed in the public service of Jesus Christ! Remember how unworthy you are to stand before him. Remember how stained your garments are with sin and worldliness, how distracted your heart is with other thoughts and feelings, how poor the service is you are capable of rendering. Remember how gloriously Jesus is served by the angels that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. And when you give yourselves to Him, or ask to be allowed to take your place among His servants, seek as you do so to be sprinkled with the blood of cleansing, own your personal unworthiness, and pray to be accepted through the merit of His sacrifice!

5. And now, the bullock being slain, they bring the child to Eli. Hannah is the speaker, and her words are few and well chosen. She reminds Eli of what she had done the last time she was there. Generous and courteous, she makes no allusion to anything unpleasant that had passed between them. Small matters of that sort are absorbed in the solemnity and importance of the transaction. In her words to Eli she touches briefly on the past, the present, and the future. What occurred in the past was, that she stood there a few years ago praying unto the Lord. What was true of the present was, that the Lord had granted her petition, and given her this child for whom she had prayed. And what was going to happen in the future was (as the Revised Version has it), "I have granted him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he is granted to the Lord."

It is interesting to remark that no word of Eli's is introduced. This Nazarite child is accepted for the perpetual service of God at once and without remark. No remonstrance is made on the score of his tender years. No doubt is insinuated as to how he may turn out. If Samuel's family was a Levitical one, he would have been entitled to take part in the service of God, but only occasionally, and at the Levitical age. But his mother brings him to the Lord long before the Levitical age, and leaves him at Shiloh, bound over to a lifelong service. How was she able to do it? For three years

that child had been her constant companion, had lain in her bosom, had warmed her heart with his smiles, had amused her with his prattle, had charmed her with all his engaging little ways. How was she able to part with him? Would he not miss her too as much as she would miss him? Shiloh was not a very attractive place, Eli was old and feeble, Hophni and Phinehas were beasts, the atmosphere was offensive and pernicious. Nevertheless, it was God's house, and if a little child should be brought to it, capable of rendering to God real service, God would take care of the child. Already he was God's child. Asked of God, and heard of God, he bore already the mark of his Master. God would be with him, as He had been with Joseph, as He had been with Moses—"He shall call on Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will be with him and honour him."

Noble in her spirit of endurance in the time of trial, Hannah is still more noble in the spirit of self-denial in the time of prosperity. It was no common grace that could so completely sacrifice all her personal feelings, and so thoroughly honour God. What a rebuke to those parents that keep back their children from God's service, that will not part with their sons to be missionaries, that look on the ministry of the Gospel as but a poor occupation! What a rebuke, too, to many Christian men and women who are so unwilling to commit themselves openly to any form of Christian service,—unwilling to be identified with religious work! Yet, on the other hand, let us rejoice that in this our age, more perhaps than in any other, so many are willing, nay eager, for Christian service. Let us rejoice that both among young men and young women recruits for the mission-field are offering themselves in such numbers. After all, it is true wisdom, and true policy, although not done as a matter of policy. It will yield far the greatest satisfaction in the end. God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love of His children. And "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

CHAPTER III.

HANNAH'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

I SAMUEL ii. 1-10.

THE emotion that filled Hannah's breast after she had granted Samuel to the Lord, and left him settled at Shiloh, was one of triumphant joy. In her song we see no trace of depression, like that of a bereaved and desolate mother. Some may be disposed to think less of Hannah on this account; they may think she would have been more of a true mother if something of human regret had been apparent in her song. But surely we ought not to blame her if the Divine emotion that so completely filled her soul excluded for the time every ordinary feeling. In the very first words of her song we see how closely God was connected with the emotions that swelled in her breast. "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord." The feeling that was so rapturous was the sense of God's gracious owning of her; His taking her into partnership, so to speak, with Himself; His accepting of her son as an instru-

ment for carrying out His gracious purposes to Israel and the world. Only those who have experienced it can understand the overwhelming blessedness of this feeling. That the infinite God should draw near to His sinful creature, and not only accept him, but identify Himself with him, as it were, taking him and those dearest to him into His confidence, and using them to carry out His plans, is something almost too wonderful for the human spirit to bear. This was Hannah's feeling, as it afterwards was that of Elizabeth, and still more of the Virgin Mary, and it is no wonder that their songs, which bear a close resemblance to each other, should have been used by the Christian Church to express the very highest degree of thankfulness.

The emotion of Hannah was intensified by another consideration. What had taken place in her experience was not the only thing of this kind that had ever happened or that ever was to happen. On the contrary, it was the outcome of a great law of God's kingdom, which law regulated the ordinary procedure of His providence. Hannah's heart was enlarged as she thought how many others had shared or would share what had befallen her; as she thought how such pride and arrogance as that which had tormented her was doomed to be rebuked and brought low under God's government; how many lowly souls that brought their burden to Him were to be relieved; and how many empty and hungry hearts, pining for food and rest, were to find how He "satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

But it would seem that her thoughts took a still wider sweep. Looking on herself as representing the nation of Israel, she seems to have felt that what had happened to her on a small scale was to happen to the nation on a large; for God would draw nigh to Israel as He had to her, make him His friend and confidential servant, humble the proud and malignant nations around him, and exalt him, if only he endeavoured humbly and thankfully to comply with the Divine will. Is it possible that her thoughts took a more definite form? May not the Holy Spirit have given her a glimpse of the great truth—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given?" May she not have surmised that it was to be through one born in the same land that the great redemption was to be achieved? May she not have seen in her little Samuel the type and symbol of another Child, to be more wonderfully born than hers, to be dedicated to God's service in a higher sense, to fulfil all righteousness far beyond anything in Samuel's power? And may not this high theme, carrying her far into future times, carrying her on to the end of the world's history, bearing her up even to eternity and infinity, have been the cause of that utter absence of human regret, that apparent want of motherly heart-sinking, which we mark in the song?

When we examine the substance of the song more carefully, we find that Hannah derives her joy from four things about God:—1. His nature (vv. 2-3); 2. His providential government (vv. 4-8); 3. His most gracious treatment of His saints (v. 9); 4. The glorious destiny of the kingdom of His anointed.

1. In the second and third verses we find comfort derived from (1) God's holiness, (2) His unity, (3) His strength, (4) His knowledge, and (5) His justice.

(1) The holiness, the spotlessness of God is a source of comfort,—“There is none holy as the

Lord.” To the wicked this attribute is no comfort, but only a terror. Left to themselves, men take away this attribute, and, like the Greeks and Romans and other pagans, ascribe to their gods the lusts and passions of poor human creatures. Yet to those who can appreciate it, how blessed a thing is the holiness of God! No darkness in Him, no corruption, no infirmity; absolutely pure. He governs all on the principles of absolute purity; He keeps all up, even in a sinful, crumbling world, to that high standard; and when His schemes are completed, the blessed outcome will be “the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

(2) His unity gives comfort,—“There is none besides Thee.” None to thwart His righteous and gracious plans, or make those to tremble whose trust is placed in Him. He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, “What doest Thou?”

(3) His strength gives comfort,—“Neither is there any rock like our God.” “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, nor is weary? There is no searching of His understanding? He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. 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; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.”

(4) His knowledge gives comfort,—“The Lord is a God of knowledge.” He sees all secret wickedness, and knows how to deal with it. His eye is on every plot hatched in the darkness. He knows His faithful servants, what they aim at, what they suffer, what a strain is often put on their fidelity. And He never can forget them, and never can desert them, for “the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.”

(5) His justice gives comfort. “By Him actions are weighed.” Their true quality is ascertained; what is done for mean, selfish ends stands out before Him in all its native ugliness, and draws down the retribution that is meet. Men may perform the outward services of religion with great regularity and apparent zeal, while their hearts are full of all uncleanness and wickedness. The hypocrite may rise to honour, the thief may become rich, men that prey upon the infirmities or the simplicity of their fellows may prosper; but there is a God in heaven by Whom all evil devices are weighed, and Who in His own time will effectually checkmate all that either deny His existence or fancy they can elude His righteous judgment.

2. These views of God's holy government are more fully enlarged on in the second part of the song (vv. 3-8). The main feature of God's providence dwelt on here is the changes that occur in the lot of certain classes. The class against whom God's providence bears chiefly is the haughty, the self-sufficient, the men of physical might who are ready to use that might to the injury of others. Those again who lie in the path of God's mercies are the weak, the hungry, the childless, the beggar. Hannah uses a variety of figures. Now it is from the profession of soldiers—“the bows of the mighty are broken”; and on the other hand they

that for very weakness were stumbling and staggering are girded with strength. Now it is from the appetite for food—they that were full have had to hire out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry are hungry no more. Now it is from family life, and from a feature of family life that came home to Hannah—"the barren hath borne seven, and she that had many children is waxed feeble." And these changes are the doing of God. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them." If nothing were taught here but that there are great vicissitudes of fortune among men, then a lesson would come from it alike to high and low—let the high beware lest they glory in their fortune, let the low not sink into dejection and despair. If it be further borne in mind that these changes of fortune are all in the hands of God, a further lesson arises, to beware how we offend God, and to live in the earnest desire to enjoy His favour. But there is a further lesson. The class of qualities that are here marked as offensive to God are pride, self-seeking, self-sufficiency both in ordinary matters and in their spiritual development. Your tyrannical and haughty Pharaohs, your high-vaunting Sennacheribs, your pride-intoxicated Nebuchadnezzars, are objects of special dislike to God. So is your proud Pharisee, who goes up to the temple thanking God that he is not as other men, no, nor like that poor publican, who is smiting on his breast, as well such a sinner may. It is the lowly in heart that God takes pleasure in. "Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and in the holy place, but with him also that is of a humble and contrite heart; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one."

When we turn to the song of the Virgin we find the same strain—"He hath showed strength with His arm. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away." Undoubtedly these words have primary reference to the social conditions of men. Thanks are given that the highest privilege that God could bestow on a creature had been conferred not on any one rolling in luxury, but on a maiden of the lowest class. This meaning does not exhaust the scope of the thanksgiving, which doubtless embraces that law of the spiritual kingdom to which Christ gave expression in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Yet it is plain that both the song of Hannah and the song of Mary dwell with complacency on that feature of providence by which men of low degree are sometimes exalted, by which the beggar is sometimes lifted from the dunghill, and set among princes to inherit the throne of glory. Why is this? Can God have any sympathy with the spirit which often prevails in the bosom of the poor towards the rich, which rejoices in their downfall just because they are rich, and in the elevation of others simply because they belong to the same class with themselves? The thought is not to be

entertained for a moment. In God's government there is nothing partial or capricious. But the principle is this. Riches, fulness, luxury are apt to breed pride and contempt of the poor; and it pleases God at times, when such evil fruits appear, to bring down these worthless rich men to the dust, in order to give a conspicuous rebuke to the vanity, the ambition, the remorseless selfishness which were so conspicuous in their character. What but this was the lesson from the sudden fall of Cardinal Wolsey? Men, and even the best of men, thanked God for that fall. Not that it gave them pleasure to see a poor wretch who had been clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, reduced to so pitiful a plight; but because they felt it a righteous thing and a wholesome thing that so proud and so wicked a career should be terminated by a conspicuous manifestation of the displeasure of God. The best instincts of men's nature longed for a check to the monstrous pride and wicked avarice of that man; and when that check was given, and given with such tremendous emphasis, there was not an honest man or woman in all England who did not utter a hearty "Praise God!" when they heard the terrible news.

So also it pleases God to give conspicuous proofs from time to time that qualities that in poor men are often associated with a hard-working, humble career are well-pleasing in His sight. For what qualities on the part of the poor are so valuable, in a social point of view, as industry, self-denying diligence, systematic, unwearied devotion even to work which brings them such scanty remuneration? By far the greater part of such men and women are called to work on, unnoticed and unrewarded, and when their day is over to sink into an undistinguished grave. But from time to time some such persons rise to distinction. The class to which they belong is ennobled by their achievements. When God wished in the sixteenth century to achieve the great object of punishing the Church which had fallen into such miserable inefficiency and immorality, and wrenching half of Europe from its grasp, he found his principal agent in a poor miner's cottage in Saxony. When he desired to summon a sleeping Church to the great work of evangelising India, the man he called to the front was Carey, a poor cobbler of Northampton. When it was his purpose to present His Church with an unrivalled picture of the Christian pilgrimage, its dangers and trials, its joys, its sorrows, and its triumphs, the artist appointed to the task was John Bunyan, the tinker of Elstow. When the object was to provide a man that would open the great continent of Africa to civilization and Christianity, and who needed, in order to do this, to face dangers and trials before which all ordinary men had shrunk, he found his agent in a poor spinner-boy, who was working twelve hours a day in a cotton mill on the banks of the Clyde. In all such matters, in humbling the rich and exalting the poor, God's object is not to punish the one because they are rich, or to exalt the other because they are poor. In the one case it is to punish vices bred from an improper use of wealth, and in the other to reward virtues that have sprung from the soil of poverty. "Poor and pious parents," wrote David Livingstone on the tombstone of his parents at Hamilton, when he wished to record the grounds of his thankfulness for the position in life which they held. "I would not exchange my peasant father for any king," said Thomas Carlyle.

when he thought of the gems of Christian worth that had shone out all the brighter amid the hard conditions of his father's life. Riches are no reproach, and poverty is no merit; but the pride so apt to be bred of riches, the idleness, the injustice, the selfishness so often associated with them, is what God likes to reprove; and the graces that may be found in the poor man's home, the unwearied devotion to duty, the neighbourliness and brotherly love, and above all the faith, the hope, and the charity are what He delights to honour.

In the spiritual sense there is no more important ingredient of character in God's sight than the sense of emptiness, and the conviction that all goodness, all strength, all blessing must come from God. The heart, thus emptied, is prepared to welcome the grace that is offered to supply its needs. Air rushes into an exhausted receiver. Where the idea prevails either that we are possessed of considerable native goodness, or that we have only to take pains with ourselves to get it, there is no welcome for the truth that "by grace are ye saved." Whoever says, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," knows not that "he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Miserable they who live and die in this delusion! Happy they who have been taught, "In me dwelleth no good thing." "All my springs are in Thee," Jesus Christ "is made to us of God wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." "Out of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace."

3. The third topic in Hannah's song is God's very gracious treatment of His saints. "He will keep the feet of His saints." The term "feet" shows the reference to be to their earthly life, their steps, their course through the world. It is a promise which others would care for but little, but which is very precious to all believers. To know the way in which God would have one to go is of prime importance to every godly heart. To be kept from wandering into unblest ways, kept from trifling with temptation, and dallying with sin is an infinite blessing. "Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all Thy commandments." "He will keep the feet of His saints."

4. And lastly, Hannah rejoices in that dispensation of mercy that was coming in connection with God's "king, His anointed" (v. 10). Guided by the Spirit, she sees that a king is coming, that a kingdom is to be set up, and ruled over by the Lord's anointed. She sees that God's blessing is to come down on the king, the anointed, and that under him the kingdom is to prosper and to spread. Did she catch a glimpse of what was to happen under such kings as David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah? Did she see in prophetic vision the loving care of such kings for the welfare of the people, their holy zeal for God, their activity and earnestness in doing good? And did the glimpse of these coming benefits suggest to her the thought of what was to be achieved by Him who was to be the anointed one, the Messiah in a higher sense? We can hardly avoid giving this scope to her song. It was but a small measure of these blessings that her son personally could bring about. Her son seems to give place to a higher Son, through whom the land would be blessed as no one else could have blessed it, and all hungry and thirsty souls would be guided to that living bread and living

water of which whosoever ate and drank should never hunger or thirst again.

What is the great lesson of this song? That for the answer to prayer, for deliverance from trial, for the fulfilment of hopes, for the glorious things yet spoken of the city of our God, our most cordial thanksgivings are due to God. Every Christian life presents numberless occasions that very specially call for such thanksgiving. But there is one thanksgiving that must take precedence of all—"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last day."

CHAPTER IV.

ELI'S HOUSE.

I SAMUEL ii. 11-36.

THE notices of little Samuel, that alternate in this passage with the sad accounts of Eli and his house, are like the green spots that vary the dull stretches of sand in a desert; or like the little bits of blue sky that charm your eye when the firmament is darkened by a storm. First we are told how, after Elkanah and Hannah departed, the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest (v. 11); then comes an ugly picture of the wickedness practised at Shiloh by Eli's sons (vv. 12-17); another episode brings Samuel again before us, with some details of his own history and that of his family (vv. 18-21); this is followed by an account of Eli's feeble endeavours to restrain the wickedness of his sons (vv. 22-25). Once more we have a bright glimpse of Samuel, and of his progress in life and character, very similar in terms to St. Luke's account of the growth of the child Jesus (v. 26); and finally the series closes with a painful narrative—the visit of a man of God to Eli, reproving his guilty laxity in connection with his sons, and announcing the downfall of his house (vv. 27-36). In the wickedness of Eli's sons we see the enemy coming in like a flood; in the progress of little Samuel we see the Spirit of the Lord lifting up a standard against him. We see evil powerful and most destructive; we see the instrument of healing very feeble—a mere infant. Yet the power of God is with the infant, and in due time the force which he represents will prevail. It is just a picture of the grand conflict of sin and grace in the world. It was verified emphatically when Jesus was a child. How slender the force seemed that was to scatter the world's darkness, roll back its wickedness, and take away its guilt! How striking the lesson for us not to be afraid though the apparent force of truth and goodness in the world be infinitesimally small. The worm Jacob shall yet thresh the mountains; the little flock shall yet possess the kingdom; "there shall be a handful of corn on the top of the mountains, the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth."

It is mainly the picture of Eli's house and the behaviour of his family that fills our eye in this chapter. It is to be noticed that Eli was a descendant, not of Eleazar, the elder son of Aaron,

but of Ithamar, the younger. Why the high priesthood was transferred from the one family to the other, in the person of Eli, we do not know. Evidently Eli's claim to the priesthood was a valid one, for in the reproof addressed to him it is fully assumed that he was the proper occupant of the office. One is led to think that either from youth or natural feebleness the proper heir in Eleazar's line had been unfit for the office, and that Eli had been appointed to it as possessing the personal qualifications which the other wanted. Probably therefore he was a man of vigour in his earlier days, one capable of being at the head of affairs; and if so his loose government of his family was all the more worthy of blame. It could not have been that the male line in Eleazar's family had failed; for in the time of David Zadok of the family of Eleazar was priest, along with Abiathar, of the family of Ithamar and Eli. From Eli's administration great things would seem to have been expected; all the more lamentable and shameful was the state of things that ensued.

1. First our attention is turned to the gross wickedness and scandalous behaviour of Eli's sons. There are many dark pictures in the history of Israel in the time of the Judges,—pictures of idolatry, pictures of lust, pictures of treachery, pictures of bloodshed; but there is none more awful than the picture of the high priest's family at Shiloh. In the other cases members of the nation had become grossly wicked; but in this case it is the salt that has lost its savour—it is those who should have led the people in the ways of God that have become the ringleaders of the devil's army. Hophni and Phinehas take their places in that unhonoured band where the names of Alexander Borgia, and many a high ecclesiastic of the Middle Ages send forth their stinking savour. They are marked by the two prevailing vices of the lowest natures—greed and lechery. Their greed preys upon the worthy men who brought their offerings to God's sanctuary in obedience to His law; their lechery seduces the very women who, employed in the service of the place (see Revised Version), might have reasonably thought of it as the gate to heaven rather than the avenue of hell. So shameless were they in both kinds of vice that they were at no pains to conceal either the one or the other. It mattered nothing what regulations God had made as to the part of the offering the priest was to have; down went their fork into the sacrificial caldron, and whatever it drew up became theirs. It mattered not that the fat of certain sacrifices was due to God, and that it ought to have been given off before any other use was made of the flesh; the priests claimed the flesh in its integrity, and if the offerer would not willingly surrender it their servant fell upon him and wrenched it away. It is difficult to say whether the greater hurt was inflicted by such conduct on the cause of religion or on the cause of ordinary morality. As for the cause of religion, it suffered that terrible blow which it always suffers whenever it is dissociated from morality. The very heart and soul is torn out of religion when men are led to believe that their duty consists in merely believing certain dogmas, attending to outward observances, paying dues, and "performing" worship. What kind of conception of God can men have who are encouraged to believe that justice, mercy, and truth have nothing to do with His service? How can they ever think of Him as a Spirit, who requires of them that worship Him that they worship Him in spirit and in truth? How can such religion give

men a real veneration for God, or inspire them with that spirit of obedience, trust, and delight of which he ought ever to be the object? Under such religion all belief in God's existence tends to vanish. Though His existence may continue to be acknowledged, it is not a power, it has no influence; it neither stimulates to good nor restrains from evil. Religion becomes a miserable form, without life, without vigour, without beauty—a mere carcase deserving only to be buried out of sight.

And if such a condition of things is fatal to religion, it is fatal to morality too. Men are but too ready by nature to play loose with conscience. But when the religious heads of the nation are seen at once robbing man and robbing God, and when this is done apparently with impunity, it seems foolish to ordinary men to mind moral restraints. "Why should we mind the barriers of conscience" (the young men of Israel might argue) "when these young priests disregard them? If we do as the priest does we shall do very well." Men of corrupt lives at the head of religion, who are shameless in their profligacy, have a lowering effect on the moral life of the whole community. Down and down goes the standard of living. Class after class gets infected. The mischief spreads like dry rot in a building; ere long the whole fabric of society is infected with the poison.

2. And how did the high priest deal with this state of things? In the worst possible way. He spoke against it but he did not act against it. He showed that he knew of it, he owned it to be very wicked; but he contented himself with words of remonstrance, which in the case of such hardened transgression were of no more avail than a child's breath against a brazen wall. At the end of the day, it is true that Eli was a decrepit old man, from whom much vigour of action could not have been expected. But the evil began before he was so old and decrepit, and his fault was that he did not restrain his sons at the time when he ought and might have restrained them. Yes, but even if Eli was old and decrepit when the actual state of things first burst on his view, there was enough of the awful in the conduct of his sons to have roused him to unwonted activity. David was old and decrepit, lying feebly at the edge of death, when word was brought to him that Adonijah had been proclaimed king in place of Solomon, for whom he had destined the throne. But there was enough of the startling in this intelligence to bring back a portion of its youthful fire to David's heart, and set him to devise the most vigorous measures to prevent the mischief that was so ready to be perpetrated. Fancy King David sending a meek message to Adonijah—"Nay, my son, it is not on your head but on Solomon's that my crown is to rest; go home, my son, and do nothing more in a course hurtful to yourself and hurtful to your people." But; it was this foolish and most inefficient course that Eli took with his sons. Had he acted as he should have acted at the beginning, matters would never have come to such a flagrant pass. But when the state of things became so terrible, there was but one course that should have been thought of. When the wickedness of the acting priests was so outrageous that men abhorred the offering of the Lord, the father ought to have been sunk in the high priest; the men who had so dishonoured their office should have been driven from the place, and the very remembrance of the crime they had committed should have been obliterated by the holy lives and holy service of better men. It was inex-

cusable in Eli to allow them to remain. If he had had a right sense of his office he would never for one moment have allowed the interest of his family to outweigh the claims of God. What! Had God in the wilderness, by a solemn and deadly judgment, removed from office and from life the two elder sons of Aaron simply because they had offered strange fire in their censers? And what was the crime of offering strange fire compared to the crime of robbing God, of violating the Decalogue, of openly practising gross and daring wickedness, under the very shadow of the tabernacle? If Eli did not take steps for stopping these atrocious proceedings, he might rely on it that steps would be taken in another quarter—God Himself would mark His sense of the sin.

For what were the interests of his sons compared with the credit of the national worship? What mattered it that the sudden stroke would fall on them with startling violence? If it did not lead to their repentance and salvation it would at least save the national religion from degradation, and it would thus bring benefit to tens of thousands in the land. All this Eli did not regard. He could not bring himself to be harsh to his own sons. He could not bear that they should be disgraced and degraded. He would satisfy himself with a mild remonstrance, notwithstanding that every day new disgrace was heaped on the sanctuary, and new encouragement given to others to practise wickedness, by the very men who should have been foremost in honouring God, and sensitive to every breath that would tarnish His name.

How differently God's servants acted in other days! How differently Moses acted when he came down from the mount and found the people worshipping the golden calf! "It came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. . . . And Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate through the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour." Do we think this too sharp and severe a retribution? At all events it marked in a suitable way the enormity of the offence of Aaron and the people, and the awful provocation of Divine judgments which the affair of the golden calf implied. It denoted that in presence of such a sin the claims of kindred were never for a moment to be thought of; and in the blessing of Moses it was a special commendation of the zeal of Levi, that "he said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children." It was the outrageous character of the offence in the matter of the golden calf that justified the severe and abrupt procedure; but it was Eli's condemnation that though the sin of his sons was equally outrageous, he was moved to no indignation, and took no step to rid the tabernacle of men so utterly unworthy.

It is often very difficult to explain how it comes to pass that godly men have had ungodly children.

There is little difficulty in accounting for this on the present occasion. There was a fatal defect in the method of Eli. His remonstrance with his sons is not made at the proper time. It is not made in the fitting tone. When disregarded, it is not followed up by the proper consequences. We can easily think of Eli letting the boys have their own will and their own way when they were young; threatening them for disobedience, but not executing the threat; angry at them when they did wrong, but not punishing the offence; vacillating perhaps between occasional severity and habitual indulgence, till by-and-bye all fear of sinning had left them, and they coolly calculated that the grossest wickedness would meet with nothing worse than a reproof. How sad the career of the young men themselves! We must not forget that, however inexcusable their father was, the great guilt of the proceeding was theirs. How must they have hardened their hearts against the example of Eli, against the solemn claims of God, against the holy traditions of the service, against the interests and claims of those whom they ruined, against the welfare of God's chosen people! How terribly did their familiarity with sacred things react on their character, making them treat even the holy priesthood as a mere trade, a trade in which the most sacred interests that could be conceived were only as counters, to be turned by them into gain and sensual pleasure! Could anything come nearer to the sin against the Holy Ghost? No wonder though their doom was that of persons judicially blinded and hardened. They were given up to a reprobate mind, to do those things that were not convenient. "They hearkened not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." They experienced the fate of men who deliberately sin against the light, who love their lusts so well that nothing will induce them to fight against them: they were so hardened that repentance became impossible, and it was necessary for them to undergo the full retribution of their wickedness.

3. But it is time we should look at the message brought to Eli by the man of God. In that message Eli was first reminded of the gracious kindness shown to the house of Aaron in their being entrusted with the priesthood, and in their having an honourable provision secured for him. Next he is asked why he trampled on God's sacrifice and offering (marg. Revised Version), and considered the interests of his sons above the honour of God? Then he is told that any previous promise of the perpetuity of his house is now qualified by the necessity God is under to have regard to the character of his priests, and honour or degrade them accordingly. In accordance with this rule the house of Eli would suffer a terrible degradation. He (this includes his successors in office) would be stript of "his arm," that is, his strength. No member of his house would reach a good old age. The establishment at Shiloh would fall more and more into decay, as if there was an enemy in God's habitation. Any who might remain of the family would be a grief and distress to those whom Eli represented. The young men themselves, Hophni and Phinehas, would die the same day. Those who shared their spirit would come crouching to the high priest of the day and implore him to put them into one of the priest's offices, not to give them the opportunity of serving God, but that they might eat a piece of bread. Terrible catalogue of curses and calamities! Oh, sin, what a brood of sorrows dost thou bring forth! Oh, young man, who walkest in the ways of thine heart, and in

the sight of thine eyes, what a myriad of distresses dost thou prepare for those whom thou art most bound to care for and to bless! Oh, minister of the gospel, who allowest thyself to tamper with the cravings of the flesh till thou hast brought ruin on thyself, disgrace on thy family, and confusion on thy Church, what infatuation was it to admit thy worst foe to the sanctuary of thy bosom, and allow him to establish himself in the citadel till thou couldst not get quit of him, so that thou art now helpless in his hands, with nothing but sadness for thy present inheritance, and for the future a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!

One word, in conclusion, respecting that great principle of the kingdom of God announced by the prophet as that on which Jehovah would act in reference to His priests—"Them that honour Me I will honour, but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." It is one of the grandest sayings in Scripture. It is the eternal rule of the kingdom of God, not limited to the days of Hophni and Phinehas, but, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, eternal as the ordinances of heaven. It is a law confirmed by all history; every man's life confirms it, for though this life is but the beginning of our career, and the final clearing up of Divine providence is to be left to the judgment-day, yet when we look back on the world's history we find that those that have honoured God, God has honoured them, while they that have despised Him have indeed been lightly esteemed. However men may try to get their destiny into their own hands; however they may secure themselves from this trouble and from that; however, like the first Napoleon, they may seem to become omnipotent, and to wield an irresistible power, yet the day of retribution comes at last; having sown to the flesh, of the flesh also they reap corruption. While the men that have honoured God, the men that have made their own interests of no account, but have set themselves resolutely to obey God's will and do God's work; the men that have believed in God as the holy Ruler and Judge of the world, and have laboured in private life and in public service to carry out the great rules of His kingdom,—justice, mercy, the love of God and the love of man,—these are the men that God has honoured; these are the men whose work abides; these are the men whose names shine with undying honour, and from whose example and achievements young hearts in every following age draw their inspiration and encouragement. What a grand rule of life it is, for old and young! Do you wish a maxim that shall be of high service to you in the voyage of life, that shall enable you to steer your barque safely both amid the open assaults of evil, and its secret currents, so that, however tossed you may be, you may have the assurance that the ship's head is in the right direction, and that you are moving steadily towards the desired haven; where can you find anything more clear, more fitting, more sure and certain than just these words of the Almighty, "Them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed"?

CHAPTER V.

SAMUEL'S VISION.

I SAMUEL iii.

It is evident that Samuel must have taken very kindly to the duties of the sanctuary. He was

manifestly one of those who are sanctified from infancy, and whose hearts go from the first with sacred duties. There were no wayward impulses to subdue, no hankerings after worldly freedom and worldly enjoyment; there was no necessity for coercive measures, either to restrain him from outbursts of frivolity or to compel him to diligence and regularity in his calling. From the first he looked with solemn awe and holy interest on all that related to the worship of God; that, to him, was the duty above all other duties, the privilege above all other privileges. God to him was not a mere idea, an abstraction, representing merely the dogmas and services of religion. God was a reality, a personality, a Being who dealt very closely with men, and with whom they were called to deal very closely too. We can easily conceive how desirous little Samuel would be to know something of the meaning of the services at Shiloh; how scrupulous to perform every duty, how regular and real in his prayers, and how full of reverence and affection for God. He would go about all his duties with a grave, sweet, earnest face, conscious of their importance and solemnity; always thinking more of them than of anything else,—thinking perhaps of the service of the angels in heaven, and trying to serve God as they served Him, to do God's will on earth as it was done in heaven.

At the opening of this chapter he seems to be the confidential servant of the high priest, sleeping near to him, and in the habit of receiving directions from him. He must be more than a child now, otherwise he would not be entrusted, as he was, with the opening of the doors of the house of the Lord.

The evil example of Hophni and Phinehas, so far from corrupting him, seems to have made him more resolute the other way. It was horrid and disgusting; and as gross drunkenness on the part of a father sometimes sets the children the more against it, so the profligacy of the young priests would make Samuel more vigilant in every matter of duty. That Eli bore as he did with the conduct of his sons must have been a great perplexity to him, and a great sorrow; but it did not become one at his time of life to argue the question with the aged high priest. This conduct of Eli's did not in any respect diminish the respectful bearing of Samuel towards him, or his readiness to comply with his every wish. For Eli was God's high priest; and in engaging to be God's servant in the tabernacle Samuel knew well that he took the high priest as his earthly master.

1. The first thing that engages our special attention in this chapter is the singular way in which Samuel was called to receive God's message in the temple.

The word of God was rare in those days; there was no open vision, or rather no vision that came abroad, that was promulgated to the nation as the expression of God's will. From the tone in which this is referred to, it was evidently looked on as a want, as placing the nation in a less desirable position than in days when God was constantly communicating His will. Now, however, God is to come into closer contact with the people, and for this purpose He is to employ a new instrument as the medium of His messages. For God is never at a loss for suitable instruments—they are always ready when peculiar work has to be done. In the selection of the boy Samuel as his prophet there is something painful, but likewise something very interesting. It is painful to find the old high

priest passed over, his venerable years and venerable office would naturally have pointed to him; but in spite of many good qualities, in one point he is grossly unfaithful, and the very purpose of the vision now to be made is to declare the outcome of his faithlessness. But it is interesting to find that already the child of Hannah is marked out for this distinguished service. Even in his case there is opportunity for verifying the rule, "Them that honour Me I will honour." His entire devotion to God's service, so beautiful in one of such tender years, is the sign of a character well adapted to become the medium of God's habitual communications with His people. Young though he is, his very youth in one sense will prove an advantage. It will show that what he speaks is not the mere fruit of his own thinking, but is the message of God. It will show that the spiritual power that goes forth with his words is not his own native force, but the force of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. It will thus be made apparent to all that God has not forsaken His people, corrupt and lamentably wicked though the young priests are.

Both Eli and Samuel sleep within the precincts of the tabernacle. Not, however, in the sanctuary itself, but in one of those buildings that opened into its courts, which were erected for the accommodation of the priests and Levites. Eli's sight was failing him, and perhaps the care of the lamp as well as the door was entrusted to Samuel. The lamp was to burn always (Exod. xxvii. 20), that is, it was to be trimmed and lighted every morning and evening (Exod. xxx. 7, 8); and to attend to this was primarily the high priest's duty. The lamp had doubtless been duly trimmed, and it would probably continue burning through a good part of the night. It was not yet out when a voice fell on the ears of Samuel, loud enough to rouse him from the profound slumber into which he had probably fallen. Thinking it was Eli's, he ran to his side; but Eli had not called him. Again the voice sounded, again Samuel springs to his feet and hastens to the high priest; again he is sent back with the same assurance. A third time the voice calls; a third time the willing and dutiful Samuel flies to Eli's side, but this time he is sent back with a different answer. Hitherto Samuel had not known the Lord—that is, he had not been cognisant of His way of communicating with men in a supernatural form—and it had never occurred to him that such a thing could happen in his case. But Eli knew that such communications were made at times by God, and, remembering the visit of the man of God to himself, he may have surmised that this was another such occasion. The voice evidently was no natural voice; so Samuel is told to lie down once more, to take the attitude of simple receptiveness, and humbly invite God to utter His message.

There are some lesser traits of Samuel's character in this part of the transaction which ought not to be passed over without remark. The readiness with which he springs from his bed time after time, and the meekness and patience with which he asks Eli for his orders, without a word of complaint on his apparently unreasonable conduct, make it very clear that Samuel had learned to subdue two things—to subdue his body and to subdue his temper. It is not an easy thing for a young person in the midst of a deep sleep to spring to his feet time after time. In such circumstances the body is very apt to overcome the mind. But Samuel's mind overcame the body. The body was the

servant, not the master. What an admirable lesson Samuel had already learned! Few parts of early education are so important as to learn to keep the body in subjection. To resist bodily cravings, whether greater or smaller, which unfit one for duty; temptations to drink, or smoke, or dawdle, or lie in bed, or waste time when one ought to be up and doing; to be always ready for one's work, punctual, methodical, purpose-like, save only when sickness intervenes,—denotes a very admirable discipline for a young person, and is a sure token of success in life. Not less admirable is that control over the temper which Samuel had evidently acquired. To be treated by Eli as he supposed that he had been, was highly provoking. Why drag him out of bed at that time of night at all? Why drag him over the cold stones in the chill darkness, and why tantalise him first by denying that he called him and then by calling him again? As far as appears, Samuel's temper was in no degree ruffled by the treatment he appeared to be receiving from Eli; he felt that he was a servant, and Eli was his master, and it was his part to obey his master, however unreasonable his treatment might be.

2. We proceed now to the message itself, and Samuel's reception of it. It is substantially a repetition of what God had already communicated to Eli by the man of God a few years before; only it is more peremptory, and the bearing of it is more fixed and rigid. When God denounced His judgment on Eli's house by the prophet, he seems to have intended to give them an opportunity to repent. If Eli had bestirred himself then, and banished the young men from Shiloh, and if his sons in their affliction and humiliation had repented of their wickedness, the threatened doom might have been averted. So at least we are led to believe by this second message having been superadded to the first. Now the opportunity of repentance has passed away. God's words are very explicit—"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." After the previous warning, Eli seems to have gone on lamenting but not chastising. Hophni and Phinehas seem to have gone on sinning as before, and heedless of the scandal they were causing. In announcing to Samuel the coming catastrophe, God shows Himself thoroughly alive to the magnitude of the punishment He is to inflict, and the calamity that is to happen. It is such that the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. God shows also that, painful though it is, it has been deliberately determined, and no relenting will occur when once the terrible retribution begins. "In that day will I perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end." But terrible though the punishment will be, there is only too good cause for it. "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." There are some good parents whose sons have made themselves vile, and they would fain have restrained them but their efforts to restrain have been in vain. The fault of Eli was, that he might have restrained them and he did not restrain them. In those times fathers had more authority over their families than is given them now. The head of the house was counted responsible for the house, because it was only by his neglecting the power he had that his family could become openly wicked. It was only by Eli neglecting the power

he had that his sons could have become so vile. Where his sons were heirs to such sacred functions there was a double call to restrain them, and that call he neglected. He neglected it at the time when he might have done it, and that time could never be recalled.

So, there is an age when children may be restrained, and if that age is allowed to pass the power of restraining them goes along with it. There are faults in this matter on the part of many parents, on the right hand and on the left. Many err by not restraining at all. Mothers begin while their children are yet infants to humour their every whim, and cannot bear to hold back from them anything they may wish. It is this habit that is liable to have such a terrible reaction. There are other parents that while they restrain do not restrain wisely. They punish, but they do not punish in love. They are angry because their children have broken their rules; they punish in anger, and the punishment falls merely as the blow of a stronger person on a weaker. It does not humble, it does not soften. What awful consequences it often brings! What skeletons it lodges in many a house! God has designed the family to be the nurse of what is best and purest in human life, and when this design is crossed then the family institution, which was designed to bring the purest joy, breeds the darkest misery. And this is one of the forms of retribution on wickedness which we see carried out in their fulness in the present life! How strange, that men should be in any doubt as to God carrying out the retribution of wickedness to the bitter end! How singular they should disbelieve in a hell! The end of many a career is written in these words:—"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts."

3. And now we go on to the meeting of Eli and Samuel. Samuel is in no haste to communicate to Eli the painful message he has received. He has not been required to do it, and he lies till the morning, awake we may believe, but staggered and dismayed. As usual he goes to open the doors of God's house. And then it is that Eli calls him, "What is the thing that He hath said unto thee?" he asks. He adjures Samuel to tell him all. And Samuel does tell him all. And Eli listens in silence, and when it is over he says, with meek resignation, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

We are touched by this behaviour of Eli. First we are touched by his bearing toward Samuel. He knows that God has conferred an honour on Samuel which He has not bestowed on him, but young though Samuel is he feels no jealousy, he betrays no sign of wounded pride. It is not easy for God's servants to bear being passed over in favour of others, in favour of younger men. A feeling of mortification is apt to steal on them, accompanied with some bitterness toward the object of God's preference. This venerable old man shows nothing of that feeling. He is not too proud to ask Samuel for a full account of God's message. He will not have him leave anything out, out of regard to his feelings. He must know the whole, however painful it may be. He has learned to reverence God's truth, and he cannot bear the idea of not knowing all. And Samuel, who did not wish to tell him anything, is now constrained to tell him the whole. "He

told him every whit, and hid nothing from him." He did not shun to declare to him the whole counsel of God. Admirable example for all God's servants! How averse some men are to hear the truth! and how prone are we to try to soften what is disagreeable in our message to sinners—to take off the sharp edge, and sheathe it in generalities and possibilities. It is no real kindness. The kindest thing we can do is to declare God's doom on sin, and to assure men that any hopes they may cherish of His relenting to do as He has said are vain hopes—"When I begin," says God, "I will also make an end."

And we are touched further by Eli's resignation to God's will. The words of Samuel must have raised a deep agony in his spirit when he thought of the doom of his sons. Feeble though he was, there might have arisen in his heart a gust of fierce rebellion against that doom. But nothing of the kind took place. Eli was memorable for the passive virtues. He could bear much, though he could dare little. He could submit, but he could not fight. We find him here meekly recognising the Divine will. God has a right to do what He will with His own; and who am I that I should cry out against Him? He is the Supreme Disposer of all events; why should a worm like me stand in His way? He submits implicitly to God. "The thing formed must not say to Him that formed him, Why hast Thou formed me thus?" What God ordains must be right. It is a terrible blow to Eli, but he may understand the bearings of it better in another state. He bows to that Supreme Will which he has learned to trust and to honour above every force in the universe.

Yes, we are touched by Eli's meekness and submission. And yet, though Eli had in him the stuff that martyrs are often made of, his character was essentially feeble, and his influence was not wholesome. He wanted that resolute purpose which men like Daniel possessed. His will was too feeble to control his life. He was too apprehensive of immediate trouble, of present inconvenience and unpleasantness, to carry out firm principles of action against wickedness, even in his own family. He was a memorable instance of the soundness of the principle afterwards laid down by St. Paul: "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" He greatly needed the exhortation which God gave to Joshua—"Be strong and of a good courage." It is true his infirmity was one of natural temperament. Men might say he could not help it. Neither can one overcome temperament altogether. But men of feeble temperament, especially when set over others, have great need to watch it, and ask God to strengthen them where they are weak. Divine grace has a wonderful power to make up the defects of nature. Timid, irresolute Peter was a different man after his fall. Divine grace turned him into a rock after all. The coward who had shrunk from before a maiden got courage to defy a whole Sanhedrim. In the ministers of God's house the timid, crouching spirit is specially unseemly. They, at least, would need to rest on firm convictions, and to be governed by a resolute will. "Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

4. Samuel is now openly known to be the prophet of the Lord. "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground." Little didst thou think, Hannah,

some twenty years ago, that the child thou didst then ask of the Lord would ere long supersede the high priest who showed so little tact and judgment in interpreting the agitation of thy spirit! No, thou hast no feeling against the venerable old man; but thou canst not but wonder at the ups and downs of Providence; thou canst not but recall the words of thine own song, "He bringeth low, and lifteth up." And Samuel has not to fight his way to public recognition, or wait long till it come. "All Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."

And by-and-bye other oracles came to him, by which all men might have known that he was the recognised channel of communication between God and the people. We shall see in our next chapter into what trouble the nation was brought by disregarding his prophetic office, and recklessly determining to drag the ark of God into the battlefield. Meanwhile we cannot but remark what a dangerous position, in a mere human point of view, Samuel now occupied. The danger was that which a young man encounters when suddenly or early raised to the possession of high spiritual power. Samuel, though little more than a boy, was now virtually the chief man in Israel. Set so high, his natural danger was great. But God, who placed him there, sustained in him the spirit of humble dependence. After all he was but God's servant. Humble obedience was still his duty. And in this higher sphere his career was but a continuation of what had been described when it was said, "The child Samuel ministered to the Lord in Shiloh."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARK OF GOD TAKEN BY THE PHILISTINES.

I SAMUEL iv.

WE are liable to form an erroneous impression of the connection of Samuel with the transactions of this chapter, in consequence of a clause which ought to belong to the last chapter, being placed, in the Authorised Version, at the beginning of this. The clause "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" belongs really to the preceding chapter. It denotes that Samuel was now over all Israel the recognised channel of communication between the people and God. But it does not denote that the war with the Philistines, of which mention is immediately made, was undertaken at Samuel's instance. In fact, the whole chapter is remarkable for the absence of Samuel's name. What is thus denoted seems to be that Samuel was not consulted either about the war or about the taking of the ark into the battle. Whatever he may have thought of the war, he would undoubtedly have been horrified at the proposal about the ark. That whole transaction must have seemed to him a piece of infatuation. Probably it was carried into effect in a kind of tumultuous frenzy. But there can be no reasonable doubt that whatever Samuel could have done to oppose it would have been done with the greatest eagerness.

The history is silent about the Philistines from the days of Samson. The last we have heard of them was the fearful tragedy at the death of that great Judge of Israel, when the house fell upon the lords, and the people, and such a prodigious

slaughter of their great men took place. From that calamity they seem now to have revived. They would naturally be desirous to revenge that unexampled catastrophe, and as Ebenezer and Aphek are situated in the land of Israel, it would seem that the Philistines were the aggressors. They had come up from the Philistine plain to the mountainous country of Israel, and no doubt had already sent many of the people to flight through whose farms they came. As the Israelites had no standing army, the troops that opposed the Philistines could be little better than an untrained horde. When they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines, and they slew of the army about four thousand men. In a moral point of view the defeat was strange; the Philistines had made the attack, and the Israelites were fighting for their homes and hearths; yet victory was given to the invaders, and in four thousand homes of Israel there was lamentation and woe.

But this was not really strange. Israel needed chastening, and the Philistines were God's instruments for that purpose. In particular, judgment was due to the sons of Eli; and the defeat inflicted by the Philistines, and the mistaken and superstitious notion which seized on the people that they would do well to take God's ark into the battle, were the means by which their punishment came. How often Providence seems to follow a retrograde course! And yet it is a forward course all the time, although from our point of view it seems backward; just as those planets which are nearer the sun than the earth sometimes seem to us to reverse the direction of their movement; although if we were placed in the centre of the system we should see very plainly that they are moving steadily forward all the time.

Three things call for special notice in the main narrative of this chapter—1. The preparation for the battle; 2. The battle itself; and 3. The result when the news was carried to Shiloh.

1. The preparation for the battle was the sending of the ark of the Lord to Shiloh, so that Israel might fight under the immediate presence and protection of their God.

It seemed a brilliant idea. Whichever of the elders first suggested it, it caught at once, and was promptly acted on. There were two great objections to it, but if they were so much as entertained they certainly had no effect given them. The first was, that the elders had no legitimate control over the ark. The custody of it belonged to the priests and the Levites, and Eli was the high priest. If the rulers of the nation at any time desired to remove the ark (as David afterwards did when he placed it on Mount Zion), that could only be done after clear indications that the step was in accordance with the will of God, and with the full consent of the priests. There is no reason to suppose that any means were taken to find out whether its removal to the camp was in accordance with the will of God; and as to the mind of the priests, Eli was probably passed over as too old and too blind to be consulted, and Hophni and Phinehas would be restrained by no scruples from an act which every one seemed to approve. The second great objection to the step was that it was a superstitious and irreverent use of the symbol of God's presence. Evidently the people ascribed to the symbol the glorious properties that belonged only to the reality. They expected that the symbol of God's presence would do for them all that might be done by His presence itself. And doubtless there had been occasions when the symbol and the

reality went together. In the wilderness, in the days of Moses, "It came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee" (Num. x. 35). But these were occasions determined by the cloud rising and going before the host, an unmistakable indication of the will of God (Num. ix. 15-22). God's real presence accompanied the ark on these occasions, and all that was expressed in the symbol was actually enjoyed by the people. There was no essential or inherent connection between the two; the actual connection was determined merely by the good pleasure of God. It pleased Him to connect them, and connected they were. But the ignorant and superstitious elders forgot that the connection between the symbol and the reality was of this nature; they believed it to be inherent and essential. In their unthinking and unreasoning minds the symbol might be relied on to produce all the effect of the reality. If only the ark of God were carried into the battle, the same effect would take place as when Moses said in the wilderness, "Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered."

Could anything show more clearly the unspiritual tendencies of the human mind in its conceptions of God, and of the kind of worship He should receive? The idea of God as the living God is strangely foreign to the human heart. To think of God as one who has a will and purpose of His own, and who will never give His countenance to any undertaking that does not agree with that will and purpose, is very hard for the unspiritual man. To make the will of God the first consideration in any enterprise, so that it is not to be thought of if He do not approve, and is never to be despaired of if He be favourable, is a bondage and a trouble beyond his ability. Yet even superstitious men believe in a supernatural power. And they believe in the possibility of enlisting that power on their side. And the method they take is to ascribe the virtue of a charm to certain external objects with which that power is associated. The elders of Israel ascribed this virtue to the ark. They never inquired whether the enterprise was agreeable to the mind and will of God. They never asked whether in this case there was any ground for believing that the symbol and the reality would go together. They simply ascribed to the symbol the power of a talisman, and felt secure of victory under its shadow.

Would that we could think of this spirit as extinct even in Christian communities! What is the Romish and the very High Church doctrine of the sacraments but an ascription to them, when rightly used, of the power of a charm? The sacraments, as Scripture teaches, are symbols of very glorious realities, and wherever the symbols are used in accordance with God's will the realities are sure to be enjoyed. But it has long been the doctrine of the Church of Rome, and it is the doctrine of Churches, with similar views, that the sacraments are reservoirs of grace, and that to those who place no fatal obstacle in their way, grace comes from them *ex opere operato*, from the very act of receiving them. It is the Protestant and scriptural doctrine that by stimulating faith, by encouraging us to look to the living Saviour, and draw from Him in whom all fulness dwells, the sacraments bring to us copious supplies of grace, but that without the presence of that living Saviour they would be merely as empty wells. The High Church view regards them as charms, that have a

magic virtue to bless the soul. The superstitious mother thinks if only her child is baptised it will be saved, the act of baptism will do it, and she never thinks of the living Saviour and His glorious grace. The dying sinner thinks, if only he had the last sacraments, he would be borne peacefully and well through the dark scenes of death and judgment, and forgets that the commandment of Scripture is not, Look unto the last sacraments, but, "Look unto Me and be ye saved." Alas! what will men not substitute for personal dealings with the living God? The first book and the last book of the Bible present sad proof of his recoil from such contact. In Genesis, as man hears God's voice, he runs to hide himself among the trees of the garden. In Revelation, when the Judge appears, men call on the mountains to fall on them and hide them from Him that sitteth on the throne. Only when we see God's face, beautiful and loving, in Christ, can this aversion be overcome.

If the presence of the ark in the field of battle did much to excite the hopes of the Israelites, it did not less to raise the fears of their opponents. The shout with which its arrival was hailed by the one struck something of consternation into the breasts of the other. But now, an effect took place on which the Israelites had not reckoned. The Philistines were too wise a people to yield to panic. If the Hebrew God, that did such wonders in the wilderness, was present with their opponents, there was all the more need for their bestirring themselves and quitting them like men. The elders of Israel had not reckoned on this wise plan. It teaches us, even from a heathen point of view, never to yield to panic. Even when everything looks desperate, there may be some untried resource to fall back on. And if this be a lesson to be learnt from pagans, much more surely may it be thought of by believers, who know that man's extremity is often God's opportunity, and that no peril is too imminent for God not to be able to deliver.

2. And now the battle rages. The hope of misguided Israel turns out an illusion. They find, to their consternation, that the symbol does not carry the reality. It pleases God to allow the ark with which His name is so intimately associated to be seized by the enemy. The Philistines carry everything before them. The ark is taken, Hophni and Phinehas are slain, and there fall of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

Can we fancy the feelings of the two priests who attended the ark as the defeat of the army of Israel became inevitable? The ark would probably be carried near the van of the army, preceded by some of the most valiant troops of Israel. No doubt it had been reckoned on that as soon as its sacred form was recognised by the Philistines, fear would seize on them, and they would fly before it. It must have made the two priests look grave when nothing of the kind took place, but the host of the Philistines advanced in firm and intrepid phalanx to the fight. But surely the first onset of the advanced guard will show with whose army the victory is to lie. The advanced guards are at close quarters, and the men of Israel give way. Was there conscience enough left in these two men to flash into their minds that God, whose Holy Spirit they had vexed, was turned to be their enemy, and was now fighting against them? Did they, in that supreme moment, get one of those momentary glimpses, in which the whole iniquities of a lifetime seem marshalled before the soul, and the

enormity of its guilt overwhelms it? Did they feel the anguish of men caught in their own iniquities, every hope perished, death inevitable, and after death the judgment? There is not one word, either in this chapter or in what precedes it, from which the slightest inference in their favour can be drawn. They died apparently as they had lived, in the very act of dishonouring God. With the weapons of rebellion in their hands, and the stains of guilt on their hearts, they were hurried into the presence of the Judge. Now comes the right estimate of their reckless, guilty life. All the arts of sophistry, all the refuges of lies, all their daring contempt of the very idea of a retribution on sin, are swept away in a moment. They are confronted with the awful reality of their doom. They see more vividly than even Eli or Samuel the truth of one part, certainly, of the Divine rule—"Them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

The time of guilty pleasure has passed for ever away; the time of endless retribution has begun. Oh, how short, how miserable, how abominable appears to them now the revelry of their evil life! what infatuation it was to forswear all the principles in which they had been reared, to laugh at the puritanic strictness of their father, to sit in the seat of the scorner, and pour contempt on the law of God's house! How they must have cursed the folly that led them into such awful ways of sin, how sighed in vain that they had not in their youth chosen the better part, how wished they had never been born!

3. But we must leave the field of battle and hasten back to Shiloh. Since the ark was carried off Eli must have had a miserable time of it, reproaching himself for his weakness if he gave even a reluctant assent to the plan, and feeling that uncertainty of conscience which keeps one even from prayer, because it makes one doubtful if God will listen. Poor old man of ninety-eight years, he could but tremble for the ark! His official seat had been placed somewhere on the wayside, where he would be near to get tidings from the field of any one who might come with them, and quite probably a retinue of attendants was around him. At last a great shout of horror is heard, for a man of Benjamin has come in sight with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. It is but too certain a sign of calamity. But who could have thought of the extent of the calamity which with such awful precision he crowded into his answer? Israel is fled before the Philistines—calamity the first; there hath been a great slaughter among the people—calamity the second; thy two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are slain—calamity the third; and last, and most terrible of all, the ark of God is taken! The ark of God is taken! The Divine symbol, with its overshadowing cherubim and its sacred light, into which year by year Eli had gone alone to sprinkle the blood of atonement on the mercy-seat, and where he had solemnly transacted with God on behalf of the people, was in an enemy's hands! The ark, that no Canaanite or Amalekite had ever touched, on which no Midianite or Ammonite had ever laid his polluted finger, which had remained safe and sure in Israel's custody through all the perils of their journeys and all the storms of battle, was now torn from their grasp! And there perishes with it all the hope of Israel, and all the sacred service which was associated with it; and Israel is a widowed, desolate, godless people, without hope and without God in the world; and all this has come because they dragged it away from

its place, and these two sons of mine, now gone to their account, encouraged the profanation!

"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."

This was calamity the fifth; but even yet the list was not exhausted. "His daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered; and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed, for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not, for thou hast borne a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel; because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken."

Poor, good woman! with such a husband she had no doubt had a troubled life. The spring of her spirit had probably been broken long ago; and what little of elasticity yet remained was all too little to bear up under such an overwhelming load. But it may have been her comfort to live so near to the house of God as she did, and to be thus reminded of Him who had commanded the sons of Aaron to bless the people saying, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." But now the ark of God is taken, its services are at an end, and the blessing is gone. The tribes may come up to the feasts as before, but not with the bright eye or the merry shouts of former days; the bullock may smoke on the altar, but where is the sanctuary in which Jehovah dwelt, and where the mercy-seat for the priest to sprinkle the blood, and where the door by which he can come out to bless the people? Oh, my hapless child, what shall I call thee, who hast been ushered on this day of midnight gloom into a God-forsaken and dishonoured place? I will call thee Ichabod, for the glory is departed. The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken.

What an awful impression these scenes convey to us of the overpowering desolation that comes to believing souls with the feeling that God has taken His departure. Tell us that the sun is no longer to shine; tell us that neither dew nor rain shall ever fall again to refresh the earth; tell us that a cruel and savage nation is to reign unchecked and unchallenged over all the families of a people once free and happy; you convey no such image of desolation as when you tell to pious hearts that God has departed from their community. Let us learn the obvious lesson, to do nothing to provoke such a calamity. It is only when resisted and dishonoured that the Spirit of God departs—only when He is driven away. Oh, beware of everything that grieves Him—everything that interferes with His gracious action on your souls. Beware of all that would lead God to say, "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek My face." Let our prayer be the cry of David:—"Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARK AMONG THE PHILISTINES.

I SAMUEL v., vi.

ALTHOUGH the history in Samuel is silent as to the doings of the Philistines immediately after their great victory over Israel, yet we learn from other parts of the Bible (Psalm lxxviii. 60-64; Jeremiah vii. 12, xxvi. 9) that they proceeded to Shiloh, massacred the priests, wrecked the city, and left it a monument of desolation, as it continued to be ever after. Probably this was considered an appropriate sequel to the capture of the ark—a fitting mode of completing and commemorating their victory over the national God of the Hebrews. For we may well believe that it was this unprecedented feature of their success that was uppermost in the Philistines' mind. The prevalent idea among the surrounding nations regarding the God of the Hebrews was that He was a God of exceeding power. The wonders done by Him in Egypt still filled the popular imagination (ch. vi. 6); the strong hand and the outstretched arm with which He had driven out the seven nations of Canaan and prepared the way for His people were not forgotten. Neither in more recent conflicts had any of the surrounding nations obtained the slightest advantage over Him. It was in His name that Barak and Deborah had defeated the Canaanites; it was the sword of the Lord and of Gideon that had thrown such consternation into the hearts of the Midianites. But now the tide was completely turned; not only had the Hebrew God failed to protect His people, but ruin had come on both Him and them, and His very sanctuary was in Philistine hands. No wonder the Philistines were marvellously elated. Let us sweep from the face of the earth every trace and memorial of His worship, was their cry. Let us inflict such humiliation on the spot sacred to His name that never again shall His worshippers be able to regain their courage and lift up their heads, and neither we nor our children shall tremble any more at the mention of His terrible deeds.

We have not one word about Samuel in connection with all this. The news from the battlefield, followed by the death of Eli and of the wife of Phinehas, must have been a terrible blow to him. But besides being calm of nature (as his bearing showed after he got the message about Eli's house), he was habitually in fellowship with God, and in this habit enjoyed a great help towards self-possession and promptitude of action in sudden emergencies and perplexities. That the ill-advised scheme for carrying the ark into battle implied any real humiliation of the God of Israel, or would have any evil effect on the covenant sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he could not for a moment suppose. But the confusion and trouble that would arise, especially if the Philistines advanced upon Shiloh, was a very serious consideration. There was much left at Shiloh which needed to be cared for. There were sacred vessels, and possibly national records, which must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. By what means Samuel was able to secure the safety of these; by what means he secured his own personal safety when "the priests fell by the sword" (Psalm lxxviii. 64), we cannot say. But the Lord was with Samuel, and even in this hour of national horror He directed his proceedings, and established upon him the work of his hands.

The fact to which we have drawn attention, that it was over the God of Israel that the Philistines had triumphed, is the key to the transactions recorded so minutely in the fifth and sixth chapters. The great object of these chapters is to show how God undeceived the Philistines on this all-important point. He undeceived them in a very quiet, undemonstrative manner. On certain occasions God impresses men by His great agencies,—by fire and earthquake and tempest, by "stormy wind fulfilling His word." But these are not needed on this occasion. Agencies much less striking will do the work. God will recover His name and fame among the nations by much humbler forces. By the most trifling exertion of His power, these Philistines will be brought to their wit's end, and all the wisdom of their wisest men and all the craft of their most cunning priests will be needed to devise some propitiation for One who is infinitely too strong for them, and to prevent their country from being brought to ruin by the silent working of His resistless power.

1. First of all, the ark is carried to Ashdod, where stood the great temple of their God, Dagon. It is placed within the precincts of the temple, in some place of subordination, doubtless, to the place of the idol. Perhaps the expectation of the Philistines was that in the exercise of his supernatural might their god would bring about the mutilation or destruction of the Hebrew symbol. The morning showed another sight. It was Dagon that was humiliated before the ark—fallen to the ground upon his face. Next day a worse humiliation had befallen him. Besides having fallen, his head and hands were severed from the image, and only the stump remained. And besides this, the people were suffering extensively from a painful disease, emerods or hemorrhoids, and this too was ascribed to the influence of the God of the Hebrews. The people of Ashdod had no desire to prolong the contest. They gathered the lords of the Philistines and asked what was to be done. The lords probably concluded that it was a case of mere local ill-luck. But what had happened at Ashdod would not happen elsewhere. Let the ark be carried to Gath.

2. To Gath, accordingly, the ark is brought. But no sooner is it there than the disease that had broken out at Ashdod falls upon the Gittites, and the mortality is terrible. The people of Gath are in too great haste to call again on the lords of the Philistines to say what is to be done. They simply carry the ark to Ekron.

3. And little welcome it gets from the Ekronites. It is now recognised as the symbol of an angry God, whose power to punish and to destroy is unlimited. The Ekronites are indignant at the people of Gath. "They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people." The destruction at Ekron seems to have been more awful than at the other places—"The cry of the city went up to heaven." The lords of the Philistines are again convened, to deliberate over the failure of their last advice. There is no use trying any other place in the country. The idea of local ill-luck is preposterous. Let it go again to its own place! is the cry. Alas that we have destroyed Shiloh, for where can we send it now? We can risk no further mistakes. Let us convene the priests and the diviners to determine how it is to be got quit of, and with what gifts or offerings it is to be accompanied. Would only we had never touched it!

The priests and the diviners give a full answer

on all the points submitted to them. First, the ark when sent away must contain an offering, in order to propitiate the Hebrew God for the insults heaped on Him. The offering was to be in the form of golden emerods and golden mice. It would appear that in addition to the disease that had broken out on the bodies of the people they had had in their fields the plague of mice. These field-mice bred with amazing rapidity, and sometimes consumed the whole produce of the field. There is a slight difficulty about numbers here. There are to be five golden emerods and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines (vi. 3); but it is said after (ver. 18) that the number of the golden mice was according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities and country villages. It is surmised, however, that (as in the Septuagint) the number *five* should not be repeated in the middle of the first passage (vi. 4, 5), but that it should run, "five golden emerods, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, and golden mice, images of the mice that destroy the land." The idea of presenting offerings to the gods corresponding with the object in connection with which they were presented was often given effect to by heathen nations. "Those saved from shipwreck offered pictures of the shipwreck, or of the clothes which they had on at the time, in the Temple of Isis; slaves and captives, in gratitude for the recovery of their liberty, offered chains to the Lares; retired gladiators, their arms to Hercules; and in the fifth century a custom prevailed among Christians of offering in their churches gold or silver hands, feet, eyes, etc., in return for cures effected in those members respectively in answer to prayer. This was probably a heathen custom transferred into the Christian Church; for a similar usage is still found among the heathen in India" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

4. Next, as to the manner in which the ark was to be sent away. A new cart was to be made, and two milch cows which had never been in harness before were to be fastened to the cart. This was to be out of respect to the God of Israel; new things were counted more honourable, as our Lord rode on a colt "whereon never man had yet sat," and His body was laid in a new sepulchre. The cows were to be left without guidance to determine their path; if they took the road to Judea, the road up the valley to Bethshemesh, that would be a token that all their trouble had come from the God of the Hebrews; but if they took any other road, the road to any place in the Philistine country, that would prove that there had only been a coincidence, and no relation of cause and effect between the capture of the ark and the evils that had befallen them. It was the principle of the lot applied to determine a grave moral question. It was a method which, in the absence of better light, men were ready enough to resort to in those times, and which on one memorable occasion was resorted to in the early Christian Church (Acts i.). The much fuller light which God has given men on moral and religious questions greatly restricts, if it does not indeed abolish, the lawful occasions of resorting to such a method. If it be ever lawful, it can only be so in the exercise of a devout and solemn spirit, for the apostles did not make use of it by itself, but only after earnest prayer that God would make the lot the instrument of making known His will.

At last the ark leaves the land of the Philistines. For seven terrible months it had spread among them anxiety, terror, and death. Nothing but utter ruin seemed likely to spring from a longer residence of the ark in their territories. Glad were they to get rid of it, golden emerods, golden mice, new cart, milch kine, and all. We are reminded of a scene in Gospel history, that took place at Gadara after the devils drove the herd of swine over the cliff into the lake. The people of the place besought Jesus to depart out of their coasts. It is a solemn truth that there are aspects of God's character, aspects of the Saviour's character, in which He is only a terror and a trouble. These are the aspects in which God is seen opposed to what men love and prize, tearing their treasures away from them, or tearing them away from their treasures. It is an awful thing to know God in these aspects alone. Yet it is the aspect in which God usually appears to the sinner. It is the aspect in which our consciences present Him when we are conscious of having incurred His displeasure. And while man remains a sinner and in love with his sin, he may try to disguise the solemn fact by his own mind, but it is nevertheless true that his secret desire is to get rid of God. As the apostle puts it, he does not like to retain God in his knowledge (Rom. i. 28). He says to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job xxi. 14). Nay, he goes a step further—"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1). Where he still makes some acknowledgment of Him, he may try to propitiate Him by offerings, and to make up for the transgressions he commits in some things by acts of will-worship, or voluntary humiliation in other things. But alas! of how large a portion even of men in Christian lands is it true that they do not love God. Their hearts have no yearning for Him. The thought of Him is a disturbing, uncomfortable element. Heart communion with Him is a difficulty not to be overcome. Forms of worship that leave the heart unexercised are a great relief. Worship *performed* by choirs and instruments and æsthetic rules comes welcome as a substitute for the intercourse and homage of the soul. Could anything demonstrate more clearly the need of a great spiritual change? What but the vision of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself can effect it? And even the glorious truths of redemption are not in themselves efficacious. The seed needs to fall on good soil. He that commanded the light to shine out of darkness must shine in our minds to give the light of the glory of God in the face of His Anointed. But surely it is a great step towards this change to feel the need of it. The heart that is honest with God, and that says, "O God Almighty, I do not love Thee, I am not happy in Thy presence, I like life better without Thee; but I am convinced that this is a most wretched condition, and most sinful. Wilt Thou, in infinite mercy, have compassion on me? Wilt Thou so change me that I may come to love Thee, to love Thy company, to welcome the thought of Thee, and to worship Thee in spirit and in truth?"—such a heart, expressing itself thus, will surely not be forsaken. How long it may be ere its quest is granted we cannot tell; but surely the day will come when the new song shall be put in its mouth—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and ten-

der mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

5. And now the ark has reached Bethshemesh, in the tribe of Judah. The lords of the Philistines have followed it, watching it, as Miriam watched her infant brother on the Nile, to see what would become of it. Nor do they turn back till they have seen the men of Bethshemesh welcome it, till they have seen the Levites take it down from the cart, till they have seen the cart cleft, and the cows offered as a trespass offering, and till they have seen their own golden jewels, along with the burnt-offerings and sacrifices of the people of Bethshemesh, presented in due form to the Lord.

Thus far all goes well at Bethshemesh. The ark is on Hebrew soil. The people there have no fear either of the emerods or of the mice that so terribly distressed their Philistine neighbours. After a time of great depression the sun is beginning to smile on Israel again. The men of Bethshemesh are reaping their barley-harvest—that is one mercy from God. And here most unexpectedly appears the sight that of all possible sights was the most welcome to their eyes; here, unhurt and unruined, is the ark of the covenant that had been given up for lost, despaired of probably, even by its most ardent friends. How could Israel hope to gain possession of that apparently insignificant box except by an invasion of the Philistines in overwhelming force—in such force as a nation that had but lately lost thirty thousand men was not able to command? And even if such an overwhelming expedition were to be arranged, how easy would it not be for the Philistines to burn the ark, and thus annihilate the very thing, to recover which the war was undertaken? Yet here is the ark back without the intervention of a single soldier. No ransom has been given for it, no blow struck, nothing promised, nothing threatened. Here it comes, as if unseen angels had fetched it, with its precious treasures and still more precious memories just as before! It was like a foreshadow of the return from the captivity—an experience that might have found expression in the words, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."

Happy men of Bethshemesh, for whom God prepared so delightful a surprise. Truly He is able to do in us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! Never let us despair of God, or of any cause with which He is identified. "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;" "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

But alas! the men of Bethshemesh did not act according to the benefit received. Their curiosity prevailed above their reverence: they looked into the ark of the Lord. As if the sacred vessel had not had enough of indignity in the din of battle, in the temples of the uncircumcised Philistines, and in the cart drawn by the kine, they must expose it to a yet further profanation! Alas for them! their curiosity prevailed over their reverence. And for this they had to pay a terrible penalty. "The Lord smote of the men of Bethshemesh fifty thousand and three score and ten men." It is the general opinion, however, that an error has slipped into the text that makes the deaths amount to fifty thousand threescore and ten.

Bethshemesh was never more than a village or little town, and could not have had anything like so great a population. Probably the threescore and ten, without the fifty thousand, is all that was originally in the text. Even that would be "a great slaughter" in the population of a little town. It was a very sad thing that an event so joyous should be clouded by such a judgment. But how often are times and scenes which God has made very bright marred by the folly and recklessness of men!

The prying men of Bethshemesh have had their counterparts many a time in more recent days. Many men, with strong theological proclivities, have evinced a strong desire to pry into the "secret things which belong to the Lord our God." Foreknowledge, election, free will, sin's punishment—men have often forgot that there is much in such subjects that exceeds the capacity of the human mind, and that as God has shown reserve in what He has revealed about them, so men ought to show a holy modesty in their manner of treating them. And even in the handling of sacred things generally, in the way of theological discussion, a want of reverence has very often been shown. It becomes us all most carefully to beware of abusing the gracious condescension which God has shown in His revelation, and in the use which He designs us to make of it. It was an excellent rule a foreign theologian laid down for himself, to keep up the spirit of reverence—never to speak of God without speaking to God.

God has drawn very near to us in Christ, and given to all that accept of Him the place and privileges of children. He allows us to come very near to Him in prayer. "In everything," He says, "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known unto God." But while we gratefully accept these privileges, and while in the enjoyment of them we become very intimate with God, never let us forget the infinite distance between us, and the infinite condescension manifested in His allowing us to enter into the holiest of all. Never let us forget that in His sight we are "as dust and ashes," unworthy to lift up our eyes to the place where His honour dwelleth. To combine reverence and intimacy in our dealings with God,—the profoundest reverence with the closest intimacy, is to realise the highest ideal of worship. God Himself would have us remember, in our approaches to Him, that He is in heaven and we on the earth. "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity and whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, but with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones."

CHAPTER VIII.

REPENTANCE AND REVIVAL.

I SAMUEL vii. 1-9.

WITH the men of Bethshemesh the presence of the ark had become the same terror as it had been successively at Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. Instead of the savour of life to life, it had proved a savour of death to death. Instead of a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, it had become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They sent therefore to

their neighbours at Kirjath-jearim, and begged them to come down and remove the ark. This they readily did. More timid men might have said, The ark has brought nothing but disaster in its train; we will have nothing to do with it. There was faith and loyalty to God shown in their readiness to give accommodation to it within their bounds. Deeming a high place to be the kind of situation where it should rest, they selected the house of Abinadab in the hill, he being probably a Levite. To keep the ark they set apart his son Eleazar, whose name seems to indicate that he was of the house of Aaron. They seem to have done all they could, and with due regard to the requirements of the law, for the custody of the sacred symbol. But Kirjath-jearim was not turned into the seat of the national worship. There is no word of sacrificial or other services being performed there. There is nothing to indicate that the annual feasts were held at this place. The ark had a resting-place there—nothing more.

And this lasted for twenty years. It was a long and dreary time. A rude shock had been given to the sacred customs of the people, and the comely order of the Divine service among them. The ark and the other sacred vessels were separated from each other. If, as seems likely (1 Sam. xxi.), the daily offerings and other sacred services ordained by Moses were offered at this time at Nob, a sense of imperfection could not but belong to them, for the ark of the covenant was not there. Incompleteness would attach to any public rites that might now be celebrated. The service of Baal and Ashtaroth would have a less powerful rival than when the service of Jehovah was conducted in all due form and regularity at Shiloh. During these years the nation seems to have been somewhat listless on the subject, and to have made no effort to remove the ark to a more suitable place. Kirjath-jearim was not in the centre, but on the very edge of the country, looking down into the territory of the Philistines, not far from the very cities where the ark had been in captivity, a constant reminder to the Israelites of its degradation. That Samuel was profoundly concerned about all this we cannot doubt. But he seems to have made no effort to remedy it, most probably because he knew it to be God's order first to make the people sensible of their wickedness, and only thereafter to restore to them free access to Himself.

What then was Samuel doing during the twenty years that the ark was at Kirjath-jearim? We can answer that question only conjecturally, only from what we know of his general character. It cannot be doubted that in some way or other he was trying to make the nation sensible of their sins against God; to show them that it was to these sins that their subjection to the Philistines was due; and to urge them to abandon their idolatrous practices if they desired a return to independence and peace. Perhaps he began at this period to move about from place to place, urging those views, as he moved about afterwards when he held the office of Judge (vii. 16). And perhaps he was laying the foundations of those schools of the prophets that afterwards were associated with his name. Whenever he found young men disposed to his views he would doubtless cultivate their acquaintance, and urge them to steadfastness and progress in the way of the Lord. There is nothing said to indicate that Samuel was connected with the priestly establishment at Nob.

There are two great services for God and for

Israel in which we find Samuel engaged in the first nine verses of this chapter: 1. In exhorting and directing them with a view to bring them into a right state before God. 2. This being accomplished, in praying for them in their time of trouble, and obtaining Divine help when the Philistines drew near in battle.

1. In the course of time the people appear to have come to feel how sad and desolate their national life was without any tokens of God's presence and grace. "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." The expression is a peculiar one, and some critics, not understanding its spiritual import, have proposed to give it a different meaning. But for this there is no cause. It seems to denote that the people, missing God, under the severe oppression of the Philistines, had begun to grieve over the sins that had driven Him away, and to long after Him, to long for His return. These symptoms of repentance, however, had not shown themselves in a very definite or practical form. Samuel was not satisfied with the amount of earnestness evinced as yet. He must have more decided evidence of sincerity and repentance. He insisted on it that they must "put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among them, and prepare their hearts unto the Lord and serve Him only."

Now the putting away of the strange gods and Ashtaroth was a harder condition than we at first should suppose. Some are inclined to fancy that it was a mere senseless and ridiculous obstinacy that drew the Israelites so much to the worship of the idolatrous gods of their neighbours. In reality the temptation was of a much more subtle kind. Their religious worship as prescribed by Moses had little to attract the natural feelings of the human heart. It was simple, it was severe, it was self-denying. The worship of the pagan nations was more lively and attractive. Fashionable entertainments and free-and-easy revelries were super-added to please the carnal mind. Between Hebrew and heathen worship, there was something of the contrast that you find between the severe simplicity of a Puritan meeting and the gorgeous and fashionable splendour of a great Romish ceremonial. To put away Baalim and Ashtaroth was to abjure what was fashionable and agreeable, and fall back on what was unattractive and sombre. Was it not, too, an illiberal demand? Was it not a sign of narrowness to be so exclusively devoted to their own religion that they could view that of their neighbours with no sort of pleasure? Why not acknowledge that in other religions there was an element of good, that the services in them were the expression of a profound religious sentiment, and were therefore entitled to a measure of praise and approval? It is very certain that with this favourite view of modern liberalism neither Samuel nor any of the prophets had the slightest sympathy. No. If the people were in earnest now, they must show it by putting away every image and every object and ornament that was connected with the worship of other gods. Jehovah would have their homage on no other terms. If they chose to divide it between Him and other gods, they might call on them for help and blessing; for it was most certain that the God of Israel would receive no worship that was not rendered to Him alone.

But the people were in earnest; and this first demand of Samuel was complied with. We are to remember that the people of Israel, in their typical significance, stand for those who are by grace in

covenant with God, and that their times of degeneracy represent, in the case of Christians, seasons of spiritual backsliding, when the things of this world are too keenly sought, when the fellowship of the world is habitually resorted to, when the soul loses its spiritual appetite, and religious services become formal and cold. Does there begin to dawn on such a soul a sense of spiritual poverty and loneliness? Does the spirit of the hymn begin to breathe from it—

“Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.”

Then the first steps towards revival and communion must be the forsaking of these sins, and of ways of life that prepare the way for them. The sorrow for sin that is working in the conscience is the work of the Holy Ghost; and if the Holy Ghost be resisted in this His first operation—if the sins, or ways towards sin, against which He has given His warning be persisted in, the Spirit is grieved and His work is stopped. The Spirit calls us to set our hearts against these sins, and “prepare them unto the Lord.”

Let us mark carefully this last expression. It is not enough that in church, or at some meeting, or in our closet, we experience a painful conviction how much we have offended God, and a desire not to offend Him in like manner any more. We must “prepare our hearts” for this end. We must remember that in the world with which we mingle we are exposed to many influences that remove God from our thoughts, that stimulate our infirmities, that give force to temptation, that lessen our power of resistance, that tend to draw us back into our old sins. One who has a tendency to intemperance may have a sincere conviction that his acts of drunkenness have displeased God, and a sincere wish never to be drunk again. But besides this he must “prepare his heart” against his sin. He must resolve to turn away from everything that leads to drinking, that gives strength to the temptation, that weakens his power of resistance, that draws him, as it were, within the vortex. He must fortify himself, by joining a society or otherwise, against the insidious approaches of the vice. And in regard to all that displeases God he must order his life so that it shall be abandoned, it shall be parted with for ever. You may say this is asking him to do more than he can do. No doubt it is. But is not the Holy Spirit working in him? Is it not the Holy Spirit that is urging him to do these things? Whoever is urged by the Holy Spirit may surely rely on the power of the Spirit when he endeavours to comply with His suggestions. When God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, we may surely work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

Having found the people so far obedient to his requirements, Samuel’s next step was to call an assembly of all Israel to Mizpeh. He desired to unite all who were like-minded in a purpose of repentance and reformation, and to rouse them to a higher pitch of intensity by contact with a great multitude animated by the same spirit. When the assembly met, it was in a most proper spirit. They began the proceedings by drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord, and by fasting. These two acts being joined in the narrative, it is probable they were acts of the same character. Now as fasting was evidently an

expression of contrition, so the pouring out of the water must have been so too. It is necessary to remark this, because an expression not unlike to our text, in Isa. xii., denotes an act of a joyful character, “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” But what was done on this occasion was to draw water and *pour it out before the Lord*. And this seems to have been done as a symbol of pouring out before God confessions of sin drawn from the depths of the heart. What they said in connection with these acts was, “We have sinned against the Lord.” They were no longer in the mood in which the Psalmist was when he kept silence, and his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day. They were in the mood into which he came when he said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” They humbled themselves before God in deep convictions of their unworthiness, and being thus emptied of self they were in a better state to receive the gracious visitation of love and mercy.

It is important to mark the stress which is laid here on the *public assembly* of the people. Some might say, would it not have answered the same end if the people had humbled themselves apart—the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart, every family apart, and their wives apart, as in the great mourning of Zechariah (Zech. xii. 12-14)? We answer, the one way did not exclude the other; we do not need to ask which is the best, for both are best. But when Samuel convened the people to a public assembly, he evidently did it on the principle on which in the New Testament we are required not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. It is in order that the presence of people like-minded, and with the same earnest feelings and purposes, may have a rousing and warming influence upon us. No doubt there are other purposes connected with public worship. We need constant instruction and constant reminding of the will of God. But the public assembly and the social prayer-meeting are intended to have another effect. They are intended to increase our spiritual earnestness by the sight and presence of so many persons in earnest. Alas! what a difference there often is between the ideal and the real. Those cold and passionless meetings that our churches and halls often present—how little are they fitted, by the earnestness and warmth of their tone, to give those who attend them a great impulse heavenward! Never let us be satisfied with our public religious services until they are manifestly adapted to this great end.

Thus did Samuel seek to promote repentance and revival among his people, and to prepare the way for a return of God’s favour. And it is in this very way that if we would have a revival of earnest religion, we must set about obtaining it.

2. The next scene in the panorama of the text is—the Philistines invading Israel. Here Samuel’s service is that of an intercessor, praying for his people, and obtaining God’s blessing. It is to be observed that the alleged occasion for this event is said to have been the meeting held at Mizpeh. “When the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel.” Was not this most strange and distressing? The blessed assembly which Samuel had convened only gives occasion for a new Philistine invasion! Trying to do his people good, Samuel would appear only to have done them harm. With the assembly at Mizpeh, called as it was for spiritual

ends, the Philistines could have no real cause for complaint. Either they mistook its purpose and thought it a meeting to devise measures to throw off their yoke, or they had an instinctive apprehension that the spirit which the people of Israel were now showing would be accompanied by some remarkable interposition on their behalf. It is not rare for steps taken with the best of intentions to become for a time the occasion of a great increase of evil,—just as the remonstrances of Moses with Pharaoh led at first to the increase of the people's burdens; or just as the coming of Christ into the world caused the massacre of the babes of Bethlehem. So here, the first public step taken by Samuel for the people's welfare was the occasion of an alarming invasion by their cruel enemies. But God's word on such occasions is, "Be still and know that I am God." Such events are suffered only to stimulate faith and patience. They are not so very overwhelming events to those who know that God is with them, and that "none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate." Though the Israelites at this time were not far advanced in spiritual life, they betrayed no consternation when they heard of the invasion of the Philistines. They knew where their help was to be found, and recognising Samuel as their mediator, they said to him, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

With this request Samuel most readily complies. But first he offers a sucking lamb as a whole burnt-offering to the Lord, and only after this are we told that "Samuel cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him."

The lesson is supremely important. When sinners approach God to entreat His favour, it must be by the new and living way, sprinkled with atoning blood. All other ways of access will fail. How often has this been exemplified in the history of the Church! How many anxious sinners have sought unto God by other ways, but have been driven back, sometimes farther from Him than before. Luther humbles himself in the dust and implores God's favour, and struggles with might and main to reform his heart; but Luther cannot find peace until he sees how it is in the righteousness of another he is to draw nigh and find the blessing,—in the righteousness of the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Dr. Chalmers, profoundly impressed with the sinfulness of his past life, strives, with the energy of a giant, to attain conformity to the will of God; but he too is only tossed about in weary disappointment until he finds rest in the atoning mercy of God in Christ. We may be well assured that no sense of peace can come into the guilty soul till it accepts Jesus Christ as its Saviour in all the fulness of His saving power.

Another lesson comes to us from Samuel's intercession. It is well to try to get God's servants to pray for us. But little real progress can be made till we can pray for ourselves. Whoever really desires to enjoy God's favour, be it for the first time after he has come to the sense of his sins; or be it at other times, after God's face has been hid from him for a time through his backsliding, can never come as he ought to come without earnest prayer. For prayer is the great medium that God has appointed to us for communion with Himself. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." If there be any lesson written with a sunbeam alike in the Old Testament and in the New,

it is that God is the Hearer of prayer. Only let us take heed to the quality and tone of our prayer. Before God can listen to it, it must be from the heart. To gabble over a form of prayer is not to pray. Saul of Tarsus had said many a prayer before his conversion; but after that for the first time it was said of him, "Behold, he prayeth." To pray is to ask an interview with God, and when we are alone with Him, to unburden our souls to Him. Those only who have learned to pray thus in secret can pray to any purpose in the public assembly. It is in this spirit, surely, that the highest gifts of Divine grace are to be sought. Emphatically it is in this way that we are to pray for our nation or for our Church. Let us come with large and glowing hearts when we come to pray for a whole community. Let us plead with God for Church and for nation in the very spirit of the prophet: "For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."

CHAPTER IX.

NATIONAL DELIVERANCE—THE PHILISTINES SUBDUED.

I SAMUEL vii. 10-17.

It must have been with feelings very different from those of their last encounter, when the ark of God was carried into the battle, that the host of Israel now faced the Philistine army near Mizpeh. Then they had only the symbol of God's gracious presence, now they had the reality. Then their spiritual guides were the wicked Hophni and Phinehas; now their guide was holy Samuel. Then they had rushed into the fight in thoughtless unconcern about their sins; now they had confessed them, and through the blood of sprinkling they had obtained a sense of forgiveness. Then they were puffed up by a vain presumption; now they were animated by a calm but confident hope. Then their advance was hallowed by no prayer; now the cry of needy children had gone up from God's faithful servant. In fact, the battle with the Philistines had already been fought by Samuel on his knees. There can be no more sure token of success than this. Are we engaged in conflict with our own besetting sins? Or are we contending against scandalous transgression in the world around us? Let us first fight the battle on our knees. If we are victorious there we need have little fear of victory in the other battle.

It was as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering that the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. There was an unseen ladder that day between earth and heaven, on which the angels of God ascended and descended as in Jacob's vision at Bethel. The smoke of the burnt-offering carried up to God the confession and contrition of the people, their reliance on God's method of atonement, and their prayer for His pardon and His blessing. The great thunder with which God thundered on the Philistines carried down from God the answer and the needed help. There is no need for supposing that the thunder was supernatural. It was an instance of what is so common, a natural force adapted to the purpose of an answer to prayer. What seems to have occurred is this: a vehement thunderstorm had gathered a

little to the east, and now broke, probably with violent wind, in the faces of the Philistines, who were advancing up the heights against Mizpeh. Unable to face such a terrific war of the elements, the Philistines would turn round, placing their backs to the storm. The men of Israel, but little embarrassed by it, since it came from behind them, and gave the greater momentum to their force, rushed on the embarrassed enemy, and drove them before them like smoke before the wind. It was just as in former days—God arose, and His enemies were scattered, and they also that hated Him fled before Him. The storm before which the Philistines covered was like the pillar of fire which had guided Israel through the desert. Jehovah was still the God of Israel; the God of Jacob was once more his refuge.

We have said that this thunderstorm may have been quite a natural phenomenon. Natural, but not casual. Though natural, it was God's answer to Samuel's prayer. But how could this have been? If it was a natural storm, if it was the result of natural law, of atmospheric conditions the operation of which was fixed and certain, it must have taken place whether Samuel prayed or not. Undoubtedly. But the very fact that the laws of nature are fixed and certain, that their operation is definite and regular, enables the great Lord of Providence to make use of them in the natural course of things, for the purpose of answering prayer. For this fact, the uniformity of natural law, enables the Almighty, who sees and plans the end from the beginning, to frame a comprehensive scheme of Providence, that shall not only work out the final result in His time and way, but that shall also work out every intermediate result precisely as He designs and desires. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Now if God has so adjusted the scheme of Providence that the final result of the whole shall wonderfully accomplish His grand design, may He not, must He not, have so adjusted it that every intermediate part shall work out some intermediate design? It is only those who have an unworthy conception of omniscience and omnipotence that can doubt this. Surely if there is a general Providence, there must be a special Providence. If God guides the whole, He must also guide the parts. Every part of the scheme must fall out according to His plan, and may thus be the means of fulfilling some of His promises.

Let us apply this view to the matter of prayer. All true prayer is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in the human soul. All the prayer that God answers is prayer that God has inspired. The prayer of Samuel was prayer which God had inspired. What more reasonable than that in the great plan of providence there should have been included a provision for the fulfilment of Samuel's prayer at the appropriate moment? The thunderstorm, we may be sure, was a natural phenomenon. But its occurrence at the time was part of that great scheme of Providence which God planned at the beginning, and it was planned to fall out then in order that it might serve as an answer to Samuel's prayer. It was thus an answer to prayer brought about by natural causes. The only thing miraculous about it was its forming a part of that most marvellous scheme—the scheme of Divine providence—a part of the scheme that was to be carried into effect after Samuel had prayed. If the term supernatural may be fitly applied to that scheme which is the sum

and substance of all the laws of nature, of all the providence of God, and of all the works and thoughts of man, then it was a miracle; but if not, it was a natural effect.

It is important to bear these truths in mind, because many have the impression that prayer for outward results cannot be answered without a miracle, and that it is unreasonable to suppose that such a multitude of miracles as prayer involves would be wrought every day. If a sick man prays for health, is the answer necessarily a miracle? No; for the answer may come about by purely natural causes. He has been directed to a skillful physician; he has used the right medicine; he has been treated in the way to give full scope to the recuperative power of nature. God, who led him to pray, foresaw the prayer, and in the original scheme of Providence planned that by natural causes the answer should come. We do not deny that prayer may be answered in a supernatural way. We would not affirm that such a thing as supernatural healing is unknown. But it is most useful that the idea should be entertained that such prayer is usually answered by natural means. By not attending to this men often fail to perceive that prayer has been answered. You pray, before you set out on a journey, for protection and safe arrival at the end. You get what you asked—you perform the journey in safety. But perhaps you say, "It would have been all the same whether I had prayed for it or not. I have gone on journeys that I forgot to pray about, and no evil befel me. Some of my fellow-passengers, I am sure, did not pray for safety, yet they were taken care of as much as I was." But these are sophistical arguments. You should feel that your safety in the journey about which you prayed was as much due to God, though only through the operation of natural causes, as if you had had a hairbreadth escape. You should be thankful that in cases where you did not pray for safety God had regard to the habitual set of your mind, your habitual trust in Him, though you did not specially exercise it at these times. Let the means be as natural as they may—to those who have eyes to see the finger of God is in them all the same.

But to return to the Israelites and the Philistines. The defeat of the Philistines was a very thorough one. Not only did they make no attempt to rally after the storm had passed and Israel had fallen on them, but they came no more into the coast of Israel, and the hand of the Lord was against them all the days of Samuel. And besides this, all the cities and tracts of land belonging to Israel which the Philistines had taken were now restored. Another mercy that came to Israel was that "there was peace between Israel and the Amorites"—the Amorites being put here, most likely, for the remains of all the original inhabitants living among or around Israel. Those promises were now fulfilled in which God had said to Moses, "This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of thee" (Deut. ii. 25). "There shall no man be able to stand before you; for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land ye shall tread upon, as He hath said to thee." It was so apparent that God was among them, and that the power of God was irresistible and overwhelming, that their enemies were frightened to assail them.

The impression thus made on the enemies of Israel corresponds in some degree to the moral influence which God-fearing men sometimes have on an otherwise godless community. The picture in the Song of Solomon—"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"—ascribes even to the fair young bride a terrifying power, a power not appropriate to such a picture in the literal sense, but quite suitable in the figurative. Wherever the life and character of a godly man is such as to recall God, wherever God's image is plainly visible, wherever the results of God's presence are plainly seen, there the idea of a supernatural power is conveyed, and a certain overawing influence is felt. In the great awakening at Northampton in Jonathan Edwards' days, there was a complete arrest laid on open forms of vice. And whensoever in a community God's presence has been powerfully realised, the taverns have been emptied, the gambling-table deserted, under the sense of His august majesty. Would only that the character and life of all God's servants were so truly godlike that their very presence in a community would have a subduing and restraining influence on the wicked!

Two points yet remain to be noticed: the step taken by Samuel to commemorate this wonderful Divine interposition; and the account given of the prophet and his occupations in his capacity of Judge of Israel.

"Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

The position of Shen is not known. But it must have been very near the scene of the defeat of the Philistines—perhaps it was the very spot where that defeat occurred. In that case, Samuel's stone would stand midway between the two scenes of battle: the battle gained by him on his knees at Mizpeh, and the battle gained by the Israelites when they fell on the Philistines demoralised by the thunderstorm.

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The characteristic feature of the inscription lies in the word "hitherto." It was no doubt a testimony to special help obtained in that time of trouble; it was a grateful recognition of that help; and it was an enduring monument to perpetuate the memory of it. But it was more, much more. The word "hitherto" denotes a series, a chain of similar mercies, an unbroken succession of Divine interpositions and Divine deliverances. The special purpose of this inscription was to link on the present deliverance to all the past, and to form a testimony to the enduring faithfulness and mercy of a covenant-keeping God. But was there not something strange in this inscription, considering the circumstances? Could Samuel have forgot that tragic day at Shiloh—the bewildered, terrified look of the messenger that came from the army to bring the news, the consternation caused by his message, the ghastly horror of Eli and his tragic death, the touching death of the wife of Phinehas, and the sad name which she had with such seeming propriety given to her babe? Was that like God remembering them? or had Samuel forgot how the victorious Philistines soon after dashed upon Shiloh like beasts of prey, plundering, destroying, massacring, till nothing more remained to be done to justify the name of "Ichabod?" How can Samuel blot that chapter

out of the history? or how can he say, with that chapter fresh in his recollection, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us"?

All that Samuel has considered well. Even amid the desolations of Shiloh the Lord was helping them. He was helping them to know themselves, helping them to know their sins, and helping them to know the bitter fruit and woful punishment of sin. He was helping them to achieve the great end for which he had called them—to keep alive the knowledge of the true God and the practice of His worship, onward to the time when the great promise should be realised,—when HE should come in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Samuel's idea of what constituted the nation's glory was large and spiritual. The true glory of the nation was to fulfil the function for which God had taken it into covenant with Himself. Whatever helped them to do this was a blessing, was a token of the Lord's remembrance of them. The links of the long chain denoted by Samuel's "hitherto" were not all of one kind. Some were in the form of mercies, many were in the form of chastenings. For the higher the function for which Israel was called, the more need was there of chastening. The higher the destination of a silver vessel, the greater is the need that the silver be pure, and therefore that it be frequently passed through the furnace. The destination of Israel was the highest that could have been. So Samuel does not merely give thanks for seasons of prosperity, but for checks and chastenings too.

Happy they who, full of faith in the faithfulness and love of God, can take a similar view of His dealings! Happy they who, when special mercies come, deem the occasion worthy to be commemorated by some special memorial, but who can embrace their whole life in the grateful commemoration, and bracket joys and sorrows alike under their "hitherto"! It is not that sorrows are less sorrows to them than to others; it is not that losses of substance entail less inconvenience, or bereavements penetrate less deeply; but that all are seen to be embraced in that gracious plan of which the final consummation is, as the apostle puts it, "to present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." And well is it for us, both in individual life and in Church and national life, to think of that plan of God in which mercies and chastenings are united, but all with a gracious purpose! It is remarkable how often in Scripture tears are wiped away with this thought. Zion saying, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me," is assured, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands, thy walls are continually before Me." Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, is thus addressed, "Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and thy children shall come again from the land of the enemy." "Weep not," said our Lord to the woman of Nain; and His first words after His resurrection were, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Vale of tears though this world is, there comes from above a gracious influence to wipe them away; and the march Zionward has in it something of the tread and air of a triumphant procession, for the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

We have yet to notice the concluding verses of the chapter (15-17), which give a little picture of the public life of Samuel. He judged Israel all the days of his life. The office of judge had a two-fold sphere, external and internal. Externally, it bore on the oppression of the people by foreign enemies, and the judge became the deliverer of the people. But in this sense there was now nothing for Samuel to do, especially after the accession of Saul to the kingdom. The judge seems to have likewise had to do with the administration of justice, and the preservation of the peace and general welfare of the nation. It is very natural to suppose that Samuel would be profoundly concerned to imbue the people with just views of the purpose for which God had called them, and of the law and covenant which He had given them. The three places among which he is said to have made his circuit, Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah, were not far from each other, all being situated in the tribes of Benjamin and Judah,—in that part of the land which afterwards constituted the kingdom of the two tribes. To these three places falls to be added Ramah, also in the same neighbourhood, where was his house. In this place he built an altar to the Lord. Whether this was in connection with the tabernacle or not, we cannot say. We know that in the time of David's wanderings "the house of God" was at Nob (Compare 1 Sam. xxi. 1 and Matt. xii. 4), but we have nothing to show us when it was carried thither. All we can say is, that Samuel's altar must have been a visible memorial of the worship of God, and a solemn protest against any idolatrous rites to which any of the people might at any time be attracted.

In this way Samuel spent his life like Him whose type he was, "always about his Father's business." An unselfish man, having no interests of his own, full of zeal for the service of God and the public welfare; possibly too little at home, taking too little charge of his children, and thus at last in the painful position of one, "whose sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." (ch. viii. 1). That Samuel attained the highest reputation for sanctity, intercourse with God and holy influence, is plain from various passages of Scripture. In Psalm xcix. 6, he is coupled with Moses and Aaron, as having influence with God,— "they called upon the Lord and He answered them." In Jeremiah xv. 1, his name is coupled with that of Moses alone as a powerful intercessor, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people." His mother's act of consecration was wonderfully fulfilled. Samuel stands out as one of the best and purest of the Hebrew worthies. His name became a perpetual symbol of all that was upright, pure and Godlike. The silent influence of his character was a great power in Israel, inspiring many a young heart with holy awe, and silencing the flippant arrogance of the scoffer. Mothers, did not Hannah do well, do nobly, in dedicating her son to the Lord? Sons and daughters, was it not a noble and honourable life? Then go ye and do likewise. And God be pleased to incline many a heart to the service; a service, which with all its drawbacks, is the highest and the noblest; and which bequeaths so blessed a welcome into the next stage of existence: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

CHAPTER X.

THE PEOPLE DEMAND A KING.

I SAMUEL viii.

WHATEVER impression the "Ebenezer" of Samuel may have produced at the time, it passed away with the lapse of years. The feeling that, in sympathy with Samuel, had recognised so cordially at that time the unbroken help of Jehovah from the very beginning, waxed old and vanished away. The help of Jehovah was no longer regarded as the palladium of the nation. A new generation had risen up that had only heard from their fathers of the deliverance from the Philistines, and what men only hear from their fathers does not make the same impression as what they see with their own eyes. The privilege of having God for their king ceased to be felt, when the occasions passed away that made His interposition so pressing and so precious. Other things began to press upon them, other cravings began to be felt, that the theocracy did not meet. This double process went on—the evils from which God did deliver becoming more faint, and the benefits which God did not bestow becoming more conspicuous by their absence—till a climax was reached. Samuel was getting old, and his sons were not like himself; therefore they afforded no materials for continuing the system of judges. None of them could ever fill their father's place. The people forgot that God's policy had been to raise up judges from time to time as they were needed. But would it not be better to discontinue this hand-to-mouth system of government and have a regular succession of kings? Why should Israel contrast disadvantageously in this respect with the surrounding nations? This seems to have been the unanimous feeling of the nation. "All the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and said to Samuel, Make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

It seems to us very strange that they should have done such a thing. Why were they not satisfied with having God for their king? Was not the roll of past achievements under His guidance very glorious? What could have been more wonderful than the deliverance from Egypt, and the triumph over the greatest empire in the world? Had ever such victories been heard of as those over Sihon and Og? Was there ever a more triumphant campaign than that of Joshua, or a more comfortable settlement than that of the tribes? And if Canaanites, and Midianites, and Ammonites, and Philistines had vexed them, were not Barak and Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah, Samson and Samuel, more than a match for the strongest of them all? Then there was the moral glory of the theocracy. What nation had ever received direct from God, such ordinances, such a covenant, such promises? Where else were men to be found that had held such close fellowship with heaven as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, and Joshua? What other people had had such revelations of the fatherly character of God, so that it could be said of them, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." Instead of wishing to change the theocracy, we might have expected that every Israelite, capable of appreciating solid benefits, would have clung

to it as his greatest privilege and his greatest honour.

But it was otherwise. Comparatively blind to its glories, they wished to be like other nations. It is too much a characteristic of our human nature that it is indifferent to God, and to the advantages which are conferred by His approval and His blessing. How utterly do some leave God out of their calculations! How absolutely unconcerned they are as to whether they can reckon on His approval of their mode of life, how little it seems to count! You that by false pretences sell your wares and prey upon the simple and unwary; you that heed not what disappointment or what pain and misery you inflict on those who believe you, provided you get their money; you that grow rich on the toil of underpaid women and children, whose life is turned to slavery to fulfil your hard demands, do you never think of God? Do you never take into your reckoning that He is against you, and that He will one day come to reckon with you? You that frequent the haunts of secret wickedness, you that help to send others to the devil, you that say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" when you are doing your utmost to confirm others in debauchery and pollution, is it nothing to you that you have to reckon one day with an angry God? Be assured that God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, while he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

But the lesson of the text is rather for those who have the favour and blessing of God, but are not content, and still crave worldly things. You are in covenant with God. He has redeemed you, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. You are now sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what you shall be. There is laid up for you an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Yet your heart hankers after the things of the world. Your acquaintances and friends are better off. Your bare house, your homely furnishings, your poor dress, your simple fare distress you, and you would fain be in a higher worldly sphere, enjoying more consideration, and participating more freely in worldly enjoyments. Be assured, my friends, you are not in a wholesome frame of mind. To be depreciating the surpassing gifts which God has given you, and to be exaggerating those which He has withheld, is far from being a wholesome condition. You wish to be like the nations. You forget that your very glory is not to be like them. Your glory is that ye are a chosen generation, an holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, your bodies temples of the Holy Ghost, your souls united to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet again, there are congregations, which though in humble circumstances, have enjoyed much spiritual blessing. Their songs have gone up, bearing the incense of much love and gratitude; their prayers have been humble and hearty, most real and true; and the Gospel has come to them not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. Yet a generation has grown up that thinks little of these inestimable blessings, and misses fine architecture, and elaborate music, and highly cultured services. They want to have a king like the nations. However they may endanger the spiritual blessing, it is all-important to have these surroundings. It is

a perilous position, all the more perhaps that many do not see the peril—that many have little or no regard for the high interests that are in such danger of being sacrificed.

This then, was the request of all the elders of Israel to Samuel—"Give us a king to judge us like all the nations." We have next to consider how it was received by the prophet.

"The thing displeased Samuel." On the very face of it, it was an affront to himself. It intimated dissatisfaction with the arrangement which had made him judge of the people under God. Evidently they were tired of him. He had given them the best energies of his youth and of his manhood. He had undoubtedly conferred on them many real benefits. For all this, his reward is to be turned off in his old age. They wish to get rid of him, and of his manner of instructing them in the ways of the Lord. And the kind of functionary they wish to get in his room is not of a very flattering order. The kings of the nations for the most part were a poor set of men. Despotic, cruel, vindictive, proud—they were not much to be admired. Yet Israel's eyes are turned enviously to them! Possibly Samuel was failing more than he was aware of, for old men are slow to recognise the progress of decay, and highly sensitive when it is bluntly intimated to them. Besides this, there was another sore point which the elders touched roughly. "Thy sons walk not in thy ways." However this may have come about, it was a sad thought to their father. But fathers often have the feeling that while they may reprove their sons, they do not like to hear this done by others. Thus it was that the message of the elders came home to Samuel, first of all, in its personal bearings, and greatly hurt him. It was a personal affront, it was hard to bear. The whole business of his life seemed frustrated; everything he had tried to do had failed; his whole life had missed its aim. No wonder if Samuel was greatly troubled.

But in the exercise of that admirable habit which he had learned so thoroughly, Samuel took the matter straight to the Lord. And even if no articulate response had been made to his prayer, the effect of this could not but have been great and important. The very act of going into God's presence was fitted to change, in some measure, Samuel's estimate of the situation. It placed him at a new point of view—at God's point of view. When he reached that, the aspect of things must have undergone a change. The bearing of the transaction on God must have come out more prominently than its bearing on Samuel. And this was fully expressed in God's words. "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me." Samuel was but the servant, God was the lord and king. The servant was not greater than his lord, nor the disciple greater than his Master. The great sin of the people was their sin against God. He it was to whom the affront had been given; He, if any, it was that had cause to remonstrate and complain.

So prone are even the best of God's servants to put themselves before their Master. So prone are ministers of the Gospel, when any of their flock has acted badly, to think of the annoyance to themselves, rather than the sin committed in the holy eyes of God. So prone are we all, in our families, and in our Churches, and in society, to think of other aspects of sin, than its essential demerit in God's sight. Yet surely this should be the first consideration. That God should be dishonoured is surely a far more serious thing than

that man should be offended. The sin against God is infinitely more heinous than the sin against man. He that has sinned against God has incurred a fearful penalty—what if this should lie on his conscience for ever, unconfessed, unforgiven? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Yet, notwithstanding this very serious aspect of the people's offence, God instructs Samuel to "hearken to their voice, yet protest solemnly to them, and show them the manner of the kingdom." There were good reasons why God should take this course. The people had shown themselves unworthy the high privilege of having God for their king. When men show themselves incapable of appreciating a high privilege, it is meet they should suffer the loss of it, or at least a diminution of it. They had shown a perpetual tendency to those idolatrous ways by which God was most grievously dishonoured. A theocracy, to work successfully, would need a very loyal people. Had Israel only been loyal, had it even been a point of conscience and a point of honour with them to obey God's voice, had they even had a holy recoil from every act offensive to Him, the theocracy would have worked most beautifully. But there had been such a habitual absence of this spirit, that God now suffered them to institute a form of government that interposed a human official between Him and them, and that subjected them likewise to many an inconvenience. Yet even in allowing this arrangement God did not utterly withdraw His loving-kindness from them. The theocracy did not wholly cease. Though they would find that their kings would make many an exaction of them, there would be among them some that would reign in righteousness, and princes that would rule in judgment. The king would so far be approved of God as to bear the name of "the Lord's anointed:" and would thus, in a sense, be a type of the great Anointed One, the true Messiah, whose kingdom, righteous, beneficent, holy, would be an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion from generation to generation.

The next scene in the chapter before us finds Samuel again met with the heads of the people. He is now showing them "the manner of the king"—the relation in which he and they will stand to one another. He is not to be a king that gives, but a king that takes. His exactions will be very multifarious. First of all, the most sacred treasures of their homes, their sons and their daughters, would be taken to do hard work in his army, and on his farms, and in his house. Then, their landed property would be taken on some pretext—the vineyards and olive-yards inherited from their fathers—and given to his favourites. The tenth part of the produce, too, of what remained would be claimed by him for his officers and his servants, and the tenth of their flocks. Any servant, or young man, or animal, that was particularly handsome and valuable would be sure to take his fancy, and to be attached for his service. This would be ordinarily the manner of their king. And the oppression and vexation connected with this system of arbitrary spoliation would be so great that they would cry out against him, as indeed they did in the days of Rehoboam, yet the Lord would not hear them. Such was Samuel's picture of what they desired so much, but it made no impression; the people were still determined to have their king.

What a contrast there was between this exacting king, and the true King, the King that in the ful-

ness of the time was to come to His people, meek and having salvation, riding upon the foal of an ass! If there be anything more than another that makes this King glorious, it is His giving nature. "The Son of God," says the Apostle, "loved me, and gave Himself for me." Gave Himself! How comprehensive the word! All that He was as God, all that He became as man. As prophet He gave Himself to teach, as priest to atone and intercede, as king to rule and to defend. "The Good Shepherd *giveth* His life for the sheep." "This is My body which is *given* for you." "If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have *given* thee living water." With what kingly generosity, while He was on earth, He scattered the gifts of health and happiness among the stricken and the helpless! "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people." See Him, even as He hung helpless on the cross, exercising His royal prerogative by giving to the thief at His side a right to the Kingdom of God—"Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." See Him likewise, exalted on His throne "at God's right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." How different the attributes of this King from him whom Samuel delineated! The one exacting all that is ours; the other giving all that is His!

The last scene in the chapter shows us the people deliberately disregarding the protest of Samuel, and reiterating their wilful resolution—"Nay, but we will have a king over us; 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." Once more, Samuel brings the matter to the Lord—repeats all that he has heard; and once more the Lord says to Samuel, "Hearken unto their choice and make them a king." The matter is now decided on, and it only remains to find the person who is to wear the crown.

On the very surface of the narrative we see how much the people were influenced by the desire to be "like all the nations." This does not indicate a very exalted tone of feeling. To be like all the nations was surely in itself a poor and childish thing, unless the nations were in this respect in a better condition than Israel. Yet how common and almost irresistible is this feeling!

Singularity is certainly not to be affected for singularity's sake; but neither are we to conform to fashion simply because it is fashion. How cruel and horrible often are its behests! The Chinese girl has to submit to her feet being bandaged and confined till walking becomes a living torture, and even the hours of what should be rest and sleep, are often broken by bitter pain. The women of Lake Nyassa insert a piece of stone in their upper lip, enlarging it from time to time till speaking and eating become most awkward and painful operations, and the very lip sometimes is torn away. Our fathers had terrible experience of the tyranny of the drinking customs of their day; and spite of the greater freedom and the greater temperance of our time, there is no little tyranny still in the drinking laws of many a class among us. All this is just the outcome of the spirit that made the Hebrews so desire a king—the shrinking of men's hearts from being unlike others, the desire to be like the world. What men dread in such

cases is not wrong-doing, not sin, not offending God; but incurring the reproof of men, being laughed at, boycotted by their fellows. But is not this a very unworthy course? Can any man truly respect himself who says, "I do this not because I think it right, not even because I deem it for my interest, but simply because it is done by the generality of people?" Can any man justify himself before God, if the honest utterance of his heart must be, "I take this course, not because I deem it well-pleasing in Thy sight, but because if I did otherwise, men would laugh at me and despise me?" The very statement of the case in explicit terms condemns it. Not less is it condemned by the noble conduct of those to whom grace has been given to withstand the voice of the multitude and stand up faithfully for truth and duty. Was there ever a nobler attitude than that of Caleb, when he withstood the clamour of the other spies, and followed the Lord fully? or that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when alone among myriads, they refused to bow down to the image of gold? or that of Luther when, alone against the world, he held unflinchingly by his convictions of truth?

Let the young especially ponder these things. To them it often seems a terrible thing to resist the general voice, and hold by conscience and duty. To confess Christ among a school of despisers, is often like martyrdom. But think! What is it to *deny* Christ? Can that bring any peace or satisfaction to those who know His worth? Must it not bring misery and self-contempt? If the duty of confessing Him be difficult, seek strength for the duty. Pray for the strength which is made perfect in your weakness. Cast your thoughts onward to the day of Christ's second coming, when the opinion and practice of the world shall all be reduced to their essential worthlessness, and the promises to the faithful, firm as the everlasting hills, shall be gloriously fulfilled. For in that day, Hannah's song shall have a new fulfilment: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar out of the dunghill, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory."

CHAPTER XI.

SAUL BROUGHT TO SAMUEL.

I SAMUEL IX. 1-14.

God's providence is a wonderful scheme; a web of many threads, woven with marvellous skill; a network composed of all kinds of materials, great and small, but so arranged that the very smallest of them is as essential as the largest to the completeness of the fabric.

One would suppose that many of the dramas of the Old Testament were planned on very purpose to show how intimately things secular and things sacred, as we call them, are connected together; how entirely the minutest events are controlled by God, and at the same time how thoroughly the freedom of man is preserved. The meeting of two convicts in an Egyptian prison is a vital link in the chain of events that makes Joseph governor of Egypt; a young lady coming to bathe in the river preserves the life of Moses, and secures the escape of the Israelites; the thoughtful regard of a father for the comfort of his sons in the army brings David into contact with Goliath, and prepares the way for his elevation to the throne; the

beauty of a Hebrew girl fascinating a Persian king saves the whole Hebrew race from massacre and extermination.

So in the passage now before us. The straying of some asses from the pastures of a Hebrew farmer brings together the two men, of whom the one was the old ruler, and the other was to be the new ruler of Israel. That these two should meet, and that the older of them should have the opportunity of instructing and influencing the younger, was of the greatest consequence for the future welfare of the nation. And the meeting is brought about in that casual way that at first sight seems to indicate that all things happen without plan or purpose. Yet we find, on more careful examination, that every event has been planned to fit in to every other, as carefully as the pieces of a dissected map, or the fragments of a fine mosaic. But of all the actors in the drama, not one ever feels that his freedom is in any way interfered with. All of them are at perfect liberty to follow the course that commends itself to their own minds.

Thus wonderfully do the two things go together—Divine ordination and human freedom. How it should be so, it baffles us to explain. But that it is so, must be obvious to every thoughtful mind. And it is because we see the two things so harmonious in the common affairs of life, that we can believe them to act harmoniously in the higher plane of redemption and salvation. For in that sphere, too, all things fall out in accordance with the Divine plan. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Yet this universal predestination in no degree interferes with the liberty of man. If men reject God's offers, it is because they are personally unwilling to accept of them. If they receive His offers, it is because they have been made willing to do so. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life," said our Lord to the Jews. And yet it is ever true that "it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

God having given the people permission to appoint a king, that king has now to be found. What kind of person must the first king be—the first to supersede the old rule of the Divinely-inspired judges, the first to fulfil the cravings of the people, the first to guide the nation which had been appointed by God to stand in so close a relation to Himself?

It seemed desirable, that in the first king of Israel, two classes of qualities should be united, in some degree contradictory to one another. First, he must possess some of the qualities for which the people desire to have a king; while at the same time, from God's point of view, it is desirable that under him the people should have some taste of the evils which Samuel had said would follow from their choice.

To an Oriental people, a stately and commanding personality was essential to an ideal king. They liked a king that would look well on great occasions, that would be a commanding figure at the head of an army, or in the centre of a procession; that would arrest the eye of strangers, and inspire at first sight an involuntary respect for the nation that had such a ruler at its head. Nor could any one have more fully realised the wishes of the people in this respect than Saul. "A choice young man and a goodly; there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he; from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people."

Further, though his tribe was small in number, it was not small in influence. And his family was of a superior caste, for Kish was "a mighty man of power." And Saul's personal qualities were prepossessing and promising. He showed himself ready to comply with his father's order about the asses that had strayed, and to undertake a laborious journey to look for them. He was interested in his father's business, and ready to help him in his time of need. And the business which he undertook he seems to have executed with great patience and thoroughness. A foot journey over a great part of the territory of Benjamin was no easy task. Altogether, he shows himself, as we say, a capable man. He is not afraid to face the irksome; he does not consult merely for his ease and pleasure; labour does not distress him, and difficulties do not daunt him.

All this was so far promising, and it seems to have been exactly what the people desired. But on the other hand, there seems to have been, from the very beginning, a great want in Saul. He appears from the very first to have wanted all that was most conspicuous and most valuable in Samuel. It is a circumstance not without its significance, that the very name and work of Samuel do not seem to have been familiar or even known to him. It was his servant that knew about Samuel, and that told Saul of his being in the city, in the land of Zuph (ver. 6). This cannot but strike us as very strange. We should have thought that the name of Samuel would have been as familiar to all the people of Israel as that of Queen Victoria to the people of Great Britain. But Saul does not appear to have heard it, as in any way remarkable. Does not this indicate a family living entirely outside of all religious connections, entirely immersed in secular things, caring nothing about godly people, and hardly ever even pronouncing their name? It is singular how utterly ignorant worldly men are of what passes in religious circles, if they happen to have no near relative, or familiar acquaintance in the religious world to carry the news to them from time to time. And as Saul thus lived outside of all religious circles, so he seems to have been entirely wanting in that great quality which was needed for a king of Israel—loyalty to the Heavenly King. Here it was that the difference between him and Samuel was so great. Loyalty to God and to God's nation was the very foundation of Samuel's life. Anything like self-seeking was unknown to him. He had early undergone that momentous change, when God is substituted for self as the pivot of one's life. The claims of the great King were ever paramount in his eyes. What would please God and be honouring to Him, was the first question that rose to his mind. And as Israel was God's people, so the interest and the welfare of Israel were ever dear to him. And thus it was that Samuel might be relied on not to think of himself, not to think of his own wishes or interests, except as utterly subordinate to the wishes and interests of his God and his nation. It was this that gave such solidity to Samuel's character, and made him so invaluable to his people. In every sphere of life it is a precious quality. Whether as domestic servants, or clerks, or managers, dependent on others, those persons are ever of priceless worth whose hearts are thus set on objects outside themselves, and who are proof against the common temptations of selfishness and worldliness. And when they are the rulers of a nation, and are able to disregard their personal welfare in their burning desire to benefit the

whole people, they rise to the rank of heroes, and after their death, their names are enshrined in the memories of a grateful and admiring people.

But in these high qualities, Saul seems to have been altogether wanting. For though he was not selfish and self-indulgent at first, though he readily obeyed his father in going to search for the strayed asses, he had no deep root of unselfishness in his nature, and by-and-bye, in the hour of temptation, the cloven foot unhappily appeared. And ere long the people would learn, that as Saul had in him no profound reverence for the will of God, so he had in him no profound and indefeasible regard for the welfare of God's people. The people would come to see what a fatal mistake they had made in selecting a king merely for superficial qualities, and passing by all that would have allied him, as Samuel was allied, to God himself. Now it seems to have been God's purpose that the first king of Israel should be a man of this kind. Through him the people were to learn that the king who simply fulfilled their notions, was capable, when his self-will was developed, of dragging the nation to ruin. No! it was not the superficial qualities of Saul that would be a blessing to the nation. It was not a man out of all spiritual sympathy with the living God that would raise the standing of Israel among the kingdoms around, and bring them the submission and respect of foreign kings. The intense and consistent godliness of Samuel was probably the quality that was not popular among the people. In the worldliness of his spirit, Saul was probably more to their liking. Yet it was this unworldly but godly Samuel that had delivered them from the bitter yoke of the Philistines, and it was this handsome but unspiritual Saul that was to bring them again into bondage to their ancient foes. This was the sad lesson to be learned from the reign of Saul.

But God did not design altogether to abandon His people. When the lesson should be learnt from Saul's history, He would guide them to a king of a different stamp. He would give them a king after His own heart—one that would make the will of God the great rule, and the welfare of the people the great end of his government. David would engrave in the history of the nation in deeper letters than even Samuel, the all-important lesson, that for kings and countries as much as for individuals, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" that God honours them that honour Him, while they that despise Him shall indeed be lightly esteemed.

But let us now come to the circumstances that led to the meeting of Saul and Samuel. The asses of Kish had strayed. Very probably they had strayed at a time when they were specially needed. The operations of the farm had to be suspended for want of them, perhaps at a season when any delay would be especially inconvenient. In all ranks of life, men are subject to these vexations, and he is a happy man who does not fret under them, but keeps his temper calm, in spite of all the worry. Especially is he a happy man who retains his equanimity under the conviction that the thing is appointed by God, and that He who overruled the loss of Kish's asses to such high events in the history of his son, is able so to order all their troubles and worries that they shall be found conducive to their highest good. At Kish's order, Saul and one of the servants go forth to seek the asses. With the precise localities through which they passed, we are not accurately acquainted, such places as Shalim or Zuph not having yet

been identified. But the tour must have been an extensive one, extending over most of the territory of Benjamin; and as it must have been necessary to make many a detour, up hill and down dale, to this farm and to that, the labour involved must have been very great. It was not a superficial but a thorough search.

At last, when they came to the land of Zuph, they had been away so long that Saul thought it necessary to return, lest his father should think that some evil had befallen them. But the servant had another string to his bow. Though Saul was not familiar with the name or the character of Samuel, his servant was. What God hides from the wise and prudent, He sometimes reveals to babes. It is an interesting thing in the history of the Church, how often great people have been indebted to servants for important guidance, perhaps even for their first acquaintance with saving truth. The little captive maid that ministered in the house of Naaman the Syrian was the channel through whom he came to know of the prophet of Israel who was able to heal him. Many a distinguished Christian has acknowledged, like the Earl of Shaftesbury, his obligations to some pious nurse that when he was a child told him Bible stories and pressed on his heart the claims of God. Happy those servants who are faithful in these circumstances, and of whom it can be said, "They have done what they could!" Of this servant of Saul's we know nothing whatever, save that, in his master's dilemma, he told him of the Lord's servant, and induced him to apply to him to extricate him from his difficulty.

It does not appear that the city was Samuel's usual place of abode. It was a place to which he had come to hold a religious service, and the occasion was evidently one of much importance. It is interesting to observe how the difficulty was got over, of their having no present to offer to the man of God, in accordance with the custom of the country. Saul, though in comfortable circumstances, had absolutely no particle of money with him. His servant had but a quarter of a shekel, not designed apparently for spending purposes, but perhaps a little keepsake or kind of amulet he carried about with him. But there was such hospitality in those days that people going about the country had no need for money. So it was when our Lord instructed the disciples when sending them out on their missionary tour—"Provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves, for the labourer is worthy of his meat." Those who have presumed on these instructions, holding that the modern missionary does not need any sustenance to be provided for him, but may safely trust to the hospitality of the heathen, forget how different was the case and the custom among the Hebrew people.

But now, as Saul and his servant came to the city, another providential meeting takes place to help them to their object. "As they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water." The city was up the hill, and the water supply would naturally be at the bottom. From the maidens that were going down to the fountain, they obtained information fitted to quicken their movements. They learned that the prophet had already arrived. The preparations for the sacrifice which he was to offer were now going on. It was just the time to get a word with him, if they had business to transact. Very soon

he would be going up to the high place, and then the solemn rites would begin, and be followed by the feast, which would engross his whole attention. If they would catch him at the proper moment they must "make haste." That they did quicken their pace, we cannot doubt. And it was necessary; for just as they reached the city Samuel made his appearance, about to go up to the high place. If they had lost that moment, they would probably have had no opportunity during the whole day. Nor is it likely that Saul, who had no great desire for the company of the prophet, would have waited till the sacrifice and the feast were over. The two men were brought together just in the nick of time. And thus another essential link of God's chain, bringing the old and the new ruler of Israel into contact with each other, was happily adjusted, all through means to us apparently accidental, but forming parts of the great scheme of God.

From this part of the narrative we may derive two great lessons, the one with reference to God, and the other with reference to man.

First, as it regards God, we cannot but see how silently, secretly, often slowly, yet surely, He accomplishes His purposes. There are certain rivers in nature that flow so gently, that when looking at the water only, the eye of the spectator is unable to discern any movement at all. Often the ways of God resemble such rivers. Looking at what is going on in common life, it is so ordinary, so absolutely quiet, that you can see no trace whatever of any Divine plan. Things seem left to themselves, and God appears to have no connection with them. And yet, all the while, the most insignificant of them is contributing towards the accomplishment of the mighty plans of God. By means of ten thousand times ten thousand agents, conscious and unconscious, things are moving on towards the grand consummation. Men may be instruments in God's hands without knowing it. When Cyrus was moving his armies towards Babylon, he little knew that he was accomplishing the Divine purpose for the humbling of the oppressor and the deliverance of His oppressed people. And in all the events of common life, men seem to be so completely their own masters, there seems such a want of any influence from without, that God is liable to slip entirely out of sight. And yet, as we see from the chapter before us, God is really at work. Whether men know it or not, they are really fulfilling the purposes of His will. Calmly but steadily, like the stars in the silent heavens, men are bringing to pass the schemes of God. His wildest enemies are really helping to swell His triumphs. Oh, how vain is the attempt to resist His mighty hand! The day cometh, when all the tokens of confusion and defeat shall disappear, when the bearing even of the fall of a sparrow on the plans of God shall be made apparent, and every intelligent creature in earth and heaven shall join in the mighty shout—"Alleluiah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

But again, there is a useful lesson in this chapter for directing the conduct of men. You see in what direction the mind of Saul's servant moved for guidance in the day of difficulty. It was toward the servant of God. And you see likewise how, when Saul and he had determined to consult the man of God, they were providentially guided to him. To us, the way is open to God Himself, without the intervention of any prophet. Let us in every time of trouble seek access to God. Have

we not a thousand examples of it in Bible history, and in other history too? Men say it is not right we should trouble God with trifles. Nay, the living God knows not what trouble is, and in His scheme there are no trifles. There is no limit one way or other in the command, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." "Acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He will direct your steps." But above all, acknowledge Him with reference to the way of life eternal. Make sure that you are in the way to heaven. Use well the guide book with which you are furnished. Let God's word be a light to your feet and a lamp to your path; and then your path shall itself "be like the shining light, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST MEETING OF SAMUEL AND SAUL.

1 SAMUEL ix. 15-27.

THE meeting between Samuel and Saul was preceded by previous meetings between Samuel and God. God had prepared the prophet for his visit from the future king of Israel, and the first thing brought before us in these verses is the communication on this subject which had been made to the prophet a day before.

It is very interesting to observe how readily Samuel still lends himself for any service he can render on behalf of his people, under the new arrangement that God had permitted for their government. We have seen how mortified Samuel was at first, when the people came to him with their request for a king. He took it as a personal affront, as well as a grave public error. Conscious as he was of having done his duty faithfully, and of having rendered high service to the nation, and reposing calmly, as he probably was, on the expectation that at least for some time to come, Israel would move forward peacefully and happily on the lines which he had drawn for them, it must have been a staggering blow when they came to him and asked him to overturn all that he had done, and make them a king. It must have been one of those bewildering moments when one's whole life appears lost, and all one's dearest hopes and hardest labours lie shattered, like the fragments of a potter's vessel. We have seen how, in that sad moment, Samuel carried his sorrows to the Lord, and learning thus to view the whole matter from God's point of view, how he came to make comparatively little account of his own disappointment, and to think only how he could still serve the cause of God, how he could still help the people, how he could prevent the vessel which he was no longer to steer from dashing against the hidden rocks he saw so clearly ahead. It is impossible not to be struck with the beauty and purity of Samuel's character in this mode of action.

How many a good man takes offence when slighted or superseded by some committee or other body, in connection with a political, social, or religious cause which he has tried to help! If they won't have me, he says, let them do without me. If they won't allow me to carry out the course which I have followed, and which has been undoubtedly highly beneficial, I'll have nothing more to do with them. He sulks in his tent

like Achilles, or goes over to the enemy like Coriolanus. Not so Samuel! His love for the people is too deep to allow of such a course. They have behaved badly to him, but notwithstanding he will not leave them. Like an injured but loving wife, who labours with every art of patient affection to reclaim the husband that has abused her and broken her heart; like a long-suffering father, who attends with his own hands to the neglected work of his dissipated son, to save him if possible from the consequences of his folly—Samuel overlooks his personal slight, and bears with the public folly of the people, in the endeavour to be of some use to them in the important stage of their history on which they are entering. He receives Divine communications respecting the man who is to supersede him in the government of the people, and instead of jealousy and dislike, shows every readiness to help him. It is refreshing to find such tokens of magnanimity and disinterestedness. However paltry human nature may be in itself, it can become very noble when rehabilitated by the Spirit of God. Need we ask which is the nobler course? You feel that you have not been treated perhaps by your church with sufficient consideration. You fret, you complain, you stay away from church, you pour your grievance into every open ear. Would Samuel have done so? Is not your conduct the very reverse of his? Side by side with his, must not yours be pronounced poor and paltry? Have you not need to study the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians, and when you read of the charity that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," ask yourselves whether it might not be said of you that you have neither part nor lot in this matter?

The communication that God had made to Samuel was, that on the following day He would send to him the man whom he was to anoint as captain over Israel, that he might save them from the Philistines; for He had looked upon His people, because their cry was come up to Him. There is an apparent inconsistency here with what is said elsewhere. In chap. viii. 13 it is said, that "the Philistines came no more into the coast of Israel, and that the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." But probably "all the days of Samuel" mean only the days when he exerted himself actively against them. As long as Samuel watched and checked them, they were kept in restraint; but when he ceased to do so, they resumed their active hostility. The concluding verses of chap. xiii. (19-23) show that in Saul's time the Philistine oppression had become so galling that the very smiths had been removed from the land of Israel, and there was no right provision even for sharpening ploughshares, or coulter, or axes, or mattocks. Undoubtedly Saul removed this oppression for a time, and David's elegy shows how beneficial his reign was in some other ways, although the last act of his life was an encounter with the Philistines in which he was utterly defeated. It is evident that before Saul's time the tyranny of their foes had been very galling to the Israelites. The words of God, "their cry is come up to Me," indicate quietly a very terrible state of distress. They carry us back to the words uttered at the burning bush, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." God speaks after the manner of men. He needs no cry to come into His ears to tell Him of the woes of the op

pressed. Nevertheless He seems to wait till that cry is raised, till the appeal is made to Him, till the consciousness of utter helplessness sends men to His footstool. And a very blessed truth it is, that he sympathises with the cry of the oppressed. There is much meaning in the simple expression—"their cry is come up to Me." It denotes a very tender sympathy, a concern for all that they have been suffering, and a resolution to interpose on their behalf. God is never impassive nor indifferent to the sorrows and sufferings of His people. All are designed to serve as chastenings with a view to ultimate good. The eye of God is ever watching to see whether the chastening is sufficient, and when it is so, to stop the suffering. In the Inquisitor's chamber, the eye of God was ever on the boot and the thumb-screw, on the knife and the pincers, on the furnace and all the other instruments of torture. In the sick room, He watches the spent and struggling patient, knows every paroxysm of pain, knows all the restlessness and tossing of the weary night. He understands the anguish of the loving heart when one after another of its treasures is torn away. He knows the unutterable distress when a child's misconduct brings down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Appearances may be all the other way, but "the Lord God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and of great compassion." The night may be long and weary, but the dawn comes at the appointed time. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

But now Samuel and Saul have met. Saul is as unfamiliar with Samuel's appearance as with his name; he goes up to him and asks where the seer's house is. "I am the seer," replies Samuel; but at the moment Samuel was not at liberty, and could not converse with Saul. He invites him to go up with him to the high place, and take part in the religious service. Then he invites him to the feast that was to follow the sacrifice. Next day he is to deal with him as a prophet, making important communications to him. But in regard to the matter which occupies him at the moment, his father's asses, he need trouble himself no more on that head, for the asses are found. Then he gives Saul a hint of what is coming. He makes an announcement to him that he and his father's house are the objects of the whole desire of Israel. It is not very apparent whether or not Saul had any inkling of the meaning of this remark. It may be that he viewed it as a mere expression of politeness, savouring of the customary exaggeration of the East. At all events, his answer was couched in those terms of extravagant humility which was likewise matter of Eastern custom. "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?"

The sacrifice next engages the attention of all. Samuel's first meeting with Saul takes place over the symbol of expiation, over the sacrifice that shows man to be a sinner, and declares that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. No doubt the circumstance was very impressive to Samuel, and would be turned to its proper use in subsequent conversation with Saul, whether Saul entered into the spirit of it or not. If it be asked, How could a sacrifice take place on the height of this city, whereas God had com-

manded that only in the place which He was to choose should such rites be performed?—the answer is, that at that time Shiloh lay in ruins, and Mount Zion was still in the possession of the Jebusites. The final arrangements had not yet been made for the Hebrew ceremonial, and in the present provisional and unsettled state of things, sacrifices were not limited to a single place.

After the sacrifice, came the feast. It was now that Samuel began to give more explicit hints to Saul of the dignity to which he was to be raised. The feast was held in "the parlour"—a room adjacent to the place of sacrifice, to which Samuel had invited a large company—thirty of the chief inhabitants of the town. First Saul and his servant are complimented by having the place of honour assigned to them. Then they are honoured by having a portion set before them which had been specially set apart for them the day before. The speech concerning this portion in ver. 24 is somewhat obscure if it be regarded as a speech of Samuel's. It seems more natural to regard it as a speech of the cook's. It will be observed that the word "Samuel" in the middle of the verse is in italics, showing that it is not in the Hebrew, so that it is more natural to regard the clause as having "the cook" for its nominative, and indeed this talk about the portion is more suitable for the cook than for Samuel. Servants were not forbidden to speak during entertainments; nor did their masters disdain even to have serious conversation with them (see Nehemiah ii. 2-8). There is another correction of the Authorised Version that needs to be made. At the end of ver. 24 the words "Since I said" are not a literal rendering. The original is simply the word which is constantly rendered *saying*. It has been suggested ("Speaker's Commentary") that a word or two should be supplied to make the sense complete, and the verse would then run:—"unto this time hath it been kept for thee [against the festival of which Samuel spake], saying, I have invited the people." The part thus reserved was the shoulder and its appurtenances. Why this part was regarded as more honourable than any other, we do not know, nor is it of any moment; the point of importance being, first, that by Samuel's express instructions it had been reserved for Saul, and second, that these instructions had been given as soon as Samuel made arrangements for the feast. To honour Saul as the destined king of Israel was Samuel's unhesitating purpose. Some men might have said, It will be time enough to show this mark of respect when the man is actually chosen king. Had there been the slightest feeling of grudge in the mind of Samuel, this is what he would have thought. But instead of grudging Saul his new dignity, he is forward to acknowledge it. There shall be no holding back on his part of honour for the man whom the Lord delighted to honour.

If the words of ver. 24 were really spoken by the cook, they must have added a new element of surprise and impression to Saul. It was apparent that he had been expected to this feast. The cook had been warned that a man of consequence was coming, and had therefore set apart that portion to him. Saul must have felt both that a supernatural power had been at work, and that some strange destiny—possibly the royal dignity—was in reserve for him. To us, pondering the circumstances, what is most striking is, the wonderful way in which the fixed purpose of

God is accomplished, while all the agents in the matter remain perfectly free. That Saul and his servant should be present with Samuel at that feast, was the fixed decree of heaven. But it was brought about quite naturally. There was no constraint on the mind of Saul's servant, when, being in the land of Zuph, he proposed that they should go into the city, and try to make inquiry of the man of God. There was no constraint on the damsels when at a certain time they went down to the fountain for water, and on their way met Saul and his servant. There was no constraint on Saul and his servant, save that created by common sense, when they quickened their pace in order to meet Samuel on the way to the sacrifice. Every one of these events fell out freely and naturally. Yet all were necessary links in the chain of God's purposes. From God's point of view they were necessary, from man's point of view they were casual. Thus necessity and freedom harmonised together, as they always do in the plans and operations of God. It is absurd to say that the predestination of God takes away the liberty of man. It is unreasonable to suppose that because God has predestinated all events, we need not take any step in the matter of our salvation. Such an idea is founded on an utter misunderstanding of the relation in which God has placed us to Him. It overlooks the great truth, that God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. The relation of the Infinite Will to the wills of finite creatures is a mystery we cannot fathom; but the effect on us should be to impel us to seek that our will may ever be in harmony with God's, and that thus the petition in the Lord's prayer may be fulfilled, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

The feast is over; Samuel and Saul return to the city, and there, on the housetop, they commune together. The twenty-sixth verse seems to narrate in detail what is summarily contained in the twenty-fifth. After returning from the sacrifice and the feast, they seem to have committed themselves to rest. In the early morning, about day-break, they had their conversation on the housetop, and thereafter Samuel sent Saul away, conveying him part of the road. What the conversation on the housetop was, we are not told; but we have no difficulty in conjecturing. Samuel could not but communicate to Saul the treasured thoughts of his lifetime regarding the way to govern Israel. He must have recalled to him God's purpose regarding His people, beginning with the call of Abraham, dwelling on the deliverance from Egypt, and touching on the history of the several judges, and the lessons to be derived from each. We may fancy the fervour with which he would urge on Saul, that the one thing most essential for the prosperity of the nation—the one thing which those in power ought continually to watch and aim at, was, loyalty by the people to their heavenly King, and the faithful observance of His law and covenant. He would dwell emphatically on the many instances in which neglect of the covenant had brought disaster and misery, and on the wonderful change in their outward circumstances which had come with every return of fidelity to their King. Granted, they were soon to have a king. They were to change their form of government, and be like the rest of the nations. But if they changed their form of government, they were not to surrender the palladium of their nation, they were not to abandon their "gloria et tutamen." The new king would be tempted like

all the kings around him to regard his own will as his only rule of action, and to fall in with the prevalent notion, that kings were above the law, because the king's will was the law, and nothing could be higher than that. What an infinite calamity it would be to himself and to the nation, if the new king of Israel were to fall into such a delusion! Yes, the king *was* above the law, and the king's will *was* the law; but it was the King of kings alone who had this prerogative, and woe to the earthly ruler that dared to climb into His throne, and take into his puny hands the sceptre of the Omnipotent!

Such, we may well believe, was the tenor of that first meeting of Samuel and Saul. We cannot but carry forward our thoughts a little, and think what was the last. The last meeting was at Endor, where in darkness and utter despair, the king of Israel had thought of his early friend, had perhaps recalled his gentle kindness on this first occasion of their meeting, and wondered whether he might not be able and willing to throw some light once more upon his path. But alas, the day of merciful visitation was gone. The first conversation was in the brightness of early morning; the last in midnight gloom. The time of day was appropriate for each. On that sepulchral night, the worst evils that he had dreaded, and against which he had doubtless warned him on that housetop, had come to pass. Self-willed and regardless of God, Saul had taken his own course, and brought his people to the very verge of ruin. Differing, *toto celo*, from Samuel in his treatment of his successor, he had hunted David like a partridge on the mountains, and stormed against the man who was to bring back to the nation the blessings of which he had robbed it. Brought to bay at last by his recklessness and passion, he could only reap the fruit of what he had sown; "for God is not mocked; they that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and they that sow to the Spirit shall, of the Spirit, reap life everlasting." Again there was to ring out the great law of the kingdom,—“Them that honour Me, I will honour; while they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”

The good words of Samuel fell not into good ground. He had not in Saul a congenial hearer. Saul was too worldly a man to care for, or appreciate spiritual things. Alas, how often for a similar reason, the best words of the best men fail of their purpose! But how is this ever to be cured? How is the uncongenial heart to become a fit bed for the good seed of the Kingdom? I own, it is a most difficult thing. Those who are afflicted with indifference to spiritual truth will not seek a remedy, because the very essence of their malady is that they do not care. But surely their Christian friends and relatives, and all interested in their welfare, will care very much. Have you such persons—persons whose worldly hearts show no sympathy with Divine truth—among your acquaintances or in your families? Persons so steeped in worldliness that the strongest statements of saving truth are as much lost upon them as grains of the best wheat would be lost if sown in a heap of sand? O how should you be earnest for such in prayer; there is a remedy, and there is a Physician able to apply it; the Spirit of God if appealed to, can repeat the process that was so effectual at Philippi, when "the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul." "If ye then that are evil know how to give good

things unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

CHAPTER XIII.

SAUL ANOINTED BY SAMUEL.

1 SAMUEL X. 1-16.

THERE is a remarkable minuteness of detail in this and other narratives in Samuel, suggesting the authenticity of the narrative, and the authorship of one who was personally connected with the transactions. The historical style of Scripture is very characteristic; sometimes great periods of time are passed over with hardly a word, and sometimes events of little apparent importance are recorded with what might be thought needless minuteness. In Genesis, the whole history of the world before the flood is despatched in seven chapters, less than is occupied with the history of Joseph. Enoch's biography is in one little verse, while a whole chapter is taken up with the funeral of Sarah, and another chapter of unusual length with the marrying of Isaac. Yet we can be at no loss to discover good reasons for this arrangement. It combines two forms of history—annals, and dramatic story. Annals are short, and necessarily somewhat dry; but they have the advantage of embracing much in comparatively short compass. The dramatic story is necessarily diffuse; it occupies a large amount of space; but it has the advantage of presenting a living picture—of bringing past events before the reader as they happened at the time. If the whole history of the Bible had been in the form of annals, it would have been very useful, but it would have wanted human interest. If it had been all in the dramatic form, it would have occupied too much space. By the combination of the two methods, we secure the compact precision of the one, and the living interest of the other. In the verses that are to form the subject of the present lecture, we have a lively dramatic picture of what took place in connection with the anointing of Saul by Samuel as king of Israel. The event was a very important one, as showing the pains that were taken to impress him with the solemnity of the office, and his obligation to undertake it in full accord with God's sacred purpose in connection with His people Israel. Everything was planned to impress on Saul that his elevation to the royal dignity was not to be viewed by him as a mere piece of good fortune, and to induce him to enter on the office with a solemn sense of responsibility, and in a spirit entirely different from that of the neighbouring kings, who thought only of their royal position as enabling them to gratify the desires of their own hearts. Both Saul and the people must see the hand of God very plainly in Saul's elevation, and the king must enter on his duties with a profound sense of the supernatural influences through which he has been elevated, and his obligation to rule the people in the fear, and according to the will, of God.

Though the servant that accompanied Saul seems to have been as much a companion and adviser as a servant, and to have been present as yet in all Samuel's intercourse with Saul, yet the act of anointing which the prophet was now to perform was more suitable to be done in private

than in the presence of another; consequently the servant was sent on before (ch. ix. 27). It would seem to have been Samuel's intention, while paying honour to Saul as one to whom honour was due, and thus hinting at his coming elevation, not to make it public, not to anticipate the public selection which would follow soon in an orderly way. It was right that Saul himself should know what was coming, and that his mind should be prepared for it; but it was not right at this stage that others should know it, for that would have seemed an interference with the choice of the people. It must have been in some quiet corner of the road that Samuel took out his vial of sacred oil, and poured it on Saul to anoint him king of Israel. The kiss which he gave him was the kiss of homage, a very old way of recognising sovereignty (Ps. ii. 12), and still kept up in the custom of kissing the sovereign's hand after elevation to office or dignity. To be thus anointed by God's recognised servant, was to receive the approval of God Himself. Saul now became God's messiah—the Lord's anointed. For the term messiah, as applied to Christ, belongs to His kingly office. Though the priests likewise were anointed, the title derived from that act was not appropriated by them, but by the kings. It was counted a high and solemn dignity, making the king's person sacred, in the eyes of every God-fearing man. Yet this was not an indelible character; it might be forfeited by unfaithfulness and transgression. The only Messiah, the only Anointed One, who was incapable of being set aside, was He whom the kings of Israel typified. Of Him Isaiah foretold: "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever." And in announcing the birth of Jesus, the angel foretold: "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

It is evident that Saul was surprised at the acts of Samuel. We can readily fancy his look of astonishment after the venerable prophet had given him the kiss of homage,—the searching gaze that asked, "What do you mean by that?" Samuel was ready with his answer: "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His heritage?" But in so momentous a matter, involving a supernatural communication of the will of God, an assurance even from Samuel was hardly sufficient. It was reasonable that Saul should be supplied with tangible proofs that in anointing him as king Samuel had complied with the will of God. These tangible proofs Samuel proceeded to give. They consisted of predictions of certain events that were about to happen—events that it was not within the range of ordinary sagacity to foresee, and which were therefore fitted to convince Saul that Samuel was in possession of supernatural authority, and that the act of consecration which he had just performed was agreeable to the will of God.

The first of these proofs was, that when he had proceeded on his journey as far as Rachel's tomb, he would meet with two men who would tell him that the lost asses had been found, and that his father's anxiety was now about his son. It must be owned that the localities here are very puzzling. If the meeting with Samuel was near Ramah of Benjamin, Saul, in returning to Gibeah, would not have occasion to go near Rachel's tomb. We can only say he may have had some reason

for taking this route unknown to us. Here he would find a confirmation of what Samuel had told him on the day before; and his mind being thus relieved of anxiety, he would have more freedom to ponder the marvellous things of which Samuel had spoken to him.

The next token was to be found in the plain of Tabor, but this Tabor can have no connection with the well-known mountain of that name in the plain of Esdraelon. Some have conjectured that this Tabor is derived from Deborah, Rachel's nurse, who was buried in the neighbourhood of Bethel (Gen. xxxv. 8), but there is no probability in this conjecture. Here three men, going up to Bethel to a religious festival were to meet Saul; and they were to present him, as an act of homage, with two of their three loaves. This was another evidence that God was filling men's hearts with a rare feeling towards him.

The third token was to be the most remarkable of any. It was to occur at what is called "the hill of God." Literally this is "Gibeah of God"—God's Gibeah. It seems to have been Saul's own city, but the name Gibeah may have been given to the whole hill where the city lay. The precise spot where the occurrence was to take place was at the garrison of the Philistines. (Thus it appears incidentally that the old enemy were again harassing the country.) Gibeah, which is elsewhere called Gibeah of Saul, is here called God's Gibeah, because of the sacred services of which it was the seat. Here Saul would meet a company of prophets coming down from the holy place, with psaltery, and tabret, and pipe, and harp, and here his mind would undergo a change, and he would be impelled to join the prophets' company. This was a strange token, with a strange result.

We must try, first, to form some idea of Saul's state of mind in the midst of these strange events.

The thought of his being king of Israel must have set his whole being vibrating with high emotion. No mind can take in at first all that is involved in such a stroke of fortune. A tumult of feeling surges through the mind. It is intoxicated with the prospect. Glimpses of this pleasure and of that, now brought within reach, flit before the fancy. The whole pulses of Saul's nature must have been quickened. A susceptibility of impression formerly unknown must have come to him. He was like a cloud surcharged with electricity; he was in that state of nervous excitement which craves a physical outlet, whether in singing, or shouting, or leaping,—anything to relieve the brain and nervous system, which seem to tremble and struggle under the extraordinary pressure.

But mingling with this, there must have been another, and perhaps deeper, emotion at work in Saul's bosom. He had been brought into near contact with the Supernatural. The thought of the Infinite Power that ordains and governs all had been stirred very vividly within him. The three tokens of Divine ordination met with in succession at Rachel's tomb, in the plain of Tabor, and in the neighbourhood of Gibeah, must have impressed him very profoundly. Probably he had never had any very distinct impression of the great Supernatural Being before. The worldly turn of mind which was natural to him would not occupy itself with any such thoughts. But now it was made clear to him not only that there was a Supernatural Being, but that He was dealing very closely with him. It is always a solemn thing to feel in the presence of God, and to remember

that He is searching us and knowing us, knowing our sitting down and our rising up, and comprehending all our thoughts afar off. At such times the sense of our guilt, feebleness, dependence, usually comes on us, full and strong. Must it not have been so with Saul? If the prospect of kingly power was fitted to puff him up, the sense of God's nearness to him was fitted to cast him down. What was he before God? An insignificant worm, a guilty sinner, unworthy to be called God's son.

The whole susceptibilities of Saul were in a state of high excitement; the sense of the Divine presence was on him, and for the moment a desire to render to God some acknowledgment of all the mercy which had come upon him. When the company of prophets met him coming down the hill, "The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied with them." When in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is said to come on one, the meaning is not always that He comes in regenerating and sanctifying grace. The Spirit of God in Bezaleel, the son of Uri, made him cunning in all manner of workmanship, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass. The Spirit of God, when He came upon Samson, magnified his physical strength, and fitted him for the most wonderful feats. So the Spirit of God, when He came on Saul, did not necessarily regenerate his being; alas! in Saul's future life, there is only too much evidence of an unchanged heart! Still it might be said of Saul that he was changed into another man. Elevated by the prospect before him, but awed at the same time by a sense of God's nearness, he had no heart for the pursuits in which he would have engaged on his return home had no such change occurred. In the mood of mind in which he was now, he could not look at anything frivolous: his mind soared to higher things. When therefore he met the company of prophets coming down the hill, he was impelled by the surge of his feelings to join their company and take part in their song. They were returning from the high place where they had been engaged in worship, and now they seem to have been continuing the service, sounding out the high praises of God, and thankfully remembering His mercies. It was the same God who had so wonderfully drawn near to Saul, and conferred on him privileges which were as exalted as they were undeserved. No wonder the heart of Saul caught the infection, and threw itself for the time into the service of praise! No young man could well have resisted the impulse. Had he not been chosen out of all the ten thousands of Israel for an honour and a function higher than any Israelite had ever yet enjoyed? Ought he not, must he not, in all the enthusiasm of profoundest wonder, extol the name of Him from whom so suddenly, so unexpectedly, yet so assuredly, this marvellous favour had come?

But it was an employment very different from what had hitherto been his custom. That utter worldliness of mind which we have referred to as his natural disposition would have made him scorn any such employment in his ordinary mood as utterly alien to his feelings. Too often we see that worldly-minded men not only have no relish for spiritual exercises, but feel bitterly and scornfully toward those who affect them. The reason is not far to seek. They know that religious men count them guilty of sin, of great sin, in neglecting the service of God. To be condemned, whether openly or not, galls their pride, and sets

them to disparage those who have so low an opinion of them. It is not said that Saul had felt bitterly toward religious men previous to this time. But whether he did so or not, he appears to have kept aloof from them quite as much as if he had. And now in his own city he appears among the prophets, as if sharing their inspiration, and joining with them openly in the praises of God. It is so strange a sight that every one is astonished. "Saul among the prophets!" people exclaim. "Shall wonders ever cease?" And yet Saul was not in his right place among the prophets. Saul was like the stony ground seed in the parable of the sower. He had no depth of root. His enthusiasm on this occasion was the result of forces that did not work at the heart of his nature. It was the result of the new and most remarkable situation in which he found himself, not of any new principle of life, any principle that would involve a radical change. It is a solemn fact that men may be worked on by outer forces so as to do many things that seem to be acts of Divine service, but are not so really. A man suddenly raised to a high and influential position feels the influence of the change,—feels himself sobered and solemnised by it, and for a time appears to live and act under higher considerations than he used to acknowledge before. But when he gets used to his new position, when the surprise has abated, and everything around him has become normal to him, his old principles of action return. A young man called suddenly to take the place of a most worthy and honoured father feels the responsibility of wearing such a mantle, and struggles for a time to fulfil his father's ideal. But ere long the novelty of his position wears away, the thought of his father recurs less frequently, and his old views and feelings resume their sway. Admission to the fellowship of a Church which sustains a high repute may have at first not only a restraining, but a stimulating and elevating effect, until, the position becoming familiar to one, the emotions it first excited die away. This risk is peculiarly incident to those who bear office in the Church. Ordination to the ministry, or to any other spiritual office, solemnises one at first, even though one may not be truly converted and nerves one with strength and resolution to throw off many an evil habit. But the solemn impression wanes with time, and the carnal nature asserts its claims. How earnest and how particular men ought ever to be in examining themselves whether their serious impressions are the effect of a true change of nature, or whether they are not mere temporary experiences, the casual result of external circumstances.

But how is this to be ascertained? Let us recall the test with which our Lord has furnished us. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name have done many wonderful works? Then will I say unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." The real test is a changed will; a will no longer demanding that itself be pleased, but that God be pleased; a will yielding up everything to the will of God; a will continually asking what is right and what is true, not what will please me, or what will be a gain to me; a will overpowered by the sense of what is due in nature to the Lord and Judge of all, and

of what is due in grace to Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. Have you thus surrendered yourselves to God? At the heart and root of your nature is there the profound desire to do what is well-pleasing in His sight? If so, then, even amid abounding infirmities, you may hold that you are the child of God. But if still the principle—silent, perhaps, and unavowed, but real—that moves you and regulates your life be that of self-pleasing, any change that may have occurred otherwise must have sprung only from outward conditions, and the prayer needs to go out from you on the wings of irrepensible desire, "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me."

Two things in this part of the chapter have yet to be adverted to. The first is that somewhat mysterious question (ver. 12) which some one asked on seeing Saul among the prophets—"But who is their father?" Various explanations have been given of this question; but the most natural seems to be, that it was designed to meet a reason for the surprise felt at Saul being among the prophets—viz. that his father Kish was a godless man. That consideration is irrelevant; for who, asks this person, is the father of the prophets? The prophetic gift does not depend on fatherhood. It is not by connection with their fathers that the prophetic band enjoy their privileges. Why should not Saul be among the prophets as well as any of them? Such men are born not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.

The other point remaining to be noticed is Saul's concealment from his uncle of all that Samuel had said about the kingdom. It appears from this both that Saul was yet of a modest, humble spirit, and perhaps that his uncle would have made an unwise use of the information if he had got it. It would be time enough for that to be known when God's way of bringing it to pass should come. There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence. Saul told enough to the uncle to establish belief in the supernatural power of Samuel, but nothing to gratify mere curiosity. Thus in many ways Saul commends himself to us in this chapter, and in no way does he provoke our blame. He was like the young man in the Gospel in whom our Lord found so much that was favourable. Alas, he was like the young man also in the particular that made all the rest of little effect—"One thing thou lackest."

CHAPTER XIV.

SAUL CHOSEN KING.

I SAMUEL X. 17-27.

WHEN first the desire to have a king came to a height with the people, they had the grace to go to Samuel, and endeavour to arrange the matter through him. They did not, indeed, show much regard to his feelings; rather they showed a sort of childlike helplessness, not appearing to consider how much he would be hurt by their virtual rejection of his government, and by their blunt reference to the unworthy behaviour of his sons. But it was a good thing that they came to Samuel at all. They were not prepared to carry out their wishes by lawless violence; they were not desirous to make use of the usual Oriental methods of revolution—massacre and riot. It was so far well that

they desired to avail themselves of the peaceful instrumentality of Samuel. We have seen how Samuel carried the matter to the Lord, and how the Lord yielded so far to the wish of the nation as to permit them to have a king. And Samuel having determined not to take offence, but to continue in friendly relations to the people and do his utmost to turn the change to the best possible account, now proceeds to superintend the business of election. He summons the people to the Lord to Mizpeh; that is, he convenes the heads of the various tribes to a meeting, which was not to be counted a rough political convention, but a solemn religious gathering in the very presence of the Lord. Either before the meeting, or at the meeting, the principle must have been settled on which the election was to be made. It was, however, not so much the people that were to choose as God. The selection was to take place by lot. This method was resorted to as the best fitted to show who was the object of God's choice. There seems to have been no trace of difference of opinion as to its being the right method of procedure.

But before the lot was actually cast, Samuel addressed to the assembly one of those stern, terrible exposures of the spirit that had led to the transaction which would surely have turned a less self-willed and stiff-necked people from their purpose, and constrained them to revert to their original economy. "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; 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." How *could* the people, we may well ask, get over this? How could they prefer an earthly king to a heavenly? What possible benefit worth naming could accrue to them from a transaction dishonouring to the Lord of heaven, which, if it did not make Him their enemy, could not but chill His interest in them?

Perhaps, however, we may wonder less at the behaviour of the Israelites on this occasion if we bear in mind how often the same offence is committed, and with how little thought and consideration, at the present day. To begin with, take the case—and it is a very common one—of those who have been dedicated to God in baptism, but who cast their baptismal covenant to the winds. The time comes when the provisional dedication to the Lord should be followed up by an actual and hearty consecration of themselves. Failing that, what can be said of them but that they reject God as their King? And with what want of concern is this often done, and sometimes in the face of remonstrances, as, for instance, by the many young men in our congregations who allow the time for decision to pass without ever presenting themselves to the Church as desirous to take on them the yoke of Christ! A moment's thought might show them that if they do not actively join themselves to Christ, they virtually sever themselves from Him. If I make a provisional bargain with any one to last for a short time, and at the end of that time take no steps to renew it, I actually renounce it. Not to renew the covenant of baptism, when years of discretion have been reached, is virtually to break it off. Much consideration must be had for the consciousness of unworthiness, but even that is not a sufficient reason, because our worthiness can never come

from what we are in ourselves, but from our faith in Him who alone can supply us with the wedding garment.

Then there are those who reject God in a more outrageous form. There are those who plunge boldly into the stream of sin, or into the stream of worldly enjoyment, determined to lead a life of pleasure, let the consequences be what they may. As to religion, it is nothing to them, except a subject of ridicule on the part of those who affect it. Morality—well, if it fall within the fashion of the world, it must be respected, otherwise let it go to the winds. God, heaven, hell,—they are mere bugbears to frighten the timid and superstitious. Not only is God rejected, but He is defied. Not only are His blessing, His protection, His gracious guidance scorned, but the devil, or the world, or the flesh is openly elevated to His throne. Yet men and women too can go on through years of life utterly unconcerned at the slight they offer to God, and unmoved by any warning that may come to them. "Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him? And what profit shall we have if we bow down before Him?" Their attitude reminds us of the answer of the persecutor, when the widow of his murdered victim protested that he would have to answer both to man and to God for the deed of that day. "To man," he said, "I can easily answer; and as for God, I will take Him in my own hands."

But there is still another class against whom the charge of rejecting God may be made. Not, indeed, in the same sense or to the same degree, but with one element of guilt which does not attach to the others, inasmuch as they have known what it is to have God for their King. I advert to certain Christian men and women who in their early days were marked by much earnestness of spirit, but having risen in the world, have fallen back from their first attainments, and have more or less accepted the world's law. Perhaps it was of their poorer days that God had cause to remember "the kindness of their youth and the love of their espousals." Then they were earnest in their devotions, full of interest in Christian work, eager to grow in grace and in all the qualities of a Christ-like character. But as they grew in wealth, and rose in the world, a change came o'er the spirit of their dream. They must have fine houses and equipages, and give grand entertainments, and cultivate the acquaintance of this great family and that, and get a recognised position among their fellows. Gradually their life comes to be swayed by considerations they never would have thought of in early days. Gradually the strict rules by which they used to live are relaxed, and an easier and more accommodating attitude towards the world is taken up. And as surely the glow of their spiritual feelings cools down; the charm of their spiritual enjoyments goes off; the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, fades away; and one scheme after another of worldly advancement and enjoyment occupies their minds. What glamour has passed over their souls to obliterate the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God? What evil spell has robbed the Cross of its holy influence, and made them so indifferent to the Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them? Is the gate of heaven changed, that they no longer care to linger at it, as in better times they used so fondly to do? No. But they have left their first love; they have gone away after idols; they have been caught in the snare:

of the god of this world. In so far, they have rejected their God that saved them out of all their adversities and tribulations; and if they go on to do so after solemn warning, their guilt will be like the guilt of Israel, and the day must come when "their own wickedness shall correct them, and their backslidings shall reprove them."

But let us come back to the election. The first lot was cast between the twelve tribes, and it fell on Benjamin. The next lot was cast between the families of Benjamin, and it fell on the family of Matri; and when they came to closer quarters, as it were, the lot fell on Saul, the son of Kish. Again we see how the most casual events are all under government, and conspire to accomplish the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

No doubt Saul had anticipated this consummation. He had had too many supernatural evidences to the same effect to have any lingering doubt what would be the result of the lot. But it was too much for him. He hid himself and could not be found. And we do not think the worse of him for this, but rather the better. It is one of the many favourable traits that we find at the outset of his kingly career. However pleasant it might be to ruminate on the privileges and honours of royalty, it was a serious thing to undertake the leadership of a great nation. In this respect, Saul shared the feeling that constrained Moses to shrink back when he was appointed to deliver Israel from Egypt, and that constrained Jeremiah to remonstrate when he was appointed a prophet unto the nations. Many of the best ministers of Christ have had this feeling when they were called to the Christian ministry. Gregory Nazianzen actually fled to the wilderness after his ordination, and Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, in the civil office which he held, tried to turn the people from their choice even by acts of cruelty and severity, after they had called on him to become their bishop.

But, besides the natural shrinking of Saul from so responsible an office, we may believe that he was not unmoved by the solemn representation of Samuel that in their determination to have a human king the people had been guilty of rejecting God. This may have been the first time that that view of the matter seriously impressed itself on his mind. Even though it was accompanied by the qualification that God in a sense sanctioned the new arrangement, and though the use of the lot would indicate God's choice, Saul might well have been staggered by the thought that in electing a king the people had rejected God. Even though his mind was not a spiritual mind, there was something frightful in the very idea of a man stepping, so to speak, into God's place. No wonder then though he hid himself! Perhaps he thought that when he could not be found the choice would fall on some one else. But no. An appeal was again made to God, and God directly indicated Saul, and indicated his place of concealment. The stuff or baggage among which Saul was hid was the collection of packages which the people would naturally bring with them, and which it was the custom to pile up, often as a rampart or defence, while the assembly lasted. We can fancy the scene when, the pile of baggage being indicated as the hiding-place, the people rushed to search among it, knocking the contents asunder very unceremoniously, until Saul was at length

discovered. From his inglorious place of retreat the king was now brought out, looking no doubt awkward and foolish, yet with that commanding figure which seemed so suitable for his new dignity. And his first encouragement was the shout of the people—"God save the king!" How strange and quick the transition! A minute ago he was safe in his hiding-place, wondering whether some one else might not get the office. Now the shouts of the people indicate that all is settled. King of Israel he is henceforward to be.

Three incidents are recorded towards the end of the chapter as throwing light on the great event of the day. In the first place, "Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord." This was another means taken by the faithful prophet to secure that this new step should if possible be for good, and not for evil. It was a new protest against assimilating the kingdom of Israel to the other kingdoms around. No! although Jehovah was no longer King in the sense in which He had been, His covenant and His law were still binding, and must be observed in Israel to their remotest generation. No change could repeal the law of the ten words given amid the thunders of Sinai. No change could annul the promise to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." No change could reverse that mode of approach to a holy God which had been ordained for the sinner—through the shedding of atoning blood. The destiny of Israel was not changed, as the medium of God's communications to the world on the most vital of all subjects in which sinners could be interested. And king though he was, Saul would find that there was no way of securing the true prosperity of his kingdom but by ruling it in the fear of God, and with the highest regard to His will and pleasure; while nothing was so sure to drive it to ruin, as to depart from the Divine prescription, and plunge into the ways that were common among the heathen.

The next circumstance mentioned in the history is, that when the people dispersed, and when Saul returned to his home at Gibeah, "there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched." They were induced to form a body-guard for the new king, and they did so under no physical constraint from him or any one else, but because they were moved to do it from sympathy, from the desire to help him and be of service to him in the new position to which he had been raised. Here was a remarkable encouragement. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Could there have been any time when Saul was more in need of friends? How happy a thing it was that he did not need to go and search for them; they came to him with their willing service. And what a happy start it was for him in his new office that these helpers were at hand to serve him! A band of willing helpers around one takes off more than half the difficulty of a difficult enterprise. Men that enter into one's plans, that sympathise with one's aims, that are ready to share one's burdens, that anticipate one's wishes, are of priceless value in any business. But they are of especial value in the Church of Christ. One of the first things our Lord did after entering on His public ministry was to call to Himself the twelve, who were to be His staff. His ready helpers wherever they were able to give help. Is it not the joy of the Christian minister, as he takes up his charge, if there go with him a band

of men whose hearts God has touched? How lonely and how hard is the ministry if there be no such men to help! How different when efficient volunteers are there in readiness for the Sunday-school, and the Band of hope, and the missionary society, and the congregational choir, and for visiting the sick, and every other service of Christian love! Congregations ought to feel that it cannot be right to leave all the work to their minister. What kind of battle would it be if all the fighting were left to the officer in command? Let the members of congregations ever bear in mind that it is their duty and their privilege to help in the work. If we wish to see the picture of a prosperous Apostolic Church, let us study the last chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans*. The glory of the primitive Church of Rome was that it abounded in men and women whose hearts God had touched, and who "laboured much in the Lord."

Do any of us shrink from such work? Are any willing to pray for God's work, but unwilling to take part in it personally? Such a state of mind cannot but suggest the question, Has the Lord touched your hearts? The expression is a very significant one. It implies that one touch of God's hand, one breathing of His Spirit, can effect such a change that what was formerly ungenial becomes agreeable; a vital principle is imparted to the heart. Life can come only from the fountain of life. Hearts can be quickened only by the living Spirit of God. In vain shall we try to serve Him until our hearts are touched by His Spirit. Would that that Spirit were poured forth so abundantly that "one should say, I am the Lord's, and another should call himself by the name of Jacob, and another should subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself with the name of Israel"!

The last thing to be noticed is the difference of feeling toward Saul among the people. While he was received cordially by most, there was a section that despised him, that scorned the idea of his delivering the nation, and, in token of their contempt, brought him no presents. They are called the children of Belial. It was not that they regarded his election as an invasion of the ancient constitution of the country, as an interference with the sovereign rights of Jehovah, but that, in their pride, they refused to submit to him; they would not have him for their king. The tokens of Divine authority—the sanction of Samuel, the use of the lot, and the other proofs that what was done at Mizpeh had been ratified in heaven—made no impression upon them. We are told of Saul that he held his peace; he would rather refute them by deeds than by words; he would let it be seen, when the opportunity offered, whether he could render any service to the nation or not. But does not this ominous fact, recorded at the very threshold of Saul's reign, at the very time when it became so apparent that he was the Lord's anointed, suggest to our minds a corresponding fact, in reference to One who is the Lord's Anointed in a higher sense? Is there not in many a disposition to say even of the Lord Jesus Christ, "How shall this man save us?" Do not many rob the Lord Jesus Christ of His saving power, reducing Him to the level of a mere teacher, denying that He shed His blood to take away sin? And are there not others who refuse their homage to the Lord from sheer self-dependence and pride? They have never been convinced of their sins, never shared the publican's feeling, but rather been

disposed to boast, like the Pharisee, that they were not like other men. And is not Christ still to many as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness wherefore they should desire Him? Oh for the spirit of wisdom and illumination in the knowledge of Him! Oh that, the eyes of our understandings being enlightened, we might all see Jesus fairer than the children of men, the chief among ten thousand, yea altogether lovely; and that, instead of our manifesting any unwillingness to acknowledge Him and follow Him, the language of our hearts might be, "Whom have we in heaven but Thee? and there is none on the earth that we desire besides Thee." "Entreat us not to leave Thee, nor to return from following after Thee; for where Thou goest we will go, and where Thou lodgest we will lodge; Thy people shall be our people," and Thou Thyself our Lord and our God.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RELIEF OF JABESH-GILEAD.

I SAMUEL xi.

PRIMITIVE though the state of society was in those days in Israel, we are hardly prepared to find Saul following the herd in the field after his election as king of Israel. We are compelled to conclude that the opposition to him was far from contemptible in number and in influence, and that he found it expedient in the meantime to make no demonstration of royalty, but continue his old way of life. If we go back to the days of Abimelech, the son of Gideon, we get a vivid view of the awful crimes which even an Israelite could commit, under the influence of jealousy, when other persons stood in the way of his ambitious designs. It is quite conceivable that had Saul at once assumed the style and title of royalty, those children of Belial who were so contemptuous at his election would have made away with him. Human life was of so little value in those Eastern countries, and the crime of destroying it was so little thought of, that if Saul had in any way provoked hostility, he would have been almost certain to fall by some assassin's hand. It was therefore wise of him to continue for a time his old way of living, and wait for some opportunity which should arise providentially, to vindicate his title to the sceptre of Israel.

Apparently he had not to wait long—according to Josephus, only a month. The opportunity arose in a somewhat out-of-the-way part of the country, where disturbance had been brewing previous to his election (comp. xii. 12). It was not the first time that the inhabitants of Gilead and other dwellers on the east side of Jordan came to feel that in settling there they had to pay dear for their well-watered and well-sheltered pastures. They were exposed in an especial degree to the assaults of enemies, and pre-eminent among these were their cousins, the Ammonites. Very probably the Ammonites had never forgotten the humiliation inflicted on them by Jephthah, when he smote them "from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and till thou come to the plain of the vineyards, with a very great-slaughter." Naturally the Ammonites would be desirous both to avenge these defeats and to regain their cities, or at least to get other cities in lieu of what they had lost. We do not know

with certainty the site of Jabesh-Gilead, or the reasons why it was the special object of attack by King Nahash at this time. But so it was; and as the people of Jabesh-Gilead either knew not or cared not for their real defence, the God of Israel, they found themselves too hard bested by the Ammonites, and, exhausted probably by the weary siege, proposed terms of capitulation.

This is the first scene in the chapter before us. "The men of Jabesh said to Nahash, king of the Ammonites, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee." The history of the Israelites in time of danger commonly presents one or other of two extremes: either pusillanimous submission, or daring defiance to the hostile power. In this case it was pusillanimous submission, as indeed it commonly was when the people followed the motions of their own hearts, and were not electrified into opposition by some great hero, full of faith in God. But it was not mere cowardice they displayed in offering to become the servants of the Ammonites; there was impiety in it likewise. For of their relation to God they made no account whatever. By covenant with their fathers, ratified from generation to generation, they were God's servants, and they had no right voluntarily to transfer to another master the allegiance which was due to God alone. The proposal they made was virtually a breach of the first commandment. And it was not a case of necessity. Instead of humbling themselves before God and confessing the sins that had brought them into trouble, they put God altogether aside, and basely offered to become the servants of the Ammonites. Even the remembrance of the glorious victories of their own Jephthah, when he went to war with the Ammonites, in dependence on the God of Israel, seems to have had no effect in turning them from the inglorious proposal. We see here the sad effect of sin and careless living in lowering men's spirits, sapping courage, and discouraging noble effort. Oh, it is pitiable to see men tamely submitting to a vile master! Yet how often is the sight repeated! How often do men virtually say to the devil, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee"! Not indeed in the open way in which it used to be believed that one of the popes, before his elevation to the papal chair, formally sold his soul to the devil in exchange for that dignity. Yet how often do men virtually give themselves over to serve a vile master, to lead evil or at least careless lives, to indulge in sinful habits which they know they should overcome, but which they are too indolent and self-indulged to resist! Men and women, with strong proclivities to sin, may for a time resist, but they get tired of the battle; they long for an easier life, and they say in their hearts, "We will resist no longer; we will become your servants." They are willing to make peace with the Ammonites, because they are wearied of fighting. "Anything for a quiet life!" They surrender to the enemy, they are willing to serve sin, because they will not surrender the ease and the pleasures of sin.

But sin is a bad master; his wages are terrible to think of. The terms which Nahash offered to the men of Jabesh-Gilead combined insult and injury. "On this condition will I make a covenant with you; that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach unto all Israel." "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." There is nothing in which the pernicious influence of paganism was more notorious in ancient times—and indeed, we may

say, is more notorious in all times—than in the horrible cruelties to which it led. Barbarity was the very element in which it lived. And that barbarity was often exemplified in cruelly depriving enemies of those members and organs of the body which are most needful for the comfort of life. The hands and the eyes were especially the victims of this diabolical feeling. Just as you may see at this day in certain African villages miserable creatures without hands or eyes who have fallen under the displeasure of their chief and received this revolting treatment, so it was in those early times. But Nahash was comparatively merciful. He was willing to let the men of Jabesh off with the loss of one eye only. But as if to compensate for this forbearance, he declared that he would regard the transaction as a reproach upon all Israel. The mutilated condition of that poor one-eyed community would be a ground for despising the whole nation; it would be a token of the humiliation and degradation of the whole Israelite community. These were the terms of Nahash. His favour could be purchased only by a cruel injury to every man's body and a stinging insult to their whole nation. But these terms were just too humiliating. Whether the men of Jabesh would have been willing to lose their eyes as the price of peace we do not know; but the proposed humiliation of the nation was something to which they were not prepared at once to submit. The nation itself should look to that. The nation should consider whether it was prepared to be thus insulted by the humiliation of one of its cities. Consequently they asked for a week's respite, that it might be seen whether the nation would not bestir itself to maintain its honour.

If we regard Nahash as a type of another tyrant, as representing the tyranny of sin, we may derive from his conditions an illustration of the hard terms which sin usually imposes. "The way of transgressors is hard." Oh, what untold misery does one act of sin often bring! One act of drunkenness, in which one is led to commit some crime of violence that would never have been dreamt of otherwise; one act of dishonesty, followed up by a course of deceit and double-dealing, that at last culminates in disgrace and ruin; one act of unchastity, leading to loss of character and to a downward career ending in utter darkness,—how frightful is the retribution! But happy is the young person, when under temptation to the service of sin, if there comes to him at the very threshold some frightful experience of the hardness of the service, if, like the men of Jabesh-Gilead, he is made to feel that the loss and humiliation are beyond endurance, and to betake himself to the service of another Master, whose yoke is easy, whose burden is light, and whose rewards are more precious than silver and gold!

With the activity of despair, the men of Jabesh now publish throughout all Israel the terms that Nahash has offered them. At Gibeah of Saul a deep impression is made. But it is not the kind of impression that gives much hope. "All the people lifted up their voices and wept." It was just the way in which their forefathers had acted at the Red Sea, when, shut in between the mountains and the sea, they saw the chariots of Pharaoh advancing in battle array against them; and again, it was the way in which they spent that night in the wilderness after the spies brought back their report of the land. It was a sorrowful sight—a whole mass of people crying like babies,

panic-stricken, and utterly helpless. But, as in the two earlier cases, there was a man of faith to roll back the wave of panic. As Moses at the Red Sea got courage to go forward, as Caleb, the faithful spy, was able to resist all the clamour of his colleagues and the people, so on this occasion the spirit that rises above the storm, and flings defiance even on the strongest enemies, came mightily on one man—on Saul. His conduct at this time is another evidence how well he conducted himself in the opening period of his reign. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul when he heard the tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly." The Spirit of the Lord evidently means here that spirit of courage, of noble energy, of dauntless resolution, which was needed to meet the emergency that had arisen. His first act was a symbolical one, very rough in its nature, but an act of the kind that was best fitted to make an impression on an Eastern people. A yoke of oxen was hewn in pieces, and the bloody fragments were sent by messengers throughout all Israel, with a thundering announcement that any one failing to follow Saul would have his own oxen dealt with in a similar fashion! It was a bold proclamation for a man to make who himself had just been following his herd in the field. But boldness, even audacity, is often the best policy. The thundering proclamation of Saul brought an immense muster of people to him. A sufficient portion of them would set out with the king, hastening down the passes to the Jordan valley, and having crossed the river, would bivouac for the night in some of the ravines that led up towards the city of Jabesh-Gilead. Messengers had been previously pushed forward to announce to the people there the approach of the relieving force. Long before daybreak, Saul had divided his force into three, who were to approach the beleaguered city by different roads and surprise the Ammonites by break of day. The plan was successfully carried out. The assault on the Ammonite army was made in the morning watch, and continued till midday. It was now the turn for the Ammonites to fall under panic. Their assailants seem to have found them entirely unprepared. There is nothing with which the undisciplined ranks of an Eastern horde are less able to cope than an unexpected attack. The defeat was complete, and the slaughter must have been terrific; and "it came to pass that they which remained of them were scattered, so that two of them were not left together." The men of Jabesh-Gilead, who had expected to spend that night in humiliation and anguish, would be sure to spend it in a very tumult of joy, perhaps rather in a wild excitement than in the calm but intensely relieved condition of men of whom the sorrows of death had taken hold, but whom the Lord had delivered out of all their distresses.

It is no wonder though the people were delighted with their king. From first to last he had conducted himself admirably. He had not delayed an hour in taking the proper steps. Though wearied probably with his day's work among the herd, he set about the necessary arrangements with the utmost promptitude. It was a serious undertaking: first, to rouse to the necessary pitch a people who were more disposed to weep and wring their hands, than to keep their heads and devise a way of escape in the hour of danger; second, to gather a sufficient army to his standard; third, to march across the Jordan, attack the foe, confident and well equipped, and deliver

the beleaguered city. But dangers and difficulties only roused Saul to higher exertions. And now, when in one short week he has completed an enterprise worthy to rank among the highest in the history of the nation, it is no wonder that the satisfaction of the people reaches an enthusiastic pitch. It would have been unaccountable had it been otherwise. And it is no wonder that their thoughts revert to the men who had stood in the way of his occupying the throne. Here is another proof that the opposition was more serious and more deadly than at first appears. These men were far from contemptible. Even now they might be a serious trouble to the nation. Would it not be good policy to get rid of them at once? Did they not deserve to die, and ought they not at once to be put to death? It is not likely that if this question had been mooted in the like circumstances in any of the neighbouring kingdoms, there would have been a moment's hesitation in answering it. But Saul was full of a magnanimous spirit—nay, it seemed at the time a godly spirit. His mind was impressed with the fact that the deliverance of that day had come from God. And it was impressed at the same time with the grandeur and sublimity of the Divine power that had been brought into operation on behalf of Israel. Saul perceived a tremendous reality in the fact that "the Lord was their defence; the Holy One of Israel was their King." If Israel was encircled by such a garrison, if Israel's king was under such a Protector, what need he fear from a gang of miscreants like these children of Belial? Why dim the glory of the day by an act of needless massacre? Let forbearance to these misguided villains be another proof of the respect the nation had to the God of Jacob, as the Defender of Israel and Israel's King, and the certainty of their trust that He would defend them. And so "Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day; for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

O Saul, Saul, how well for thee it would have been hadst thou maintained this spirit! For then God would not have had to reject thee from being king, and to seek among the sheepfolds of Bethlehem a man after His own heart to be the leader of His people! And then thou wouldest have had no fear for the security of thy throne; thou wouldest not have hunted thy rival like a partridge on the mountains; and never, never wouldest thou have been tempted, in thy difficulties, to seek counsel from a woman with a familiar spirit, on the plea that God was departed from thee!

As we are thinking how well Saul has acted on this occasion, we perceive that an old friend has come on the scene who helps us materially to understand the situation. Yes, he is all the better of Samuel's guidance and prayers. The good old prophet has no jealousy of the man who took his place as head of the nation. But knowing well the fickleness of the people, he is anxious to turn the occasion to account for confirming their feelings and their aims. Seeing how the king has acknowledged God as the Author of the victory, he desires to strike while the iron is hot. "Come," he says, "let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there." Gilgal was the first place where the people had encamped under Joshua on crossing the Jordan. It was the place where the twelve stones taken from the empty bed of the river had been set up, as a testimony to the reality of the Divine presence in the midst of them. In some aspects, one might have thought that Samuel

would invite them to Ebenezer, where he had set up the stone of help, and that he would add another testimony to the record that hitherto the Lord had helped them. But Gilgal was nearer to Jabesh-Gilead, and it was memorable for still higher traditions. To Gilgal accordingly they went, to renew the kingdom. "And there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal, and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace-offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

The first election of Saul had been effected without any ceremonial, as if the people had been somewhat afraid to have a public coronation when it was obvious they had carried their point only by Divine sufferance, not by Divine command. But now, unequivocal testimony has been borne that, so long as Saul pays becoming regard to the heavenly King, the blessing and countenance of the Almighty will be his. Let him then be set apart with all due enthusiasm for his exalted office. Let his consecration take place in the most solemn circumstances—let it be "before the Lord in Gilgal;" let it be accompanied with those sacrifices of peace-offerings which shall indicate respect for God's appointed method of reconciliation; and let it be conducted with such devout regard to Him and to His law, that when it is over, the Divine blessing shall seem to fall on Saul in the old form of benediction. "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine on thee and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up His countenance on thee and give thee peace." Let the impression be deepened that "the God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people." Saul himself will not be the worse for having these feelings confirmed, and it will be of the highest benefit to the people.

And thus, under Samuel's guidance, the kingdom was renewed. Thus did both Saul and the people give unto the Lord the glory due to His name. And engaging in the ceremonial as they all did in this spirit, "both Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." It was, perhaps, the happiest occasion in all the reign of Saul. What contributed the chief element of brightness to the occasion was—the sunshine of Heaven. God was there, smiling on His children. There were other elements too. Samuel was there, happy that Saul had conquered, that he had established himself upon the throne, and, above all, that he had, in a right noble way, acknowledged God as the Author of the victory at Jabesh-Gilead. Saul was there, reaping the reward of his humility, his forbearance, his courage, and his activity. The people were there, proud of their king, proud of his magnificent appearance, but prouder of the super-eminent qualities that had marked the commencement of his reign. Nor was the pleasure of any one marred by any ugly blot or unworthy deed throwing a gloom over the transaction.

For one moment, let us compare the joy of this company with the feelings of men revelling in the pleasures of sin and sensuality or even of men storing a pile of gold, the result of some successful venture or the legacy of some deceased relative. How poor the quality of the one joy compared to that of the other! For what is there outside themselves that can make men so happy as the smile of God? Or what condition of the soul can be so full, so overflowing with healthy gladness as when the heart is ordered in accordance with God's law, and men are really disposed and en-

abled to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and to love their neighbours as themselves?

Is there not something of heaven in this joy? Is it not joy unspeakable and full of glory?

One other question: Is it *yours*?

CHAPTER XVI.

SAMUEL'S VINDICATION OF HIMSELF.

I SAMUEL xii. 1-5.

It was a different audience that Samuel had to address at Gilgal from either that which came to him to Ramah to ask for a king, or that which assembled at Mizpeh to elect one. To both of these assemblies he had solemnly conveyed his warning against the act of distrust in God implied in their wishing for a king at all, and against any disposition they might feel, when they got a king, to pay less attention than before to God's will and covenant. The present audience represented the army, undoubtedly a great multitude, that had gone forth with Saul to relieve Jabesh-Gilead, and that now came with Samuel to Gilgal to renew the kingdom. As the audience now seems to have been larger, so it very probably represented more fully the whole of the twelve tribes of Israel. This may explain to us why Samuel not only returned to the subject on which he had spoken so earnestly before, but enlarged on it at greater length, and appealed with more fulness to his own past life as giving weight to the counsels which he pressed upon them. Besides this, the recognition of Saul as king at Gilgal was more formal, more hearty, and more unanimous than at Mizpeh, and the institution of royalty was now more an established and settled affair. No doubt, too, Samuel felt that, after the victory at Jabesh-Gilead, he had the people in a much more impressible condition than they had been in before; and while their minds were thus so open to impression, it was his duty to urge on them to the very uttermost the truths that bore on their most vital well-being.

The address of Samuel on this occasion bore on three things: 1, his own personal relations to them in the past (vers. 1-5); 2, the mode of God's dealing with their fathers, and its bearing on the step now taken (vers. 6-12); and 3, the way in which God's judgments might be averted and His favour and friendship secured to the nation in all time coming (vers. 13-25).

1. The reason why Samuel makes such explicit reference to his past life and such a strong appeal to the people as to its blameless character is, that he may establish a powerful claim for the favourable consideration of the advice which he is about to give them. The value of an advice no doubt depends simply on its own intrinsic excellence, but the *effect* of an advice depends partly on other things; it depends, to a great extent, on the disposition of people to think favourably of the person by whom the advice is given. If you have reason to suspect an adviser of a selfish purpose, if you know him to be a man who can plausibly represent that the course which he urges will be a great benefit to you, while in reality he has no real regard for any interest but his own, then, let him argue as he pleases, you do not allow yourselves to be moved by anything he may say. But if you have good cause to know that he is a disinterested man, if he has never shown himself to be selfish,

but uniformly devoted to the interests of others, and especially of yourselves, you feel that what such a man urges comes home to you with extraordinary weight. Now, the great object of Samuel in his reference to his past life was to bring the weight of this consideration to bear in favour of the advice he was to give to the people. For he could appeal to them with the greatest confidence as to his absolute disinterestedness. He could show that, with ever so many opportunities of acting a selfish part, no man could accuse him of having ever been guilty of crooked conduct in all his relations to the people. He could establish from their own mouths the position that he was as thoroughly devoted to the interests of the nation as any man could be. And therefore he called on them to give their most favourable and their most earnest attention to the advice which he was about to press on them, the more so that he was most profoundly convinced that the very existence of the nation in days to come depended on its being complied with.

The first consideration he urged was, that he had listened to their voice in making them a king. He had not obstructed nor balked them in their strong feeling, though he might reasonably enough have done so. He had felt the proposal keenly as a reflection on himself, but he had waived that objection and gone on. He had regarded it as a slur on the Almighty, but the Almighty Himself had been pleased to forgive it, and he had transacted with Him on their behalf in the same way as before. Nothing that he had done in this matter could have an unfriendly aspect put on it. He had made the best of an objectionable proposal; and now they had not only got their wish, but along with it, objectionable though it was, a measure of the sanction of God. "And now, behold, the king walketh before you."

In the next place, Samuel adverts to his age. "I am old and grey-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you, and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day." You have had abundant opportunities to know me, and my manner of life. You know how I began, and you know how I have gone on, till now the circle of my years is nearly completed; a new generation has grown up; my sons are your contemporaries; I am old and grey-headed. You know how my childhood was spent in God's house in Shiloh, how God called me to be His prophet, and how I have gone on in that exalted office, trying ever to be faithful to Him that called me. What Samuel delicately points to here is the uniformity of his life. He had not begun on one line, then changed to another. He had not seesawed nor zigzagged, one thing at one time, another at another; but from infancy to grey hairs he had kept steadfastly to the same course, he had ever served the same Master. Such steadiness and uniformity throughout a long life genders a wonderful weight of character. The man that has borne an honoured name through all the changes and temptations of life, through youth and middle age, and even to hoar hairs, that has served all that time under the same banner and never brought discredit on it, has earned a title to no ordinary esteem. It is this that forms the true glory of old age. Men instinctively pay honour to the hoary head when it represents a career of uniform and consistent integrity; and Christian men honour it all the more when it represents a lifetime of Christian activity and self-denial. Examine the ground of this reverence, and you will find it to be

this: such a mature and consistent character could never have been attained but for many a struggle, in early life, of duty against inclination, and many a victory of the higher principle over the lower, till at length the habit of well-doing was so established, that further struggles were hardly ever needed. Men think of him as one who has silently but steadily yielded up the baser desires of his nature all through his life to give effect to the higher and the nobler. They think of him as one who has sought all through life to give that honour to the will of God in which possibly they have felt themselves sadly deficient, and to encourage among their fellow-men, at much cost of self-denial, those ways of life which inflict no damage on our nature and bring a serene peace and satisfaction. Of such a mode of life, Samuel was an admirable representative. Men of that stamp are the true nobles of a community. Loyal to God and faithful to man; denying themselves and labouring to diffuse the spirit of all true happiness and prosperity; visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and keeping themselves unspotted by the world—happy the community whose quiver is full of them! Happy the Church, happy the country, that abounds in such worthies!—men, as Thomas Carlyle said of his peasant Christian father, of whom one should be prouder in one's pedigree than of dukes or kings, for what is the glory of mere rank or accidental station compared to the glory of Godlike qualities, and of a character which reflects the image of God Himself?

The third point to which Samuel adverts is his freedom from all acts of unjust exaction or oppression, and from all those corrupt practices in the administration of justice which were so common in Eastern countries. "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 to you." It was no small matter to be able to make this challenge, which is as fearless in tone as it is comprehensive in range, in the very midst of such a sea of corruption as the neighbouring kingdoms of the East presented. It would seem as if, down to this day, the people in most of these despotic countries had never known any other régime but one of unjust exaction and oppression. We have seen, in an earlier chapter of this book, how shamefully the very priests abused the privilege of their sacred office to appropriate to themselves the offerings of God. In the days of our Lord and John the Baptist, what was it that rendered "the publicans" so odious but that their exactions went beyond the limits of justice and decency alike? Even to this day, the same system prevails as corrupt as ever. I have heard from an excellent American missionary a tale of a court of justice that came within his experience, even at a conspicuous place like Beirut, that shows that without bribery it is hardly possible to get a decision on the proper side. A claim had been made to a piece of land which he had purchased for his mission, and as he refused to pay what on the very face of it was obviously unjust, he was summoned before the magistrate. The delays that took place in dealing with the case were alike needless and vexatious, but the explanation came in a message from the authorities, slyly conveyed to him, that the wheels of justice would move much faster if they were

duly oiled with a little American gold. To such a proposal he would not listen for a moment, and it was only by threatening an exposure before the higher powers that the decision was at last given where really there was not the shadow of a claim against him. From the same source I got an illustration of the exactions that are made to this day in the payment of taxes. The law provides that of the produce of the land one tenth shall belong to the Government for the public service. There is an officer whose duty it is to examine the produce of every farm, and carry off the share that the Government are entitled to. The farmer is not allowed to do anything with his produce till this officer has obtained the Government share. After harvest the farmers of a district will send word to the officer that their produce is ready, and invite him to come and take his tenth. The officer will return word that he is very busy, and will not be able to come for a month. The delay of a month would entail incalculable loss and inconvenience on the farmers. They know the situation well; and they send a deputation of their number to say that if he will only come at once, they are willing to give him two tenths instead of one, the second tenth being for his own use. But this too they are assured that he cannot do. And there is nothing for them but to remain with him higgling and bargaining, till at last perhaps, in utter despair, they promise him a proportion which will leave no more than the half available for themselves.

And these are not exceptional instances—they are the common experiences of Eastern countries, at least in the Turkish empire. When such dishonest practices prevail on every side, it often happens that even good men are carried away with them, and seem to imagine that, being universal, it is necessary for them to fall in with them too. It was a rare thing that Samuel was able to do to look round on that vast assembly and demand whether one act of that kind had ever been committed by him, whether he had ever deviated even an hair-breadth from the rule of strict integrity and absolute honesty in all his dealings with them. Observe that Samuel was not like one of many, banded together to be true and upright, and supporting each other by mutual example and encouragement in that course. As far as appears, he was alone, like the seraph Abdiel, "faithful found among the faithless, faithful only he." What a regard he must have had for the law and authority of God! How rigidly he must have trained himself in public as in private life to make the will of God the one rule of his actions! What was it to him that slight peccadilloes would be thought nothing of by the public? What was it to him that men would have counted it only natural that of the money that passed through his hands a little should stick to his fingers, provided he was faithful in the main? What was it to him that this good man and that good man were in the way of doing it, so that, after all, he would be no worse than they? All such considerations would have been absolutely tossed aside. "Get thee behind me, Satan," would have been his answer to all such proposals. Unbending integrity, absolute honesty, unswerving truth, was his rule on every occasion. "How can I do this wickedness," would have been his question—"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Is there nothing here for us to ponder in these days of intense competition in business and questionable methods of securing gain? Surely the

rule of unbending integrity, absolute honesty, and unswerving truth is as binding on the Christian merchant as it was on the Hebrew judge. Is the Christian merchant entitled to make use of the plea of general corruption around him in business any more than Samuel was? Some say, How else are we to make a living? We answer, No man is entitled even to make a living on terms which shut him out from using the Lord's Prayer,—from saying, "Give us this day our daily bread." Who would dare to say that bread obtained by dishonesty or deceit is God-given bread? Who could ask God to bless any enterprise or transaction which had not truth and honesty for its foundation? Better let bread perish than get it by unlawful means. For "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." Instead of Christian men accepting the questionable ways of the world for pushing business, let them stand out as those who never can demean themselves by anything so unprincipled. No doubt Samuel was a poor man, though he might have been rich had he followed the example of heathen rulers. But who does not honour him in his poverty, with his incorruptible integrity and most scrupulous truthfulness, as no man would or could have honoured him had he accumulated the wealth of a Cardinal Wolsey and lived in splendour rivalling royalty itself? After all, it is the true rule, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

But ere we pass from the contemplation of Samuel's character, it is right that we should very specially take note of the root of this remarkable integrity and truthfulness of his toward men. For we live in times when it is often alleged that religion and morality have no vital connection with each other, and that there may be found an "independent morality" altogether separate from religious profession. Let it be granted that this divorce from morality may be true of religions of an external character, where Divine service is supposed to consist of ritual observances and bodily attitudes and attendances, performed in strict accordance with a very rigid rule. Wherever such performances are looked on as the end of religion, they may be utterly dissociated from morality, and one may be, at one and the same time, strictly religious and glaringly immoral. Nay, further, where religion is held to be in the main the acceptance of a system of doctrine, where the reception of the doctrines of grace is regarded as the distinguishing mark of the Christian, and fidelity to these doctrines the most important duty of discipleship, you may again have a religion dissociated from moral life. You may find men who glory in the doctrine of justification by faith and look with infinite pity on those who are vainly seeking to be accepted by their works, and who deem themselves very safe from punishment because of the doctrine they hold, but who have no right sense of the intrinsic evil of sin, and who are neither honest, nor truthful, nor worthy of trust in the common relations of life. But wherever religion is spiritual and penetrating, wherever sin is seen in its true character, wherever men feel the curse and pollution of sin in their hearts and lives, another spirit rules. The great desire now is to be delivered from sin, not merely in its punishment, but in its pollution and power. The end of religion is to establish a gracious relation

through Jesus Christ between the sinner and God, whereby not only shall God's favour be restored, but the soul shall be renewed after God's image, and the rule of life shall be to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now we say, You cannot have *such* a religion without moral reformation. And, on the other hand, you cannot rely on moral reformation being accomplished without a religion like this. But alas! the love of sinful things is very deeply grained in the fallen nature of man.

Godlessness and selfishness are frightfully powerful in unregenerate hearts. The will of God is a terrible rule of life to the natural man—a rule against which he rebels as unreasonable, impracticable, terrible. How then are men brought to pay supreme and constant regard to that will? How was Samuel brought to do this, and how are men led to do it now? In both cases, it is through the influence of gracious, Divine love. Samuel was a member of a nation that God had chosen as His own, that God had redeemed from bondage, that God dwelt among, protected, restored, guided, and blessed beyond all example. The heart of Samuel was moved by God's goodness to the nation. More than that, Samuel personally had been the object of God's redeeming love; and though the hundred-and-third Psalm was not yet written, he could doubtless say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." It is the same gracious Divine action, the same experience of redeeming grace and mercy, that under the Christian dispensation draws men's hearts to the will of God; only a new light has been thrown on these Divine qualities by the Cross of Christ. The forgiving grace and love of God have been placed in a new setting, and when it is felt that God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, a new sense of His infinite kindness takes possession of the soul. Little truly does any one know of religion, in the true sense of the term, who has not got this view of God in Christ, and has not felt his obligations to the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him. And when this experience comes to be known, it becomes the delight of the soul to do the will of God. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAMUEL'S DEALINGS WITH THE PEOPLE.

I SAMUEL xii. 6-25.

2. HAVING vindicated himself (in the first five verses of this chapter), Samuel now proceeds to his second point, and takes the people in hand. But before proceeding to close quarters with them, he gives a brief review of the history of the nation,

in order to bring out the precise relation in which they stood to God, and the duty resulting from that relation (vers. 6-12).

First, he brings out the fundamental fact of their history. Its grand feature was this: "It is the Lord who advanced Moses and Aaron, and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt." The fact was as indisputable as it was glorious. How would Moses ever have been induced to undertake the task of deliverance from Egypt if the Lord had not sent him? Was he not most unwilling to leave the wilderness and return to Egypt? What could Aaron have done for them if the Lord had not guided and anointed him? How could the people have found an excuse for leaving Egypt even for a day if God had not required them? How could Pharaoh have been induced to let them go, when even the first nine plagues only hardened his heart, or how could they have escaped from him and his army, had the Lord not divided the sea that His ransom might pass over? The fact could not be disputed—their existence as a people and their settlement in Canaan were due to the special mercy of the Lord. If ever a nation owed everything to the power above, Israel owed everything to Jehovah. No distinction could even approach this in its singular glory.

And yet there was a want of cordiality on the part of the people in acknowledging it. They were partly at least blind to its surpassing lustre. The truth is, they did not like all the duties and responsibility which it involved. It is the highest honour of a son to have a godly father, upright, earnest, consistent in serving God. Yet many a son does not realise this, and sometimes in his secret heart he wishes that his father were just a little more like the men of the world. It is the brightest chapter in the history of a nation that records its struggles for God's honour and man's liberty; yet there are many who have no regard for these struggles, but denounce their champions as ruffians and fanatics. Close connection with God is not, in the eyes of the world, the glorious thing that it is in reality. How strange that this should be so! "O righteous Father," exclaimed Christ in His intercessory prayer, "the world hath not known Thee." He was distressed at the world's blindness to the excellence of God. "How strange it is," Richard Baxter says in substance somewhere, "that men can see beauty in so many things—in the flowers, in the sky, in the sun—and yet be blind to the highest beauty of all, the fountain and essence of all beauty, the beauty of the Lord!" Never rest, my friends, so long as this is true of you. Is not the very fact that to you God, even when revealed in Jesus Christ, may be like a root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness or any beauty wherefore you should desire Him—is not that, if it be a fact, alike alarming and appalling? Make it your prayer that He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness would shine in your heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Having emphatically laid down the fundamental fact in the history of Israel, Samuel next proceeds to reason upon it. The reasoning rests on two classes of facts: the first, that whenever the people forsook God they had been brought into trouble; the second, that whenever they repented and cried to God He delivered them out of their trouble. The prophet refers to several instances of both, but not exhaustively, not so as

to embrace every instance. Among those into whose hand God gave them were Sisera, the Philistines, and the Moabites; among those raised up to deliver them when they cried to the Lord were Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel. The name Bedan does not occur in the history, and as the Hebrew letters that form the word are very similar to those which form Barak, it has been supposed, and I think with reason, that the word Bedan is just a clerical mistake for Barak. The use the prophet makes of both classes of facts is to show how directly God was concerned in what befell the nation. The whole course of their history under the judges had shown that to forsake God and worship idols was to bring on the nation disaster and misery; to return to God and restore His worship was to secure abundant prosperity and blessing. This had been made as certain by past events as it was certain that to close the shutters in an apartment was to plunge it into darkness, and that to open them was to restore light. Cause and effect had been made so very plain that any child might see how the matter stood.

Now, what was it that had recently occurred? They had had trouble from the Ammonites. At ver. 11 the prophet indicates—what is not stated before—that this trouble with the Ammonites had been connected with their coming to him to ask a king. Evidently, the siege of Jabesh-Gilead was not the first offensive act the Ammonites had committed. They had no doubt been irritating the tribes on the other side of Jordan in many ways before they proceeded to attack that city. And if their attack was at all like that which took place in the days of Jephthah, it must have been very serious and highly threatening. (See Judges x. 8, 9.) Now, from what Samuel says here, it would appear that this annoyance from the Ammonites was the immediate occasion of the people wishing to have a king. Here let us observe what their natural course would have been, in accordance with former precedent. It would have been to cry to the Lord to deliver them from the Ammonites. As they had cried for deliverance when the Ammonites for eighteen years vexed and oppressed all the tribes settled on the east side of Jordan, and when they even passed over Jordan to fight against Judah and Benjamin and Ephraim, and the Lord raised up Jephthah, so ought they to have cried to the Lord at this time, and He would have given them a deliverer. But instead of that they asked Samuel to give them a king, that he might deliver them. You see from this what cause Samuel had to charge them with rejecting God for their King. You see at the same time how much forbearance God exercised in allowing Samuel to grant their request. God virtually said, "I will graciously give up My plan and accommodate Myself to theirs. I will give up the plan of raising up a special deliverer in special danger, and will let their king be their deliverer. If they and their king are faithful to My covenant, I will give the same mercies to them as they would have received had things remained as they were. It will still be true, as I promised to Abraham, that I will be their God and they shall be My people."

3. This is the third thing that Samuel is specially concerned to press on the people; and this he does in the remaining verses (vers. 13-25). They were to remember that their having a king in no sense and in no degree exempted them from their moral and spiritual obligations to God. It

did not give them one atom more liberty either in the matter of worship, or in those weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and truth. It did not make it one iota less sinful to erect altars to Baal and Ashtaroth, or to join with any of their neighbours in religious festivities in honour of these gods. "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; 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."

There is nothing very similar to this in the circumstances in which we are placed. And yet it is often needful to remind even Christian people of this great truth: that no change of outward circumstances can ever bring with it a relaxation of moral duty, or make that lawful for us which in its own nature is wrong. Nothing of moral quality can be right for us on shipboard which is wrong for us on dry land. Nothing can be allowable in India which could not be thought of in England or Scotland. The law of the Sabbath is not more elastic on the continent of Europe than it is at home. There is no such thing as a geographical religion or a geographical Christianity. Burke used to say, looking to the humane spirit that Englishmen showed at home and the oppressive treatment they were often guilty of to the natives of other countries, that the humanity of England was a thing of points and parallels. But a local humanity is no humanity. Those who act as if it were, make public opinion their god, instead of the eternal Jehovah. They virtually say that what public opinion does not allow in England is wrong in England, and must be avoided. If public opinion allows it on the continent of Europe, or in India, or in Africa, it may be done. Is this not dethroning God, and abrogating His immutable law? If God be our King, His will must be our one unailing rule of life and duty wherever we are. Truly, there is little recognition of a mutable public opinion affecting the quality of our actions, in that sublime psalm that brings out so powerfully the omniscience of God.—the hundred and thirtieth, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."

It was Samuel's purpose, then, to press on the people that the change involved in having a king brought no change as to their duty of invariable allegiance to God. The lessons of history had been clear enough; but they were always a dull-sighted people, and not easily impressed except by what was palpable and even sensational. For this reason Samuel determined to impress the lesson on them in another way. He would show them there and then, under their very eyes, what agencies of destruction God held in His hand, and how easily He could bring these to bear on them and on their property. "Is it not wheat

harvest to-day?" You are gathering or about to gather that important crop, and it is of vital importance that the weather be still and calm. But I will pray the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain, and you will see how easy it is for Him in one hour to ruin the crop which you have been nursing so carefully for months back. "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. 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." It was an impressive proof how completely they were in God's hands. What earthly thing could any of them or all of them do to ward off that agent of destruction from their crops? There were they, a great army, with sword and spear, young, strong, and valiant, yet they could not arrest in its fall one drop of rain, nor alter the course of one puff of wind, nor extinguish the blaze of one tongue of fire. Oh, what folly it was to offer an affront to the great God, who had such complete control over "fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind fulfilling His word"! What blindness to think they could in any respect be better with another king!

Thus it is that in their times of trial God's people in all ages have been brought to feel their entire dependence on Him. In days of flowing prosperity, we have little sense of that dependence. As the Psalmist puts it in the thirtieth Psalm: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." When all goes well with us, we expect the same prosperity to continue; it seems stereotyped, the fixed and permanent condition of things. When the days run smoothly, "involving happy months, and these as happy years, all seems certain to continue. But a change comes over our life. Ill-health fastens on us; death invades our circle; relatives bring us into deep waters; our means of living fail; we are plunged into a very wilderness of woe. How falsely we judged when we thought that it was by its own inherent stability our mountain stood strong! No, no; it was solely the result of God's favour, for all our springs are in Him; the moment He hides His face we are most grievously troubled. Sad but salutary experience! Well for you, my afflicted friend, if it burns into your very soul the conviction that every blessing in life depends on God's favour, and that to offend God is to ruin all!

But now, the humble and contrite spirit having been shown by the people, see how Samuel hastens to comfort and reassure them. Now that they have begun to fear, he can say to them, "Fear not." Now that they have shown themselves alive to the evils of God's displeasure, they are assured that there is a clear way of escape from these evils. "Turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart." If God be terrible as an enemy, He is glorious as a friend. No doubt you offered a slight to Him when you sought another king. But it is just a proof of His wonderful goodness that, though you have done this, He does not cast you off. He will be as near to you as ever He was if you are only faithful to Him. He will still deliver you from your enemies when you call upon Him. For His name and His memorial are still the same: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth, forgiving iniquity and

transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

Samuel, moreover, reminds them that it was not they that had chosen God; it was God that had chosen them. "The Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people." This was a great ground of comfort for Israel. The eternal God had chosen them and made them His people for great purposes of His own. It was involved in this very choice and purpose of God that He would keep His hand on them, and preserve them from all such calamities as would prevent them from fulfilling His purpose. Fickle and changeable, they might easily be induced to break away from Him; but, strong and unchangeable, He could never be induced to abandon His purpose in them. And if this was a comfort to Israel then, there is a corresponding comfort to the spiritual Israel now. If my heart is in any measure turned to God, to value His favour and seek to do His will, it is God that has effected the change. And this shows that God has a purpose with me. Till that purpose is accomplished, He cannot leave me. He will correct me when I sin, He will recover me when I stray, He will heal me when I am sick, He will strengthen me when I am weak; "I am confident of this very thing: that He which hath begun a good work in me will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ."

Once more, in answer to the people's request that he would intercede for them, Samuel is very earnest. "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." The great emphasis with which he says this shows how much his heart is in it. "What should I do, if I had not the privilege of intercessory prayer for you?" There is a wonderful revelation of love to the people here. They are dear to him as his children are dear to a Christian parent, and he feels for them as warmly as he feels for himself. There is a wonderful deepening of interest and affection when men's relation to God is realised. The warmest heart as yet unregenerate cannot feel for others as the spiritual heart must do when it takes in all the possibilities of the spiritual state—all that is involved in the favour or in the wrath of the infinite God, in the predominance of sin or of grace in the heart, and in the prospect of an eternity of woe on the one hand or of glory, honour, and heavenly bliss on the other. How is it possible for one to have all these possibilities full in one's view and not desire the eternal welfare of loved ones with an intensity unknown to others? We know from experience how hard it is to get them to do right. Even one's own children seem sometimes to baffle every art and endeavour of love, and go off, in spite of everything, to the ways of the world. Entreaty and remonstrance are apparently in vain. The more one pleads, the less perhaps are one's pleas regarded. One resource remains—intercessory prayer. It is the only method to which one may resort with full assurance of its ultimate efficacy for attaining the dearest object of one's heart. Does the thought of giving up intercessory prayer come to one from any quarter? No wonder if the insinuation is met by a deep, earnest "God forbid"!

"I bless God," said Mr. Flavel, one of the best and sweetest of the old Puritan divines, on the death of his father—"I bless God for a religious and tender father, who often poured out his soul

to God for me; and this stock of prayers I esteem the fairest inheritance on earth." How many a man has been deeply impressed even by the very thought that some one was praying for him! "Is it not strange," he has said to himself, "that he should pray for me far more than I pray for myself? What can induce him to take such an interest in me?" Every Christian ought to think much of intercessory prayer, and practise it greatly. It is doubly blessed: blessed to him who prays and blessed to those for whom he prays. Nothing is better fitted to enlarge and warm the heart than intercessory prayer. To present to God in succession, one after another, our family and our friends, remembering all their wants, sorrows, trials, and temptations; to bear before Him the interests of this struggling Church and what in various parts of the world, this interesting mission and that noble cause; to make mention of those who are waging the battles of temperance, of purity, of freedom, of Christianity itself, in the midst of difficulty, obloquy, and opposition; to gather together all the sick and sorrowing, all the fatherless and widows, all the bereaved and dying, of one's acquaintance, and ask God to bless them; to think of all the children of one's acquaintance in the bright springtide of life, of all the young men and young women arrived or arriving at the critical moment of decision as to the character of their life, and implore God to guide them—O brethren, this is good for one's self; it enlarges one's own heart; it helps one's self in prayer! And then what a blessing it is for those prayed for! Who can estimate the amount of spiritual blessing that has been sent down on this earth in answer to the fervent intercessions of the faithful? Think how Moses interceded for the whole nation after the golden calf, and it was spared. Think how Daniel interceded for his companions in Babylon, and the secret was revealed to him. Think how Elijah interceded for the widow, and her son was restored to life. Think how Paul constantly interceded for all his Churches, and how their growth and spiritual prosperity evinced that his prayer was not in vain. God forbid that any Christian should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for the Church which He hath purchased with His own blood. And while we pray for the Church, let us not forget the world that lieth in wickedness. For of all for whom the desires of the faithful should go up to heaven, surely the most necessitous are those who have as yet no value for heavenly blessings. What duty can be more binding on us than to "pray for her that prays not for herself"?

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAUL AND SAMUEL AT GILGAL.

I SAMUEL xiii.

THE first thing that claims our attention in connection with this chapter is the question of dates involved in the first verse. In the Authorised Version we read, "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men." This rendering of the original is now quite given up. The form of expression is the same as that which so often tells us the age of a king at the beginning of his reign and the length of his reign. The Revised

Version is in close, but not in strict, accord with the Hebrew. It runs, "Saul was *thirty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." A marginal note of the Revised Version says, "The Hebrew text has, '*Saul was a year old.*' The whole verse is omitted in the unrevised Septuagint, but in a later recension the number *thirty* is inserted." There can be no doubt that something has been dropped out of the Hebrew text. Literally translated, it would run, "Saul was a year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." A figure seems to have dropped out after "Saul was" and another after "he reigned." A blot of some kind may have effaced these figures in the original manuscript, and the copyist not knowing what they were, may have left them blank. The Septuagint conjecture of "thirty" as Saul's age is not very felicitous, for at the beginning of Saul's reign his son Jonathan was old enough to distinguish himself in the war. Judging from probabilities, we should say that the original may have run thus: "Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and two years over Israel." This would make the length of Saul's reign to correspond with the duration of Saul's dynasty as given in Acts xiii. 21. There it is said that God gave to the people Saul "by the space of forty years." If to the thirty-two years which we suppose to have been the actual length of Saul's reign we add seven and a half, during which his son Ishbosheth reigned, we get in round numbers as the duration of his dynasty forty years. This would make Saul about seventy-two at the time of his death.

The narrative in this chapter appears to be in immediate connection with that of the last. The bulk of the army had gone from Jabesh-Gilead to Gilgal, and there, under Samuel, they had renewed the kingdom. There they had listened to Samuel's appeal, and there the thunderstorm had taken place that helped so well to rivet the prophet's lessons. Therefore the bulk of the army was disbanded, but two thousand men were kept with Saul at Michmash and near Bethel, and one thousand with Jonathan at Gibeah. These were necessary to be some restraint on the Philistines, who were strong in the neighbourhood and eager to inflict every possible annoyance on the Israelites. Saul, however, does not seem to have felt himself in a position to take any active steps against them.

But though Saul was inactive, Jonathan did not slumber. Though very young, probably under twenty, he had already been considered worthy of an important command, and now, by successfully attacking a garrison of the Philistines in Geba, he showed that he was worthy of the confidence that had been placed in him. It is interesting to mark in Jonathan that dash and daring which was afterwards so conspicuous in David, and the display of which on the part of David drew Jonathan's heart to him so warmly. The news of the exploit of Jonathan soon circulated among the Philistines, and would naturally kindle the desire to retaliate. Saul would see at once that, as the result of this, the Philistines would come upon them in greater force than ever; and it was to meet this expected attack that he called for a muster of his people. Gilgal was the place of rendezvous, deep down in the Jordan valley; for the higher part of the country was so dominated by the enemy that no muster could take place there.

So it seemed as if the brilliant achievement of Jonathan was going to prove a curse rather than a blessing. In all kinds of warfare, we must be prepared for such turns in the order of events. When one side shows a great increase of activity, the other does the same. When one achieves an advantage, the other rouses itself to restore the balance. It has often happened in times of religious darkness that the bold attitude of some fearless reformer has roused the enemy to activity and ferocity, and thus brought to his brethren worse treatment than before. But such reverses are only temporary, and the cause of truth gains on the whole by the successful skirmishes of its pioneers. Many persons, when they see the activity and boldness which the forces of evil manifest in our day, are led to conclude that our times are sadly degenerate; they forget that the activity of evil is the proof and the result of the vitality and activity of good. No doubt there were faint-hearted persons in the host of Israel who would bring hard accusations against Jonathan for disturbing the equilibrium between Israel and the Philistines. They would shake their heads and utter solemn truisms on the rashness of youth, and would ask if it was not a shame to entrust a stripling with such power and responsibility. But Jonathan's stroke was the beginning of a movement which might have ended in the final expulsion of the Philistines from the territories of Israel if Saul had not acted foolishly at Gilgal. In this case, it was not the young man, but the old, that was rash and reckless. Jonathan had acted with courage and vigour, probably also with faith; it was Saul that brought disturbance and disaster to the host.

The dreaded invasion of the Philistines was not long of taking place. The force which they brought together is stated so high, that in the number of the chariots some commentators have suspected an error of the copyist, 30,000 for 3,000, an error easily accounted for, as the extra cipher would be represented by a slight mark over the Hebrew letter. But, be this as it may, the invading host was of prodigiously large dimensions. It was so large as to spread a thorough panic through the whole community of Israel, for the people "hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits." Not content with such protection, some of them crossed the Jordan, and took refuge in Gilead and in Dan, not far from Jabesh-Gilead, where another enemy had been so signally defeated. Saul had remained in Gilgal, where he was followed by a host of people, not in any degree impressed by what God had done for them at Jabesh-Gilead, not trying to rally their courage by the thought that God was still their King and Defender, but full of that abject fear which utterly unnerves both mind and body, and prepares the way for complete disaster. How utterly prostrated and helpless the people were is apparent from that very graphic picture of their condition which we find towards the end of the chapter: "There was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make to themselves swords or spears; but all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen every man his share, and his coultter, and his axe, and his mattock." It requires little effort of imagination to see that the condition of the Israelites was, humanly speaking, utterly desperate. An enormous array of warriors like the Philistines, equipped with all the weapons of war,

and confident in their prowess and their power, pouring upon a land where the defenders had not even swords nor spears, but only clubs and stones and such-like rude resources for the purposes of conflict, presented a scene the issue of which could not have been doubtful on all human calculations.

But surely the case was not a whit more desperate than that of their forefathers had been, with the sea before them, the mountains on either side, and the Egyptian army, in all its completeness of equipment, hastening to fall upon their rear. Yet out of that terrible situation their Divine King had delivered them, and a few hours after, they were all jubilant and triumphant, singing to the Lord who had triumphed gloriously, and had cast the horse and his rider into the sea. And no one can fail to see that the very gravity of the situation at the present time ought to have given birth to a repetition of that spirit of faith and prayer which had animated Moses, as it afterwards animated Deborah, and Gideon, and many more, and through which deliverance had come. On every ground the duty incumbent on Saul at this time was to show the most complete deference to the will of God and the most unreserved desire to enjoy His countenance and guidance. First, the magnitude of the danger, the utter disproportion between the strength of the defending people and that of the invading host, was fitted to throw him on God. Second, the fact, so solemnly and earnestly urged by Samuel, that, notwithstanding the sin committed by the people in demanding a king, God was willing to defend and rule His people as of old, *if only they had due regard to Him and His covenant*, should have made Saul doubly careful to act at this crisis in every particular in the most rigid compliance with God's will. Thirdly, the circumstance which he himself had so well emphasised, that the recent victory at Jabesh-Gilead was a victory obtained from God, should have led him direct to God, to implore a similar interposition of His power in this new and still more overwhelming danger. If only Saul had been a true man, a man of faith and prayer, he would have risen to the height of the occasion at this terrible crisis, and a deliverance as glorious as that which Gideon obtained over the Midianites would have signalled his efforts. It was a most testing moment in his history. The whole fortunes of his kingdom seemed to depend on his choice. *There* was God, ready to come to his help if His help had been properly asked. *There* were the Philistines, ready to swallow them up if no sufficient force could be mustered against them. But weighed in the balances, Saul was found wanting. He did not honour God; he did not act as knowing that all depended on Him. And this want of his would have involved the terrible humiliation and even ruin of the nation if Jonathan had not been of a different temper from his father, if Jonathan had not achieved the deliverance which would not have come by Saul.

Let us now examine carefully how Saul acted on the occasion, all the more carefully because, at first sight, many have the impression that he was justified in what he did, and consequently that the punishment announced by Samuel was far too severe.

It appears that Samuel had instructed Saul to wait seven days for him at Gilgal, in order that steps might be properly taken for securing the guidance and help of God. There is some obscurity in the narrative here, arising from the

fact that it was on the first occasion of their meeting that we read how Samuel directed Saul to wait seven days for him at Gilgal, till he should come to offer burnt-offerings and to show him what he was to do (chap. x. 8). We can hardly suppose, however, that this first direction, given by Samuel, was not implemented at an earlier time. It looks as if Samuel had repeated the instruction to Saul with reference to the circumstances of the Philistine invasion. But, be this as it may, it is perfectly clear from the narrative that Saul was under instructions to wait seven days at Gilgal, at the end, if not before the end, of which time Samuel promised to come to him. This was a distinct instruction from Samuel, God's known and recognised prophet, acting in God's name and with a view to the obtaining of God's countenance and guidance in the awful crisis of the nation. The seven days had come to an end, and Samuel had not appeared. Saul determined that he would wait no longer. "Saul said, Bring hither a burnt-offering to me, and peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering."

Now, it has been supposed by some that Saul's offence lay in his taking on him the functions of priest, and doing that which it was not lawful for any but priests to do. But it does not appear that this was his offence. A king is often said to do things which in reality are done by his ministers and others. All that is necessarily involved in the narrative is, that the king caused the priests to offer the burnt-offering. For even Samuel had no authority personally to offer sacrifices, and had he been present, the priests would have officiated all the same.

The real offence of Saul was that he disregarded the absence of God's prophet and representative, of the man who had all along been the mediator between God and the king and between God and the people. And this was no secondary matter. If Saul had had a real conviction that all depended at this moment on his getting God's help, he would not have disregarded an instruction received from God's servant, and he would not have acted as if Samuel's presence was of no moment. The significant thing in Saul's state of mind, as disclosed by his act, was that he was not really bent on complying with the will of God. God was not a reality to Saul. The thought of God just loomed vaguely before his mind as a power to be considered, but not as the power on whom everything depended. What he thought about God was, that a burnt-offering must be offered up to propitiate Him, to prevent Him from obstructing the enterprise, but he did not think of Him as the Being who alone could give it success. It was substantially the carnal mind's view of God. It says, no doubt there is a God, and He has an influence on things here below; and to keep Him from thwarting us, we must perform certain services which seem to please Him. But what a pitiful view it is of God! As if the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity could be induced to bestow or to withhold His favour simply by the slaughter of an animal, or by some similar rite!

But this was Saul's idea. "The sacrifice must be offered; the rite must be gone through. This piece of outward homage must be paid to the power above, but the way of doing it is of little moment. It is a sacred form, no more. I am sorry not to have Samuel present, but the fault is not mine. He was to be here, and he has not

come. And now these frightened people are stealing away from me, and if I wait longer, I may be left without followers. Priests, bring the animal and offer the sacrifice, and let us away to the war!"

How different would have been the acting of a man that honoured God and felt that in His favour was life! How solemnised he would have been, how concerned for his own past neglect of God, and the neglect of his people! The presence of God's prophet would have been counted at once a necessity and a privilege. How deeply, in his sense of sin, would he have entered into the meaning of the burnt-offering! How earnestly he would have pleaded for God's favour, countenance, and blessing! If Jacob could not let the angel go at Peniel unless he blessed him, neither would Saul have parted from God at Gilgal without some assurance of help. "If Thy presence go not with me," he would have said, "carry us not up hence." Alas, we find nothing of all this! The servant of God is not waited for; the form is gone through, and Saul is off to his work. And this is the doing of the man who has been called to be king of Israel, and who has been solemnly warned that God alone is Israel's defence, and that to offend God is to court ruin!

When Samuel came, Saul was ready with a plausible excuse. On the ground of expediency, he vindicated his procedure. He could not deny that he had broken his promise (it was a virtual promise) to wait for Samuel, but there were reasons exceedingly strong to justify him in doing so. Samuel had not come. The people were scattered from him. The Philistines were concentrating at Michmash, and might have come down and fallen upon him at Gilgal. All very true, but not one of them by itself, nor all of them together, a real vindication of what he had done. Samuel, he might be sure, would not be an hour longer than he could help. There were far more people left to him than Gideon's band, and the God that gave the victory to the three hundred would not have let him suffer for want of men. The Philistines might have been discomfited by God's tempest on the way to Gilgal, as they were discomfited before, on the way to Mizpeh. O Saul, distrust of God has been at the bottom of your mind! The faith that animated the heroes of former days has had no control of you. You have walked by sight, not by faith. Had you been faithful now, and honoured God, and waited till His servant sent you off with his benediction, prosperity would have attended you, and your family would have been permanently settled in the throne. But now your kingdom shall not continue. Personally, you may continue to be king for many years to come; but the penalty which God affixes to this act of unbelief, formality, and presumption is, that no line of kings shall spring from your loins. The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people.

What a solemn and impressive condemnation have we here, my friends, of that far too common practice—deserting principle to serve expediency. I don't like to tell a lie, some one may say, but if I had not done so, I should have lost my situation. I dislike common work on the Sabbath day, but if I did not do it, I could not live. I don't think it right to go to Sunday parties or to play games on Sunday, but I was invited by this or that great person to do it, and I could not refuse him. I

ought not to adulterate my goods, and I ought not to give false statements of their value, but every one in my business does it, and I cannot be singular. What do these vindications amount to, but just a confession that from motives of expediency God's commandment may be set aside? These excuses just come to this: It was better for me to offend God and gain a slight benefit, than it would have been to lose the benefit and please God. It is a great deal to lose a small profit in business, or a small pleasure in social life, or a small honour from a fellow-man; but it is little or nothing to displease God, it is little or nothing to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. Alas for the practical unbelief that lies at the bottom of all this! It is the doing of the fool who hath said in his heart, There is no God. Look at this history of Saul. See what befell him for preferring expediency to principle. Know that the same condemnation awaits all who walk in his footsteps—all who are not solemnised by that awful, that unanswerable, question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Great offence has often been taken at the character here ascribed to the man who was to fill the throne after Saul—"The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart." Was David, the adulterer, the traitor, the murderer, a man after God's own heart? But surely it is not meant to be affirmed that David was such a man in every aspect, in every particular. The point on which the emphasis should rest must surely be that David was such a man in that feature in which Saul was so wanting. And undoubtedly this was eminently true of him. That which stood out most fully in the public character of David was the honour which he paid to God, the constancy with which he consulted His will, the prevailing desire he had to rule the kingdom in His fear and for His glory. If God was but a form to Saul, He was an intense reality to David. If Saul could not get it into his mind that he ought to rule for God, David could not have got it out of his mind if he had tried. That David's character was deformed in many ways cannot be denied; he had not only infirmities, but tumours, blotches, defilements, most distressing to behold; but in this one thing he left an example to all of us, and especially to rulers, which it would be well for all of us to ponder deeply: that the whole business of government is to be carried on in the spirit of regard to the will of God; that the welfare of the people is ever to be consulted in preference to the interests of the prince; that for nations, as for individuals, God's favour is life, and His frown ruin.

CHAPTER XIX.

JONATHAN'S EXPLOIT AT MICHMASH.

I SAMUEL xiv. 1-23.

It has sometimes been objected to the representation occurring at the end of the thirteenth chapter of the utter want of arms among the Hebrews at this time that it is inconsistent with the narrative of the eleventh. If it be true, as stated there, that the Israelites gained a great victory over the Ammonites, they must have had arms to accomplish that; and, moreover, the victory itself must have put them in possession of the arms of the Ammonites. The answer to this is, that the

invasion of the Philistines subsequent to this in such overwhelming numbers seems to have been the cause of the miserable plight to which the Hebrews were reduced, and of the loss of their arms.

Whether we are to take the statement as quite literal that in the day of battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people save Saul or Jonathan, or whether we are to regard this as just an Oriental way of saying that these were the only two who had a thorough equipment of arms, it is plain enough that the condition of the Hebrew troops was very wretched. That in their circumstances a feeling of despondency should have fallen on all save the few who walked by faith, need not excite any surprise.

The position of the two armies is not difficult to understand. Several miles to the north of Jerusalem, a valley, now named Wady Suweinet, runs from west to east, from the central plateau of Palestine, down towards the valley of the Jordan. The name Mûkmas, still preserved, shows the situation of the place which was then occupied by the garrison of the Philistines. Near to that place, Captain Conder* believes that he has found the very rocks where the exploit of Jonathan occurred. On either side of the valley there rises a perpendicular crag, the northern one, called in Scripture Bozez, being extremely steep and difficult of ascent. "It seems just possible that Jonathan, with immense labour, might have climbed up on his hands and his feet, and his armour-bearer after him."

It is evident that Saul had no thought at this time of making any attack on the Philistines. How could he, with soldiers so poorly armed and so little to encourage them? Samuel does not appear to have been with him. But in his company was a priest, Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, grandson of Eli, perhaps the same as Ahimelech, afterwards introduced. Saul still adhered to the forms of religion; but he had too much resemblance to the Church of Sardis—"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

The position of the army of Israel with reference to the Philistines seems to have been very similar to what it was afterwards when Goliath defied the army of the living God. The Israelites could only look on, in hopeless inactivity. But just as the youthful spirit of David was afterwards roused in these circumstances to exertion, so on the present occasion was the youthful spirit of Jonathan. It was not the first time that he had attacked the garrison of the Philistines. (See xiii. 3.) But what he did on the former occasion seems to have been under more equal conditions than the seemingly desperate enterprise to which he betook himself now. A project of unprecedented daring came into his mind. He took counsel with no one about it. He breathed nothing of it to his father. A single confidant and companion was all that he thought of—his armour-bearer, or aide-de-camp. And even him he did not so much consult as attach. "Come," said he, "and let us go over into the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint by the Lord to save by many or by few." No words are needed to show the daring character of this project. The physical effort to climb on hands and feet up a precipitous rock was itself most difficult and perilous, possible only to boys, light and lithe of form,

* "Tent Work in Palestine."

and well accustomed to it; and if the garrison observed them and chose to oppose them, a single stone hurled from above would stretch them, crushed and helpless, on the valley below. But suppose they succeeded, what were a couple of young men to do when confronted with a whole garrison? Or even if the garrison should be overpowered, how were they to deal with the Philistine host, that lay encamped at no great distance, or at most were scattered here and there over the country, and would soon assemble? In every point of view save one, the enterprise seemed utterly desperate. But that exception was a very important one. The one point of view in which there was the faintest possibility of success was, that the Lord God might favour the enterprise. The God of their fathers might work for them, and if He did so, there was no restraint with Him to work by many or by few. Had He not worked by Ehud alone to deliver their fathers from the Moabites? Had he not worked by Shamgar alone, when with his ox goad he slew six hundred Philistines? Had he not worked by Samson alone in all his wonderful exploits? Might he not work that day by Jonathan and his armour-bearer, and, after all, only produce a new chapter in that history which had already shown so many wonderful interpositions? Jonathan's mind was possessed by the idea. After all, if he failed, he could but lose his life. And was not that worth risking when success, if it were vouchsafed, might rescue his country from degradation and destruction, and fill the despairing hearts of his countrymen with emotions of joy and triumph like those which animated their fathers when on the shores of Sinai they beheld the horse and his rider cast into the sea?

It is this working of faith that must be regarded as the most characteristic feature of the attempt of Jonathan. He showed himself one of the noble heroes of faith, not unworthy to be enrolled in the glorious record of the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. He showed himself pre-eminent for the very quality in which his father had proved deficient. Though the earnest lessons of Samuel had been lost on the father, they had been blessed to the son. The seed that in the one case fell on stony places fell in the other on good ground. While Samuel was doubtless disconsolate at the failure of his work with Saul, he was succeeding right well, unknown perhaps to himself, with the youth that said little but thought much. While in spirit perhaps he was uttering words like Isaiah's, "Then said I, I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." God was using him in a way that might well have led him to add, "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." And what encouragement is here for every Christian worker! Don't despond when you seem to fail in your first and most direct endeavour. In some quiet but thinking little boy or girl in that family circle, your words are greatly regarded. And just because that young mind sees, and seeing wonders, that father or mother is so little moved by what you say, it is the more impressed. If the father or the mother were manifestly to take the matter up, the child might dismiss it, as no concern of his. But just because father or mother is not taking it up, the child cannot get rid of it. "Yes, there is an eternity, and we ought all to be preparing for it. Sin is the soul's ruin, and unless we get a Saviour, we are lost. Jesus *did* come into the world to save

sinners; must we not go to Him? Yes, we must be born again. Lord Jesus, forgive us, help us, save us!" Thus it is that things hid from the wise and prudent are often revealed to babes; and thus it is that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God perfects praise.

But Jonathan's faith in God was called to manifest itself in a way very different from that in which the faith of most young persons has to be exercised now. Faith led Jonathan to seize sword and spear, and hurry out to an enterprise in which he could only succeed by risking his own life and destroying the lives of others. We are thus brought face to face with a strange but fascinating development of the religious spirit—military faith. The subject has received a new and wonderful illustration in our day in the character and career of that great Christian hero General Gordon. In the career of Gordon, we see faith contributing an element of power, an element of daring, and an element of security and success to a soldier, which can come from no other source. No one imagines that without his faith Gordon would have been what he was or could have done what he did. It is little to say that faith raised him high above all ordinary fears, or that it made him ready at any moment to risk, and if need be, to sacrifice his life. It did a great deal more. It gave him a conviction that he was an instrument in God's hands, and that when he was moved to undertake anything as being God's will, he would be carried through all difficulties, enabled to surmount all opposition, and to carry the point in face of the most tremendous odds. And to a great extent the result verified the belief. If Gordon could not be said to work miracles, he achieved results that even miracles could hardly have surpassed. If he failed in the last and greatest hazard of his life, he only showed that after much success one may come to believe too readily in one's inspiration; one may mistake the voice of one's own feeling for the unfailing assurance of God. But that there is a great amount of reality in that faith which hears God calling one as if with audible voice, and goes forth to the most difficult enterprises in the full trust of Divine protection and aid, is surely a lesson which lies on the very surface of the life of Gordon, and such other lives of the same kind as Scripture shows us, as well as the lives of those military heroes of whom we will speak afterwards, whose battle has been not with flesh and blood, but with the ignorance and the vice and the disorder of the world.

One is almost disposed to envy Jonathan, with his whole powers of mind and body knit up to the pitch of firmest and most dauntless resolution, under the inspiration that moved him to this apparently desperate enterprise. All the world would have rushed to stop him, insanely throwing away his life, without the faintest chance of escape. But a voice spoke firmly in his bosom,—I am not throwing away my life. And Jonathan did not want certain tokens of encouragement. It was something that his armour-bearer neither flinched nor remonstrated. But that was not all. To encourage himself and to encourage his companion, he fixed on what might be considered a token for them to persevere in one alternative, and desist in another. The token was, that if, on observing their attempt, the Philistines in the garrison should defy them, should bid them tarry till they came to them, that would be a sign that they ought to return. But if they should say,

"Come up to us," that would be a proof that they ought to persevere. Was this a mere arbitrary token, without anything reasonable underlying it? It does not seem to have been so. In the one case, the words of the Philistines would bear a hostile meaning, denoting that violence would be used against them; in the other case they would denote that the Philistines were prepared to treat them peaceably, under the idea perhaps that they were tired of skulking and, like other Hebrews (ver. 21), wishing to surrender to the enemy. In this latter case, they would be able to make good their position on the rock, and the enemy would not suspect their real errand till they were ready to begin their work. It turned out that their reception was in the latter fashion. Whether in the way of friendly banter or otherwise, the garrison, on perceiving them, invited them to come up, and they would "show them a thing." Greatly encouraged by the sign, they clambered up on hands and feet till they gained the top of the rock. Then when nothing of the kind was expected, they fell on the garrison and began to kill. So sudden and unexpected an onslaught threw the garrison into a panic. Their arms perhaps were not at hand, and for anything they knew, a whole host of Hebrews might be hastening after their leaders to complete the work of slaughter. In this way, nearly twenty Philistines fell in half an acre of ground. The rest of the garrison taking to flight seems to have spread a panic among the host. Confusion and terror prevailed on every side. Every man's sword was against his fellow. "There was trembling in the host, in the field, and among the people; the spoilers and the garrison, they also trembled, and the earth quaked; so it was a very great trembling." Whether this implies that the terror and discomfiture of the Philistines was increased by an earthquake, or whether it means that there was so much motion and commotion that the very earth seemed to quake, it is not very easy to decide; but it shows how complete was the discomfiture of the Philistines. Thus wonderfully was Jonathan's faith rewarded, and thus wonderfully, too, was the unbelief of Saul rebuked.

Seen from the watch-tower at Gibeah, the affair was shrouded in mystery. It seemed as if the Philistine troops were retreating, while no force was there to make them retreat. When inquiry was made as to who were absent, Jonathan and his armour-bearer alone were missed. So perplexed was Saul, that, to understand the position of affairs, he had called for Ahiah, who had charge of the ark (the Septuagint reads, "the ephod"), to consult the oracle. But before this could be done, the condition of things became more plain. The noise in the host of the Philistines went on increasing, and when Saul and his soldiers came on the spot, they found the Philistines, in their confusion, slaughtering one another, amid all the signs of wild discomfiture. Nothing loath, they joined in harassing the retreating foe. And as the situation revealed itself others hastened to take part in the fray. Those Hebrews that had come for protection within the Philistine lines now turned against them, all the more heartily perhaps because, before that, they had had to place their feelings so much under restraint. And the Hebrews that lay hid in caves and thickets and pits, when they saw what was going on rushed forth to join in the discomfiture of the Philistines. What a contrast to the state of things that very morning!—the Israelites

in helpless feebleness, looking with despair on the Philistines as they lay in their stronghold in all the pride of security, and scattered defiant looks and scornful words among their foes; now the Philistine garrison surprised, their camp forsaken, their army scattered, and the only desire or purpose animating the remnant being to escape at the top of their speed from the land of Israel, and find shelter and security in their native country. "So the Lord saved Israel that day; and the battle passed over unto Bethaven."

And thus the faith of Jonathan had a glorious reward. The inspiration of faith vindicated itself, and the noble self-devotion that had plunged into this otherwise desperate enterprise, because there was no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few, led thus to a triumph more speedy and more complete than even Jonathan could have ventured to dream of. None of the judges had wrought a more complete or satisfactory deliverance; and even the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses had not afforded a more glorious evidence than this achievement of Jonathan's of the power of faith, or given more ample testimony to that principle of the kingdom of God, which our Lord afterwards enunciated. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence unto yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

This incident is full of lessons for modern times. First it shows what wide and important results may come from *individual conviction*. When an individual heart is moved by a strong conviction of duty, it may be that God means through that one man's conviction to move the world. Modesty might lead a man to say, I am but a unit; I have no influence; it will make very little difference what I do with my conviction, whether I cherish it or stifle it. Yet it may be of just worldwide importance that you be faithful to it, and stand by it steadfastly to the end. Did not the Reformation begin through the steadfastness of Luther, the miner's son of Eisleben, to the voice that spoke out so loudly to himself? Did not Carey lay the foundation of the modern mission in India, because he could not get rid of that verse of Scripture. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature"? Did not Livingstone persevere in the most dangerous, the most desperate enterprise of our time, because he could not quench the voice that called him to open up Africa or perish? Or to go back to Scripture times. A Jewish maiden at the court of the great king of Persia becomes the saviour of her whole nation, because she feels that, at the risk of her life, she must speak a word for them to the king, Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, becomes impressed with the conviction that he must preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and through his faithfulness to that conviction, he lays the foundation of the whole European Church. Learn, my friends, every one, from this, never to be faithless to any conviction given to you, though as far as you know, it is given to you alone. Make very sure that it comes from the God of truth. But don't stifle it, under the notion that you are too weak to bring anything out of it. Don't reason that if it were really from God, it would be given to others too. Test it in every way you can, to determine whether it be right. And if it stands these tests, manfully give effect to it, for it may bear seed that will spread over the globe.

Second, this narrative shows what large results

may flow from *individual effort*. The idea may not have occurred for the first time to some one; it may have been derived by him from another; but it has commended itself to him, it has been taken up by him, and worked out by him to results of great magnitude and importance. Pay a visit to the massive buildings and well-ordered institutions of Kaiserswerth, learn its ramifications all over the globe, and see what has come of the individual efforts of Fliedner. Think how many children have been rescued by Dr. Barnardo, how many have been emigrated by Miss Macpherson, how many souls have been impressed by Mr. Moody, how many orphans have been cared for by Mr. Müller, how many stricken ones have been relieved in the institutions of John Bost. It is true, we are not promised that every instance of individual effort will bring any such harvest. It may be that we are to be content with very limited results and with the encomium bestowed on the woman in the Gospel. "She hath done what she could." But it is also true that none of us can tell what possibilities there are in individual effort. We cannot tell but in our case the emblem of the seventy-second Psalm may be verified, "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth."

Lastly, we may learn from this narrative that the true secret of all spiritual success lies in our seeking to be instruments in God's hands, and in our lending ourselves to Him, to do in us and by us whatever is good in His sight. Thus it was eminently with Jonathan. "It may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." It was not Jonathan that was to work with some help from God; it was the Lord that was to work by Jonathan. It was not Jonathan's project that was to be carried out; it was the Lord's cause that was to be advanced. Jonathan had no personal ends in this matter. He was willing to give up his life, if the Lord should require it. It is a like consecration in all spiritual service that brings most blessing and success. Men that have nothing of their own to gain are the men who gain most. Men who sacrifice all desire for personal honour are the men who are most highly honoured. Men who make themselves of no reputation are the men who gain the highest reputation. Because Christ emptied Himself, and took on Him the form of a servant, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. And those who are like Christ in the mortifying of self become like Christ also in the enjoyment of the reward. Such are the rules of the kingdom of heaven. "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

CHAPTER XX.

SAUL'S WILFULNESS.

I SAMUEL xiv. 24-52.

THAT Saul was now suffering in character under the influence of the high position and great power to which he had been raised, is only too apparent from what is recorded in these verses. No doubt he pays more respect than he has been used to pay to the forms of religion. He enjoins a fast on his people at a very inconvenient time,

under the idea that fasting is a proper religious act. He is concerned for the trespass of the people in eating their food with the blood. He builds the first altar he ever built to God. He consults the oracle before he will commit himself to the enterprise of pursuing the retreating enemy by night. He is concerned to find the oracle dumb, and tries to discover through whose sin it is so. For a ceremonial offence, committed by Jonathan in ignorance, he fancies that God's displeasure has come down on the people, and he not only insists that Jonathan shall die for this offence, but confirms his decision by a solemn oath, sworn in the name of God. All this shows Saul plunging and floundering from one mistake to another, and crowning his blunders by a proposal so outrageous that the indignation of the people arrests his purpose. The idea that the work of the day shall be wound up by the execution of the youth through whom all the wonderful deliverance has come, and that youth Saul's own son, is one that could never have entered into any but a distempered brain. Reason seems to have begun to stagger on her throne; the sad process has begun which in a more advanced stage left Saul the prey of an evil spirit, and in its last and most humiliating stage drove him to consult with the witch of Endor.

But how are we to explain his increase of religiousness side by side with the advance of moral obliquity and recklessness? Why should he be more careful in the service of God while he becomes more imperious in temper, more stubborn in will, and more regardless of the obligations alike of king and father? The explanation is not difficult to find. The expostulation of Samuel had given him a fright. The announcement that the kingdom would not be continued in his line, and that God had found a worthier man to set over His people Israel, had moved him to the quick. There could be no doubt that Samuel was speaking the truth. Saul had begun to disregard God's will in his public acts, and was now beginning to reap the penalty. He felt that he must pay more attention to God's will. If he was not to lose everything, he must try to be more religious. There is no sign of his feeling penitent in heart. He is not concerned in spirit for his unworthy behaviour toward God. He feels only that his own interests as king are imperilled. It is this selfish motive that makes him determine to be more religious. The fast, and the consultation of the oracle, and the altar, and the oath that Jonathan shall die, have all their origin in this frightened, selfish feeling. And hence, in their very nature and circumstances, his religious acts are unsuitable and unseemly. In place of making things better by such services, he makes them worse; no peace of God falls like dew on his soul; no joy is diffused throughout his army; discontent reaches a climax when the death of Jonathan is called for; and tranquillity is restored only by the rebellion of the people, rescuing their youthful prince and hero.

Alas, how common has this spirit been in the history of the world! What awful tragedies has it led to, what slaughter of heretics, what frightful excesses disgraceful to kings, what outrages on the common feelings of humanity! Louis XIV. has led a most wicked and profligate life, and he has ever and anon qualms that threaten him with the wrath of God. To avert that wrath, he must be more attentive to his religious duties. He must show more favour to the Church, exalt

her dignitaries to greater honour, endow her orders and foundations with greater wealth. But that is not all. He must use all the arms and resources of his kingdom for ridding the Church of her enemies. For twenty years he must harass the Protestants with every kind of vexatious interference, shutting up their churches on frivolous pretexts, compelling them to bury their dead by night, forbidding the singing of psalms in worship, subjecting them to great injustice in their civil capacity, and at last, by the revocation of the edict that gave them toleration, sweeping them from the kingdom in hundreds of thousands, till hardly a Protestant is left behind. What the magnificent monarch did on a large scale, millions of obscurer men have done on a small. It is a sad truth that terror and selfishness have been at the foundation of a great deal of that which passes current as religion. Prayers and penances and vows and charities in cases without number have been little better than premiums of insurance, designed to save the soul from punishment and pain. Nor have these acts been confined to that Church which, more than any other, has encouraged men to look for saving benefit to the merit of their own works. Many a Protestant, roused by his conscience into a state of fright, has resolved to be more attentive to the duties of religion. He will read his Bible more; he will pray more; he will give more; he will go to church more. Alas, the spring of all this is found in no humiliation for sin before God, no grief at having offended the Father, no humble desire to be renewed in heart and conformed to the image of the First-born! And the consequence is, as in the case of Saul, that things go, not from bad to better, but from bad to worse. There is no peace of God that passeth all understanding; there is no general rectification of the disordered faculties of the soul; there is no token of heavenly blessing, blessing to the man himself and blessing to those about him. A more fiery element seems to come into his temper; a more bitter tone pervades his life. To himself it feels as if there were no good in trying to be better; to the world it appears as if religion put more of the devil into him. But it is all because what he calls religion is no religion; it is the selfish bargain-making spirit, which aims no higher than deliverance from pain; it is not the noble exercise of the soul, prostrated by the sense of guilt, and helpless through consciousness of weakness, lifting up its eyes to the hills whence cometh its help, and rejoicing in the grace that freely pardons all its sin through the blood of Christ, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit that renews and sanctifies the soul.

The first thing that Saul does, in the exercise of this selfish spirit, is to impose on the people an obligation to fast until the day be over. Any one may see that to compel fasting under such circumstances was alike cruel and unwise. To fast in the solitude of one's chamber, where there is no extra wear and tear of the bodily organs, and therefore no special need for recruiting them, is comparatively safe and easy. But to fast amid the struggles of battle or the hurry of a pursuit; to fast under the burning sun and that strain of the system which brings the keenest thirst; to fast under exertions that rapidly exhaust the thews and sinews, and call for a renewal of their tissues—to fast in circumstances like these involves an amount of suffering which it is not easy to estimate. It was cruel in Saul to impose a fast at such a time, all the more that, being commander-

in-chief of the army, it was his duty to do his utmost for the comfort of his soldiers. But it was unwise as well as cruel; with energies impaired by fasting, they could not continue the pursuit nor make the victory so telling. Perhaps he was under the influence of the delusion that the more painful a religious service is, the more is it acceptable to God. That idea of penance does find a place in our natural notions of religion. Saul, as we have seen, grew up with little acquaintance with religious persons and little knowledge of Divine things; and now that perforce he is constrained to attend to them, it is no wonder if he falls into many a serious error. For he probably had no idea of that great rule of God's kingdom, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

The folly of Saul's order became apparent when the army came to a wood, where, as is common enough in the country, a stream of wild honey poured out, probably from the trunk of a hollow tree. Stretching out his rod or spear, Jonathan fixed it in a piece of the comb, which he transferred with his hand to his mouth. Immediately "his eyes were enlightened;" the dull feeling which settles on the eyes amid fatigue and hunger disappeared; and with the return of clear vision to his eyes, there would come a restoration of vigour to his whole frame. When told for the first time of the order which his father had given, he showed no regret at having broken it, but openly expressed his displeasure at its having ever been imposed. "Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land. See, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they found! for had there not been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" We must bear in mind that Jonathan was a true man of God. He had set out that morning in his wonderful exploit in the true spirit of faith and full consecration to God. He was in far nearer fellowship with God than his father, and yet so far from approving of the religious order to fast which his father had given, he regards it with displeasure and distrust. Godly men will sometimes be found less outwardly religious than some other men, and will greatly shock them by being so. The godly man has an unction from the Holy One to understand His will; he goes straight to the Lord's business; like our blessed Lord, he finishes the work given him to do; while the merely religious man is often so occupied with his forms, that, like the Pharisees, he neglects the structure for which forms are but the scaffolding; in paying his tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, he omits the weightier matters—justice, mercy, and truth.

But the evil caused by Saul's injudicious fast was not yet over. The obligation to fast lasted only till sunset, and when the day was ended, the people, faint and ravenous, flew upon the spoil—sheep, oxen, and calves—and devoured them on the spot, without taking time or pains to sever the blood from the flesh. To remedy this, Saul had a great stone placed beside him, and ordered the people to bring every man his ox or his sheep, and slay them on that stone, that he might see that the blood was properly drained from the flesh. Then we gather from the marginal reading of ver. 35 that he was proceeding to erect with the stone an altar to God, but that he did not carry this purpose completely into effect, because he determined to continue the pursuit of the Philistines.

He saw how much recruited his troops were by their food, and he therefore determined to make a new assault. If it had not been for the unwise order to fast given early in the day, if the people had been at liberty to help themselves to the honey as they passed it, or to such other refreshments as they found in their way, they would have been some hours earlier in this pursuit, and it would have been so much the more effectual.

It would seem, however, that the priest who was in attendance on Saul was somewhat alarmed at the abrupt and rather reckless way in which the king was making his plans and giving his orders. "Let us draw near hither unto God," said he. Counsel was accordingly asked of God whether Saul should go down after the Philistines and whether God would deliver them into the hand of Israel. But to this inquiry no answer was given. It was natural to infer that some sin had separated between God and Saul, some iniquity had caused God to hide His face from him. Here was a state of things that might well make Saul pause and examine himself. Had he done so in an honest spirit, he could hardly have failed to find out what was wrong. God had given a wonderful deliverance that day through Jonathan. Jonathan was as remarkable for the power of faith as Saul for the want of it. Jonathan had been wonderfully blessed that day, but now that Saul, through the priest, sought to have a communication with God, none was given. Might he not have seen that the real cause of this was that Saul wanted what Jonathan possessed? Besides, was Saul doing justice to Jonathan in taking the enterprise out of his hands? If Jonathan began it, was he not entitled to finish it? Would not Saul have been doing a thing alike generous and just had he stood aside at this time, and called on Jonathan to complete the work of the day? If the king of England was justified in not going to the help of the Black Prince, serious though his danger was, but leaving him to extricate himself, and thus enjoy the whole credit of his valour, might not Saul have let his son end the enterprise which he had so auspiciously begun? In these two facts, in the difference between him and Jonathan as to the spirit of faith, and in the way in which Saul displaced the man whom God so signally countenanced in the morning, the king of Israel might have found the cause of the silence of the oracle. And the right thing for him would have been to confess his error, stand aside, and call on Jonathan to continue the pursuit and, if possible, exterminate the foe.

But Saul took a different course. He had recourse to the lot, to determine the guilty party. Now, it does not appear that even the king of Israel, with the priest at his side, was entitled to resort to the lot to ascertain the mind of God except in cases where all natural means of discovering it confessedly failed. But we have just seen that in this case the natural means had not failed. Therefore there was no obligation on God to order the lot supernaturally so as to bring out the truth. In point of fact, the process ended so as to point to the very last man in all the army to whom blame was due. It was, as mathematicians say, a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is a proof that an instrument is out of order if it brings out a result positively ludicrous. If near the equator an instrument gives the latitude of the polar circle, it is a proof that it is not working rightly. When the lot pointed to Jonathan, it was a proof that it was not working rightly. Any man might have

seen this. And Saul ought to have seen it. And he ought to have confessed that he was entirely out of his reckoning. Frankly and cordially he should have taken the blame on himself, and at once exonerated his noble son.

But Saul was in no mood to take the blame on himself. Nor had he moral sagacity enough to see what an outrage it would be to lay the blame on Jonathan. Assuming that he was guilty, he asked him what he had done. He had done nothing but eat a little honey, not having heard the king's order to abstain. The justification was complete. At worst, it was but a ceremonial offence, but to Jonathan it was not even that. But Saul was too obstinate to admit the plea. By a new oath, he devoted his son to death. Nothing could show more clearly the deplorable state of his mind. In the eye of reason and of justice, Jonathan had committed no offence. He had given signal evidence of the possession in a remarkable degree of the favour of God. He had laid the nation under inconceivable obligations. All these pleas were for him; and surely in the king's breast a voice might have been heard pleading, "Your son, your first-born, 'the beginning of your strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power' ! Is it possible that this voice was silenced by jealousy, jealousy of his own son, like his after-jealousy of David? What kind of heart could this Saul have had when in such circumstances he could deliberately say, 'God do so, and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan' ?"

But "the Divine right of kings to govern wrong" is not altogether without check. A temporary revolution saved Jonathan. It was one good effect of excitement. In calmer circumstances, the people might have been too terrified to interfere. But now they were excited—excited by their victory, excited by their fast followed by their meal, and excited by the terror of harm befalling Jonathan. They had far clearer and more correct apprehension of the whole circumstances than the king had. It is especially to be noted that they laid great emphasis on the fact that that day God had worked by Jonathan, and Jonathan had worked with God. This made the great difference between him and Saul. "As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

The opportunity of inflicting further damage on the Philistines at this time was thus lost through the moral obtuseness, recklessness, and obstinacy of Saul. But in many a future campaign Saul as a warrior rendered great service to the kingdom. He fought against all his enemies on every side. On the east, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites had to be dealt with; on the north, the kings of Zobah; on the south, the Amalekites; and on the west, the Philistines. These campaigns are briefly stated, but we may easily see how much of hard military work is implied in connection with each. We may understand, too, with what honesty David, in his elegy over Saul and Jonathan, might commemorate their warlike prowess: "From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty." Whether these military expeditions were conducted in a better spirit than Saul shows in this chapter we cannot tell. Whether further proofs were given of

God's presence with Jonathan as contrasted with his absence from Saul we do not know. It does not appear that there was any essential improvement in Saul. But when Jonathan again emerges from the obscurity of history, and is seen in a clear and definite light, his character is singularly attractive—one of the purest and brightest in the whole field of Scripture.

Evidently the military spirit ruled in Saul, but it did not bring peace nor blessing to the kingdom. "He gathered an host," surrounded himself with a standing army, so as to be ready and have an excuse for any expedition that he wished to undertake. After a brief notice of Saul's family, the chapter ends by telling us that "there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him unto him." The Philistines were far from being permanently subdued; there were not even intervals of peace between the two countries. There was bitter war, an open sore, perpetually bleeding, a terror on every side, never removed. How different it might have been had that one day been better spent! how different it would certainly have been had Saul been a man after God's own heart! One day's misdeeds may bring a whole generation of sorrow, for "one sinner destroyeth much good." Once off the right rail, Saul never got on it again; rash and restless, he doubtless involved his people in many a disaster, fulfilling all that Samuel had said about *taking* from the people, fulfilling but little that the people had hoped concerning deliverance from the hand of the Philistines.

Who does not see what a fearful thing it is to leave God and His ways, and give one's self up to the impulses of one's own heart? Fearful for even the humblest of us, but infinitely fearful for one of great resources and influence, with a whole people under him! How beautiful some prayers in the Psalms sound after we have been contemplating the wild career of Saul! "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me in Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." "Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FINAL REJECTION OF SAUL.

I SAMUEL xv.

HERE we find the second portion of God's indictment against Saul, and the reason for his final rejection from the office to which he had been raised. There is no real ground for the assertion of some critics that in this book we have two accounts of Saul's rejection, contradictory one of the other, because a different ground is asserted for it in the one case from that assigned in the other. The first rejection (1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14) was the rejection of his house as the permanent dynasty of Israel but it did not imply either that Saul was to cease to reign, or that God was to withdraw all countenance and co-operation with him as king. The rejection we read of in the present chapter goes further than the first. It does not indeed imply that Saul would cease to

reign, but it does imply that God would no longer countenance him as king, would no longer make him his instrument of deliverance and blessing to Israel, but would leave him to the miserable feeling that he was reigning without authority. More than that, as we know from the sequel, it implied that God was about to bring his successor forward, and thereby exhibit both to him and to the nation the evidence of his degradation and rejection. It is likely that the transactions of this chapter occurred when Saul's reign was far advanced. If he had not been guilty of fresh disregard of God's will, though David would still have been his successor, he would have been spared the shame and misery of going out and in before his people like one who bore the mark of Cain, the visible expression of the Divine displeasure.

Throughout the whole of this chapter, God appears in that more stern and rigorous aspect of His character which is not agreeable to the natural heart of man. Judgment, we are told, is His strange work; it is not what He delights in; but it is a work which He cannot fail to perform when the necessity for it arises. There is a gospel which is often preached in our day that divests God wholly of the rigid, judicial character; it clothes Him with no attributes but those of kindness and love; it presents Him in a countenance ever smiling, never stern. It maintains that the great work of Christ in the world was to reveal this paternal aspect of God's character, to convince men of His fatherly feelings towards them, and to divest their minds of all those conceptions of indignation and wrath with which our minds are apt to clothe Him, and which the theologies of men are so ready to foster. But this is a gospel that says, Peace! peace! when there is no peace. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does indeed reveal, and reveal very beautifully, the paternal character of God; but it reveals at the same time that judicial character which insists on the execution of His law. That God will execute wrath on the impenitent and unbelieving is just as much a feature of the Gospel as that He will bestow all the blessings of salvation and eternal life on them that believe. What the Gospel reveals respecting the sterner, the judicial, aspect of God's character is, that there is no bitterness in His anger against sinners; there is nothing in God's breast of that irritation and impatience which men are so apt to show when their fellow-men have offended them; God's anger is just. The calm, settled opposition of His nature to sin is the feeling that dictates the sentence "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The Gospel is indeed a glorious manifestation of the love and grace of God for sinners, but it is not an indiscriminate assurance of grace for all sinners; it is an offer of grace to all who believe on God's Son, but it is an essential article of the Gospel that without faith in Christ the saving love and grace of God cannot be known. Instead of reducing the character of God to mere good-nature, the Gospel brings His righteousness more prominently forward than ever; instead of smoothing the doom of the impenitent, it deepens their guilt, and it magnifies their condemnation. Yes, my friends, and it is most wholesome for us all to look at times steadily in the face this solemn attribute of God, as the Avenger of the impenitent. It shows us that sin is not a thing to be trifled with. It shows us that God's will is not a thing to be despised. There are just two alternatives for thee, O sinner, who art not making God's will the rule of

thy life. Repent, believe and be forgiven; continue to sin, and be lost for ever.

The transaction in connection with which Saul was guilty of a fresh disregard of God's will was an expedition which was appointed for him against the Amalekites. This people had been guilty of some very atrocious treatment of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, the details of which are not given. Nations having a corporate life, when they continue to manifest the spirit of preceding generations, are held responsible for their actions, and liable to the penalty. Saul was sent to inflict on Amalek the retribution that had been due so long for his perfidious treatment of Israel on the way to Canaan. In the narrative, various places are mentioned as being in the Amalekite territory, but their exact sites are not known; and indeed this matters little, all that it is important to know being that the Amalekites were mainly a nomadic people, occupying the fringe between Canaan and the desert on the south border of Palestine, and doubtless subsisting to a large extent on the prey secured by them when they made forays into the territories of Israel. Saul gathered a great army to compass the destruction of this bitter and hostile people.

In reading of the instructions he received to exterminate them, to "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass," we shudder to think of the fearful massacre which this involved. It was an order similar to that which the Israelites received to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan, or that to destroy the Midianites, during the lifetime of Moses. Though it seems very horrible to us, in whose eyes human life has become very sacred, it probably excited little feeling of the kind in the breasts of the Israelites, accustomed as they were, and as all Eastern nations were, to think very little of human life, and to witness wholesale slaughter with little emotion. But there is one thing in the order that we must not overlook, because it gave a complexion to the transaction quite different from that of ordinary massacres. That circumstance was, that the prey was to be destroyed as well as the people. In the case of an ordinary massacre, the conquering people abandon themselves to the license of their passions, and hasten to enrich themselves by appropriating everything of value on which they can lay their hands. In the case of the Israelites, there was to be nothing of the kind. They were to destroy the prey just as thoroughly as they were to destroy the people. They were to enrich themselves in nothing. Now, this was a most important modification of the current practice in such things. But for this restriction, the extermination of the Amalekites would have been a wild carnival of selfish passion. The restriction appointed to Saul, like that which Joshua had imposed at Jericho, bound the people to the most rigid self-restraint, under circumstances when self-restraint was extremely difficult. The extermination was to be carried into effect with all the solemnity of a judicial execution, and the soldiers were to have no benefit from it whatever, any more than the jailer or the hangman can have benefit from the execution of some wretched murderer.

Now, let it be observed that it was in entirely disregarding this restriction that a chief part of Saul's disobedience lay. "Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy

them; but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." The sparing of King Agag seems to have been a piece of vanity with Saul, for a conqueror returning home with a royal prisoner was greatly thought of in those Eastern lands. But the sparing of the prey was a matter of pure greed. Observe how the character of the transaction was wholly changed by this circumstance. Instead of wearing the aspect of a solemn retribution on a sinful nation, on a people laden with iniquity, all the more impressive because the ministers of God's vengeance abstained from appropriating a vestige of the property, but consigned the whole, like a plague-stricken mass, too polluted to be touched, to the furnace of destruction—instead of this, it just appeared like an ordinary unprincipled foray, in which the victorious party slew the other, mainly to get them out of the way and enable them without opposition to appropriate their goods. It was this consideration that made the offence of Saul so serious, that made his breach of the Divine order so guilty. Had he no knowledge of the history of his people? Did he not remember what had happened at Jericho in the days of Joshua, when Achan stole the wedge of gold and the Babylonian garment, and, in spite of the fact that the rest of the people had behaved well and that God's purpose in the main was amply carried out, Achan and all his family were judicially stoned to death? How could Saul expect that such a flagrant violation of the Divine command in the case of the Amalekites, perpetrated not on the sly by a single individual, but openly by the king and all the people, could escape the retribution of God?

Such then was Saul's conduct in the affair of Amalek. The next incident in the narrative is the communication that took place regarding it between the Lord and Samuel. Speaking after the manner of men, God said, It repented Him that He had set up Saul to be king. That these words are not to be explained in a strictly literal sense is evident from what is said in ver. 29: "The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for He is not a man that He should repent." The intimation to Samuel was equivalent to this: that God was now done with Saul. He had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. He had had his time of probation, and he had failed. He was joined to his idols, and must now be let alone. This last and very flagrant act of disobedience settled the matter. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

How did Samuel receive the announcement? "It grieved Samuel, and he cried to the Lord all night." It is the same word as is translated in Jonah, "It displeased Jonah." But there is nothing to show that Samuel was displeased with God. The whole transaction was disappointing, worrying, heart-breaking. Doubtless he had a certain liking for Saul. He admired his splendid figure and many fine kingly qualities. It was a terrible struggle to give him up. The Divine announcement threw his mind into a tumult. All night he cried unto the Lord. Doubtless his cry was somewhat similar to our Lord's cry in Gethsemane, "If it be possible, let this cup pass." If it be possible, recover Saul. And observe, Samuel had good cause to raise this cry on account of the man who would naturally have been Saul's successor. He must have had great complacency in Jonathan. If Saul was to be set aside, why should not Jonathan have the crown? On whose head would it sit more gracefully? In whose hand would the

sceptre be held more suitably? But even this plea would not avail. It was God's purpose to mark the offence of Saul with a deeper stigma, and attach to it in the mind of the nation a more conspicuous brand, by cutting off his whole family and transferring the crown to a quite different line. It took the whole night to reconcile Samuel to the Divine sentence. How very deeply and tenderly must this man's heart have been moved by regard for Saul and for the people! In the morning, his soul seems to have returned to its quiet rest. His mood seems now to have been, "Not my will but Thine be done!"

Next comes the meeting of Saul and Samuel. Samuel seems to have expected to meet Saul at Carmel—the Carmel of Nabal (chap. xxv. 2)—but, perhaps on purpose to avoid him Saul hastened to Gilgal. And when they met there, Saul, with no little audacity, claimed to have performed the commandment of the Lord. That this plea was not advanced in simple ignorance, as some have thought, is plain enough from Samuel's reception of it and his rebuke. "What meaneth this bleating of sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the oxen in my ears?" Facts are stubborn things, and they make quick work of sophistry. Oh, says Saul, these are brought as a sacrifice to the Lord thy God; they are an extra proof of my loyalty to Him. Saul, Saul, is it not enough that thou didst allow the selfish greed whether of thyself or of thy people to overbear the Divine command? Must thou add the sin of hypocrisy, and pretend that it was a pious act? And dost thou imagine that in so doing thou canst impose either on Samuel, or on God? O sinners, you do miscalculate fearfully when you give to God's servants such false explanations of your sins! How long, think you, will the flimsy material hold out? In the case of Saul, it did not even enable him to turn the corner. It brought out a fact which he must have trembled to hear: that Samuel had had a communication about him from God the very night before, and that God had spoken very plainly about him. And what had God said? God had proceeded on the fact that Saul had disobeyed his voice, and had flown upon the spoil to preserve what God had commanded him to destroy. "Nay," says Saul, "it was not I that did that, but the people, and they did it to sacrifice to the Lord thy God in Gilgal." The excuse hardly needed to be exposed. Why did you let the people do so? Why did you not fulfil God's command as faithfully as Joshua did at Jericho? Why did you allow yourself, or the people either, to tamper with the clear orders given you by your King and theirs? "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Moral conduct is more than ceremonial form. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being king."

This terrible word pierces Saul to the quick. He is thoroughly alarmed. He makes acknowledgment of his sin in so far as he had feared the people and obeyed their words. He entreats Samuel to forgive him and turn again with him that he may worship God. He shows no evidence of true, heartfelt repentance. And Samuel refuses to return with him, and refuses to identify himself with one whom God hath rejected from being king. But Saul is deeply in earnest. He tries to detain Samuel by force. He takes hold of his mantle, and holds it so firmly that it rends. It is a symbol, says Samuel, of the rending of the

kingdom of Israel from thee this day, to be given by God to a neighbour of thine that is better than thou. And this is God's irreversible sentence. Your day of grace is expired, and the Divine sentence is beyond recall. One more appeal does Saul make to Samuel. Again he owns his sin, but the request he makes shows clearly that what he is most anxious about is that he should not appear dishonoured before the people. It is his own reputation that concerns him. "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people and before Israel and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God." Samuel yields. The abject wretchedness of the man seems to have touched him. But it is not said that Samuel worshipped with him. Samuel would no doubt continue firm to his purpose not to identify himself with Saul as king, or give him any moral support in his attitude of disobedience. So far from that, Samuel openly superseded him in dealing with Agag; he went out of his way, and did an act which could not but appear a frightful one for a venerable prophet of the Lord. It is the voice of the real king that sounds in the command, "Bring ye hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." We seem to see the royal prisoner advancing cringingly before that imperial figure, in whose eye there is a look, and in whose face and figure there is a determination, that may well make him quail. "Surely," says Agag, imploringly, "the bitterness of death is past." Spared by the king, I am not to fare worse from the prophet. Samuel knew him a merciless destroyer. "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of God deceitfully, and cursed be he that withholdeth his sword from shedding of blood." It is a scene of terror. The swift retribution executed on the one king was but the sign of the slower retribution pronounced upon the other. In the one case the doom was rapid; in the other it was deferred; in both it was sure. And have we not here a sad picture of that retribution which is sure to come on the impenitent sinner, and in the procedure of Samuel a foreshadowing of Him who cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, who will one day speak to His enemies in His wrath and vex them in His hot displeasure? Have we not here a foretaste of the opening of the sixth seal, when the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, shall say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

And oh! how little in that day will those plausible excuses avail with which men try to cover their sins to themselves, and it may be to others. How will the hail sweep away the refuges of lies! How will the real character of men's hearts, the true tenor of their lives, in respect they have set aside God's will and set up their own, be revealed in characters that cannot be mistaken! The question to be determined by your life was, whether God or you was King. Which did you obey, God's will or your own? Did you set aside God's will? Then you are certainly a rebel; and never having repented, never having been washed, or sanctified, or justified, your portion is with the rebels; the Father's house is not for you!

And now the breach between Samuel and Saul is final. "Samuel came no more to visit Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul; and the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel."

Saul is cut off now from his best means of grace—he is virtually an excommunicated man. Was it hard? Do our sympathies in any degree go with him? To our compassion he is entitled in the highest degree, but to nothing more. Saul's worst qualities had now become petrified. His wilfulness, his selfishness, his passionateness, his jealousy, had now got complete control, nor could their current be turned aside. The threat of losing his kingdom — perhaps the most terrible threat such a man could have felt — had failed to turn him from his wayward course. He was like the man in the iron cage in the "Pilgrim's Progress," who gave his history: "I left off to watch and be sober; I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit and He is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger and He has left me; I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent."

It is a terrible lesson that comes to us from the career of Saul. If our natural lusts are not under the restraint of a higher power; if by that power we are not trained to watch, and check, and overpower them; if we allow them to burst all restraint and lord it over us as they will,—then will they grow into so many tyrants, who will rule us with rods of iron; laugh at the feeble remonstrances of our conscience; scoff at every messenger of God; vex His Holy Spirit, and hurl us at last to everlasting woe!

CHAPTER XXII.

DAVID ANOINTED BY SAMUEL.

1 SAMUEL XVI. 1-13.

THE rejection of Saul was laid very deeply to heart by Samuel. No doubt there were many engaging qualities in the man Saul, which Samuel could not but remember, and which fed the flame of personal attachment, and made the fact of his rejection hard to digest. And no doubt, too, Samuel was concerned for the peace and prosperity of the nation. He knew that a change of dynasty commonly meant civil war—it might lead to the inward weakening of a kingdom already weak enough, and its exposure to the attacks of hostile neighbours that watched with lynx eyes for any opportunity of dashing against Israel. Thus both on personal and on public grounds the rejection of Saul was a great grief to Samuel, especially as the rejection of Saul implied the rejection of Jonathan, and the prophet might ask, with no small reason, where, in all the nation, could there be found a better successor.

It was not God's pleasure to reveal to Samuel the tragic events that were to stretch Jonathan and his brothers among the dead on the same day as their father; but it was His pleasure to introduce him to the man who, at a future time, was to rule Israel according to the ideal which the prophet had vainly endeavoured to press upon Saul. There is a sharpness in God's expostulation with Samuel which implies that the prophet's grief for Saul was carried to an excessive and

therefore sinful length. "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?" Grief on account of others seems such a sacred, such a holy feeling, that we are not ready to apprehend the possibility of its acquiring the dark hue of sin. Yet if God's children abandon themselves to the wildest excess for some sorrow which bears to them the character of a fatherly chastening! if they refuse to give effect in any way to God's purpose in the matter, and to the gracious ends which He designs it to serve, they are guilty of sin, and that sin one which is greatly dishonouring to God. It can never be right to shut God out of view in connection with our sorrows, or to forget that the day is coming—impossible though it may seem—when His character shall be so vindicated in all that has happened to His children, that all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and it shall be seen that his tender mercies have been over all His works.

It was to Bethlehem, and to the family of Jesse, that Samuel was to go to find the destined successor of Saul. The place was not so far distant from Ramah as to be quite beyond the sphere of Samuel's acquaintance. Of Jesse, one of the leading men of the place, he would probably have at least a general knowledge, though it is plain he had not any personal acquaintance with him, or knowledge of his family. Bethlehem had already acquired a marked place in Hebrew history, and Samuel could not have been ignorant of the episode of the young Moabite widow who had given such a beautiful proof of filial piety, and among whose descendants Jesse and his sons were numbered. The very name of Bethlehem was fitted to recall how God honours those that honour Him, and might have rebuked that outburst of fear which fell from Samuel, whose first thought was that he could not go, because if Saul heard of it he would kill him. Well, it is plain enough that, with all his glorious qualities as a prophet, Samuel was but a man, subject to the infirmities of men. What an honest book the Bible is! its greatest heroes coming down so often to the human level and showing the same weaknesses as ourselves! But God, who stoops to human weakness, who fortified the failing heart of Moses at the burning bush, and the doubting heart of Gideon, and afterwards the weary heart of Elijah and the trembling heart of Jeremiah, condescends in like manner to the infirmity of Samuel, and provides him with an ostensible object for his journey, which was not fitted to awaken the jealous temper of the king. Samuel is to announce that his coming to Bethlehem is for the purpose of a sacrifice, and the circumstances connected with the anointing of a successor to Saul are to be gone about so quietly and so vaguely that the great object of his visit will hardly be so much as guessed by any.

The question has often been raised, Was this diplomatic arrangement not objectionable? Was it not an act of duplicity and deceit? Undoubtedly it was an act of concealment, but it does not follow that it was an act of duplicity. It was concealment of a thing which Samuel was under no obligation to divulge. It was not concealment of which the object was to mislead any one, or to induce any one to do what he would not have done had the whole truth been known to him. When concealment is practised in order to take an unfair advantage of any one, or to secure an unworthy advantage over him, it is a detestable crime.

But to conceal what you are under no obligation to reveal, when some important end is to be gained, is a quite different thing. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing;" providence is often just a vast web of concealment; the trials of Job were the fruit of Divine concealment; the answers of our Lord to the Syrophenician woman were a concealment; the delay in going to Bethany when he heard of the illness of Lazarus was just a concealment of the glorious miracle which He intended by-and-bye to perform. One may tell the truth, and yet not the whole truth, without being guilty of any injustice or dishonesty. It was not on Saul's account at all that Samuel was sent to anoint a king at Bethlehem. It was partly on Samuel's account and partly on David's. If David was hereafter to fill the exalted office of king of Israel, it was desirable that he should be trained for its duties from his earliest years. Saul had not been called to the throne till middle life, till his character had been formed and his habits settled; the next king must be called at an earlier period of life. And though the boy's father and brothers may not understand the full nature of the distinction before him, they must be made to understand that he is called to a very special service of God, in order that they may give him up freely and readily to such preparation as that service demands. This seems to have been the chief reason of the mission of Samuel to Bethlehem. It could not but be known after that, that David was to be distinguished as a servant of God, but no idea seems to have been conveyed either to his brothers or to the elders of Bethlehem that he was going to be king.

The arrangements for the public worship of God in those times—while the ark of God was still at Kirjath-jearim—seem to have been far from regular, and it appears to have been not unusual for Samuel to visit particular places for the purpose of offering a sacrifice. It would seem that the ordinary, though not the uniform, occasion for such visits was the occurrence of something blameworthy in the community, and if so this will explain the terror of the elders of Bethlehem at the visit of Samuel, and their frightened question, "Comest thou peaceably?" Happily Samuel was able to set their fears at rest, and to assure them that the object of his visit was entirely peaceable. It was a religious service he was come to perform, such a service as may have been associated with the other religious services he was accustomed to hold as he went round in circuit in the neighbourhood of Ramah. For this sacrifice the elders of Bethlehem were called to sanctify themselves, as were also Jesse and his sons. They were to take the usual steps for freeing themselves of all ceremonial uncleanness, and after the sacrifice they were to share the feast. A considerable interval would necessarily elapse between the sacrifice and the feast, for the available portions of the animal had to be prepared for food, and roasted on the fire. It was during this interval that Samuel made acquaintance with the sons of Jesse. First came the handsome and stately Eliab. And strange it is that even with the fate of the handsome and stately Saul full in his memory, Samuel leapt to the conclusion that this was the Lord's anointed. Could he wonder at God's emphatic No! Surely he had seen enough of outward appearance coupled with inward unfitness. One trial of that criterion had been enough for Israel.

But alas, it is not merely in the choice of kings

that men are apt to show their readiness to rest in the outward appearance. To what an infinite extent has this tendency been carried in the worship of God! Let everything be outwardly correct, the church beautiful, the music excellent, the sermon able, the congregation numerous and respectable—what a pattern such a church is often regarded! Alas! how little satisfactory it may be to God. The eye that searches and knows us penetrates to the heart,—it is there only that God finds the genuine elements of worship. The lowly sense of personal unworthiness, the wondering contemplation of the Divine love, the eager longing for mercy to pardon and grace to help, the faith that grasps the promises, the hope that is anchored within the veil, the kindness that breathes benediction all round, the love that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,—it is these things, breathing forth from the hearts of a congregation, that give pleasure to God.

Or look at what often happens in secular life. See how intensely eager some are about appearances. Why, it is one of the stereotyped rules of society that it is necessary "to keep up appearances." Well-born people may have become poor, very poor, but they must live to outward appearance as if they were rich. Between rivals there may be a deadly jealousy, but they must, by courtesy, keep up the form of friendship. And in trade a substantial appearance must be given to goods that are really worthless. And often, men who are really mean and unprincipled must pose as persons very particular about the right and very indignant at the wrong. And some, meaner than the common, must put on the cloak of religion, and establish a character for sanctity.

The world is full of idolatries, but I question if any idolatry has been more extensively practised than the idolatry of the outward appearance. If there be less of this in our day than perhaps a generation back, it is because in these days of sifting and trial men have learned in so many ways by hard experience what a delusion it is to lean on such a broken reed. Yes, and we have had men among us who from a point of view not directly Christian have exposed the shams and counterfeits of the age,—men like Carlyle, who have sounded against them a trumpet blast which has been echoed and re-echoed round the very globe. But surely we do not need to go outside the Bible for this great lesson. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom;" "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Or if we pass to the New Testament, what is the great lesson of the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee? The Publican was a genuine man, an honest, humble, self-emptied sinner. The Pharisee was a silly puffed-up pretender. The world seems to think that all high profession must be hollow. I need not say that such an opinion is utterly untenable. The world would have you profess nothing, lest you should not come up to it. Christ says, "Abide in Me, so shall ye bear much fruit." It was on this principle that St. Paul professed so much and did so much. "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

There is nothing to be said of the other sons of Jesse. Only the youngest one remained, apparently too young to be at the feast; he was in the field, keeping the sheep. "And Jesse sent and

brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance" (*marg. eyes*), "and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Though goodly to look at he was too young, too boyish to be preferred on the score of "outward appearance." It was qualities unseen, and as yet but little developed, that commended him. Greatly astonished must Jesse and his other sons have been to see Samuel pouring on the ruddy stripling the holy oil, and anointing him for whatever the office might be. But it has often been God's way to find His agents in unexpected places. Here a great king is found in the sheepfold. In Joseph's time a prime minister of Egypt was found in the prison. Our Lord found His chief apostle in the school of Gamaliel. The great Reformer of the sixteenth century was found in a poor miner's cottage. God is never at a loss for agents, and if the men fail that might naturally have been looked for to do Him service substitutes for them are not far to seek. Out of the very stones He can raise up children to Abraham.

But it was not a mere arbitrary arrangement that David should have been a shepherd before he was king. There were many things in the one employment that prepared the way for the other. In the East the shepherd had higher rank and a larger sphere of duties than is common with us. The duties of the shepherd, to watch over his flock, to feed and protect them, to heal the sick, bind up the broken, and bring again that which was driven away, corresponded to those which the faithful and godly ruler owed to the people committed to his sceptre. It was from the time of David that the shepherd phraseology began to be applied to rulers and their people; and we hardly carry away the full lesson that the prophets intended to teach in their denunciations of "the shepherds that fed themselves and not the flock" when we apply these exclusively to the shepherds of souls. So appropriate was the emblem of the shepherd for denoting the right spirit and character of rulers, that it was ultimately appropriated in a very high and peculiar sense to the person and office of the Lord Jesus Christ. But long ere he appeared King David had familiarised men's minds with the kind of benefits that flow from the sceptre of a shepherd-ruler—the kind of blessings that were to flow in their fitness from Christ. Never did he write a more expressive word than this, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." On the groundwork of his own earthly kingdom he had drawn the pattern of things in heavenly places, for describing which in after times no language could be found more suitable than that borrowed from his first occupation.

But in full harmony with the character of Old Testament typology, the glory of the thing symbolised was infinitely greater than the glory of the symbol. Much though the nation owed to the godly administration of him whom God "took from the sheepfold, and brought from following the ewes great with young, to feed Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance," these benefits were shadows indeed when compared with the blessings procured by the great "Shepherd of Israel," "the good Shepherd that giveth His life for the sheep," whose shepherd care does not terminate with the life that now is, but will be exercised in eternity in feeding them and leading them by living fountains of water, where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

There are other points of typical resemblance

between David and Christ that demand our notice here. If it was a strange-like thing for God to find the model king of Israel in a sheepcot at Bethlehem, it was still more so to find the Saviour of the world in a workshop at Nazareth. But again; King David was chosen for qualities that did not fall in with the ordinary conception of what was king-like, but qualities that commended him to God; and in the same manner the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Elect, in whom His soul delighted, was not marked by those attributes which men might have considered suitable in one who was to gain the empire of the world. "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." In bodily form the Lord Jesus would seem to have resembled David rather than Saul. There is no reason to think that there was any great physical superiority in Christ, that He was taller than the common, or that He was distinguished by any of those physical features that at first sight captivate men. And even in the region of intellectual and spiritual influence, our Lord did not conform to the type that naturally commands the confidence and admiration of the world. He had a still, quiet manner. His eloquence did not flash, nor blaze, nor flow like a torrent. The power of His words was due more to their wonderful depth of meaning, going straight to the heart of things, and to the aptness of His homely illustrations. Our Lord's mode of conquest was very remarkable. He conquered by gentleness, by forbearance, by love, by sympathy, by self-denial. He impressed men with the glory of sacrifice, the glory of service, the glory of obedience, obedience to the one great authority—the will of God—to which all obedience is due. He inspired them with a love of purity,—purity of heart, purity after the highest pattern. If you compare our blessed Lord with those who have achieved great conquests, you cannot but see the difference. I do not mean with conquerors like Alexander, or Cæsar, or Napoleon. Napoleon himself : St. Helena showed in a word the vast difference between Christ and them. "Our conquests," said he, "have been achieved by force, but Jesus achieved His by love, and to-day millions would die for Him." But look at some who have conquered by gentler means. Take such men as Socrates, or Plato, or Aristotle. They achieved great intellectual conquests—they founded intellectual empires. But the intellect of Jesus Christ was of another order from theirs. He propounded no theory of the universe, He did not affect to explain the world of reason, He did not profess to lay bare the laws of the human mind, or prescribe conditions for the welfare of states. What strikes us about Christ's method of influence is its quiet homeliness. Yet quiet and homely though it was and is, how prodigious, how unprecedented has been its power! What other king of men has wielded a title of His influence? And that not with one class of society, but with all, not only with the poor and uneducated, but with thinkers and men of genius as well; not only with men and women who know the world, and know their own hearts and all their wants, and apprehend the fitness of Christ to supply them, but even with little children, in the simple unconsciousness of opening years. For out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He hath perfected praise.

Now let us mark this also, in conclusion, that besides being a King Himself Jesus makes all His

people kings to God. Every Christian is designed to be a ruler, an unconscious one it may be, but one who exercises an influence in the same direction as Christ's. How can you accomplish this? By first of all drinking into Christ's spirit, looking out on the world as He did, with compassion, sympathy, self-sacrifice, and an ardent desire for its renovation and its happiness. By walking "worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called. Not by the earthquake, or by the tempest, but by the still small voice. By quiet, steady, persistent love, goodness, and self-denial. These are the true Christian weapons, often little thought of, but really the armour of God, and weapons mighty to the pulling down of strongholds and the subjugation of the world to Christ.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID'S EARLY LIFE.*

I SAMUEL xvi. 14-23.

BEFORE we enter at large into the incident of which these verses form the record it is desirable to settle, as far as we can, the order of events in the early life of David.

After being anointed by Samuel, David would probably return to his work among the sheep. It is quite possible that some years elapsed before anything else occurred to vary the monotony of his first occupation. The only interruption likely to have occurred to his shepherd life would be, intercourse with Samuel. It is rather striking that nothing is said, nothing is even hinted, as to the private relations that prevailed in youth between him and the venerable prophet who had anointed him with the holy oil. But it cannot be supposed that Samuel would just return to Ramah without any further communication with the youth that was to play so important a part in the future history of the country. If Saul, with all his promising qualities at the beginning, had greatly disappointed him, he could only be the more anxious on that account about the disposition and development of David. The fact that after David became the object of the murderous jealousy of Saul, it was to Samuel he came when he fled from the court to tell what had taken place, and to ask advice (ch. xix. 18, 19), seems to indicate that the two men were on intimate terms, and therefore that they had been much together before. Whether David derived his views of government from Samuel, or whether they were impressed on him directly by the Spirit of God, it is certain that they were the very same as those which Samuel cherished so intensely, and which he sought so earnestly to impress on Saul. God's imperial sovereignty, and the earthly king's entire subordination to him; the standing of the people as God's people, God's heritage, and the duty of the king to treat them as such, and do all that he could for their good; the infinite and inexhaustible privilege involved in this relation, making all coquetting with false gods shameful, dishonouring to God, and disastrous to the people,—were ruling principles with Samuel and David alike. If David was never formally a pupil of Samuel's, informally he must have been so to a large extent. Samuel lived in David; and the complacency which the old prophet must have had in his youthful friend, and

his pleasure in observing the depth of his loyalty to God, and his eager interest in the highest welfare of the people, must have greatly mitigated his distress at the rejection of Saul, and revived his hope of better days for Israel.

As David grew in years, but before he ceased to be a boy, he might acquire that local reputation as "a mighty valiant man and a man of war" which his friend referred to when he first mentioned him to Saul. In him as in Jonathan faith generated a habit of dash and daring which could not be suppressed in the days of eager boyhood. The daring insolence of the Philistines, whose country lay but a few miles to the west of Bethlehem, might afford him opportunities for deeds of boyish valour. Jerusalem, the stronghold of the Jebusites, was but two hours distant from Bethlehem, and on the part of its people, too, collisions with Israelites were doubtless liable to occur. It may have been now, or possibly a little later, that the contest occurred with the lion and the bear. The country round Bethlehem was not a peaceful paradise, and the career of a shepherd was not the easy life of lovesick swains which poets dream.

It was at this period of David's life that Saul's peculiar malady took that form which suggested the use of music to soothe his nervous irritation. His courtiers recommended that he should seek out a cunning player on the harp, whose soothing strains would calm him in the paroxysms of his ailment. Obviously, it was desirable that one who was to be so close to a king so full of the military spirit as Saul should have a touch of that spirit himself. David had become known to one of the courtiers, who at once mentioned him as in all respects suitable for the berth. Saul accordingly sent messengers to Jesse, bidding him send to him David his son, who was with the sheep. And David came to Saul. But his first visit seems to have been quite short. Saul's attacks were probably occasional, and at first long intervals may have occurred between them. When he recovered from the attack at which David had been sent for, the cunning harper was needed no longer, and would naturally return home. He may have been but a very short time with Saul, too short for much acquaintance being formed. But it is the way of the historians of Scripture, when a topic has once been introduced, to pursue it to its issues without note of the events that came between. The writer having indicated how David was first brought into contact with Saul, as his musician, pursues the subject of their relation, without mentioning that the fight with Goliath occurred between. Some critics have maintained that in this book we have two accounts of David's introduction to Saul, accounts which contradict one another. In the first of them he became known to him first as a musician sent for in the height of his attack. In the other it is as the conqueror of Goliath he appears before Saul. It is the fact that neither Saul nor any of his people knew on this occasion who he was that is so strange. According to our view the order of events was this: David's first visit to Saul to play before him on his harp was a very short one. Some time after the conflict with Goliath occurred. David's appearance had probably changed considerably, so that Saul did not recognise him. It was now that Saul attached David to himself, kept him permanently, and would not let him return to his father's house (ch. xviii. 2). And while David acted as musician, playing to him on his harp in the paroxysms of his ailment (ch. xviii. 10), he went on

*A few paragraphs on the Life of David are reproduced from the author's book "David, King of Israel."

at his command on military expeditions, and acquired great renown as a warrior (ch. xviii. 5). Thus, to turn back to the sixteenth chapter, the last two verses of that chapter record the permanent office before Saul which David came to fill after the slaughter of the Philistine. In fact, we find in that chapter, as often elsewhere, a brief outline of the whole course of events, some of which are filled up in minute detail in the chapter following.

Having thus settled the chronology, or rather the order of events in David's early history, it may be well now to examine more fully that period of his life, in so far as we have any materials for doing so.

According to the chronology of the Authorised Version, the birth of David must have occurred about the year before Christ 1080. It was about a hundred years later than the date commonly assigned to the Trojan war, and therefore a considerable time before the dawn of authentic history, at least among the Greeks or the Romans. The age of David succeeded what might be called the heroic age of Hebrew history; in one sense, indeed, it was a continuation of that period. Samson, the latest, and in some sense the greatest of the Jewish heroes, had perished not very long before; and the scene of his birth and of some of his most famous exploits lay within a very few miles of Bethlehem. In David's boyhood old men would still be living who had seen and talked with the Hebrew Hercules, and from whose lips high-spirited boys would hear, with sparkling eye and heaving bosom, the story of his exploits and the tragedy of his death. The whole neighbourhood would swarm with songs and legends illustrative of the deeds of those mighty men of valour, that ever since the sojourn in Egypt had been conferring renown on the Hebrew name. The mind of boyhood delights in such narratives; they rouse the soul, expand the imagination, and create sympathy with all that is brave and noble. We cannot doubt that such things had a great effect on the susceptible temperament of the youthful David, and contributed some elements of that manly and invincible spirit which remained so prominent in his character.

But a much more important factor in determining his character and shaping his life was the religious awakening in which Samuel had so prominent a share. Not a word is said anywhere of the manner in which David's heart was first turned to God; but this must have been in his earliest years. We think of David as we think of Samuel, or Jeremiah, or Josiah, or John the Baptist, as sanctified to the Lord from his very childhood. God chose him at the very outset in a more vital sense than He afterwards chose him to be king. In the exercise of that mysterious sovereignty which we are unable to fathom, God made his youthful heart a plot of good soil, into which when the seed fell it bore fruit an hundredfold. In strong contrast to Saul, whose early sympathies were against the ways and will of God, those of David were warmly for them. Samuel would find him an eager and willing listener when he spoke to him of God and His ways. How strange are the differences of young persons, in this respect, when they come first under the instructions of a minister or other servant of God! Some so earnest, so attentive, so impressed; so ready to drink in all that is said; treasuring it, hiding it in their hearts, rejoicing in it like those that find great spoil. Others so hard to bring into line, so

glad of an excuse for absence, so difficult to interest, so fitful and unconcerned. No doubt much depends on the skill of the teacher in working upon anything in their minds that gives even a faint response to the truth. And in no case is the aversion of the heart beyond the power of the Holy Spirit to influence and to change. But for all that, we cannot but acknowledge the mysterious sovereignty which through causes we cannot trace makes one man so to differ from another; which made Abel so different from Cain, Isaac from Ishmael, Moses from Balaam, and David from Saul.

Was David at any time a member of any of the schools of the prophets? We cannot say with certainty, but when we ponder what we read about them it seems very likely that he was. These schools seem to have enjoyed in an eminent degree the gracious power of the Holy Spirit. The hearts of the inmates seem to have burned with the glow of devotion; the emotions of holy joy with which they were animated could not be restrained, but poured out from them, like streams from a gushing fountain, in holy songs and ascriptions to God; and such was the overpowering influence of this spirit that for a time it infected even cold-hearted men like Saul, and bore them along, as an enthusiastic crowd gathers up stragglers and sweeps them onward in its current. It seems highly probable that it was in connection with these institutions, on which so signal a blessing rested, that the devotional spirit became so powerful in David afterwards poured out so freely in his Psalms. For surely he could not be in the company of men who were so full of the Spirit without sharing their experience and pouring forth the feelings that stirred his soul.

We all believe in some degree in the law of heredity and find it interesting to trace the features of forefathers, physical and spiritual, in the persons of their descendants. The piety, the humanity, and the affectionateness of Boaz and Ruth form a beautiful picture in the early Hebrew history, and seem to come before us anew in the character of David. Boaz was remarkable for the fatherly interest he took in his dependants, for his generous kindness to the poor, and for a spirit of gentle piety that breathed even through his secular life. Was it not the same spirit that dictated the benediction "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble"? Was it not the same interest in the welfare of dependants that David showed when "he dealt among the people, even the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as to the men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine? Ruth again was remarkable for the extraordinary depth and tenderness of her affection; her words to Naomi have never been surpassed as an expression of simple, tender feeling: "Entreat me not to leave thee, nor 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." Does not this extraordinary tenderness seem to have fallen undiminished to the man who had such an affection for Jonathan, who showed such emotion on the illness of his infant child, and poured out such a flood of anguish on the death of Absalom? The history of Boaz and Ruth would surely take hold very early of his mind. The very house in which he lived, the fields where he tended his sheep, every object around him, might have associations with their memory;

aged people might tell him stories of their benevolence, and pious people give him traditions of their godliness, and thus an element would be contributed to a character in which the tenderness of a woman and the piety of a saint were combined with the courage and energy of a man.

The birthplace of David, Bethlehem, is more remarkable for its moral associations than its natural features. Well has it been said by Edward Robinson of the place where both David and Jesus were born, "What a mighty influence for good has gone forth from this little spot upon the human race both for time and for eternity!" It was situated some six miles to the south of Jerusalem, and about twice that distance to the north of Hebron. The present town is built upon the north and northeast slope of a long grey ridge, with a deep valley in front and another behind, uniting at no great distance, and running down toward the Dead Sea. The country around is hilly, but hardly beautiful; the limestone rock gives a bare appearance to the hills, which is not redeemed by boldness of form or picturesqueness of outline. The fields, though stony and rough, produce good crops of grain; olive groves, fig-orchards, and vineyards abound both in the valleys and on the gentler slopes; the higher and wilder tracts were probably devoted to the pasturing of flocks. The whole tract in which Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem are situated is elevated nearly four thousand feet above the level of Jordan and the Dead Sea on the one side, and between two and three thousand feet above the Mediterranean on the other. Among these hills and valleys David spent his youth, watching the flocks of his father.

We have seen that the life of a shepherd in those scenes was not without its times of danger, making great demands on the shepherd's courage and affection. In the main, however, it was a quiet life, affording copious opportunities for meditation and for quiet study. It was the great privilege of David to see much of God in His works and to commune with him therein. The Psalms are full of allusions to the varied aspects of nature—the mountains, the rocks, the rivers, the valleys, the forests, the lightning, the thunder, the whirlwind.

It is not easy to say how much of the written Word existed in David's time, but at the most it could not be but a fragment of what we now possess. But if the mines of revelation were few, all the more eager was his search for their hidden treasures. And David had the advantage of using what we may call a pictorial Bible. When he read of the destruction of Sodom he could see the dark wall of Moab frowning over the lake near to which the guilty cities were consumed by the fire of heaven. When he paused to think of the solemn transactions at Machpelah, he could see in the distance the very spot where so much sacred dust was gathered. Close by his daily haunts one pillar marked the place where God spake to Jacob, and another the spot where poor Rachel died. In the dark range of Moab yon lofty peak was the spot whence Moses had his view and Balaam his vision. It was from that eminence the prophet from Pethor saw a star come out of Jacob and a sceptre rise out of Israel that should smite the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Seth. The sympathy with God fostered by these studies and meditations was of the closest kind; an unusually clear and impressive knowledge seems to have been acquired of the purpose of God concerning Israel; drinking in himself the lessons of revelation, he was becoming qualified to become

the instrument of the Holy Spirit for those marvellous contributions to its canon which he was afterwards honoured to make.

And among these hills and valleys, too, David would acquire his proficiency in the two very different arts which were soon to make him famous—the use of the sling and the use of the harp. It seems to have been his ambition, whatever he did, to do it in the best possible way. His skill in the use of the sling was so perfect that he could project a stone even at a small object with unerring certainty. His harp was probably a very simple instrument, small enough to be carried about with him, but in handling it he acquired the same perfect skill as in handling his sling. In his hands it became a wonderfully expressive instrument. And hence, when Saul required a skilful musician to soothe him, the known gifts of the young shepherd of Bethlehem pointed him out as the man.

Of the influence of music in remedying disorders of the nerves there is no want of evidence. "Bochart has collected many passages from profane writers which speak of the medicinal effects of music on the mind and body, especially as appeasing anger and soothing and pacifying a troubled spirit" (*Speaker's Commentary*). A whole book was written on the subject by Caspar Læscherus, Professor of Divinity at Wittenberg (A. D. 1688). Kitto and other writers have added more recent instances. It is said of Charles IX. of France that after the massacre of St. Bartholomew his sleep was disturbed by nightly horrors, and he could only be composed to rest by a symphony of singing boys. Philip V. of Spain, being seized with deep dejection of mind that unfitted him for all public duties, a celebrated musician was invited to surprise the king by giving a concert in the neighbouring apartment to his majesty's, with the effect that the king roused himself from his lethargy and resumed his duties. We may readily believe that in soothing power the harp was not inferior to any of the other instruments.

Still, with all its success, it was but a poor method of soothing a troubled spirit compared to the methods that David was afterwards to employ. It dealt chiefly with man's physical nature, it soothed the nervous system and removed the hindrance which their disorder caused to the action of the powers of the mind. It did not strike at the root of all trouble—alienation from God, it did not attempt to create and apply the only permanent remedy for trouble—trust in a loving father's care. It was a mere foreshadow, on a comparatively low and earthly ground, of the way in which David, as the Psalmist, was afterwards to provide the true "oil of joy for the mourner," and to become a guide to the downcast soul from the fearful pit and the miry clay up to the third heaven of joy and peace. The sounds of his harp could only operate by an influence felt alike by saint and sinner in soothing an agitated frame; but with the words of his Psalms, the Divine Spirit, by whose inspiration they were poured out, was in all coming ages to unite Himself, and to use them for showing the sin-burdened soul the true cause of its misery, and for leading it by a holy path, sorrowing yet rejoicing, to the home of its reconciled Father.

It is a painful thing to see any one in overwhelming trouble; it is doubly painful to see kings and others in high places miserable amid all their splendours, helpless amid all their resources. Alas, O Spirit of man, what awful trials thou

art subject to! Well mayest thou sometimes envy the very animals around thee, which, if they have no such capacities of enjoyment as thou hast, have on the other hand no such capacities of misery. The higher our powers and position, the more awful the anguish when anything goes wrong. Yet hast thou not, O man, a capacity to know that thy misery cannot be remedied till the cause of it is removed? Prodigal son, there is but one way to escape a miserable life. Arise, go to thy Father. See how He is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to men their trespasses. Accept His offers and be at peace. Receive His Spirit and your disorder shall be healed. I own that not even then can we assure you of freedom from grievous sorrows. The best of men in this world have often most grievous sufferings. But they are strengthened to bear them while they last; they are assured that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose; and they know that when "the earthly house of their tabernacle is dissolved, they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID'S CONFLICT WITH GOLIATH.

I SAMUEL xvii.

THESE irrepressible Philistines were never long recovering from their disasters. The victory of Jonathan had been impaired by the exhaustion of the soldiers, caused by Saul's fast preventing them from pursuing the enemy as far, and destroying their force as thoroughly, as they might have done. A new attack was organised against Israel, headed by a champion, Goliath of Gath, whose height must have approached the extraordinary stature of ten feet. Against this army Saul arrayed his force, and the two armies fronted each other on opposite sides of the valley of Elah. This valley has generally been identified with that which now bears the name of Wady-es-Sumt—a valley running down from the plateau of Judah to the Philistine plain, not more than perhaps eight or ten miles from Bethlehem. The Philistine champion appears to have been a man of physical strength corresponding to the massiveness of his body. The weight of his coat of mail is estimated at more than one hundred and fifty pounds, and the head of his spear eighteen pounds. Remembering the extraordinary feats of Samson, the Philistines might well fancy that it was now their turn to boast of a Hercules. Day after day Goliath presented himself before the army of Israel, calling proudly for a foeman worthy of his steel, and demanding that in default of any one able to fight with him and kill him, the Israelites should abandon all dream of independence, and become vassals of the Philistines. And morning and evening, for nearly six weeks, had this proud challenge been given, but never once accepted. Even Jonathan, who had faith enough and courage enough and skill enough for so much, seems to have felt himself helpless in this great dilemma. The explanation that has sometimes been given of his abstention, that it was not etiquette for a king's son to engage in fight with a commoner, can hardly hold water; Jonathan showed no such squeamishness at Michmash; and besides, in cases of desperation etiquette has to be thrown to the

winds. Of the host of Israel, we read simply that they were dismayed. Nor does Saul seem to have renewed the attempt to get counsel of God after his experience on the day of Jonathan's victory. The Israelites could only look on in grim humiliation, sullenly guarding the pass by the valley into their territories, but returning a silent refusal to the demand of the Philistines either to furnish a champion or to become their servants.

The coming of David upon the scene corresponded in its accidental character to the coming of Saul into contact with Samuel, to be designated for the throne. Everything seemed to be casual, yet those things which seemed most casual were really links in a providential chain leading to the gravest issues. It seemed to be by chance that David had three brothers serving in Saul's army; it seemed also to be by chance that their father sent his youthful shepherd son to inquire after their welfare; it was not by design that as he saluted his brethren Goliath came up and David heard his words of defiance; still less was it on purpose to wait for David that Saul had sent no one out as yet to encounter the Philistine; and nothing could have appeared more ridiculous than that the challenge should wait to be answered by the stripling shepherd, who, with his sling and shepherd's bag thrown over his shoulder, had so little of the appearance of a man of war. It seemed very accidental, too, that the only part of the giant's person that was not thoroughly defended by his armour, his eyes and a morsel of his forehead above them, was the only part of him on which a small stone from a sling could have inflicted a fatal injury. But obviously all these were parts of the providential plan by which David was at once to confer on his country a signal boon, and to raise his name to the pinnacle of fame. And, as usual, all the parts of this pre-arranged plan fell out without constraint or interference; a new proof that Divine pre-ordination does not impair the liberty of man.

One cannot but wonder whether, in offering his prayers that morning, David had any presentiment of the trial that awaited him, anything to impel him to unwonted fervour in asking God that day to establish the works of his hands upon him. There is no reason to think that he had. His prayers that morning were in all likelihood his usual prayers. And if he was sincere in the expression of his own sense of weakness, and in his supplication that God would strengthen him for all the day's duties, it was enough. Oh! how little we know what may be before us, on some morning that dawns on us just as other days, but which is to form a great crisis in our life. How little the boy that is to tell his first lie that day thinks of the serpent that is lying in wait for him! How little the girl that is to fall in with her betrayer thinks of the snare preparing for her body and her soul! How little the party that are to be upset in the pleasure boat and consigned to a watery grave think how the day is to end! Should we not pray more really, more earnestly if we did realise these possibilities? True, indeed, the future is hid from us, and we do not usually experience the impulse to earnestness which it would impart. But is it not a good habit, as you kneel each morning, to think, "For aught I know, this may be the most important day of my life. The opportunity may be given me of doing a great service in the cause of truth and righteousness; or the temptation may assail me to deny my Lord and ruin my soul. O God, be not far

from me this day; prepare me for all that Thou preparest for me!"

The distance from Bethlehem being but a few hours' walk, David starting in the morning would arrive early in the day at the quarters of the army. When he heard the challenge of the Philistine he was astonished to find that no one had taken it up. There was a mystery about this, about the cowardice of his countrymen, perhaps about the attitude of Jonathan, that he could not solve. Accordingly, with all that earnestness and curiosity with which one peers into all the circumstances surrounding a mystery, he asked, what encouragement there was to volunteer, what reward was any one to receive who should kill this Philistine? Not that he personally was caring about the reward, but he wished to solve the mystery. It is evident that the consideration that moved David himself was that the Philistine had defied the armies of the living God. It was the same arrogant claim to be above the God of Israel, which had puffed up their minds when they took possession of the ark and placed it in the temple of their god. "You thought so that day," David might mutter, "but what did you think next morning, when the mutilated image of your god lay prostrate on the floor? Please God, your sensations to-morrow, yea, this very forenoon, shall be such as they were then." The spirit of faith started into full and high activity and the same kind of inspiration that had impelled Jonathan to climb into the garrison at Michmash now impelled David to vindicate the blasphemed name of Jehovah. Was it the flash of this inspiration in his eye, was it the tone of it in his voice, was it the consciousness that something desperate was to follow in the way of personal faith and daring, that roused the temper of Eliab, and drew from him a withering rebuke of the presumption of the stripling that dared to meddle with such matters? Eliab certainly did not spare him. Elder brothers are seldom remiss in rebuking the presumption of younger. "Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thy heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." Irritating though such language was, it was borne with admirable meekness. "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." Eliab showed himself defeated by his own temper, a most mortifying defeat; David held his temper firmly in command. Which was the greater, which the better man? And the short question he put to Eliab was singularly apt, "Is there not a cause?" When all you men of war are standing helpless and perplexed in the face of this great national insult, is there not a cause why I should inquire into the matter, if, by God's help, I can do anything for my God and my people?

Undaunted by his brother's volley, he turned to some one else, and obtained a similar answer to his questions. Inspiration is a rapid process, and the course for him to pursue was now fully determined upon. His indignant tone and confident reliance on the God of Israel, so unlike the tone of every one else, excited the attention of the bystanders; they rehearsed his words to Saul, and Saul sent for him. And when he came to Saul, there was not the slightest trace of fear or faintheartedness about him. "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Brave words, but, as Saul

thinks, very foolish. "You go and fight with the Philistine? you a mere shepherd boy, who never knew the brunt of battle, and he a man of war from his youth?" Yes, Saul, that is just the way for you to speak, with your earthly way of viewing things; you, who measure strength only by a carnal standard, who know nothing of the faith that removes mountains, who forget the meaning of the name ISRA-EL, and never spent an hour as Jacob spent his night at Peniel! Listen to the reply of faith. "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; 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. 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. 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."

Could there have been a nobler exercise of faith, a finer instance of a human spirit taking hold of the Invisible; fortifying itself against material perils by realising the help of an unseen God! resting on His sure word as on solid rock; flinging itself fearlessly on a very sea of dangers; confident of protection and victory from Him? The only help to faith was the remembrance of the encounter with the lion and the bear, and the assurance that the same gracious help would be vouchsafed now. But no heart that was not full of faith would have thought of that, either as an evidence that God worked by him then, or as a sure pledge that God would work by him now. How many an adventurer or sportsman, that in some encounter with wild animals has escaped death by the very skin of his teeth, thinks only of his luck, or the happiness of the thought that led him to do so and so in what seemed the very article of death? A deliverance of this kind is no security against a like deliverance afterwards; it can give nothing more than a hope of escape. The faith of David recognised God's merciful hand in the first deliverance, and that gave an assurance of it in the other. What! would that God that had helped him to rescue a lamb fail him while trying to rescue a nation? Would that God that had sustained him when all that was involved was a trifling loss to his father fail him in a combat that involved the salvation of Israel and the honour of Israel's God? Would He who had subdued for him the lion and the bear when they were but obeying the instincts of their nature, humiliate him in conflict with one who was defying the armies of the living God? The remembrance of this deliverance confirmed his faith and urged him to the conflict, and the victory which faith thus gained was complete. It swept the decks clear of every vestige of terror; it went right to the danger, without a particle of misgiving.

There are two ways in which faith may assert its supremacy. One, afterwards very familiar to David, is, when it has first to struggle hard with distrust and fear; when it has to come to close quarters with the suggestions of the carnal mind, grapple with these in mortal conflict, strangle them, and rise up victorious over them. For most men, most believing men, it is only thus that faith rises to her throne. The other way is, to spring to her throne in a moment; to assert her authority, free and independent, utterly regardless of all

that would hamper her, as free from doubt and misgiving as a little child in his father's arms, conscious that whatever is needed that father will provide. It was this simple, child-like, but most triumphant exercise of faith that David showed in undertaking this conflict. Happy they who are privileged with such an attainment! Only let us beware of despairing if we cannot attain to this prompt, instinctive faith. Let us fall back with patience on that other process where we have to fight in the first instance with our fears and misgivings, driving them from us as David had often to do afterwards: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope in God, for I will yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God."

And now David prepared himself for the contest. Saul, ever carnal, and trusting only in carnal devices, is fain to clothe him in his armour, and David makes trial of his coat of mail; but he is embarrassed by a heavy covering to which he is not accustomed, and which only impedes the freedom of his arm. It is plain enough that it is not in Saul's panoply that he can meet the Philistine. He must fall back on simpler means. Choosing five smooth stones out of the brook, with his shepherd's staff in one hand and his sling in the other, he drew near to the Philistine. When Goliath saw him no words were bitter enough for his scorn. He had sought a warrior to fight with; he gets a boy to annihilate. It is a paltry business. "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the fields." "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might." Was ever such proof given of the sin and folly of boasting as in the case of Goliath? And yet, as we should say, how natural it was for Goliath! But pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. In the spiritual conflict it is the surest presage of defeat. It was the Goliath spirit that puffed up St. Peter when he said to his Master, "Lord, I will go with Thee to prison and to death." It is the same spirit against which St. Paul gives his remarkable warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Can it be said that it is a spirit that Churches are always free from? Are they never tempted to boast of the talents of their leading men, the success of their movements, and their growing power and influence in the community? And does not God in His providence constantly show the sin and folly of such boasting? "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

In beautiful contrast with the scornful self-confidence of Goliath was the simplicity of spirit and the meek, humble reliance on God, apparent in David's answer: "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. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the Philistines this day to 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. 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 hand."

What a reality God was to David! He ad-

vanced "as seeing Him who is invisible." Guided by the wisdom of God, he chose his method of attack, with all the simplicity and certainty of genius. Conscious that God was with him, he fearlessly met the enemy. A man of less faith might have been too nervous to take the proper aim. Undisturbed by any fear of missing, David hurls the stone from his sling, hits the giant on the unprotected part of his forehead, and in a moment has him reeling on the ground. Advancing to his prostrate foe, he seizes his sword, cuts off his head, and affords to both friends and foes unmistakable evidence that his opponent is dead. Rushing from their tents, the Philistines fly towards their own country, hotly pursued by the Israelites. It was in these pursuits of flying foes that the greatest slaughter occurred in those Eastern countries, and the whole road was strewn with the dead bodies of the foe to the very gates of Ekron and Gaza. In this pursuit, however, David did not mingle. With the head of the Philistine in his hands, he came to Saul. It is said that afterwards he took the head of Goliath to Jerusalem, which was then occupied, at least in part, by the Benjamites (Judges i. 21), though the stronghold of Zion was in the hands of the Jebusites (2 Sam. v. 7). We do not know why Jerusalem was chosen for depositing this ghastly trophy. All that it is necessary to say in relation to this is, that seeing it was only the stronghold of Zion that is said to have been held by the Jebusites, there is no ground for the objection which some critics have taken to the narrative that it cannot be correct, since Jerusalem was not yet in the hands of the Israelites.

It cannot be doubted that David continued to hold the same conviction as before the battle, that it was not he that conquered, but God. We cannot doubt that after the battle he showed the same meek and humble spirit as before. Whatever surprise his victory might be to the tens of thousands who witnessed it, it was no surprise to him. He knew beforehand that he could trust God, and the result showed that he was right. But that very spirit of implicit trust in God by which he was so thoroughly influenced kept him from taking any of the glory to himself. God had chosen him to be His instrument, but he had no credit from the victory for himself. His feeling that day was the very same as his feeling at the close of his military life, when the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies:—"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock, in Him will I trust; He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour; Thou savest me from violence."

While David was preparing to fight with the Philistine, Saul asked Abner whose son he was. Strange to say, neither Abner nor any one else could tell. Nor could the question be answered till David came back from his victory, and told the king that he was the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite. We have already remarked that it was strange that Saul should not have recognised him, inasmuch as he had formerly given attendance on the king to drive away his evil spirit by means of his harp. In explanation it has been urged by some that David's visit or visits to Saul at that time may have been very brief, and as years may have elapsed since his last visit, his appearance may have so changed as to prevent recognition. On the part of others, another explanation has been offered. Saul may have recognised David

at first, but he did not know his family. Now that there was a probability of his becoming the king's son-in-law, it was natural that Saul should be anxious to know his connections. The question put to Abner was, Whose son is this youth? The commission given to him was to enquire "whose son the stripling is." And the information given by David was, "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." It may be added that there is some difficulty about the text of this chapter. It seems as if somehow two independent accounts of David had been mixed together. And in one important version of the Septuagint several passages that occur in the received text are omitted, certainly with the result of removing some difficulties as the passage stands.

It is not possible to read this chapter without some thought of the typical character of David, and indeed the typical aspect of the conflict in which he was now engaged. We find an emblematic picture of the conquest of Messiah and His Church. The self-confident boasting of the giant, strong in the resources of carnal might, and incapable of appreciating the unseen and invincible power of a righteous man in a righteous cause, is precisely the spirit in which opposition to Christ has been usually given, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The contempt shown for the lowly appearance of David, the undisguised scorn at the notion that through such a stripling any deliverance could come to his people, has its counterpart in the feeling towards Christ and His Gospel to which the Apostle alludes: "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The calm self-possession of David, the choice of simple but suitable means, and the thorough reliance on Jehovah which enabled him to conquer, were all exemplified, in far higher measure, in the moral victories of Jesus, and they are still the weapons which enable His people to overcome. The sword of Goliath turned against himself, the weapon by which he was to annihilate his foe, employed by that very foe to sever his head from his body, was an emblem of Satan's weapons turned by Christ against Satan, "through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, and delivered them who all their lifetime were subject to bondage." The representative character of David, fighting, not for himself alone but the whole nation, was analogous to the representative character of Christ. And the shout that burst from the ranks of Israel and Judah when they saw the champion of the Philistines fall, and the enemy betake themselves in consternation to flight, foreshadowed the joy of redeemed men when the reality of Christ's salvation flashes on their hearts, and they see the enemies that have been harassing them repulsed and scattered—a joy to be immeasurably magnified when all enemies are finally conquered, and the loud voice is heard in heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, that accused them before our God day and night."

Lastly, while we are instructed by the study of this conflict, let us be animated by it too. Let us learn never to quail at carnal might arrayed against the cause of God. Let us never fear to attack SIN, however apparently invincible it may be. Be it sin within or sin without, sin in our hearts or sin in the world, let us go boldly at it, strong in the might of God. That God who delivered

David from the paw of the wild beast, and from the power of the giant, will make us more than conquerors—will enable us to spoil "principalities and powers and triumph openly over them."

CHAPTER XXV.

SAUL'S JEALOUSY—DAVID'S MARRIAGE.

I SAMUEL xviii.

THE conqueror of Goliath had been promised, as his reward, the eldest daughter of the king in marriage. The fulfilment of that promise, if not utterly neglected, was at least delayed; but if David lost the hand of the king's daughter, he gained, what could not have been promised—the heart of the king's son. It was little wonder that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Besides all else about David that was attractive to Jonathan as it was attractive to every one, there was that strongest of all bonds, the bond of a common, all-prevailing faith, faith in the covenant God of Israel, that had now shown itself in David in overwhelming strength, as it had shown itself in Jonathan some time before at Michmash.

To Jonathan David must indeed have appeared a man after his own heart. The childlike simplicity of the trust he had reposed in God showed what a profound hold his faith had of him, how entirely it ruled his life. What depths of congeniality the two young men must have discovered in one another; in what wonderful agreement they must have found themselves respecting the duty and destiny of the Hebrew people! That Jonathan should have been so fascinated at that particular moment shows what a pure heart he must have had. If we judge aright, David's faith had surpassed Jonathan's; David had dared where Jonathan had shrunk; and David's higher faith had obtained the distinction that might naturally have been expected to fall to Jonathan. Yet no shadow of jealousy darkens Jonathan's brow. Never were hands more cordially grasped; never were congratulations more warmly uttered. Is there anything so beautiful as a beautiful heart? After well-nigh three thousand years, we are still thrilled by the noble character of Jonathan, and well were it for every young man that he shared in some degree his high nobility. Self-seekers and self-pleasers, look at him—and be ashamed.

The friendship between David and Jonathan will fall to be adverted to afterwards; meanwhile we follow the course of events as they are detailed in this chapter.

One thing that strikes us very forcibly in this part of David's history is the rapidity with which pain and peril followed the splendid achievement which had raised him so high. The malignant jealousy of Saul towards him appears to have sprung up almost immediately after the slaughter of Goliath. "When David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, saying Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have

ascribed but thousands; and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." This statement seems (like so many other statements in Scripture narratives) to be a condensed one, embracing things that happened at different times; it appears to denote that as soon as David returned from killing Goliath, his name began to be introduced by the women into their songs; and when he returned from the expeditions to which Saul appointed him when he set him over the men of war, and in which he was wonderfully successful, then the women introduced the comparison, which so irritated Saul, between Saul's thousands and David's ten thousands. The truth is, that David's experience, while Saul continued to be his persecutor, was a striking commentary on the vanity of human life,—on the singularly tantalising way in which the most splendid prizes are often snatched from men's hands as soon as they have secured them, and when they might reasonably have expected to enjoy their fruits. The case of a conqueror killed in the very moment of victory—of a Wolfe falling on the Plains of Quebec, just as his victory made Britain mistress of Canada; of a Nelson expiring on the deck of his ship, just as the enemy's fleet was hopelessly defeated,—these are touching enough instances of the deceitfulness of fortune in the highest moments of expected enjoyment. But there is something more touching still in the early history of David. Raised to an eminence which he never courted or dreamt of, just because he had such trust in God and such regard for his country; manifesting in his new position all that modesty and all that diffidence which had marked him while his name was still unknown; taking his life in his hand and plunging into toils and risks innumerable just because he desired to be of service to Saul and his country,—surely, if any man deserved a comfortable home and a tranquil mind David was that man. That David should have become the worst treated and most persecuted man of his day; that for years and years he should have been maligned and hunted down, with but a step between him and death; that the very services that ought to have brought him honour should have plunged him into disgrace, and the noble qualities that ought to have made him the king's most trusted counsellor should have made him a fugitive and an outlaw from his presence,—all that is very strange. It would have been a great trial to any man; it was a peculiar trial to a Hebrew. For under the Hebrew economy the principle of temporal rewards and punishments had a prominence beyond the common. Why was this principle reversed in the case of David? Why was one who had been so exemplary doomed to such humiliation and trial,—doomed to a mode of life which seemed more suitable for a miscreant than for the man after God's own heart?

The answer to this question cannot be mistaken now. But that answer was not found so readily in David's time. David's early years bore a close resemblance to that period of the career of Job when the hand of God was heavy upon him, and thick darkness encompassed one on whose tabernacle the candle of the Lord had previously shone very brightly. It pleased God, in infinite love, to make David pass through a long period of hard discipline and salutary training for the office to which he was to be raised. The instances were innumerable in the East of young men of promising character being ruined through sudden elevation

to supreme unchallenged power. The case of Saul himself was a sad instance of this doleful effect. It pleased God to take steps to prevent it from happening in the case of David. It is said that when Alcibiades, the distinguished Athenian, was young, Socrates tried hard to withhold him from public life, and to convince him that he needed a long course of inward discipline before he could engage safely and usefully in the conduct of public affairs. But Alcibiades had no patience for this; he took his own way, became his own master, but with the result that he lost at once true loftiness of aim and all the sincerity of an upright soul. We do not need, however, to illustrate from mere human history the benefits that arise from a man bearing the yoke in his youth. Even our blessed Lord, David's antitype, "though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." And how often has the lesson been repeated! What story is more constantly repeated than, on the one hand, that of the young man succeeding to a fortune in early life, learning every wretched habit of indolence and self-indulgence, becoming the slave of his lusts, and after a miserable life sinking into a dishonoured grave? And on the other, how often do we find, in the biography of the men who have been an honour to their race, that their early life was spent amid struggles and acts of self-denial that seem hardly credible, but out of which came their resolute character and grand conquering power? O adversity, thy features are hard, thy fingers are of iron, thy look is stern and repulsive; but underneath thy hard crust there lies a true heart, full of love and full of hope; if only we had grace to believe this, in times when we are bound with affliction and iron; if only we had faith to look forward a very little, when, like the patriarch Job, we shall find that, after all, He who frames our lot is "very pitiful and of tender mercy"!

In the case of David, God's purpose manifestly was to exercise and strengthen such qualities as trust in God, prayerfulness, self-command, serenity of temper, consideration for others, and the hope of a happy issue out of all his troubles. His trials were indeed both numerous and various. The cup of honour dashed from his lips when he had just begun to taste it; promises the most solemn deliberately violated, and rewards of perilous service coolly withheld from him; faithful services turned into occasions of cruel persecution; enforced separation from beloved friends; laceration of feelings from Saul's cruel and bloody treatment of some who had befriended him; calumnious charges persisted in after convincing and generous refutation; ungrateful treatment from those he had benefited, like Nabal; treachery from those he had delivered, like the men of Keilah; perfidy on the part of some he had trusted, like Cush; assassination threatened by some of his own followers, as at Ziklag,—these and many other trials were the hard and bitter discipline which David had to undergo in the wilderness.

And not only was David thus prepared for the great work of his future life but as a type of the Messiah he foreshadowed the deep humiliation through which He was to pass on His way to His throne. He gave the Old Testament Church a glimpse of the manner in which "it became Him, by whom are all things and for whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering."

The growth of the malignant passion of jealousy in Saul is portrayed in the history in a way painfully graphic. First, it is simply a feeling that steals occasionally into his bosom. It needs some outward occasion to excite it. Its first great effort to establish itself was when Saul heard the Hebrew women ascribing to David ten times as great a slaughter as they ascribed to Saul. We cannot but be struck with the ruggedness of the women's compliment. To honour David as more ready to incur risk and sacrifice for his country, even in encounters involving terrible bloodshed, would have been worthy of women, and worthy of good women; but to make the standard of compliment the number of lives destroyed, the amount of blood shed, indicated surely a coarseness of feeling, characteristic of a somewhat barbarous age. But the compliment was quite significant to Saul, who saw in it a proof of the preference entertained for David, and began to look on him as his rival in the kingdom. The next step in the history of Saul's jealousy is its forming itself into an evil habit, that needed no outward occasion to excite it, but kept itself alive and active by the vitality it had acquired. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (ver. 9). If Saul had been a good man, he would have been horrified at the appearance of this evil passion in his heart; he would have said, "Get thee behind me, Satan;" he would have striven to the utmost to strangle it in the womb. Oh! what untold mountains of guilt would this not have saved him in after life! And what mountains of guilt, darkening their whole life, would the policy of resistance and stamping out, when an evil lust or passion betrays its presence in their heart, save to every young man and young woman who find for the first time evidence of its vitality! But instead of stamping it out, Saul nourished it; instead of extinguishing the spark, he heaped fuel on the flame. And his lust, having been allowed to conceive, was not long of bringing forth. Under a fit of his malady, even as David was playing to him with his harp, he launched a javelin at him, no doubt in some degree an act of insanity, but yet betraying a very horrible spirit. Then, perhaps afraid of himself, he removes David from his presence, and sends him out to battle as a captain of a thousand. But David only gives fresh proofs of his wisdom and his trustworthiness, and establishes his hold more and more on the affections of the people. The very fact of his wisdom, the evidence which his steady, wise, and faithful conduct affords of God's presence with him, creates a new restlessness in Saul, who, with a kind of devilish feeling, hates him the more because "the Lord is with him, and is departed from Saul."

The next stage in the career of jealousy is to ally itself with cunning, under the pretence of great generosity. "Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife; only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him." But cunning and treachery are close connections, and when this promise ought to have been fulfilled, Merab was given to Adriel the Meholathite to wife. There remained his younger daughter Michal, who was personally attached to David. "And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." The question of dowry was a difficult one to David; but on that point the king bade his servants

set his mind at rest. "The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. And Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines."

Alas! the history of Saul's malignant passion is by no means exhausted even by these sad illustrations of its rise and progress. It swells and grows, like a horrid tumour, becoming uglier and uglier continually. And the notices are very significant and instructive which we find as to the spiritual condition of Saul, in connection with the development of his passion. We are told that the Lord was departed from him. When Saul was reproved by Samuel for his transgression, he showed no signs of real repentance, he continued consciously in a state of enmity with God, and took no steps to get the quarrel healed. He preferred the kind of life in which he might please himself, though he offended God, to the kind of life in which he would have pleased God, while he denied himself. And Saul had to bear the awful penalty of his choice. Living apart from God, all the evil that was in his nature came boldly out, asserting itself without let or hindrance, and going to the terrible length of the most murderous and at the same time the meanest projects. Don't let any one imagine that religion has no connection with morality! Sham religion, as we have already seen, may exist side by side with the greatest wickedness; but that religion, the beginning of which is the true fear of God, a genuine reverential regard for God, a true sense of His claims on us, alike as our Creator and our Redeemer,—that religion lays its hand firmly on our moral nature, and scares and scatters the devices of the evil that still remains in the heart. Let us take warning at the picture presented to us in this chapter of the terrible results, even in the ordinary affairs of life, of the evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God. The other side of the case, the effect of a true relation to God in purifying and guiding the life, is seen in the case of David. God being with him in all that he does, he is not only kept from retaliating on Saul, but only kept from all devices for getting rid of one who was so unjust and unkind to himself, but he is remarkably obedient, remarkably faithful, and by God's grace remarkably successful in the work given him to do. It is indeed a beautiful period of David's life—the most blameless and beautiful of any. The object of unmerited hatred, the victim of atrocious plots, the helpless object of a despot's mad and ungoverned fury, yet cherishing no trace of bitter feeling, dreaming of no violent project of relief, but going out and in with perfect loyalty, and straining every nerve to prove himself a laborious, faithful, and useful servant of the master who loathed him.

The question of David's marriage is a somewhat difficult one, appearing to involve some contradictions. First of all we read that a daughter of Saul, along with great riches, had been promised to the man who should kill Goliath. But after David kills him, there is no word of this promise being fulfilled, and even afterwards, when the idea of his being the king's son-in-law is brought forward, there is no hint that he ought to have been so before. Are we to understand that it was an unauthorised rumour that was told to David (ch. xvii. 25-27) when it was said that the victor was to get these rewards? Was it that the people recalled what had been said by Caleb about Kirjath-sepher, a town in that very

neighbourhood, and inferred that surely Saul would give his daughter to the conqueror, as Caleb had given his? This is perhaps the most reasonable explanation, because when David came into Saul's presence nothing of the kind was said to him by the king; and also because, if Saul had really promised it, there was no reason at the time why he should not have kept his promise; nay, the impulsive nature of the king, and the great love of Jonathan toward David, and the love with which David inspired women, would rather have led Saul to be forward in fulfilling it, and in constituting a connection which would then have been pleasant to all. If it be said that this would have been a natural thing for Saul to do, even had there been no promise, the answer is that David was such a stripling, and even in his father's household occupied so humble a place, as to make it reasonable that he should wait, and gain a higher position, before any such thing should be thought of. Accordingly, when David became older, and acquired distinction as a warrior, his being the king's son-in-law had become quite feasible. First, Saul proposes to give him his elder daughter Merab. The murderous desire dictates the proposal, for Saul already desires David's death, though he has not courage himself to strike the blow. But when the time came, for some reason that we do not know of Merab was given to Adriel the Meholathite. David's action at an after period showed that he regarded this as a cruel wrong (2 Sam. iii. 13). Saul, however, still desired to have that hold on David which his being his son-in-law would have involved, and now proposed that Michal his younger daughter should be his wife. The proposal was accepted, but David could bring no dowry for his wife. The only dowry the king sought was a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And the hundred foreskins David paid down in full tale.

What a distressing view these transactions give us of the malignity of Saul's heart! When parents have sacrificed the true happiness of their daughters by pressing on them a marriage of splendid misery, the motive, however selfish and heartless, has not usually been malignant. The marriage which Saul urged between David and Michal was indeed a marriage of affection, but as far as he was concerned his sin in desiring it, as affording facilities for getting rid of him, was on that account all the greater. For nothing shows a wicked heart than being willing to involve another, and especially one's own child, in a lifelong sorrow in order to gratify some feeling of one's own. Saul was not merely trifling with the heart and happiness of his child, but he was deliberately sacrificing both to his vile passion. The longer he lives, Saul becomes blacker and blacker. For such are they from whom the Spirit of the Lord has departed.

We may well contrast David and Saul at this period of their lives; but what a strange thing it is that further on in life David should have taken this leaf from Saul's book, and acted in this very spirit towards Uriah the Hittite! Not that Uriah was, or was to be, son-in-law to the king; alas! there was an element of blackness in the case of David which did not exist in that of Saul; but it was in the very spirit now manifested by Saul towards himself that David availed himself of Uriah's bravery, of Uriah's faithfulness, of Uriah's chivalrous readiness to undertake the most perilous expeditions—availed himself of these to compass his death. What do we learn from

this? The same seeds of evil were in David's heart as in Saul's. But at the earlier period of David's life he walked humbly with God, and God's Spirit poured out on him not only restrained the evil seed, but created a pure, holy, devoted life, as if there were nothing in David but good. Afterwards, grieving the Holy Spirit, David was left for a time to himself, and then the very evil that had been so offensive in Saul came creeping forth, drew itself up and claimed that it should prevail. It was a blessed thing for David that he was not beyond being arrested by God's voice, and humbled by His reproof. He saw whither he had been going; he saw the emptiness and wickedness of his heart; he saw that his salvation depended on God in infinite mercy forgiving his sin and restoring His Spirit, and for these blessings he pled and wrestled as Jacob had wrestled with the angel at Peniel. So we may well see that for any one to trust in his heart is to play the fool; our only trust must be in Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. "*He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a root and withered, and men take them and cast them into the fire and they are burned.*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SAUL'S FURTHER EFFORTS AGAINST DAVID.

I SAMUEL XIX.

A NEW stage of his wicked passion is now reached by Saul; he communes with his servants, and even with his son, with a view to their killing David. Ordinary conspirators are prone to confine their evil designs to their own breasts; or if they do have confidants, to choose for that purpose persons as vile as themselves, whom they bind to secrecy and silence. Saul must have been sadly overpowered by his passion when he urged his very son to become a murderer, to become the assassin of his friend, of the man with whom God manifestly dwelt, and whom God delighted to honour. It is easy to understand what line Saul would take with Jonathan. Heir to the throne, he was specially affected by the popularity of David; if David were disposed of, his seat would be in no danger. The generous prince did his utmost to turn his father from the horrid project: "He spake good of David unto Saul, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good. For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?" For the moment the king was touched by the intercession of Jonathan. Possibly he was rebuked by the burst of generosity and affection,—a spirit so opposite to his own; possibly he was impressed by Jonathan's argument, and made to feel that David was entitled to very different treatment. For the time, the purpose of Saul was arrested, and "David was in his presence as in times past." "Ofttimes," says Bishop Hall,

“wicked men’s judgments are forced to yield unto that truth against which their affections maintain a rebellion. Even the foulest hearts do sometimes retain good notions; like as, on the contrary, the holiest souls give way sometimes to the suggestions of evil. The flashes of lightning may be discerned in the darkest prison. But if good thoughts look into a wicked heart, they stay not there; as those that like not their lodging, they are soon gone; hardly anything distinguishes between good and evil but continuance. The light that shines into a holy heart is constant, like that of the sun, which keeps due times, and varies not his course for any of these sublunary occasions.”

But, as the heathen poet said, “You may expel nature with a thunderbolt, but it always returns.” The evil spirit, the demon of jealousy, returned to Saul. And strange to say, his jealousy was such that nothing was more fitted to excite it than eminent service to his country on the part of David. A new campaign had opened against the Philistines. David had had a splendid victory. He slew them with a great slaughter, so that they fled before him. We may be sure that in these circumstances the songs of the women would swell out in heartier chorus than ever. And in Saul’s breast the old jealousy burst out again, and sprang to power. A fit of his evil spirit was on him, and David was playing on his harp in order to beguile it away. He sees Saul seize a javelin, he instinctively knows the purpose, and springs aside just as the javelin flies past and lodges in the wall. The danger is too serious to be encountered any longer. David escapes to his house, but hardly before messengers from Saul have arrived to watch the door, and slay him in the morning. Knowing her father’s plot, Michal warns David that if he does not make his escape that night his life is sure to go.

Michal lets him down through a window, and David makes his escape. Then, to give him a sufficient start, and prolong the time a little, she has recourse to one of those stratagems of which Rebecca, and Rahab, and Jeroboam’s wife, and many another woman have shown themselves mistresses—she gets up a tale, and pretends to the messengers that David is sick. The men carry back the message to their master. There is a peculiar ferocity, an absolute brutality, in the king’s next order, “Bring him up to me in the bed that I may slay him.” Evidently he was enraged, and he either felt that it would be a satisfaction to murder David with his own hand when unable to defend himself, or he saw that his servants could not be trusted with the dastardly business. The messengers enter the house, and instead of David they find an image in the bed, with a pillow of goat’s hair for his bolster. When Michal is angrily reproached by her father for letting him escape, she parries the blow by a falsehood—“He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?”

On this somewhat mean conduct of hers a light is incidentally shed by the mention of the image which she placed in the bed in order to personate David. What sort of image was it? The original shows that it was one of the class called “teraphim”—images which were kept and used by persons who in the main worshipped the one true God. They were not such idols as represented Baal or Ashtoreth or Moloch, but images designed to aid in the worship of the God of Israel. The use of them was not a breach of the first commandment, but it was a breach of the second. We see plainly

that David and his wife were not one in religion; there was discord there. The use of the images implied an unspiritual or superstitious state of mind; or at least a mind more disposed to follow its own fancies as to the way of worshipping God than to have a severe and strict regard to the rule of God. It is impossible to suppose that David could have either used, or countenanced the use of these images. God was too much a spiritual reality to him to allow such material media of worship to be even thought of. He knew too much of worship inspired by the Spirit to dream of worship inspired by shapes of wood or stone. When we read of these images we are not surprised at the defects of character which we see in Michal. That she loved David and had pleasure in his company there is no room to doubt. But their union was not the union of hearts that were one in their deepest feelings. The sublimest exercises of David’s soul Michal could have no sympathy with. Afterwards, when David brought the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion, she mocked his enthusiasm. How sad when hearts, otherwise congenial and loving, are severed on the one point on which congeniality is of deepest moment! Agreement in earthly tastes and arrangements, but disagreement in the one thing needful—alas, how fatal is the drawback! Little blessing can they expect who disregard this point of difference when they agree to marry. If the one that is earnest does so in the expectation of doing good to the other, that good is far more likely to be done by a firm stand at the beginning than by a course which may be construed to mean that after all the difference is of no great moment.

If the title of the fifty-ninth Psalm can be accepted as authentic, it indicates the working of David’s mind at this period of his history. It is called “Michtam of David, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.” It is not to be imagined that it was composed in the hurried interval between David reaching his house and Michal sending him away. That David had a short time of devotion then we may readily believe, and that the exercises of his heart corresponded generally to the words of the psalm, which might be committed afterwards to writing as a memorial of the occasion. From the words of the psalm it would appear that the messengers sent by Saul to apprehend him were men of base and cowardly spirit, and that they were actuated by the same personal hatred to him that marked Saul himself. No doubt the piety of David brought to him the enmity, and the success of David the rivalry, of many who would be emboldened by the king’s avowed intention, to pour out their insults and calumnies against him in the most indecent fashion. Perhaps it is to show the estimate he formed of their spirit, rather than to denote literally their nationality, that the Psalmist calls on God to “awake to visit all the heathen.” Prowling about the city under cloud of darkness coming and going and coming again to his house, “they return at evening; they make a noise like a dog, and go about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth; swords are in their lips; for who, say they, doth hear?” Thus showing his estimate of his enemies, the Psalmist manifests the most absolute reliance on the protection and grace of God. “But Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. Because of his strength will I wait upon Thee; for God is my defence. The God of my mercy shall prevent me; God shall let me see my

desire upon mine enemies." He does not ask that they may be slain, but he asks that they may be conspicuously dishonoured and humbled, and made to go about the city like dogs, in another sense—not like dogs seeking to tear upright men in pieces, but like those starved, repulsive, cowardly brutes, familiar in Eastern cities, that would do anything for a morsel of food. His own spirit is serene and confident—"Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing; for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy."

It may be that the superscription of this psalm is not authentic, and that the reference is either to some other passage in David's life, or in the life of some other psalmist, when he was especially exposed to the ravings of a murderous and calumnious spirit, and in the midst of unscrupulous enemies thirsting for his life. The psalm is eminently fitted to express the feelings and experiences of the Church of Christ in times of bitter persecution. For calumny has usually been the right-hand instrument of the persecutor. To justify himself, he has found it necessary to denounce his victim. Erroneous opinions, it is instinctively felt, are no such offence as to warrant the wholesale spoliation and murder which vehement persecution calls for. Crimes of a horrible description are laid to the charge of the persecuted. And even where the sword of persecution in its naked form is not employed, but opposition and hatred vent themselves on the more active servants of God in venomous attacks and offensive letters, it is not counted enough to denounce their opinions. They must be charged with meanness, and double dealing, and vile plots and schemes to compass their ends. They are spoken of (as St. Paul and his companions were) as the offscourings of the earth, creatures only to be hunted out of sight and spoiled of all influence. Happy they who can bear all in the Psalmist's tranquil and truthful spirit; and can sum up their feelings like him—"I will sing of Thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning; for Thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble."

But let us return to David. Can we think of a more desolate condition than that in which he found himself after his wife let him down through a window? It is night, and he is alone. Who could be unmoved when placed in such a position? Forced to fly from his home and his young wife, just after he had begun to know their sweets, and no prospect of a happy return! Driven forth by the murderous fury of the king whom he had served with a loyalty and a devotion that could not have been surpassed! His home desolated and his life threatened by the father of his wife, the man whom even nature should have inspired with a kindly interest in his welfare! What good had it done him that he had slain that giant? What return had he got for his service in ever so often soothing the nerves of the irritable monarch with the gentle warblings of his harp? What good had come of all his perilous exploits against the Philistines, of the hundred foreskins of the king's enemies, of the last great victory which had brought so unprecedented advantage to Israel? Would it not have been better for him never to have touched a weapon, never to have encountered a foe, but kept feeding that flock of his father's, and caring for those irrational creatures, who had always returned his kindness with gratitude, and been far more like friends and companions than that terrible Saul? Such thoughts might perhaps hover

about his bosom, but certainly they would receive no entertainment from him. They might knock at his door, but they would not be admitted. A man like David could never seriously regret that he had done his duty. He could never seriously wish that he had never responded to the call of God and of his country. But he might well feel how empty and unprofitable even the most successful worldly career may become, how maddening the changes of fortune, how intolerable the unjust retributions of men in power. His ill-treatment was so atrocious that, had he not had a refuge in God, it might have driven him to madness or to suicide. It drove him to the throne of grace, where he found grace to help him in his time of need.

It was no wonder that the fugitive thought of Samuel. If he could get shelter with him Saul would surely let him alone, for Saul could have no mind to meddle with Samuel again. But more than that, in Samuel's company he would find congenial fellowship, and from Samuel's mature wisdom and devotion to God's law learn much that would be useful in after life. We can easily fancy what a cordial welcome the old prophet would give the youthful fugitive. Was not David in a sense his son, seeing that he had chosen him from among all the sons of Jesse, and poured on him the holy oil? If an old minister has a special interest in one whom he has baptised, how much more Samuel in one whom he had anointed! And there was another consideration that would have great effect with Samuel. Old Christians feel very tenderly for young believers who have had hard lines in serving God. It moves them much when those on whom they have very earnestly pressed God's ways have encountered great trials in following them. Gladly would they do anything in their power to soothe and encourage them. Samuel's words to David would certainly be words of exceeding tenderness. They must have fallen like the dew of Hermon on his fevered spirit. Doubtless they would tend to revive and strengthen his faith, and assure him that God would keep him amid all his trials, and at last set him on high, because he had known his name.

From Ramah, his ordinary dwelling-place, Samuel had gone with David to Naioth, perhaps under the idea that they would elude the eyes of Saul. Not so, however. Word of David's place of abode was carried to the king. Saul was deeply in earnest in his effort to get rid of David,—surely a very daring thing when he must have known God's purpose regarding him. Messengers were accordingly sent to Naioth. It was the seat of one of the schools of the prophets, and David could not but be deeply interested in the work of the place, and charmed with its spirit. Here, under the wing of Samuel, he did dwell in safety; but his safety did not come in the way in which perhaps he expected. Saul's purpose was too deeply seated to be affected by the presence of Samuel. Nay, though Samuel in all likelihood had told him how God had caused him to anoint David as his successor, Saul determined to drag him even from the hands of Samuel. But Saul never counted on the form of opposition he was to encounter. The messengers went to Naioth, but their hearts were taken hold of by the Spirit who was then working in such power in the place, and from soldiers they were turned into prophets. A second batch of messengers was sent, and with the same result. A third batch followed, and still the same miraculous transformation. Determined not to be baffled, and

having probably exhausted the servants whom he could trust, Saul went himself to Ramah. But Saul was proof no more than his servants against the marvellous spiritual force that swept all before it. When he came to Ramah, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he went on and prophesied all the way from Ramah to Naioth. And there, stripping himself of his royal robes and accoutrements, he prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down, just as one of the prophets, and continued so a whole day and night. It was a repetition of what had taken place at "the hill of God" when Saul returned from his search after the asses (1 Sam. x. 10, 11), and it resuscitated the proverb that had been first used on that occasion, is Saul also among the prophets? Transformed and occupied as Saul was now, he was in no mood to carry out his murderous project against David, who in the view of this most unexpected form of deliverance might well sing "My safety cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

The question cannot but press itself on us, What was the character of the influence under which Saul was brought on this remarkable occasion? Observe the phenomena so far as they are recorded. In the first place, nothing is said of any appeal to Saul's reason and conscience. In the second place, no such conduct followed this experience as would have followed it, had his reason and conscience been impressed. He was precisely the same wicked man as before. In the third place, there is no evidence of anything else having taken place than a sort of contagious impression being produced on his physical nature, something corresponding to the effect of mesmerism or animal magnetism. In earnest religious movements of a very solid character, it has been often remarked that another unusual experience runs alongside of them; in some persons in contact with them a nervous susceptibility is developed, which sometimes causes prostration, and sometimes a state of trance; and it has been found that many persons are liable to the state of trance whose hearts and lives are in no way transformed by the religious impression. It seems to have been some such experience that befell Saul. He was entranced, but he was not changed. He was for the time another man, but there was no permanent change; after a time, his old spirit returned. Evidently he was a man of great nervous susceptibility, and it is plain from many things that his nerves had become weakened. He fell for the time under the strong influence of the prophetic company; but David did not trust him, for he fled from Naioth.

And yet, even if this was all that happened to Saul, there was something providential and merciful in it that might have led on to better results. Was it not in some sense a dealing of God with Saul? Was it not a reminder of that better way which Saul had forsaken, and in forsaking which he had come to so much guilt and trouble? Was it not a gracious indication that even yet, if he would return to God, though he could not get back the kingdom, he might personally be blessed? Whatever of this kind there might be in it, it was trampled by Saul under foot. He had made his bed, and, thorny though it was, he was determined to lie on it. He would not change his life; he would not return to God.

Does not God, in His merciful providence, often deal with transgressors as he dealt with Saul, placing them in circumstances that make it com-

paratively easy for them to turn from their sins and change their life? Your marriage, a change in your circle, a change of residence, a change of fortune, forming a new acquaintance, coming under a new ministry,—oh! friends, if there be in you the faintest dissatisfaction with your past life, the faintest desire for a better, take advantage of the opportunity, and turn to God. Summon courage, break with your associates in sin (the loss will be marvellously small), give up your dissipated pleasures, betake yourselves to the great matters that concern your welfare evermore. Mark in the providence that gave you the opportunity, the kind hand of a gracious Father, sadly grieving over your erring life, and longing for your return. Harden not your heart as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness. Don't drive the angel out of your way, who stands in your path, as he stood in Balaam's, to stop your progress in the ways of sin. Who knows whether ever again you shall have the same opportunity? And even if you have, is it not certain that the disinclination you feel now will be stiffer and stronger then? Be a man, and face the irksome. Whatever you do, determine to do right. It is childish to stand shivering over a duty which you know ought to be done. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

I SAMUEL XX.

We have no means of determining how long time elapsed between the events recorded in the preceding chapter and those recorded in this. It is not unlikely that Saul's experience at Naioth led to a temporary improvement in his relations to David. The tone of this chapter leads us to believe that at the time when it opens there was some room for doubt whether or not Saul continued to cherish any deliberate ill-feeling to his son-in-law. David's own suspicions were strong that he did; but Jonathan appears to have thought otherwise. Hence the earnest conversation which the two friends had on the subject; and hence the curious but crooked stratagem by which they tried to find out the truth.

But before we go on to this, it will be suitable for us at this place to dwell for a little on the remarkable friendship between David and Jonathan—a beautiful oasis in this wilderness history,—one of the brightest gems in this book of Samuel.

It was a striking proof of the ever mindful and considerate grace of God, that at the very opening of the dark valley of trial through which David had to pass in consequence of Saul's jealousy, he was brought into contact with Jonathan, and in his disinterested and sanctified friendship, furnished with one of the sweetest earthly solaces for the burden of care and sorrow. The tempest suddenly let loose on him must have proved too vehement, if he had been left in Saul's dark palace without one kind hand to lead him on, or the sympathy of one warm heart to encourage him: the spirit of faith might have declined more seriously than it did, had it not been strengthened by the bright faith of Jonathan. It was plain that Michal, though she had a kind of attachment to David,

was far from having a thoroughly congenial heart; she loved him, and helped to save him, but at the same time bore false witness against him (chap. xix. 17). In his deepest sorrows, David could have derived little comfort from her. Whatever gleams of joy and hope, therefore, were now shed by human companionship across his dark firmament, were due to Jonathan. In merciful adaptation to the infirmities of his human spirit, God opened to him this stream in the desert, and allowed him to refresh himself with its pleasant waters; but to show him, at the same time, that such supplies could not be permanently relied on, and that his great dependence must be placed, not on the fellowship of mortal man, but on the ever-living and ever-loving God, Jonathan and he were doomed, after the briefest period of companionship, to a lifelong separation, and the friendship which had seemed to promise a perpetual solace of his trials, only aggravated their severity, when its joys were violently reft away.

In another view, David's intercourse with Jonathan served an important purpose in his training. The very sight he constantly had of Saul's outrageous wickedness might have nursed a self-righteous feeling,—might have encouraged the thought, so agreeable to human nature, that as Saul was rejected by God for his wickedness, so David was chosen for his goodness. The remembrance of Jonathan's singular virtues and graces was fitted to rebuke this thought; for if regard to human goodness had decided God's course in the matter, why should not Jonathan have been appointed to succeed his father? From the self-righteous ground on which he might have been thus tempted to stand, David would be thrown back on the adorable sovereignty of God; and in deepest humiliation constrained to own that it was God's grace only that made him to differ from others.

Ardent friendships among young men were by no means uncommon in ancient times; many striking instances occurred among the Greeks, which have sometimes been accounted for by the comparatively low estimation in which female society was then held. "The heroic companions celebrated by Homer and others," it has been remarked, "seem to have but one heart and soul, with scarcely a wish or object apart, and only to live, as they are always ready to die, for one another. . . . The idea of a Greek hero seems not to have been thought complete without such a brother in arms by his side."*

But there was one feature of the friendship of Jonathan and David that had no parallel in classic times,—it was friendship between two men, of whom the younger was a most formidable rival to the older. It is Jonathan that shines most in this friendship, for he was the one who had least to gain and most to lose from the other. He knew that David was ordained by God to succeed to his father's throne, yet he loved him; he knew that to befriend David was to offend his father, yet he warmly befriended him; he knew that he must decrease and David increase, yet no atom of jealousy disturbed his noble spirit. What but divine grace could have enabled Jonathan to maintain this blessed temper? What other foundation could it have rested on but the conviction that what God ordained must be the very best, infinitely wise and good for him and for all? Or what could have filled the heart thus bereaved of so fair an earthly prospect, but the sense of God's

* Thirlwall's "History of Greece."

love, and the assurance that He would compensate to him all that He took from him? How beautiful was this fruit of the Spirit of God! How blessed it would be if such clusters hung on every branch of the vine!

Besides being disinterested, Jonathan's friendship for David was of an eminently holy character. Evidently Jonathan was a man that habitually honoured God, if not in much open profession, yet in the way of deep reverence and submission. And thus, besides being able to surrender his own prospects without a murmur, and feel real happiness in the thought that David would be king, he could strengthen the faith of his friend, as we read afterwards (chap. xxiii. 16): "Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." At the time when they come together in the chapter before us, Jonathan's faith was stronger than David's. David's faltering heart was saying, "There is but a step between me and death" (ver. 3), while Jonathan in implicit confidence in God's purpose concerning David was thus looking forward to the future,—“Thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the Lord that I die not; but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house forever; no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.” There has seldom, if ever, been exhibited a finer instance of triumphant faith, than when the prince, with all the resources of the kingdom at his beck, made this request of the helpless outlaw. What a priceless blessing is the friendship of those who support and comfort us in great spiritual conflicts, and help us to stand erect in some great crisis of our lives! How different from the friendship that merely supplies the merriment of an idle hour, at the expense, perhaps, of a good conscience, and to the lasting injury of the soul!

But let me now briefly note the events recorded in this chapter. It is a long chapter, one of those long chapters in which incidents are recorded with such fulness of detail, as not only to make a very graphic narrative, but to supply an incidental proof of its authenticity.

First of all, we have the preliminary conversation between David and Jonathan, as to the real feeling of Saul toward David. Incidentally, we learn how much Saul leant on Jonathan: "My father will do nothing, either great or small, but he will show it me,"—a proof that Jonathan was, like Joseph before him, and like Daniel after him, eminently trustworthy, and as sound in judgment as he was noble in character. Guileless himself, he suspected no guile in his father. But David was not able to take so favourable a view of Saul. So profound was his conviction to the contrary, that in giving his reason for believing that Saul had concealed from his son his real feeling in the matter, and the danger in which he was, he used the solemn language of adjuration: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." Viewed from the human point, this was true; viewed from under the Divine purpose and promise, it could not be true. Yet we cannot blame David, knowing as he did what Saul really felt, for expressing his human fears, and the distress of mind to which the situation gave birth.

Next, we find a device agreed on between David and Jonathan, to ascertain the real sentiments of Saul. It was one of those deceitful ways to which, very probably, David had become accustomed in

his military experiences, in his forays against the Philistines, where stratagems may have been, as they often were, a common device. It was probable that David would be missed from Saul's table next day, as it was the new moon and a feast; if Saul inquired after him, Jonathan was to pretend that he had asked leave to go to a yearly family sacrifice at Bethlehem; and the way in which Saul should take this explanation would show his real feeling and purpose about David. In the event of Saul being enraged, and commanding Jonathan to bring David to him, David implored Jonathan not to comply; rather kill him with his own hand than that; for there was nothing that David dreaded so much as falling into the hands of Saul. Jonathan surely did not deserve that it should be thought possible for him to surrender David to his father, or to conceal anything from him that had any bearing on his welfare. But inasmuch as David had put the matter in the form he did, it seemed right to Jonathan that a very solemn transaction should take place at this time, to make their relation as clear as day, and to determine the action of the stronger of them to the other, in time to come.

This is the third thing in the chapter. Jonathan takes David into the field, that is, into some sequestered wady, at some distance from the town, where they would be sure to enjoy complete solitude; and there they enter into a solemn covenant. Jonathan takes the lead. He begins with a solemn appeal to God, calling on Him not as a matter of mere form or propriety, but of real and profound significance. First, he binds himself to communicate faithfully to David the real state of things on the part of his father, whether it should be for good or for evil. And then he binds David, whom by faith he sees in possession of the kingly power, in spite of all that Saul may do against him, first to be kind to himself while he lived, and not cut him off, as new kings so often massacred all the relations of the old; and also after his death to show kindness to his family, and never cease to remember them, not even when raised to such a pitch of prosperity that all his enemies were cut off from the earth. One knows not whether most to wonder at the faith of Jonathan, or the sweetness of his nature. It is David, the poor outlaw, with hardly a man to stand by him, that appears to Jonathan the man of power, the man who can dispose of all lives and sway all destinies; while Jonathan, the king's son and confidential adviser, is somehow reduced to helplessness and unable even to save himself. But was there ever such a transaction entered into with such sweetness of temper? The calmness of Jonathan in contemplating the strange reverse of fortune both to himself and to David, is exquisitely beautiful; nor is there in it a trace of that servility with which mean natures worship the rising sun; it is manly and generous while it is meek and humble; such a combination of the noble and the submissive as was shown afterwards, in highest form, in the one perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next comes a statement of the way in which Jonathan was to announce to David the result. It might not be safe for him to see David personally, but in that case he would let him know what had transpired about him through a preconcerted signal, in reference to the place where he would direct an attendant to go for some arrows. As it happened, a personal interview was obtained with David; but before that, the telegraphing with the arrows was carried out as arranged.

On the first day of the feast, David's absence passed unnoticed, Saul being under the impression that he had acquired ceremonial uncleanness. But as that excuse could only avail for one day, Saul finding him absent the second day, asked Jonathan what had become of him. The excuse agreed on was given. It excited the deepest rage of Saul. But his rage was not against David so much as against Jonathan for taking his part. Saul did not believe in the excuse, otherwise he would not have ordered Jonathan to send and fetch David. If David was at Bethlehem, Saul could have sent for him himself; if he lay concealed in the neighbourhood, Jonathan alone would know his hiding-place, therefore Jonathan must get hold of him. If this be the true view, the stratagem of Jonathan had availed nothing; the plain truth would have served the purpose no worse. As it was, Jonathan's own life was in the most imminent danger. Remonstrating with his father for seeking to destroy David, he narrowly escaped his father's javelin, even though, a moment before, in his jealousy of David, Saul had professed to be concerned for the interests of Jonathan. "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and to the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?" What strange and unworthy methods will not angry men and women resort to, to put vinegar into their words and make them sting! To try to wound a man's feelings by reviling his mother, or by reviling any of his kindred, is a practice confined to the dregs of society, and nauseous, to the last degree, to every gentle and honourable mind. In Saul's case, the offence was still more infamous because the woman reviled was his own wife. Surely if her failings reflected on any one, they reflected on her husband rather than her son. But that it was any real failing that Saul denounced when he called her "the perverse rebellious woman," we greatly doubt. To a man like Saul, any assertion of her rights by his wife, any refusal to be his abject slave, any opposition to his wild and wicked designs against David, would mean perversity and rebellion. We are far from thinking ill of this nameless woman because her husband denounced her to her son. But when we see Saul in one breath trying to kill his son with a javelin and to destroy his wife's character by poisoned words, and at the same time thirsting for the death of his son-in-law, we have a mournful exhibition of the depth to which men are capable of descending from whom the Spirit of the Lord hath departed.

No wonder that Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month. One wonders how the feast went on thereafter, but one does not envy the guests. Did Saul drown his stormy feelings in copious draughts of wine, and turn the holy festival into a bacchanalian rout, amid whose boisterous mirth and tempestuous exhilaration the reproaches of conscience would be stifled for the hour?

The third day has come, on which, by preconcerted agreement, Jonathan was to reveal to David his father's state of mind. David is in the agreed-on hiding-place; and Jonathan, sallying forth with his servant, shoots his arrows to the place which was to indicate the existence of danger. Then, the lad having gone back to the city, and no one being on the spot to observe them or interrupt them, the two friends come together and have an affecting meeting. When Jonathan parted from David three days before, he had not been without

hopes of bringing to him a favourable report of his father. David expected nothing of the kind; but even David must have been shocked and horrified to find things so bad as they were now reported. In an act of unfeigned reverence for the king's son, David bowed himself three times to the ground. In token of much love they kissed one another; while under the dark cloud of adversity that had risen on them both, and that now compelled them to separate, hardly ever again (as it turned out) to see one another in the flesh, "they wept one with another until David exceeded."

"They wept as only strong men weep,
When weep they must, or die."

One consolation alone remained, and it was Jonathan that was able to apply it. "Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever." Yes, even in that darkest hour, Jonathan could say to David, "Go in peace." What peace? "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

We cannot turn from this chapter without adding a word on the friendships of the young. It is when hearts are tender that they are most readily knit to each other, as the heart of Jonathan was knit to the heart of David. But the formation of friendships is too important a matter to be safely left to casual circumstances. It ought to be gone about with care. If you have materials to choose among, see that you choose the best. At the foundation of all friendship lies congeniality of heart—a kindred feeling of which one often becomes conscious by instinct at first sight. But there must also be elements of difference in friends. It is a great point to have a friend who is above us in some things, and who will thus be likely to draw us up to a higher level of character, instead of dragging us down to a lower. And a friend is very useful, if he is rich in qualities where we are poor. As it is in *In Memoriam*—

"He was rich where I was poor,
And he supplied my want he core
As his unlikeness fitted mine."

But surely, of all qualities in a friend or companion who is to do us good, the most vital is, that he fears the Lord. As such friendships are by far the most pleasant, so they are by far the most profitable. And when you have made friends, stick by them. Don't let it be said of you that your friend seemed to be everything to you yesterday, but nothing to-day. And if your friends rise above you in the world, rejoice in their prosperity, and banish every envious feeling; or if you should rise above them, do not forget them, nor forsake them, but, as if you had made a covenant before God, continue to show kindness to them and to their children after them. Pray for them, and ask them to pray for you.

Perhaps it was with some view to the friendship of Jonathan and his father that Solomon wrote, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Jonathan was such a friend to David. But the words suggest a higher friendship. The glory of Jonathan's love for David fades before our Lord's love for His brethren. If Jonathan were living among us, who of us could look on

him with indifference? Would not our hearts warm to him, as we gazed on his noble form and open face, even though *we* had never been the objects of his affection? In the case of Jesus Christ, we have all the noble qualities of Jonathan in far higher excellence than his, and we have this further consideration, that for us He has laid down His life, and that none who receive His friendship can ever be separated from His love. And what an elevating and purifying effect that friendship will have! In alliance with Him, you are in alliance with all that is pure and bright, all that is transforming and beautifying; all that can give peace to your conscience, joy to your heart, lustre to your spirit, and beauty to your life; all that can make your garments smell of myrrh, and aloe, and cassia; all that can bless you and make you a blessing. And once you are truly His, the bond can never be severed; David had to tear himself from Jonathan, but you will never have to tear yourselves from Christ. Your union is cemented by the blood of the everlasting covenant; and by the eternal efficacy of the prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAVID AT NOB AND AT GATH.

I SAMUEL XXI.

WE enter here on a somewhat painful part of David's history. He is not living so near to God as before, and in consequence his course becomes more carnal and more crooked. We saw in our last chapter the element of distrust rising up somewhat ominously in that solemn adjuration to Jonathan, "Truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." These words, it is true, gave expression to an undoubted and in a sense universal truth, a truth which all of us should at all times ponder, but which David had special cause to feel, under the circumstances in which he was placed. It was not the fact of his giving solemn expression to this truth that indicated distrust on the part of David, but the fact that he did not set over against it another truth which was just as real,—that God had chosen him for His service, and would not allow him to perish at the hand of Saul. When a good man sees himself exposed to a terrible danger which he has no means of averting, it is no wonder if the contemplation of that danger gives rise for the moment to fear. But it is his privilege to enjoy promises of protection and blessing at the hand of the unseen God, and if his faith in these promises be active, it will not only neutralise the fear, but raise him high above it. Now, the defect in David's state of mind was, that while he fully realised the danger, he did not by faith lay hold of that which was fitted to neutralise it. It was Jonathan rather than David who by faith realised at this time David's grounds of security. All through Jonathan's remarks in chapter xx. you see him thinking of God as David's Protector,—thinking of the great purposes which God meant to accomplish by him, and which were a pledge that He would preserve him now,—thinking of David as a coming man of unprecedented power and influence, whose word would determine other men's destinies, and dispose of their fortunes. David seems to have been greatly indebted to Jonathan for sustaining his faith while he was with him:

for after he parted from Jonathan, his faith fell very low. Time after time, he follows that policy of deceit which he had instructed Jonathan to pursue in explaining his absence from the feast in Saul's house. It is painful in the last degree to see one whose faith towered to such a lofty height in the encounter with Goliath, coming down from that noble elevation, to find him resorting for self-protection to the lies and artifices of an impostor.

We cannot excuse it, but we may account for it. David was wearied out by Saul's restless and incessant persecution. We read in Daniel of a certain persecutor that he should "wear out the saints of the Most High," and it was the same sad experience from which David was now suffering. It does not appear that he was gifted naturally with great patience, or power of enduring. Rather we should suppose that one of such nimble and lively temperament would soon tire of a strained and uneasy attitude. It appears that Saul's persistency in injustice and cruelty made David at last restless and impatient. All the more would he have needed in such circumstances to resort to God, and seek from Him the oil of grace to feed his patience, and bear him above the infirmities of his nature. But this was just what he seems not to have done. Carnal fear therefore grew apace, and faith fell into a state of slumber. The eye of sense was active, looking out on the perils around him; the eye of faith was dull, hardly able to decipher a single promise. The eye of sense saw the vindictive scowl of Saul, the javelin in his hand, and bands of soldiers sent out on every side to seize David or slay him; the eye of faith did not see—what it might have seen—the angel of the Lord encamping around him and delivering him. It was God's purpose now to allow David to feel his own weakness; he was to pass through that terrible ordeal when, tossed on a sea of trials, one feels like Noah's dove, unable to find rest for the sole of one's foot, and seems on the very eve of dropping helpless into the billows, till the ark presents itself, and a gracious hand is put forth to the rescue. Left to himself, tempted to make use of carnal expedients, and taught the wretchedness of such expedients; learning also, through this discipline, to anchor his soul more firmly on the promise of the living God, David was now undergoing a most essential part of his early training, gaining the experience that was to qualify him to say with such earnestness to others, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

On leaving Gibeah, David, accompanied with a few followers, bent his steps to Nob, a city of the priests. The site of this city has not been discovered; some think it stood on the northeastern ridge of Mount Olivet; this is uncertain, but it is evident that it was very close to Jerusalem (see Isa. x. 32). Its distance from Gibeah would therefore be but five or six miles, much too short for David to have had there any great sense of safety. It appears to have become the seat of the sacred services of the nation, some time after the destruction of Shiloh. David's purpose in going there seems to have been simply to get a shelter, perhaps for the Sabbath day, and to obtain supplies. Doeg, indeed, charged Ahimelech, before Saul, with having inquired of the Lord for David, but Ahimelech with some warmth denied the charge.* The privilege of consulting the Urim

and Thummim seems to have been confined to the chief ruler of the nation; if with the sanction of the priest David had done so now, he might have justly been charged with treason; probably it was because he believed Doeg rather than Ahimelech, and concluded that this royal privilege had been conceded by the priests to David, that Saul was so enraged, and inflicted such dreadful retribution on them. Afterwards, when Abiathar fled to David with the high priest's ephod, through which the judgment of Urim and Thummim seems to have been announced, David regarded that circumstance as an indication of the Divine permission to him to make use of the sacred oracle.

But what shall we say of the untruth which David told Ahimelech, to account for his coming there without armed attendants? "The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee; and I have commanded my servants to such and such a place." Here was a statement not only not true, but the very opposite of the truth; spoken too to God's anointed high priest, and in the very place consecrated to God's most solemn service; everything about the speaker fitted to bring God to his mind, and to recall God's protection of him in time past; yet the first thing he did on entering the sacred place was to utter a falsehood, prompted by distrust, prompted by the feeling that the pledged protection of the God of truth, before whose shrine he now stood, was not sufficient. How plain the connection between a deficient sense of God's truthfulness, and a deficient regard to truth itself! What could have tempted David to act thus? According to some, it was altogether an amiable and generous desire to keep Ahimelech out of trouble, to screen him from the responsibility of helping a known outlaw. But considering the gathering distrust of David's spirit at the time, it seems more likely that he was startled at the fear which Ahimelech expressed when he saw David coming alone, as if all were not right between him and Saul, as if the truce that had been agreed on after the affair of Naioth had now come to an end. Probably David felt that if Ahimelech knew all, he would be still more afraid, and do nothing to help him; moreover, the presence of Doeg the Edomite was another cause of embarrassment, for Saul had once ordered all his servants to kill David, and if the fierce Edomite were told that David was now simply a fugitive, he might be willing enough to do the deed. Anyhow, David now lent himself to the devices of the father of lies. And so the brave spirit that had not quailed before Goliath, and that had met the Philistines in so many terrific encounters, now quailed before a phantom of its own devising, and shrank from what, at the moment, was only an imaginary danger.

David succeeded in getting from Ahimelech what he wanted, but not without difficulty. For when David asked for five loaves of bread, the priest replied that he had no common bread, but only shewbread; he had only the bread that had been taken that day from off the table on which it stood before the Lord, and replaced by fresh bread, according to the law. The priest was willing to give that bread to David, if he could assure him that his attendants were not under defilement. It will be remembered that our Lord ad-

* See 1 Sam. xxii. 15:—"Have I to-day begun to inquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute anything unto his servant, nor to all the

house of my father; for thy servant knoweth nothing of all this, less or more" (R. V.) To deny beginning to do a thing is much the same as to deny doing it.

verted to this fact, as a justification of His own disciples for plucking the ears of corn and eating them on the Sabbath. The principle underlying both was, that when a ceremonial obligation comes into collision with a moral duty, the lesser obligation is to give place to the heavier. The keeping of the Sabbath free from all work, and the appropriation of the shewbread to the use of the priests alone, were but ceremonial obligations; the preservation of life was a moral duty. It is sometimes a very difficult thing to determine duty, when moral obligations appear to clash with each other, but there was no difficulty in the collision of the moral and the ceremonial. Our Lord would certainly not have sided with that body of zealots, in the days of conflict between the Maccabees and the Syrians, who allowed themselves to be cut in pieces by the enemy, rather than break the Sabbath by fighting on that day.

David had another request to make of Ahimelech. "Is there not here under thy hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." It was a strange place to ask for military weapons. Surely the priests would not need to defend themselves with these. Yet it happened that there was a sword there which David knew well, and which he might reasonably claim,—the sword of Goliath. "Give it me," said David; "there is none like that." We read before, that David carried Goliath's head to Jerusalem. Nob was evidently in the Jerusalem district, and as the sword was there, there can be little doubt that it was at Nob the trophies had been deposited.

So far, things had gone fairly well with David at Nob. But there was a man there "detained before the Lord,"—prevented probably from proceeding on his journey because it was the Sabbath day,—whose presence gave no comfort to David, and was, indeed, an omen of evil. Doeg, the Edomite, was the chief of the herdmen of Saul. Why Saul had entrusted that office to a member of a nation that was notorious for its bitter feelings towards Israel, we do not know; but the herdman seems to have been like his master in his feelings towards David; he would appear, indeed, to have joined the hereditary dislike of his nation to the personal dislike of his master. Instinctively, as we learn afterwards, David understood the feelings of Doeg. It would have been well for him, when a shudder passed over him as he caught the scowling countenance of the Edomite, had his own conscience been easier than it was. It would have been well for him had he been ruled by that spirit of trust which triumphed so gloriously the day he first got possession of that sword. It would have been well for him had he been free from the disturbing consciousness of having offended God by borrowing the devices of the father of lies and bringing them into the sanctuary, to pollute the air of the house of God. No wonder, though, David was restless again! "And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath."

How different his state and prospects now from what they had been a little time before! Then the world smiled on him; fame and honour, wealth and glory, flowed in on him: God was his Father; conscience was calm: he hardly knew the taste of misery. But how has his sky become overcast! A homeless and helpless wanderer, with scarcely an attendant or companion; in momentary fear of death; fain to beg a morsel of

bread where he could get it; a creature so banished and cursed that kindness to him involved the risk of death; his heart bleeding for the loss of Jonathan; his soul clouded by distrust of God; his conscience troubled by the vague sense of unacknowledged sin! And yet he is destined to be king of Israel, the very ideal of a good and prosperous monarch, and the earthly type of the Son of God! Like a lost sheep, he has gone astray for a time, but the Good Shepherd will leave the ninety-and-nine and go among the mountains till He find him; and his experience will give a wondrous depth to that favourite song of young and old of every age and country, "*He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake.*"

And now we must follow him to Gath, the city of Goliath. Down the slope of Mount Olivet, across the brook Kedron, and past the stronghold of Zion, and probably through the very valley of Elah where he had fought with the giant, David makes his way to Gath. It was surely a strange place to fly to, a sign of the despair in which David found himself! What reception could the conqueror of Goliath expect in his city? What retribution was due to him for the hundred fore-skins, and for the deeds of victory which had inspired the Hebrew singers when they sang of the tens of thousands whom David had slain?

It will hardly do to say that he reckoned on not being recognised. It is more likely that he relied on a spirit not unknown among barbarous princes towards warriors dishonoured at home, as when Themistocles took refuge among the Persians, or Coriolanus among the Volscians. That he took this step without much reflection on its ulterior bearings is well nigh certain. For, granting that he should be favourably received, this would be on the understanding that his services would be at the command of his protector, or at the very least it would place him under an obligation of gratitude that would prove highly embarrassing at some future time. Happily, the scheme did not succeed. The jealousy of the Philistine nobles was excited. "The servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" David began to feel himself in a false position. He laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish. The misery of his situation and the poverty of his resources may both be inferred from the unworthy device to which he resorted to extricate himself from his difficulty. He feigned himself mad, and conducted himself as madmen commonly do. "He scrambled on the door of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard." But the device failed. "Have I need of madmen?" asked the king, "that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?" A Jewish tradition alleges that both the wife and daughter of Achish were mad; he had plenty of that sort of people already; no need of more! The title of the thirty-fourth Psalm tells us, "he drove him away, and he departed."

Have any of you ever been tempted to resort to a series of devices and deceits either to avoid a danger or to attain an object? Have you been tempted to forsake the path of straightforward honesty and truth, and to pretend that things were different with you from what they really were? I do not accuse you of that wickedness which they

commit who deliberately imprison conscience, and fearlessly set up their own will and their own interests as their king. What you have done under the peculiar circumstances in which you found yourselves is not what you would ordinarily have done. In this one connection, you felt pressed to get along in one way or another, and the only available way was that of deceit and device. You were very unhappy at the beginning, and your misery increased as you went on. Everything about you was in a constrained, unnatural condition,—conscience, temper, feelings, all out of order. At one time it seemed as if you were going to succeed; you were on the crest of a wave that promised to bear you to land, but the wave broke, and you were sent floundering in the broken water. You were obliged to go from device to device, with a growing sense of misery. At last the chain snapped, and both you and your friends were confronted with the miserable reality. But know this: that it would have been infinitely worse for you if your device had succeeded than that it failed. If it had succeeded you would have been permanently entangled in evil principles and evil ways, that would have ruined your soul. Because you failed, God showed that He had not forsaken you. David prospering at Gath would have been a miserable spectacle; David driven away by Achish is on the way to brighter and better days.

For, if we can accept the titles of some of the Psalms, it would seem that the carnal spell, under which David had been for some time, burst when Achish drove him away, and that he returned to his early faith and trust. It was to the cave of Adullam that he fled, and the hundred and forty-second Psalm claims to have been written there. So also the thirty-fourth Psalm, as we have seen, bears to have been written "when he changed his behaviour" (feigned madness) "before Abimelech" (Achish?), "who drove him away, and he departed." So much uncertainty has been thrown of late years on these superscriptions, that we dare not trust to them explicitly; yet recognising in them at least the value of old traditions, we may regard them as more or less probable, especially when they seem to agree with the substance of the Psalms themselves. With reference to the thirty-fourth, we miss something in the shape of confession of sin, such as we should have expected of one whose lips had *not* been kept from speaking guile. In other respects the psalm fits the situation. The image of the young lions roaring for their prey might very naturally be suggested by the wilderness. But the chief feature of the psalm is the delightful evidence it affords of the blessing that comes from trustful fellowship with God. And there is an expression that seems to imply that that blessing had not been *always* enjoyed by the Psalmist; he had lost it once; but there came a time when (ver. 4) "I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears." And the experience of that new time was so delightful that the Psalmist had resolved that he would always be on that tack: "I will bless the Lord *at all times*; His praise shall *continually* be in my mouth." How changed the state of his spirit from the time when he feigned madness at Gath! When he asks, "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days that he may see good?" (ver. 12)—what man would fain preserve his life from harassing anxiety and bewildering dangers?—the prompt reply is, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking

guile." Have nothing to do with shifts and pretences and false devices; be candid and open, and commit all to God. "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the Lord, *ye His saints*" (for you too are liable to forsake the true confidence), "for there is no want to them that fear Him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. . . . Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

"The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple; I was brought low, and He helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Psalm cxvi. 3-7).

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAVID AT ADULLAM, MIZPEH, AND HARETH.

I SAMUEL xxii.

THE cave of Adullam, to which David fled on leaving Gath, has been placed in various localities even in modern times; but as the Palestine Exploration authorities have placed the town in the valley of Elah, we may regard it as settled that the cave lay there, not far indeed from the place where David had his encounter with Goliath. It was a humble dwelling for a king's son-in-law, nor could David have thought of needing it on the memorable day when he did such wonders with his sling and stone. These "dens and caves of the earth"—effects of great convulsions in some remote period of its history—what service have they often rendered to the hunted and oppressed! How many a devout saint, of whom the world was not worthy, has blessed God for their shelter! With how much purer devotion and loftier fellowship, with how much more sublime and noble exercises of the human spirit have many of them been associated, than some of the proudest and costliest temples that have been reared in name—often little more—to the service of God!

If David at first was somewhat an object of jealousy to his own family in this the day of his trials they showed a different spirit. "When his brethren and all his father's house heard of it, they went down thither to him." As the proverb says, "Blood is thicker than water," and often adversity draws families together between whom prosperity has been like a wedge. If our relations are prospering while we are poor, we think of them as if they had moved away from us; but when their fortunes are broken, and the world turns its back on them, we get closer, our sympathy revives. We think all the better of David's family that when they heard of his outlaw condition they all went down to him. Besides these, "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them; and there were with him about four hundred men." The account here given of the circumstances of this band is not very

flattering, but there are two things connected with it to be borne in mind: in the first place, that the kind of men who usually choose the soldier's calling are not your men of plodding industry, but men who shrink from monotonous labour; and, in the second place, that under the absolute rule of Saul there might be many very worthy persons in debt and discontented and in distress, men who had come into that condition because they were not so ready to cringe to despotism as their ruler desired. Mixed and motley therefore though David's troop may have been, it was far from contemptible; and their adherence was fitted greatly to encourage him, because it showed that public feeling was with him, that his cause was not looked on as desperate, that his standard was one to which it was deemed safe and hopeful to resort.

But if, at the first glance, the troop appeared somewhat disreputable, it was soon joined by two men, the one a prophet, the other a priest, whose adherence must have brought to it a great accession of moral weight. The prophet was Gad (ver. 5), who next to Samuel seems to have stood highest in the nation as a man of God, a man of holy counsel, and elevated, heavenly character. His open adherence to David (which seems to be implied in ver. 5) must have had the best effects both on David himself and on the people at large. It must have been a great blessing to David to have such a man as Gad beside him; for, with all his personal piety, he seems to have required a godly minister at his side. No man derived more benefit from the communion of saints, or was more apt to suffer for want of it; for, as we have seen, he had begun to decline in spirituality when he left Samuel at Naioth, and still more when he was parted from Jonathan. When Gad joined him, David must have felt that he was sent to him from the Lord, and could not but be full of gratitude for so conspicuous an answer to his prayers. It would seem that Gad remained in close relation to David to the close of his life. It was he that came from the Lord to offer him his choice between three forms of chastisement after his offence in numbering the people; and from the fact of his being called "David's seer" (2 Sam. xxiv. 11) we conclude that he and David were intimately associated. It was he also that instructed David to buy the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and thus to consecrate to God a spot with which, to the very end of time, the most hallowed thoughts must always be connected.

The other eminent person that joined David about this time was Abiathar the priest. But before adverting to this, we must follow the thread of the narrative and especially note the tragedy that occurred at Nob, the city of the priests.

From the mode of life which David had to follow and the difficulty of obtaining subsistence for his troop at one place for any length of time, he was obliged to make frequent changes. On leaving the cave of Adullam, which was near the western border of the tribe of Judah, he traversed the whole breadth of that tribe, and crossing the Jordan, came to the territories of Moab. He was concerned for the safety of his father and mother, knowing too well the temper of Eastern kings, and how they thirsted for the blood, not only of their rivals, but of all their relations. He feared that they would not be let alone at Bethlehem or in any other part of Saul's kingdom. But what led him to think of the king of Moab? Perhaps a tender remembrance of his ancestress Ruth, the damsel from Moab, who had been so eminent for

her devotion to her mother-in-law. Might there not be found in the king of Moab somewhat of a like disposition, that would look with pity on an old man and woman driven from their home, not indeed, like Naomi, by famine, but by what was even worse, the shameful ingratitude and murderous fury of a wicked king? If such was David's hope, it was not without success; his father and his mother dwelt with the king of Moab all the time that David was in the hold.

But it was not God's purpose that David should lurk in a foreign land. The prophet Gad directed him to return to the land of Judah. It was within the boundaries of that tribe, accordingly, that the rest of David's exile was spent, with the exception of the time at the very end when he again resorted to Philistine territory. His first hiding place was the forest of Hareth.

While David was here, Saul, encamped in military state at Gibeah, delivered an extraordinary speech to the men of his own tribe. "Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; that all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that showeth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or that showeth me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" It would have been difficult for any other man to condense so much that was vile in spirit into the dimensions of a little speech like this. It begins with a base appeal to the cupidity of his countrymen, the Benjamites, among whom he was probably in the habit of distributing the possessions of his enemies, as, for instance, the Gibeonites, who dwelt near him and whom he slew, contrary to the covenant made with them by Joshua (2 Sam. xxi. 2). It accuses his people of having conspired against him, because they had not spoken to him of the friendship of his son with David, although that fact must have been notorious. It accuses the noble Jonathan of having stirred up David against Saul, while neither Jonathan nor David had ever lifted a little finger against him, and both the one and the other might have been trusted to serve him with unflinching fidelity if he had only given them a fair chance. It indicates that nothing would be more agreeable to Saul than any information about David or those connected with him that would give him an excuse for some deed of overwhelming vengeance. Did ever man draw his own portrait in viler colours than Saul in this speech?

There was one bosom—let us hope only one—in which it awoke a response. It was that of Doeg the Edomite. He told the story of what he had seen at Nob, adding thereto the unfounded statement that Ahimelech had inquired of the Lord for David. Ahimelech and the whole college of priests were accordingly sent for, and they came. The charge brought against him was a very offensive one; in so far, it was a statement of facts, but of facts placed in an odious light, of facts coloured with a design which Ahimelech never entertained. Oh, how many an innocent man has suffered in this way! Even in courts of justice, by pleaders whose interest is on the other side, and sometimes by judges (like Jeffreys) steeped in hatred and prejudice, how often have acts that were quite innocent been put to the account of treason, or put to the account of malice, or cunningly forged into a chain, indicating a deliberate

design to injure another! It can never be too earnestly insisted on that to be just to a man you must not merely ascertain the real facts of his case, but you must put the facts in their true light, and not colour them with prejudices of your own or with suppositions which the man repudiates.

The conduct of Ahimelech was manly and straightforward, but indiscreet. He admitted the facts, with the exception of the statement that he had inquired of the Lord for David. He vindicated right manfully the faithful, noble services of David, services that ought to have excluded the very idea of treason or conspiracy. He protested that he knew nothing of any ground the king had against David, or of any cause that could have led him to believe that in helping him he was offending Saul. But just because Ahimelech's defence was so true and so complete, it was most offensive to Saul. What is there a despot likes worse to hear than that he is entirely in the wrong? What words irritate him so much as those which prove the entire innocence of someone with whom he is angry? Saul was angry both with David and with Ahimelech. Ahimelech had the great misfortune to prove to him that in both cases there was no shadow of ground for his anger. In proportion as Saul's reason should have been satisfied, his temper was excited. What an uncontrollable condition that temper must have been in when the death of Ahimelech was decreed, and all his father's house! We do not wonder that no one could be found in his bodyguard to execute the order. Did this not stagger and sober the king? Far from it. His fit of rage was so hot and imperious that he would not be balked. Turning to Doeg, he commanded him to fall on the priests. And this vile man had the brutality to execute the order, and to plunge his sword into the heart of fourscore and five unarmed persons that wore the garments which even in heathen nations usually secured protection and safety. And as if it were not enough to kill the men, their city, Nob, was utterly destroyed. Men and women, children and sucklings, oxen and asses and sheep—a thorough massacre was made of them all. Had Nob been a city of warriors that had resisted the king's armies with haughty insolence, harassed them by sorties, entrapped them by stratagems, and exasperated them by hideous cruelty to their prisoners, but at last been overpowered, it could not have had a more terrible doom. And had Saul never committed any other crime, this would have been enough to separate him from the Lord for ever, and to bring down on him the horrors of the night at Endor and of the day that followed on Mount Gilboa.

This cruel and sacrilegious murder must have told against Saul and his cause with prodigious effect. There could not have been a single priest or Levite throughout the kingdom whose blood would not boil at the news of the massacre, and whose sympathies would not be enlisted, more or less, on behalf of David, now openly proclaimed by Saul as his rival, and probably known to have been anointed by Samuel as his successor. Not only the priests and Levites, but every right-minded man throughout the land would share in this feeling, and many a prayer would be offered for David that God would protect him, and spare him to be a blessing to his country. The very presence in his camp of Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, who escaped the massacre, with his ephod,—an official means of consulting God in all cases of difficulty,—would be a visible proof to

his followers and to the community at large, that God was on his side. And when the solemn rites of the national worship were performed in his camp, and when, at each turn of public affairs, the high priest was seen in communication with Jehovah, the feeling could not fail to gain strength that David's cause was the cause of God, and the cause of the country, and that, in due time, his patient sufferings and his noble services would be crowned with the due reward.

But if the news of the massacre would tend on the whole to improve David's position with the people, it must have occasioned a terrible pang to David himself. There was, indeed, one point of view in which something of the kind was to be looked for. Long ago, it had been foretold to Eli, when he tolerated so calmly the scandalous wickedness of his sons, "Behold, the days come that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, but there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in My habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thy house for ever." Ahimelech was a grandson of Eli, and the other massacred priests were probably of Eli's blood. Here, then, at last, was the fulfilment of the sentence announced to Eli; doomed as his house had been, their subsistence for years back was of the nature of a respite; and here, at length, was the catastrophe that had been so distinctly foretold.

That consideration, however, would not be much, if any, consolation to David. If the falsehood which he had told to Ahimelech was really dictated by a desire to save the high priest from conscious implication with his affairs—with the condition of one who was now an outlaw and a fugitive, it had failed most terribly of the desired effect. The issue of the lie only served to place David's duplicity in a more odious light. There is one thing in David, when he received the information, that we cannot but admire—his readiness to take to himself his full share of blame. "I have occasioned the death of all thy father's house." And more than that, he did not even protest that it was impossible to have foreseen what was going to happen. For at the very time when he was practising the falsehood on Ahimelech, he owns that he had a presentiment of mischief to follow. "I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul." Nor did he excuse himself on the ground that the massacre was the fulfilment of the longstanding sentence on Eli's house. He knew well that that circumstance in no degree lessened his own guilt, or the guilt of Doeg and Saul. Though God may use men's wicked passions to bring about His purposes, that in no degree lessens the guilt of these passions. It seems as if David never could have forgiven himself his share in this dreadful business. And what a warning this conveys to us! Are you not sometimes tempted to think that sin to you is not a very serious matter, because you will get forgiveness for it, the atoning work of the Saviour will cleanse you from its guilt? Be it so; but what if your sin has involved others, and if no atoning blood has been sprinkled on them? What of the youth whom your careless example first led to drink, and who died a miserable drunkard? What of the clerk whom you instructed to tell a lie? What of the companion of your sensuality whom you drove nearer to hell? Alas, alas! sin is like a network, the ramifications of which go out on the right hand and on the left,

and when we break God's law, we cannot tell what the consequences to others may be! And how can we be ever comforted if we have been the occasion of ruin to any? It seems as if the burden of that feeling could never be borne; as if the only way of escape were, to be put out of existence altogether!

The superscription of the fifty-second Psalm bears—"Maschil of David; when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, David is come to the house of Ahimelech." There is not much in this title to recommend it, as the information that was given by Doeg to Saul is not stated accurately. We might have expected, too, that if Doeg was alone in the Psalmist's eye, the atrocious slaughter of the priests would have had a share of reprobation, as well as the sharp, calumnious, mischievous tongue which is the chief object of denunciation. And though Doeg, as the chief of Saul's bondmen, might be a rich man, that position would hardly have entitled him to be called a mighty man, nor to assume the swaggering tone of independence here ascribed to him. Whoever was really the object of denunciation in this psalm, seems however to have belonged to the same class with Doeg, in respect of his wicked tongue and love of mischief. It is indeed a wretched character that is delineated: the Psalmist's enemy is at once mischievous and mighty; and not only is he mischievous, but he boasts himself in it. He is shameless and without conscience, bent on doing all the evil that he can. Let him only have a chance of bringing a railing accusation against God's servants, and he does it with delight. But his conduct is senseless as it is wicked. God is unchangeably good, and His goodness is a sure defence to His servants against all the calumnious devices of the greatest and strongest of men. It is the tongue of this evil man that is his instrument of mischief. It is utterly unscrupulous, sharp as a razor, cunning, devouring. A liar is a serious enemy, one who is utterly unprincipled, clever withal, and who trains himself with great skill to do mischief with his tongue. It is painful to be at the mercy of a calumniator who does not launch against you a clumsy and incredible calumny, but one that has an element of probability in it, only fearfully distorted. Especially when the calumniator is one that *deviseth* mischief, who loves evil more than good, to whom truth is too tame to be cared for, who delights in falsehood because it is more piquant, more exciting. To those who have learned to regard it as the great business of life to spread light, order, peace, and joy, such men appear to be monsters, and indeed they are; but it is a painful experience to lie at their mercy.

To this class belonged Doeg, a monster in human form, to whom it was no distress, but apparently a congenial employment, to murder in cold blood a very hecatomb of men consecrated to the service of God. No doubt it would appal David to think that such a man was now leagued with Saul as his bitter and implacable enemy. But his faith saw him in the same prostrate position in which his faith had seen Goliath. Men cannot defy God in vain. Men dare not defy that truth and that mercy which are attributes of God. "God shall likewise destroy thee for ever: He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place, and root thee out of the land of the living. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him."

What became of Doeg we do not know. The

historian does not introduce his name again. Before David came to power, he had probably received his doom. Had he still survived, we should have been likely again to fall in with his name. The Jews have a tradition that he was Saul's armour-bearer at the battle of Gilboa, and that the sword by which he and his master fell, was no other than that which had slain the priests of the Lord. As for the truth of this we cannot say. But even supposing that no special judgment befell him, we cannot fancy him as other than a most miserable man. With such a heart and such a tongue, with the load of a guilty life lying heavy on his soul, and that life crowned by such an infamous proceeding as the massacre of the priests, we cannot think of him as one who enjoyed life, but as a man of surly and gloomy nature, to whom life grew darker and darker, till it was extinguished in some miserable ending. In contrast with such a career, how bright and how much to be desired was David's anticipated future:—"I am like a green olive-tree in the house of my God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. I will praise Thy name for ever, because Thou hast done it: and I will wait on Thy name, for it is good before Thy saints."

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about."

CHAPTER XXX.

DAVID AT KEILAH, ZIPH, AND MAON.

I SAMUEL xxiii.

THE period of David's life shortly sketched in this chapter, must have been full of trying and exciting events. If we knew all the details, they would probably be full of romantic interest; many a tale of privation, disease, discomfort, on the one hand, and of active conflicts and hair-breadth escapes on the other. The district which he frequented was a mountainous tract, bordering on the west coast of the Dead Sea, and lying exposed more or less to the invasions of the neighbouring nations. In the immediate neighbourhood of Ziph, Maon, and Carmel, the country—a fine upland plain—is remarkably rich and fertile; but between these places and the Dead Sea it changes to a barren wilderness; the rocky valleys that run down to the margin of the sea, parched by the heat and drought, produce only a dry stunted grass. Innumerable caves are everywhere to be seen, still affording shelter to outlaws and robbers. But at Engedi (now Ain-Jidy, "the fountain of the goat"), the last place mentioned in this chapter, the traveller finds a little plain on the shore of the Dead Sea, where the soil is remarkably rich: a delicious fountain fertilises it; shut in between walls of rock, both its climate and its products are like those of the tropics; it only wants cultivation to render it a most prolific spot.

By what means did David obtain sustenance for himself and his large troop in these sequestered regions? Bayle, in the article in his famous Dictionary on "David,"—an article which gave the cue to much that has been said and written against him since,—speaks of them as a troop of robbers, and compares them to the associates of Catiline, and even Dean Stanley calls them "freebooters." Both expressions are obviously unwarranted. The only class of persons whom David and his troop regarded as enemies were the open enemies of his

country,—that is, either persons who lived by plunder, or the tribes on whom Saul, equally with himself, would have made war. That David regarded himself as entitled to attack and pillage the Hebrew settlers in his own tribe of Judah is utterly inconsistent with all that we know both of his character and of his history. If David had a weakness, it lay in his extraordinary partiality for his own people, contrasted with his hard and even harsh feelings towards the nations that so often annoyed them. Nothing was too good for a Hebrew, nothing too severe for an alien. In after life, we see how his heart was torn to its very centre by the judgment that fell upon his people after his offence in numbering the people (2 Sam. xxiv. 17); while the record of his severity to the Ammonites cannot be read without a shudder (2 Sam. xii. 31). Besides, in this very narrative, in the account of his collision with Nabal (1 Sam. xxv. 7), we find David putting in the very forefront of his message to the churl the fact that all the time he and his troop were in Carmel the shepherds of Nabal sustained no hurt, and his flocks no diminution. Instead of fleecing his own countrymen, he sent them presents when he was more successful than usual against their common foes (1 Sam. xxx. 26). Unquestionably therefore such terms as “robbers” and “freebooters” are quite undeserved.

One chief source of support would obviously be the chase—the wild animals that roamed among these mountains, the wild goat and the coney, the pigeon and the partridge, and other creatures whose flesh was clean. Possibly, patches of soil, like the oasis at Engedi, would be cultivated, and a scanty return obtained from the labour. A third employment would be that of guarding the flocks of the neighbouring shepherds both from bears, wolves, and lions, and from the attacks of plundering bands, for which service some acknowledgment was certainly due. At the best, it was obviously a most uncomfortable mode of life, making not a little rough work very necessary; an utter contrast to the peaceful early days of Bethlehem, and rendering it infinitely more difficult to sing, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

Acting as guardian to the shepherds in the neighbourhood, and being the avowed foe of all the Arab tribes who were continually making forays from their desert haunts on the land of Judah, David was in the very midst of enemies. Hence probably the allusions in some of the psalms. “Consider mine enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred.” “Mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for there be many that fight against me, O Thou Most High.” “My soul is among lions, and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword.” Could we know all his trials and difficulties, we should be amazed at his tranquillity. One morning, an outpost brings him word that Saul is marching against him. He hastily arranges a retreat, and he and his men clamber over the mountains, perhaps under a burning sun, and reach their halting-place at night, exhausted with thirst, hunger, and fatigue. Scarcely have they lain down, when an alarm is given that a body of Bedouins are plundering the neighbouring sheepfolds. Forgetful of their fatigues, they rush to their arms, pursue the invaders, and rescue the prey. Next morning, perhaps, the very men whose flocks he had saved, refuse to make him any acknowledgment. Murmurs

rise from his hungry followers, and a sort of mutiny is threatened if he will not allow them to help themselves. To crown all, he learns by-and-by, that the people whom he has delivered have turned traitors and are about to give him up to Saul. Wonderful was the faith that could rise above such troubles, and say, “Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.”

In illustration of these remarks let us note first what took place in connection with Keilah. This was a place of strength and importance not far from the land of the Philistines. A rumour reaches him that the Philistines are fighting against it and robbing the threshing-floors. The first thing he does, on hearing this rumour, is to inquire of God whether he should go and attack the Philistines. It is not a common case. The Philistines were a powerful enemy; probably their numbers were large, and it was a serious thing for David to provoke them when he had so many enemies besides. This was evidently the feeling of his followers. “Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?” But David is in an admirable frame of mind, and his only anxiety is about knowing precisely the will of God. He inquires again, and when he gets his answer he does not hesitate an instant. It was about this time that Abiathar the son of Ahimelech came to him, bringing an ephod from Nob, perhaps the only sacred thing that in the hurry and horror of his flight he was able to carry away. And now, in his time of need, David finds the value of these things; he knows the privilege of fearing God, and of having God at his right hand. The fears of his men appear now to be overcome; he goes to Keilah, attacks the Philistines, smites them with a very great slaughter, brings away their cattle and rescues the people. It is a great deliverance, and David, with peace and plenty around him, and the benedictions of the men of Keilah, breathes freely and praises God.

But this sense of ease and tranquillity was of short duration. Saul hears of what has taken place, and hears that David has taken up his quarters within the town of Keilah. He chuckles over the news with fiendish satisfaction, for Keilah is a fortified town; he will be able to shut up David within its walls and lay siege to the place, and when he has taken it, David will be at his mercy. But Saul, as usual, reckons without his host. David has received information that leads him to suspect that Saul is meditating mischief against him, and it looks as if he had come to Keilah only to fall into a trap,—to fall into the hands of Saul. But though a new danger has arisen, the old refuge still remains. “Bring hither the ephod,” he says to Abiathar. And communication being again established with Heaven, two questions are asked: Will Saul come down to Keilah, to destroy the city for David’s sake? Yes, he will. Will the men of Keilah whom David has saved from the Philistines distinguish themselves for their gratitude or for their treachery? They will become traitors; they will deliver David up to Saul. So there is nothing for it but for David to escape from Keilah. The worst of it is, he has no other place to go to. He goes forth from Keilah, as his father Abraham went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing whither. He and his followers went “whithersoever they could go.” Treachery was a new foe, and when the treachery was on the part of those on whom he had just conferred

a signal benefit, it was most discouraging; it seemed to indicate that he could never be safe.

Flying from Keilah, he takes refuge in a part of the wilderness near Ziph. Being very rocky and mountainous, it affords good opportunities for hiding; but in proportion as it is advantageous for that purpose, it is unfavourable for getting sufficient means of subsistence. A wood in the neighbourhood of Ziph afforded the chance of both. In this wood David enjoys the extraordinary privilege of a meeting with Jonathan. What a contrast to his treatment from the men of Keilah! If, on turning his back on them, he was disposed to say, "All men are liars," the blessed generosity of Jonathan modifies the sentiment. In such circumstances, the cheering words of his friend and the warmth of his embrace must have come on David with infinite satisfaction. They were to him what the loving words of the dying thief were to the Saviour, amid the babel and blasphemy of Calvary. Who, indeed, does not see in the David of this time, persevering in his work under such fearful discouragements, under the treachery of men with hearts like Judas Iscariot, experiencing the worst treatment from some whom he had benefited already, and from others whom he was to benefit still more—who can fail to see the type of Christ, patiently enduring the cross at the hands and in the stead of the very men whom by His sufferings He was to save and bless? For David, like our blessed Lord, though not with equal steadfastness, drinks the cup which the Father has given him; he holds to the work which has been given him to do.

The brief note of Jonathan's words to David in the wood is singularly beautiful and suggestive. "Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee, and that also Saul my father knoweth." To begin with the last of Jonathan's words, what a lurid light they throw on the conduct of Saul! He was under no misapprehension as to the Divine destiny of David. He must have known therefore that in fighting against David, he was fighting against God. It looks unaccountable madness; yet what worse is it than a thousand other schemes in which, to carry out their ends, men have trampled on every moral precept, as if there were no God, no lawgiver, ruler, or judge above, no power in hell or heaven witnessing their actions to bring them all into judgment?

In his words to David the faith and piety of Jonathan were as apparent as his friendship. He strengthened his hand in God. Simple but beautiful words! He put David's hand as it were into God's hand, in token that they were one, in token that the Almighty was pledged to keep and bless him, and that when he and his God were together, no weapon formed against him would ever prosper. Surely no act of friendship is so true friendship as this. To remind our Christian friends in their day of trouble of their relation to God, to encourage them to think of His interest in them and His promises to them; to drop in their ear some of His assurances—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,"—is surely the best of all ways to encourage the downcast, and send them on their way rejoicing.

And what a hallowed word that was with which Jonathan began his exhortation—"Fear not." The "fear not's" of Scripture are a remarkable gar-

land. All of them have their root in grace, not in nature. They all imply a firm exercise of faith. And Jonathan's "fear not" was no exception. If David had not been a man of faith, it would have sounded like hollow mockery. "The hand of Saul my father shall not find thee." Was not Saul with his well-equipped force, at that very moment, within a few miles of him, while he, with his half-starved followers was at his very wits' end, not knowing where to turn to next? "Thou shalt be king over Israel." Nay, friend, I should be well pleased, David might have said, if I were again feeding my father's flocks in Bethlehem, with all that has happened since then obliterated, reckoned as if it had never been. "And I shall be next unto thee." O Jonathan, how canst thou say that? Thou art the king's eldest son, the throne ought to be thine, there is none worthier of it; the very fact that thou canst say that to me shows what a kingly generosity is in thy bosom, and how well entitled thou art to reign over Israel! Yes, David, but does not the very fact of Jonathan using such words show that he is in closest fellowship with God? Only a man pervaded through and through by the Spirit of God could speak thus to the person who stands between him and what the world would call his reasonable ambition. In that spirit of Jonathan there is a goodness altogether Divine. Oh what a contrast to his father, to Saul! What a contrast to the ordinary spirit of jealousy, when some one is like to cut us out of a coveted prize! Some one at school is going to beat you at the competition. Some one in business is going to get the situation for which you are so eager. Some one is going to carry off the fair hand to which you so ardently aspire. Where, oh where, in such cases, is the spirit of Jonathan? Look at it, study it, admire it; and in its clear and serene light, see what a black and odious spirit jealousy is; and oh, seek that *you*, by the grace of God, may be, not a Saul, but a Jonathan!

It would appear that Saul had left the neighbourhood of Ziph in despair of finding David, and had returned to Gibeah. But the distance was small—probably not more than a long day's journey. And after a time, Saul is recalled to Ziph by a message from the Ziphites. "Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand." The men of Keilah had not gone the length of treachery, for when they were thinking of it, David escaped; but even if they had, they would have had something to say for themselves. Was it not better to give up David and let him suffer, than to keep him in their city, and let both him and them and their city share the fate, as they would have been sure to do, of Ahimelech and the city of Nob,—that is, be utterly destroyed? But the men of Ziph were in no such dilemma. Their treachery was simple meanness. They no doubt wished to ingratiate themselves with Saul. They had no faith either in David, or in God's promises regarding him. Disbelieving God, they acted inhumanly to man. They let Saul know his best opportunity, and when he came on the spot, apparently of a sudden, David and his troop were surrounded, and their escape seemed to be cut off. Here was a strange commentary on the strong assurance of Jonathan, "Saul my father shall not find thee." Has he not

found me, only to too good purpose? But man's extremity is God's opportunity. When Saul seems ready to pounce on David, a messenger arrives, "Haste thee, and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land." The danger was imminent, and Saul could not afford to lose an hour. And thus, on the very eve of seizing the prey he had been hunting for years, he is compelled to let it go.

It is edifying to observe all the different ways in which the Divine protection toward David had been shown, all the time that he had been exposed to the hostility of Saul. First of all, when Saul spoke to his servants and to Jonathan that they should kill David, Jonathan was raised up to take his side, and by his friendly counsels, arrested for the time the murderous purpose of Saul. Next, when Saul hurled a javelin at David, a rapid movement saved his life. The third time, he was let down through a window by his wife, in time to escape. The fourth time, the messengers that were sent to apprehend him were filled with the Spirit of God, and even Saul, determined to make up for their lack of service, underwent the same transformation. The fifth time, when he was in Keilah, he was supernaturally warned of the unkind treachery of the men of Keilah, and thus escaped the snare. And now, a sixth escape is effected, in the very article of death, so to speak, by a Philistine invasion. Thus was illustrated that wonderful diversity of plan that characterises the ways of God, that "variety in unity" which we may trace alike in the kingdom of nature, of providence, and of grace. A similar variety is seen in His deliverances of Israel. At one time the sea is divided, at another the sun stands still; Gideon delivers by lamps and pitchers, Shamgar by his ox-goad, Samson by the jawbone of an ass, Jephthah by his military talents, David by his sling and stone, Daniel by his skill in dreams, Esther by her beauty and power of fascination. To remember such things ought to give you confidence in times of perplexity and danger. If it be God's purpose to deliver you, He has thousands of unseen methods, to any one of which He may resort, when, to the eye of sense, there seems not the shadow of a hope. And one reason why He seems at times to doom His children to inevitable ruin, is that He may call their faith and their patience into higher exercise, and teach them more impressively the sublime lesson—"Stand still, and see the salvation of God."

The fifty-fourth Psalm bears an inscription that would refer it to this occasion. There are some expressions in the psalm that hardly agree with this reference; but the general situation is quite in keeping with it. "Save me, O God," the Psalmist cries, "by Thy name, and judge me by Thy strength." The danger from which he needs to be saved comes from strangers that are risen up against him, and opposers that seek after his soul; persons "that have not set God before them." To be saved by God's *name* is to be saved through attributes which are manifestly Divine: to be judged by God's *strength*, is to be vindicated, to be shown to be under God's favour and protection, by the manifest exercise of His power. The petitions are such as David might well have made after his conversation with Jonathan. The psalm is evidently the song of one whose hand had been "strengthened in God." Its great central truth is, "God is mine helper; the Lord is with them who (like Jonathan) uphold my soul." And there comes after that a happy exercise of the spirit of

trust, enabling the Psalmist to say, "He hath delivered me out of all trouble." This result is wonderful and beautiful. How remarkable that in that wilderness of Judah, amid a life of hardship, exposure, and peril, with a powerful king thirsting for his blood, and using his every device to get hold of him, he should be able to say of God, "He hath delivered me out of all trouble." It is the faith that removes mountains: it is the faith that worked so wonderfully when the lad with the sling and stones went out so bravely against the giant. What wonders cannot faith perform when it gets clear of all the entanglements of carnal feeling, and stands, firm and erect, on the promise of God! How infinitely would such a faith relieve and sustain us in the common troubles and anxieties of life, and in deeper perplexities connected with the cause of God! Take this short clause as marking out the true quality and highest attainment of simple faith, and resolve that you will not rest in your own endeavours till your mind reaches the state of tranquillity which it describes so simply,— "He hath delivered me out of all trouble."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DAVID TWICE SPARES THE LIFE OF SAUL.

I SAMUEL xxiv., xxvi.,

THE invasion of the Philistines had freed David from the fear of Saul for a time, but only for a time. He knew full well that when the king of Israel had once repelled that invasion he would return to prosecute the object on which his heart was so much set. For a while he took refuge among the rocks of Engedi, that beautiful spot of which we have already spoken, and which has been embalmed in Holy Writ, as suggesting a fair image of the Beloved One—"My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi" (Song of Solomon i. 14). The mountains here and throughout the hill country of Judea are mostly of limestone formation, abounding, like all such rocks in caverns of large size, in which lateral chambers run off at an angle from the main cavity, admitting of course little or no light, but such that a person inside, while himself unseen, may see what goes on at the entrance to the cave. In the dark sides of such a cave, David and his men lay concealed when Saul was observed by him to enter and lie down, probably unattended, to enjoy the mid-day sleep which the heat of the climate often demands. We cannot fail to remark the singular providence that concealed from Saul at this time the position of David. He had good information of his movements in general; the treacherous spirit which was so prevalent greatly aided him in this; but on the present occasion, he was evidently in ignorance of his situation. If only he had known, how easy it would have been for him with his three thousand chosen men to blockade the cave, and starve David and his followers into surrender!

The entrance of the king being noticed by David's men, they urged their master to avail himself of the opportunity of getting rid of him which was now so providentially and unexpectedly presented to him. We can hardly think of a stronger temptation to do so than that under which David now lay. In the first place, there was the prospect of getting rid of the weary life he was leading,—

more like the life of a wild beast hunted by its enemies, than of a man eager to do good to his fellows, with a keen relish for the pleasures of home and an extraordinary delight in the services of God's house. Then there was the prospect of wearing the crown and wielding the sceptre of Israel,—the splendours of a royal palace, and its golden opportunities of doing good. Further, there was the voice of his followers urging him to the deed, putting on it a sacred character by ascribing to it a Divine permission and appointment. And still further, there was the suddenness and unexpectedness of the opportunity. Nothing is more critical than a sudden opportunity of indulging an ardent passion; with scarcely a moment for deliberation, one is apt to be hurried blindly along, and at once to commit the deed. With all his noble nature, Robert the Bruce could not refrain from plunging his dagger into the heart of the treacherous Comyn, even in the convent of the Minorite friars. The discipline of David's spirit must at this time have been admirable. Not only did he restrain himself, but he restrained his followers too. He would neither strike his heartless enemy, nor suffer another to strike him. On the first of the two occasions of his sparing him—recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter—he might naturally believe that his forbearance would turn Saul's heart and end the unjust quarrel. On the second occasion of the same sort—recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter—he could have had no hope of the kind. It was a pure sense of duty that restrained him. He acted in utter contempt of what was personal and selfish, and in deepest reverence for what was holy and Divine. How different from the common spirit of the world! Young people, who are so ready to keep up a sense of wrong, and wait an opportunity of paying back your schoolfellows, study this example of David. Ye grown men, who could not get such-a-one to vote for you, or to support your claim in your controversy, and who vowed that you would never rest till you had driven him from the place, how does your spirit compare with that of David? Ye statesmen, who have received an affront from some barbarous people, utterly ignorant of your ways, and who forthwith issue your orders for your ships of war to scatter destruction among their miserable villages, terrifying, killing, mutilating, no matter how many of the wretches that have no arms to meet you in fair fight—think of the forbearance of David. And think too of many passages in the New Testament that give the idea of another treatment and another species of victory:—"Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

The special consideration that held back the arm of David from killing Saul was that he was the Lord's anointed. He held the office of king by Divine appointment,—not merely as other kings may be regarded as holding it, but as God's lieutenant, called specially, and selected for the office. For David to remove him would be to interfere with the Divine prerogative. It would be so much the more inexcusable as God had many other ways of removing him, any one of which He might readily employ. "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. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed."

Let us briefly follow the narrative on each of the two occasions.

First, when David saw Saul asleep at the entrance of the cave near Engedi, he crept towards him as he lay, and removed a loose piece of his garment. When Saul rose up and proceeded on his way, David boldly followed him, believing that after sparing the king's life he was safe from attack either from him or his people. His respectful salutation, drawing the king's attention, was followed by an act of profound obeisance. David then addressed Saul somewhat elaborately, his address being wholly directed to the point of disabusing the king's mind of the idea that he had any plot whatever against his life. His words were very respectful but at the same time bold. Taking advantage of the act of forbearance which had just occurred, he demanded of the king why he listened to men's words, saying Behold, David seeketh thy hurt. He protested that for himself nothing would induce him to stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed. That very day, he had had the chance, but he had forborne. His people had urged him, but he would not comply. *There* was the skirt of his garment which he had just cut off: it would have been as easy for him, when he did that, to plunge his sword into the heart of the king. Could there be a plainer proof that Saul was mistaken in supposing David to be actuated by murderous or other sinful feelings against him? And yet Saul hunted for his life to take it. Rising still higher, David appealed to the great Judge of all, and placed the quarrel in His hands. To vary the case, he quoted a proverb to the effect that only where there was wickedness in the heart could wickedness be found in the life. Then, with the easy play of a versatile mind, he put the case in a comical light: did it become the great king of Israel to bring his hosts after one so insignificant—"after a dead dog, after a flea"? Was ocean to be tossed into tempest "to waft a feather or to drown a straw"? Once more, and to sum up the whole case, he appealed solemnly to God, virtually invoking His blessing on whoever was innocent in this quarrel, and calling down His wrath and destruction on the party that was really guilty.

The effect on Saul was prompt and striking. He was touched in his tenderest feelings by the singular generosity of his opponent. He broke down thoroughly, welcomed the dear voice of David, "lifted up his voice and wept." He confessed that he was wrong, that David had rewarded him good and he had rewarded David evil. David had given him that day a convincing proof of his integrity; though it seemed that the Lord had delivered him into his hand, he killed him not. He had reversed the principle on which men were accustomed to act when they came upon an enemy, and had him in their power. And all these acknowledgments of David's superior goodness Saul made, while knowing well and frankly owning that David should be the king, and that the kingdom should be established in his hand. One favour only Saul would beg of David in reference to that coming time—that he would not massacre his family, or destroy his name out of his father's house—a request which it was easy for David to comply with. Never would he dream of such a thing, however common it was in these Eastern kingdoms. David swore to Saul, and the two parted in peace.

How glad David must have been that he acted as he did! Already his forbearance has had a full reward. It has drawn out the very best ele-

ments of Saul's soul; it has placed Saul in a light in which we can think of him with interest, and even admiration. How can this be the man that so meanly plotted for David's life when he sent him against the Philistines? that gave him his daughter to be his wife in order that he might have more opportunities to entangle him? that flung the murderous javelin at his head? that massacred the priests and destroyed their city simply because they had shown him kindness? Saul is indeed a riddle, all the more that this generous fit lasted but a very short time; and soon after, when the treacherous Ziphites undertook to betray David, Saul and his soldiers came again to the wilderness to destroy him.

It has been thought by some, and with reason, that something more than the varying humour of Saul is necessary to account for his persistent efforts to kill David. And it is believed that a clue to this is supplied by expressions of which David made much use, and by certain references in the Psalms, which imply that to a great extent he was the victim of calumny, and of calumny of a very malignant and persistent kind. In the address on which we have commented David began by asking why Saul *listened to men's words*; saying, Behold, David seeketh thy life? And in the address recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter (ver. 19) David says very bitterly, "If they be the children of men that have stirred thee up against me, cursed be they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, go, serve other gods." Turning to the seventh Psalm, we find in it a vehement and passionate appeal to God in connection with the bitter and murderous fury of an enemy, who is said in the superscription to have been Cush the Benjamite. The fury of that man against David was extraordinary. Deliver me, O Lord, "lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces when there is none to deliver." It is plain that the form of calumny which this man indulged in was accusing David of "rewarding evil to him that was at peace with him," an accusation not only not true, but outrageously contrary to the truth, seeing he had "delivered him that without cause was his enemy." It is not unlikely therefore that at Saul's court David had an enemy who had the bitterest enmity to him, who never ceased to poison Saul's mind regarding him, who put facts in the most offensive light, and even after the first act of David's generosity to Saul not only continued, but continued more ferociously than ever to inflame Saul's mind, and urge him to get rid of this intolerable nuisance. What could have inspired Cush, or indeed any one, with such a hatred to David we cannot definitely say; much of it was due to that instinctive hatred of holy character which worldly men of strong will show in every age, and perhaps not a little to the apprehension that if David did ever come to the throne, many a wicked man, now fattening on the spoils of the kingdom through the favour of Saul, would be stripped of his wealth and consigned to obscurity.

It would seem, then, that had Saul been left alone he would have left David alone. It was the bitter and incessant plotting of David's enemies that stirred him up. Jealousy was only too active a feeling in his breast, and it was easy to work upon it, and fill him with the idea that, after all, David was a rebel and a traitor. These things David must have known; knowing them, he made allowance for them, and did not suffer his heart to become altogether cold to Saul. The kindly

feelings which Saul expressed when he dismissed from his view all the calumnies with which he had been poisoned, and looked straight at David, made a deep impression on his rival, and the fruit of them appeared in that beautiful elegy on Saul and Jonathan, which must seem a piece of hypocrisy if the facts we have stated be not kept in view: "Saul and Jonathan were pleasant and lovely in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

In the second incident, recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter, when David again spared the life of Saul, not much more needs to be said. Some critics would hold it to be the same incident recorded by another hand in some earlier document consulted by the writer of 1 Samuel, containing certain variations such as might take place at the hand of a different historian. But let us observe the differences of the two chapters. (1) The scene is different; in the one case it is near Engedi, in the other in the wilderness, near the hill Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon. (2) The place where Saul was asleep is different; in the one case a cave; in the other case a camp, protected by a trench. (3) The trophy carried off by David was different; in the one case the skirt of his garment, in the other a spear and cruse of water. (4) The position of David when he made himself known was different; in the one case he went out of the cave and called after Saul; in the other he crossed a gully and spoke from the top of a crag. (5) His way of attracting attention was different; in the one case he spoke directly to Saul, in the other he rallied Abner, captain of the host, for failing to protect the person of the king. But we need not proceed further with this list of differences. Those we have adverted to are enough to repel the assertion that there were not two separate incidents of the same kind. And surely if the author was a mere compiler, using different documents, he might have known if the incidents were the same. If it be said that we cannot believe that two events so similar could have happened, that this is too improbable to be believed, we may answer by referring to similar cases in the Gospels, or even in common life. Suppose a historian of the American civil war to describe what took place at Bull Run. First he gives an account of a battle there, between the northern and southern armies, some incidents of which he describes. By-and-bye he again speaks of a battle there, but the incidents he gives are quite different. Our modern critics would say it was all one event, but that the historian, having consulted two accounts, had clumsily written as if there had been two battles. We know that this fancy of criticism is baseless. In the American civil war there were two battles of Bull Run between the same contending parties at different times. So we may safely believe that there were two instances of David's forbearance to Saul, one in the neighbourhood of Engedi, the other in the neighbourhood of Ziph.

And all that needs to be said further respecting the second act of forbearance by David is that it shines forth all the brighter because it was the second, and because it happened so soon after the other. We may see that David did not put much trust in Saul's profession the first time, for he did not disband his troop, but remained in the wilderness as before. It is quite possible that this displeased Saul. It is also possible that that inveterate false accuser of David from whom he suffered so much would make a great deal of this to Saul, and would represent to him strongly that

David really was the innocent man he claimed to be, after receiving the assurance he got from him he would have sent his followers to their homes, and returned in peace to his own. That he did nothing of the kind may have exasperated Saul, and induced him to change his policy, and again take steps to secure David, as before. Substantially, David's remonstrance with Saul on this second occasion was the same as on the first. But at this time he gave proof of a power of sarcasm which he had not shown before. He rated Abner on the looseness of the watch he kept of his royal master, and adjudged him worthy of death for not making it impossible for any one to come unobserved so near the king, and have him so completely in his power. The apology of Saul was substantially the same as before; but how could it have been different? The acknowledgment of what was to happen to David was hardly so ample as on the last occasion. David doubtless parted from Saul with the old conviction that kindness was not wanting in his personal feelings, but that the evil influences that were around him, and the fits of disorder to which his mind was subject, might change his spirit in a single hour from that of generous benediction to that of implacable jealousy.

But now to draw to a close. We have adverted to that high reverence for God which was the means of restraining David from lifting up his hand against Saul, because he was the Lord's anointed. Let us now notice more particularly what an admirable spirit of self-restraint and patience David showed in being willing to bear all the risk and pain of a most distressing position, until it should please God to bring to him the hour of deliverance. The grace we specially commend is that of waiting for God's time. Alas! into how many sins, and even crimes, have men been betrayed through unwillingness to wait for God's time! A young man embarks in the pursuits of commerce; but the gains to be derived from ordinary business come in far too slowly for him; he makes haste to be rich, engages in gigantic speculation, plunges into frightful gambling, and in a few years brings ruin on himself and all connected with him. How many sharp and unhandsome transactions continually occur just because men are impatient, and wish to hurry on some consummation which their hearts are set on! Nay, have not murders often taken place just to hasten the removal of some who occupied places that others were eager to fill? And how often are evil things done by those who will not wait for the sanction of honourable marriage?

But even where no act of crime has been committed, impatience of God's time may give rise to many an evil feeling that does not go beyond one's own breast. Many a son who will succeed to an inheritance on the death of his father, or of some other relative, is tempted to wish, more or less consciously, for an event the last to be desired by a filial heart. You may say, it is human nature; how could any one help it? The example of David shows how one may help it. The heart that is profoundly impressed with the excellence of the Divine will, and the duty and privilege of loyally accepting all His arrangements, can never desire to anticipate that will in any matter, great or small. For how can any good come in the end from forcing forward arrangements out of the Divine order? If, for the moment, this brings any advantage in one direction, it is sure to be followed by far greater evils in another. Do we all

realise the full import of our prayer when we say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? Of one thing you may be very sure, there is no impatience in heaven for a speedier fulfilment of desirable events than the will of God has ordained. There is no desire to force on the wheels of Providence if they do not seem to be moving fast enough. So let it be with us. Let us fix it as a first principle in our minds, as an immovable rule of our lives, that as God knows best how to order His providence, so any interference with Him is rash and perilous, and wicked too; and with reference both to events which are not lawfully in our hands, and the time at which they are to happen, let us realise it as alike our duty and our interest to say to God, in the spirit of full and unreserved trust—"Not our will, but Thine be done."

CHAPTER XXXII.

DAVID AND NABAL.

I SAMUEL XXV.

We should be forming far too low an estimate of the character of the people of Israel if we did not believe that they were very profoundly moved by the death of Samuel. Even admitting that but a small proportion of them are likely to have been in warm sympathy with his ardent godliness, he was too remarkable a man, and he had been too conspicuous a figure in the history of the nation, not to be greatly missed, and much spoken of and thought of, when he passed away.

Cast in the same mould with their great leader and legislator Moses, he exerted an influence on the nation only second to that which stood connected with the prophet of the Exodus. He had not been associated with such stirring events in their history as Moses; neither had it been his function to reveal to them the will of God, either so systematically, or so comprehensively, or so supernaturally; but he was marked by the same great spirituality, the same intense reverence for the God of Israel, the same profound belief in the reality of the covenant between Israel and God, and the same conviction of the inseparable connection between a pure worship and flowing prosperity on the one hand, and idolatrous defection and national calamity on the other.

No man except Moses had ever done more to rivet this truth on the minds and hearts of the people. It was the lifelong aim and effort of Samuel to show that it made the greatest difference to them in every way how they acted toward God, in the way of worship, trust, and obedience. He made incessant war on that cold worldly spirit, so natural to us all that leaves God out of account as a force in our lives, and strives to advance our interests simply by making the most of the conditions of material prosperity.

No doubt with many minds the name of Samuel would be associated with a severity and a spirituality and a want of worldliness that were repulsive to them, as indicating one who carried the matter to use a common phrase, too far. But at Samuel's death even these men might be visited with a somewhat remorseful conviction that, if Samuel had gone too far, they had not gone half far enough. There might come from the retrospect of his career a wholesome rebuke to their worldliness and neglect of God; for surely, they would feel, if there be a God, we ought to worship Him,

and it cannot be well for us to neglect Him altogether.

On the other hand, the career of Samuel would be recalled with intense admiration and gratitude by all the more earnest of the people. What an impressive witness for all that was good and holy had they not had among them! What a living temple, what a Divine epistle, written not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart! What glory and honour had not that man's life been to the nation,—so uniform, so consistent, so high in tone! What a reproof it carried to low and selfish living, what a splendid example it afforded to old and young of the true way and end of life, and what a blessed impulse it was fitted to give them in the same direction, showing so clearly "what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

By a remarkable connection, though perhaps not by design, two names are brought together in this chapter representing very opposite phases of human character—Samuel and Nabal. In Samuel we have the high-minded servant of God, trained from infancy to smother his own will and pay unbounded regard to the will of his Father in heaven; in Nabal we see the votary of the god of this world, enslaved to his worldly lusts, grumbling and growling when he is compelled to submit to the will of God. Samuel is the picture of the serene and holy believer, enjoying unseen fellowship with God, and finding in that fellowship a blessed balm for the griefs and trials of a wounded spirit; Nabal is the picture of the rich but wretched worldling who cannot even enjoy the bounties of his lot, and is thrown into such a panic by the mere dread of losing them that he actually sinks into the grave. Under the one picture we would place the words of the Apostle in the third chapter of Philippians—"Whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things;" under the other the immediately following words, "Our conversation is in heaven." Such were the two men to whom the summons to appear before God was sent about the same time; the one ripe for glory, the other meet for destruction; the one removed to Abraham's bosom, the other to the pit of woe; each to the master whom he served, and each to the element in which he had lived. Look on this picture and on that, and say which you would be like. And as you look remember how true it is that as men sow so do they reap. The one sowed to the flesh, and of the flesh he reaped corruption; the other sowed to the Spirit, and of the Spirit he reaped life everlasting. The continuity of men's lives in the world to come gives an awful solemnity to that portion of their lives which they spend on earth:—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

There is another lesson to be gathered from a matter of external order before we proceed to the particulars of the narrative. This chapter, recording David's collision with Nabal, and showing us how David lost his temper, and became hot and impetuous and impatient in consequence of Nabal's treatment, comes in between the narrative of his two great victories over the spirit of revenge and impatience. It gives us a very emphatic lesson—how the servant of God may conquer in a great fight and yet be beaten in a small. The history of all spiritual warfare is full of such cases. In the

presence of a great enemy, the utmost vigilance is maintained; every effort is strained, every stimulus is applied. In the presence of a small foe, the spirit of confidence, the sense of security, is liable to leave every avenue unguarded, and to pave the way for signal defeat. When I am confronted with a great trial, I rally all my resources to bear it, I realise the presence of God. I say, "Thou God seest me"; but when it is a little trial, I am apt to meet it unarmed and unguarded, and I experience a humiliating fall. Thus it is that men who have in them the spirit of martyrs, and who would brave a dungeon or death itself rather than renounce a testimony or falter in a duty, often suffer defeat under the most ordinary temptations of everyday life,—they lose their temper on the most trifling provocations; almost without a figure, they are "crushed before the moth."

Whether the death of Samuel brought such a truce to David as to allow him to join in the great national gathering at his funeral we do not know with certainty; but immediately after we find him in a region called "the wilderness of Paran," in the neighbourhood of the Judean Carmel. It was here that Nabal dwelt. This Carmel is not to be confounded with the famous promontory of that name in the tribe of Asher, where Elijah and the priests of Baal afterwards had their celebrated contest; it was a hill in the tribe of Judah, in the neighbourhood of the place where David had his encampment. A descendant of the lion-hearted Judah and of the courageous Caleb, this Nabal came of a noble stock; but cursed with a narrow heart, a senseless head, and a grovelling nature, he fell as far below average humanity as his great ancestors had risen above it. With all his wealth and family connection, he appears to us now as poor a creature as ever lived,—a sort of "golden beast," as was said of the Emperor Caligula; and we cannot think of him without reflecting how little true glory or greatness mere wealth or worldly position confers,—how infinitely more worthy of honour are the sterling qualities of a generous Christian heart. It is plain that in an equitable point of view Nabal owed much to David; but what he owed could not be enforced by an action at law, and Nabal was one of those poor creatures that acknowledge no other obligation.

The studied courtesy and modesty with which David preferred his claim is interesting; it could not but be against the grain to say anything on the subject; if Nabal had not had his "understanding blinded" he would have spared him this pain; the generous heart is ever thinking of the services that others are rendering, and will never subject modesty to the pain of urging its own. "Ye shall greet him in my name," said David to his messengers; "and thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity. Peace be both to thee, and peace to thy house, and peace be to all that thou hast." No envying of his prosperity—no grudging to him his abundance; but only the Christian wish that he might have God's blessing with it, and that it might all turn to good. It was the time of sheep-shearing, when the flocks were probably counted and the increase over last year ascertained; and by a fine old custom it was commonly the season of liberality and kindness. A time of increase should always be so; it is the time for helping poor relations (a duty often strangely overlooked), for acknowledging ancient kindnesses, for relieving distress, and for devising liberal things for the Church of Christ. David gently reminded Nabal that he had come at this

good time; then he hinted at the services which he and his followers had done him; but to show that he did not wish to press hard on him, he merely asked him to give what might come to his hand: though, as the anointed king of Israel, he might have assumed a more commanding title, he asked him to give it to "thy son, David." So modest, gentle, and affectionate an application, savouring so little of the persecuted, distracted outlaw, savouring so much of the mild self-possessed Christian gentleman,—deserved treatment very different from what it received. The detestable niggardliness of Nabal's heart would not suffer him to part with anything which he could find an excuse for retaining. But greed so excessive, even in its own eyes, must find some cloak to cover it; and one of the most common and most congenial to flinty hearts is—the unworthiness of the applicant. The miser is not content in simply refusing an application for the poor, he must add some abusive charge to conceal his covetousness—they are lazy, improvident, intemperate; or if it be a Christian object he is asked to support,—these unreasonable people are always asking. Any excuse rather than tell the naked truth. "We worship our money; and when we spend it, we spend it on ourselves." Such was Nabal. "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take *my* bread, and *my* water, and *my* flesh that I have killed for *my* shearers, and give it unto men, that I know not whence they be?"

As often happens, excessive selfishness overreached itself. Insult added to injury was more than David chose to bear; for once, he lost self-command, and was borne along by impetuous passion. Meek men, when once their temper is roused, usually go to great extremes. And if David's purpose had not been providentially arrested, Nabal and all that belonged to him would have been swept before morning to destruction.

With the quickness and instinctive certainty of a clever woman's judgment, Abigail, Nabal's wife, saw at once how things were going. With more than the calmness and self-possession of many a clever woman, she arranged and despatched the remedy almost instantaneously after the infliction of the wrong. How so superior a woman could have got yoked to so worthless a man we can scarcely conjecture, unless on the vulgar and too common supposition that the churl's wealth and family had something to do with the match. No doubt she had had her punishment. But luxury had not impaired the energy of her spirit, and wealth had not destroyed the regularity of her habits. Her promptness and her prudence all must admire, her commissariat skill was wonderful in its way; and the exquisite tact and cleverness with which she showed and checked the intended crime of David—all the while seeming to pay him a compliment—could not have been surpassed. "Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord *hath withholden thee* from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies and they that seek evil to my lord be as Nabal." But the most remarkable of all her qualities is her faith; it reminds us of the faith of Rahab of Jericho, or of the faith of Jonathan; she had the firm persuasion that David was owned of God, that he was to be the king of Israel, and that all the devices men might use against him would fail; and she addressed him—

poor outlaw though he was—as one of whose elevation to sovereign power, after what God had spoken, there could not be the shadow of a doubt. Her liberality, too, was very great. And there was a truthful, honest tone about her. Perhaps she spoke even too plainly of her husband, but the occasion admitted of no sort of apology for him; there was no deceit about her, and as little flattery. Her words had a wholesome honest air, and some of her expressions were singularly happy. When she spoke of the soul of my lord as "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God," she seemed to anticipate the very language in which the New Testament describes the union of Christ and His people, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." She had a clear conception of the "sure mercies of David," certainly in the literal, and we may hope also in the spiritual sense.

The revengeful purpose and rash vow of David were not the result of deliberate consideration; they were formed under the influence of excitement,—most unlike the solemn and prayerful manner in which the expedition at Keilah had been undertaken. God unacknowledged had left David to misdirected paths. But if we blame David, as we must, for his heedless passion, we must not less admire the readiness with which he listens to the reasonable and pious counsel of Abigail. With the ready instinct of a gracious heart he recognises the hand of God in Abigail's coming,—this mercy had a heavenly origin; and cordially praises Him for His restraining providence and restraining grace. He candidly admits that he had formed a very sinful purpose; but he frankly abandons it, accepts her offering, and sends her away in peace. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to me; and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." It is a mark of sincere and genuine godliness to be not less thankful for being kept from sinning than from being rescued from suffering.

And it was not long before David had convincing proof that it is best to leave vengeance in the hands of God. "It came to pass, about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal that he died." Having abandoned himself at his feast to the baseliest sensuality, his nervous system underwent a depression corresponding to the excitement that had accompanied the debauch. In this miserable state of collapse and weakness, the news of what had happened gave him a fright from which he never recovered. A few days of misery, and this wretched man went to his own place, there to join the great crowd of selfish and godless men who said to God, "Depart from us," and to whom God will but echo their own wish—"Depart from Me!"

When David heard of his death, his satisfaction at the manifest interposition of God on his behalf, and his thankfulness for having been enabled to conquer his impetuosity, overcame for the time every other consideration. Full of this view, he blessed God for Nabal's death, rejoicing over his untimely end more perhaps than was altogether becoming. We, at least, should have liked to see David dropping a tear over the grave of one who had lived without grace and who died without comfort. Perhaps, however, we are unable to sympathise with the earnestness of the feeling produced by God's visible vindication of him; a feeling that would be all the more fervent, because what had happened to Nabal must have been

viewed as a type of what was sure to happen to Saul. In the death of Nabal, David by faith saw the destruction of all his enemies—no wonder though his spirit was lifted up at the sight.

If it were not for a single expression, we should, without hesitation, set down the thirty-seventh Psalm as written at this period. The twenty-fifth verse seems to connect it with a later period; even then it seems quite certain that, when David wrote it, the case of Nabal (among other cases perhaps) was full in his view. The great fact in providence on which the psalm turns is the sure and speedy destruction of the wicked; and the great lesson of the psalm to God's servants is not to fret because of their prosperity, but to rest patiently on the Lord, who will cause the meek to inherit the earth. Many of the minor expressions and remarks, too, are quite in harmony with this occasion: "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily *thou shalt be fed.*" "Cease from *anger*, and forsake *wrath*; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." "The *meek* shall inherit the earth." "The mouth of the righteous speaketh *wisdom*,"—unlike Nabal, a fool by name and a fool by nature. The great duty enforced is that of waiting on the Lord; not merely because it is right in itself to do so, but because "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday."

The chapter ends with Abigail's marriage to David. We are told at the same time, that he had another wife, Ahinoam the Jezreelite, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, had been taken from him, and given to another. These statements cannot but grate upon our ear, indicating a laxity in matrimonial relations very far removed from our modern standard alike of duty and of delicacy. We cannot acquit David of a want of patience and self-restraint in these matters; undoubtedly it is a blot in his character, and it is a blot that led to very serious results. It was an element of coarseness in a nature that in most things was highly refined. David missed the true ideal of family life, the true ideal of love, the true ideal of purity. His polygamy was not indeed imputed to him as a crime; it was tolerated in him, as it had been tolerated in Jacob and in others; but its natural and indeed almost necessary effects were not obviated. In his family it bred strife, animosity, division; it bred fearful crimes among brothers and sisters; while, in his own case, his unsubdued animalism stained his conscience with the deepest sins, and rent his heart with terrible sorrows. How dangerous is even one vulnerable spot—one unsubdued lust of evil! The fable represented that the heel of Achilles, the only vulnerable part of his body, because his mother held him by it when she dipped him in the Styx, was the spot on which he received his fatal wound. It was through an unmortified lust of the flesh that nearly all David's sorrows came. How emphatic in this view the prayer of the Apostle—"I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord." And how necessary and appropriate the exhortation, "Put on the *whole* armour of God"—girdle, breastplate, sandals, helmet, sword—all; leave no part unprotected, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

Thus, then, it appears, that for all that was beautiful in David he was not a perfect character, and not without stains that seriously affected the integrity and consistency of his life. In that most

important part of a young man's duty—to obtain full command of himself, yield to no unlawful bodily indulgence, and do nothing that, directly or indirectly, can tend to lower the character or impair the delicacy of women,—David, instead of an example, is a beacon. Greatly though his early trials were blessed in most things, they were not blessed in all things. We must not, for this reason, turn from him as some do, with scorn. We are to admire and imitate the qualities that were so fine, especially in early life. Would that many of us were like him in his tenderness, his godliness, and his attachment to his people! His name is one of the embalmed names of Holy Writ,—all the more that when he did become conscious of his sin, no man ever repented more bitterly; and no man's spirit, when bruised and broken, ever sent more of the fragrance as "of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DAVID'S SECOND FLIGHT TO GATH.

I SAMUEL xxvii. ; xxviii. 1, 2; xxix.

WE are not prepared for the sad decline in the spirit of trust which is recorded in the beginning of the twenty-seventh chapter. The victory gained by David over the carnal spirit of revenge, shown so signally in his sparing the life of Saul a second time, would have led us to expect that he would never again fall under the influence of carnal fear. But there are strange ebbs and flows in the spiritual life, and sometimes a victory brings its dangers, as well as its glory. Perhaps this very conquest excited in David the spirit of self-confidence; he may have had less sense of his need of daily strength from above; and he may have fallen into the state of mind against which the Apostle warns us, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

In his collision with Nabal we saw him fail in what seemed one of his strong points—the very spirit of self-control which he had exercised so remarkably toward Saul; and now we see him fail in another of his strong points—the spirit of trust toward God. Could anything show more clearly that even the most eminent graces of the saints spring from no native fountain of goodness within them, but depend on the continuance of their vital fellowship with Him of whom the Psalmist said, "All my springs are in Thee"? (Psalm lxxxvii. 7). Carelessness and prayerlessness interrupt that fellowship; the supply of daily strength ceases to come; temptation arises, and they become weak like other men. "*Abide* in Me," said our Lord, with special emphasis on the need of permanence in the relation; and the prophet says, "They that wait on the Lord," as a habitual exercise, "shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

The most strange thing about David's new decline is, that it led him to try a device which he had tried before, and which had proved a great failure. We see him retreating before an enemy he had often conquered; retreating, too, by a path every foot of which he had traversed, and with whose bitter ending he was already familiar. Just as before, his declension begins with distrust; and just as before, dissimulation is the product of the distrustful spirit. He is brought into the most

painful dilemma, and into experience of the most grievous disaster; but God, in His infinite mercy, extricates him from the one and enables him to retrieve the other. It is affliction that brings him to his senses and drives him to God; it is the returning spirit of prayer and trust that sustains him in his difficulties, and at last brings to him, from the hand of God, a merciful deliverance from them all.

Our first point of interest is the growth and manifestation of the spirit of distrust. "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." We find it difficult to account for the sudden triumph of this very despondent feeling. It is hardly enough to say that David could have had no confidence in Saul's expressions of regret and declared purposes of amendment. That was no new feature of the case. Perhaps one element of the explanation may be, that Saul, with his three thousand men, had not only become familiar with all David's hiding-places, but had stationed troops in various parts of the district that would so hamper his movements as to hem him in as in prison. Then also there may have been some new outbreak of the malignant fury of Cush the Benjamite, and other enemies who were about Saul, rousing the king to even more earnest efforts than ever to apprehend him. There is yet another circumstance in David's situation, that has not, we think, obtained the notice it deserves, but which may have had a very material influence on his decision. David had now two wives with him, Abigail the widow of Nabal, and Ahinoam the Jezreelitess. He would naturally be desirous to provide them with the comforts of a settled home. A band of young men might put up with the risks and discomforts of a roaming life, which it would not be possible for women to bear. The rougher sex might think nothing of midnight removals, and attacks in the dark, and scampers over wild passes and rugged mountains at all hours of the day and night, and snatches of food at irregular times, and all the other experiences which David and his men had borne patiently and cheerfully in the earlier stages of their outlaw history. But for women this was unsuitable. It is true that this alone would not have led David to say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." But it would increase his sense of difficulty; it would make him feel more keenly the embarrassments of his situation; it would help to overwhelm him. And when he was thus at his wit's end, the sense of danger from Saul would become more and more serious. The tension of a mind thus pressed on every side is something terrible. Pressed and tortured by invincible difficulties, David gives way to despair—"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul."

Let us observe the manner in which this feeling grew to such strength as to give rise to a new line of conduct. It got entrance into *his heart*. It hovered about him in a somewhat loose form, before he took hold of it, and resolved to act upon it. It approached him in the same manner in which temptation approaches many a one, first presenting itself to the imagination and the feelings, trying to get hold of them, and then getting possession of the will, and turning the whole man in the desired direction. Like a skillful adversary who first attacks an outpost, apparently of little value, but when he has got it erects on it a battery by which he is able to conquer a nearer position, and thus gradually approaches, till at last the very citadel is

in his hands,—so sin at first hovers about the outposts of the soul. Often it seems at first just to play with the imagination; one fancies this thing and the other, this sensual indulgence or that act of dishonesty; and then, having become familiar with it there, one admits it to the inner chambers of the soul, and ere long the lust bringeth forth sin. The lesson not to let sin play even with the imagination, but drive it thence the moment one becomes conscious of its presence, cannot be pressed too strongly. Have you ever studied the language of the Lord's Prayer?—"Lead us not *into* temptation." You are being led into temptation whenever you are led to think, with interest and half longing, of any sinful indulgence. Wisdom demands of you that the moment you are conscious of such a feeling you resolutely exclaim, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" It is the tempter trying to establish a foothold in the outworks, meaning, when he has done so, to advance nearer and nearer to the citadel, till at last you shall find him in strong possession, and your soul entangled in the meshes of perdition.

The conclusion to which David came, under the influence of distrust, as to the best course for him to follow shows what opposite decisions may be arrived at, according to the point of view at which men take their stand. "There is nothing better for me than that I should escape speedily into the land of the Philistines." From a more correct point of view, nothing could have been worse. Had Moses thought of his prospects from the same position, he would have said, "There is nothing better for me than to remain the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and enjoy all the good things to which Providence has so remarkably called me;" but standing on the ground of faith, his conclusion was precisely the opposite. Looking abroad over the world with the eye of sense, the young man may say, "There is nothing better for me than that I should rejoice in my youth, and that my heart should cheer me in the days of my youth, and that I should walk in the ways of mine heart and in the sight of mine eyes." But the eye of faith sees ominous clouds and gathering storms in the distance, which show that there could be nothing worse.

As usual, David's error was connected with the omission of prayer. We find no clause in this chapter, "bring hither the ephod." He asked no counsel of God; he did not even sit down to deliberate calmly on the matter. The impulse to which he yielded required him to decide at once. The word "speedily" indicates the presence of panic, the action of a tumultuous force on his mind, inducing him to act as promptly as one does in raising one's arm to ward off a threatened blow. Possibly he had the feeling that, if God's mind were consulted, it would be contrary to his desire, and on that ground, like too many persons, he may have shrunk from honest prayer. How different from the spirit of the psalm—"Show me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths; lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." Dost thou imagine, David, that the Lord's arm is shortened that it cannot save, and His ear heavy that it cannot hear? Would not He who delivered you in six troubles cause that in seven no evil should touch thee? Has he not promised that thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue, neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh? Dost thou not know that thy seed shall be great and thine offspring as the grass of the earth? Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full

age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.

So "David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him, unto Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath." It is thought by some that this was a different king from the former, the name Achish like the name Pharaoh being used by all the kings. At first the arrangement seemed to succeed. Achish appears to have received him kindly. "David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives." The emphasis laid on the household and the wives shows how difficult it had been to provide for them before. And Saul, at last, gave up the chase, and sought for him no more. Of course, in giving him a friendly reception, Achish must have had a view to his own interest. He would calculate on making use of him in his battles with Saul, and very probably give an incredulous smile if he heard anything of the scruples he had shown to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed.

Availing himself of the favourable impression made on Achish, David now begs to have a country town allotted to him as his residence, so as to avoid what appeared the unseemliness of his dwelling in the royal city with him. There was much common sense in the demand, and Achish could not but feel it. Gath was but a little place, and Achish, if he was but lord of Gath, was not a very powerful king. The presence in such a place of a foreign prince, with a retinue of soldiers six hundred strong, was hardly becoming. Possibly Achish's own body guard did not come up in number and in prowess to the troop of David. The request for a separate residence was therefore granted readily, and Ziklag was assigned to David. It lay near the southern border of the Philistines, close to the southern desert. At Ziklag he was away from the eye of the lords of the Philistines that had always viewed him with such jealousy; he was far away from the still greater jealousy of Saul; and with Geshurites, and Gezrites, and Amalekites in his neighbourhood, the natural enemies of his country, he had opportunities of using his troop so as at once to improve their discipline and promote the welfare of his native land.

There was another favourable occurrence in David's experience at this time. From a parallel passage (1 Chron. xii.) we learn that during his residence among the Philistines he was constantly receiving important accessions to his troop. One set of men who came to him, Benjamites, of the tribe of Saul, were remarkably skilful in the use of the bow and the sling, able to use either right hand or left with equal ease. The men that came to him were not from one tribe only, but from many. A very important section were from Benjamin and Judah. At first David seemed to have some suspicion of their sincerity. Going out to meet them he said to them, "If ye be come peaceably to me to help me, my heart shall be knit unto you; but if ye be come to betray me to my enemies, seeing there is no wrong in my hands, the God of our fathers look thereon and rebuke it." The answer was given by Amasai, in the spirit and rhythmical language of prophecy: "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse; peace, peace be unto thee; and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee." Thus he was continually receiving evidence of the favour in which he was held by his people, and his band was continually increasing, "until it was a great host,

like the host of God." It seemed, up to this point, as if Providence had favoured his removal to the land of the Philistines, and brought to him the security and the prosperity which he could not find in the land of Judah. But it was ill-gained security and only mock-prosperity; the day of his troubles drew on.

The use which, as we have seen, he made of his troop was to invade the Geshurites, the Gezrites, and the Amalekites. In taking this step David had a sinister purpose. It would not have been so agreeable to the Philistines to learn that the arms of David had been turned against these tribes as against his own countrymen. When therefore he was asked by Achish where he had gone that day, he returned an answer fitted, and indeed intended, to deceive. Without saying in words, "I have been fighting against my own people in the south of Judah," he led Achish to believe that he had, and he was pleased when his words were taken in that sense. Achish, we are told, believed David, believed that he had been in arms against his countrymen. "He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever." Could there have been a more lamentable spectacle? one of the noblest of men stained by the meanness of a false insinuation; David, the anointed of the God of Israel, ranged with the common herd of liars!

Nor was this the only error into which his crooked policy now led him. To cover his deceitful course he had recourse to an act of terrible carnage. It was deemed by him important that no one should be able to carry to Achish a faithful report of what he had been doing. To prevent this he made a complete massacre, put to death every man, woman, child of the Amalekites and other tribes whom he now attacked. Such massacres were indeed quite common in Eastern warfare. The Bulgarian and other massacres of which we have heard in our own day show that even yet, after an interval of nearly three thousand years, they are not foreign to the practice of Eastern nations. In point of fact, they were not thought more of, or worse of, than any of the other incidents of war. War was held to bind up into one bundle the whole lives and property of the enemy, and give to the conqueror supreme control over it. To destroy the whole was just the same in principle as to destroy a part. If the destruction of the whole was necessary in order to carry out the objects of the campaign, it was not more wicked to perpetrate such destruction than to destroy a part.

True, according to our modern view, there is something mean in falling on helpless, defenceless women and children, and slaughtering them in cold blood. And yet our modern ideas allow the bombardment or the besieging of great cities, and the bringing of the more slow but terrible process of starvation to bear against women and children and all, in order to compel a surrender. Much though modern civilisation has done to lessen the horrors of war, if we approve of all its methods we cannot afford to hold up our hands in horror at those which were judged allowable in the days of David. Yet surely, you may say, we might have expected better things of David. We might have expected him to break away from the common sentiment, and to show more humanity. But this would not have been reasonable. For it is very seldom that the individual conscience, even in the case of the best men, becomes sensible at once of the vices of its age. How many good men in this

country, in the early part of this century, were zealous defenders of slavery, and in America down to a much later time! There is nothing more needful for us in studying history, even Old Testament history, than to remember that very remarkable individual excellence may be found in connection with a great amount of the vices of the age. We cannot attempt to show that David was not guilty of a horrible carnage in his treatment of the Amalekites. All we can say is, he shared in the belief of the time that such carnage was a lawful incident of war. We cannot but feel that in the whole circumstances it left a stain upon his character; and yet he may have engaged in it without any consciousness of barbarity, without any idea that the day would come when his friends would blush for the deed.

The Philistines were now preparing a new campaign under Achish against Saul and his kingdom, and Achish determined that David should go with him; further, that he should go in the capacity of "keeper of his head," or captain of his body guard, and that this should not be a temporary arrangement, but permanent—"for ever." It is difficult for us to conceive the depth of the embarrassment into which this intimation must have plunged David. We must bear in mind how scrupulous and sensitive his conscience was as raising his hand against the Lord's anointed; and we must take into account the horror he must have felt at the thought of rushing in deadly array against his own dear countrymen, with most of whom he had had no quarrel, and who had never done him any harm. When Achish made him head of his body guard he paid a great compliment to his fidelity and bravery; but in proportion as the post was honourable it was disagreeable and embarrassing. For David and his men would have to fight close to Achish, under his very eye; and any symptoms of holding back from the fray—any inclination to be off, or to spare the foe, which natural feeling might have dictated in the hour of battle, must be resisted in presence of the king. Perhaps David reckoned that if the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines he might be able to make better terms for them—might even be of use to Saul himself, and thus render such services as would atone for his hostile attitude. But this was a wretched consolation. David was entangled so that he could neither advance nor retreat. Before him was GOD, closing His path in front; behind him was MAN, closing it in rear; and we may well believe he would have willingly given all he possessed if only his feet could have been clear and his conscience upright as before.

Still, he does not appear to have returned to a candid frame of mind, but rather to have continued the dissimulation. He had gone with Achish as far as the battle-field, when it pleased God, in great mercy, to extricate him from his difficulty by using the jealousy of the lords of the Philistines as the means of his dismissal from the active service of King Achish. But instead of gladly retiring when he received intimation that his services were dispensed with, we find him (chap. xxix. 8) remonstrating with Achish, speaking as if it were a disappointment not to be allowed to go with him, and as if he thirsted for an opportunity of chastising his countrymen. It is sad to find him continuing in this strain. We are told that the time during which he abode in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months. It was to all appearance a time of spiritual declension; and as distrust ruled his heart, so dissimula-

tion ruled his conduct. It could hardly have been other than a time of merely formal prayers and comfortless spiritual experience. If he would but have allowed himself to believe it, he was far happier in the cave of Adullam or the wilderness of Engedi, when the candle of the Lord shone upon his head, than he was afterwards amid the splendour of the palace of Achish, or the princely independence of Ziklag.

The only bright spot in this transaction was the very cordial testimony borne by Achish to the faultless way in which David had uniformly served him. It is seldom indeed that such language as Achish employed can be used of any servant—"I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God." Achish must have been struck with the utter absence of treachery and of all self-seeking in David. David had shown that singular, unblemished trustworthiness that earned such golden opinions for Joseph in the house of Potiphar and from the keeper of the prison. In this respect he had kept his light shining before men with a clear, unclouded lustre. Even amid his spiritual backsliding and sad distrust of God, he had never stained his hands with greed or theft, he had in all these respects kept himself unspotted of the world.

The chapter of David's history which we have now been pursuing is a very painful one, but the circumstances in which he was placed were extremely difficult and trying. It is impossible to justify the course he took. By-and-bye we shall see how God chastised him for it, and by chastising him brought him to Himself. But to those who are disposed to be very severe on him we might well say, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at him. Who among you have not been induced at times to try carnal and unworthy expedients for extricating yourselves from difficulty? Who, in days of boyhood or girlhood, never told a falsehood to cover a fault? Who of you have been uniformly accustomed to carry to God every difficulty and trial, with the honest, immovable determination to do simply and solely what might seem to be agreeable to God's will? Have we not all cause to mourn over conduct that has dishonoured God and distressed our consciences? May He give all of us light to see wherein we have come short in the past, or wherein we are coming short in the present. And from the bottom of our hearts may we be taught to raise our prayer, From all the craft and cunning of Satan; from all the devices of the carnal mind; from all that blinds us to the pure and perfect will of God—good Lord, deliver us.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SAUL AT ENDOR.

I SAMUEL xxviii. 3-25.

FOR a considerable time Saul had been drifting along like a crippled vessel at sea, a melancholy example of a man forsaken of God. But as his decisive encounter with the Philistines drew on, the state of helplessness to which he had been reduced became more apparent than ever. He had sagacity enough to perceive that the expedition which the Philistines were now leading against him was the most formidable that had ever taken place in his day. It was no ordinary battle that was to be fought; it was one that would decide the

fate of the country. The magnitude of the expedition on his part is apparent from an expression in the fourth verse—"Saul gathered all Israel together." The place of encounter was not any of the old battlefields with the Philistines. Usually the engagements had taken place in some of the valleys that ran down from the territories of Dan, or Benjamin, or Judah into the Philistine plain, or on the heights above these. But such places were comparatively contracted, and did not afford scope for great bodies of troops. This time the Philistines chose a wider and more commanding battle-field. Advancing northwards along their own maritime plain, and beyond it along the plain of Sharon, they turned eastwards into the great plain of Esdraelon or Jezreel, and occupied the northern side of the plain. The troops of Saul were encamped on the southern side, occupying the northern slope of Mount Gilboa. There the two armies faced each other, the wide plain stretching between.

It was a painful moment for Saul when he got his first view of the Philistine host, for the sight of it filled him with consternation. It would appear to have surpassed that of Israel very greatly in numbers, in resources, as it certainly did in its confident spirit. Yet, if Saul had been a man of faith, none of these things would have moved him. Was it not in that very neighbourhood that Barak, with his hasty levies, had inflicted a signal defeat on the Canaanites? And was it not in that very plain that the hosts of Midian lay encamped in the days of Gideon, when the barley cake rolling into their camp overturned and terrified the host, and a complete discomfiture followed? Why should not the Lord work as great a deliverance now? If God was with them, He was more than all that could be against them. Might not this be another of the days foretold by Moses, when one should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?

Yes, if God was with them. All turned upon that *if*. And Saul felt that God was not with them, and that they could not count on any such deliverance as, in better times, had been vouchsafed to their fathers.

And why, O Saul, when you felt thus, did you not humble yourself before God, confess all your sins, and implore Him to show you mercy? Why did you not cry "Return, O Lord, how long? And let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants"? Would you have found God inexorable? Would His ear have been heavy that it could not hear? Don't you remember how Moses said that when Israel, in sore bondage, should cry humbly to God, the Lord would hear his cry, and have mercy on him? Why, O Saul, do you not fall in the dust before Him?

Somehow Saul felt that he could not. Among other effects of sin and rebellion, one of the worst is a stiffening of the soul, making it hard and rigid, so that it cannot bend, it cannot melt, it cannot change its course. The long career of wilfulness that Saul had followed had produced in him this stiffening effect; his spirit was hardened in its own ways, and incapable of all exercise of contrition or humiliation, or anything essentially different from the course he had been following. There are times in the life of a deeply afflicted woman when the best thing she could do would be to weep, but that is just the thing she cannot do. There are times when the best thing an inveterate sinner could do would be to fling himself before God and sob for mercy, but fling himself before

God and sob he cannot. Saul was incapable of that exercise of soul which would have saved him and his people. Most terrible effect of cherished sin! It dries up the fountains of contrition and they will not flow. It stiffens the knees and they will not bend. It paralyses the voice and it will not cry. It blinds the eyes and they see not the Saviour. It closes the ears and the voice of mercy is unheard. It drives the distressed one to wells without water, to refuges of lies, to trees twice dead, to physicians who have no medicines, to gods who have no salvation; all he feels is that his case is desperate, and yet somewhere or other he must have help!

Saul did not neglect the outward means by which in other days God had been accustomed to direct the nation. He tried every authorised way he could think of for getting guidance from above. He believed in a heavenly power, and he asked its guidance and its help. But God took no notice of him. He answered him neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Men, though in heart rebellious against God's will, will go through a great deal of mechanical service in the hope of securing His favour. It is not their muscles that get stiffened, but their souls. What a strange conception they must have of God when they fancy that mere external services will please Him! How little Saul knew of God when he supposed that, overlooking all the rebellion of his heart, God would respond to a mechanical effort or efforts to communicate with Him! Don't you know, O Saul, that your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear? Nothing will have the least effect on Him till you own your sin. "I will go and return unto My place, until they acknowledge their offence and seek my face." And this is just what you will not, cannot do! How infinitely precious would one tear of genuine repentance have been in that dark hour! It would have saved thousands of the Israelites from a bloody death; it would have saved the nation from defeat and humiliation; it would have removed the obstacle to fellowship with the Hope of Israel, who would have stood true to His ancient character,—“the Saviour thereof in time of trouble.”

But Saul's day of grace was over, and accordingly we find him driven to the most humbling expedient to which a man can stoop—seeking counsel from a quarter against which, in his more prosperous days, he had directed his special energies, as a superstitious, demoralising agency. He had been most zealous in exterminating a class of persons, abounding in Eastern countries, who pretend to know the secrets of the future, and to have access to the inhabitants of the unseen world. Little could he have dreamt in those days of fiery zeal that a time would come when he would rejoice to learn that one poor wretch had escaped the vigilance of his officers, and still carried on, or pretended to carry on, a nefarious traffic with the realms of the departed! It shows how little man is acquainted with the inner feelings of other men—how little he knows even himself. Doubtless he thought, in the days of exterminating zeal, that it was sheer folly and drivelling superstition that encouraged these sorcerers, and that by clearing them away he would be ridding the land of a mass of rubbish that could be of service to no one. He did not consider that there are times of wretchedness and despair when the soul that knows not God will seek counsel even of men with a familiar

spirit—he little dreamt that such would be the case with himself. “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?” he would have asked with great indignation in those early days, if it had been insinuated that he would ever be tempted to resort to such counsellors. “What better could I ever be of anything they could tell me? Surely it would be wiser to meet any conceivable danger full in the face than to seek after such counsel as they could give!” He did not consider that when man’s spirit is overwhelmed within him, and his craving for help is like the passion of a madman, he will clutch like a drowning man at a straw, he will even resort to a woman with a familiar spirit, if, peradventure, some hint can be got to extricate him from his misery.

But to this complexion it came at last. With dreadful sacrifice of self-respect, Saul had to ask his advisers to seek out for him a woman of this description. They were able to tell him of such a woman residing at Endor, about ten miles from where they were. With two attendants he set out after nightfall, disguised, and found her. Naturally, she was afraid to do anything in the way of business in the face of such measures as the king had taken against all of her craft, nor would she stir until she had got a solemn promise that she would not be molested in any way. Then, when all was ready, she asked whom she should call up. “Call up Samuel,” said Saul. To the great astonishment of the woman herself, she sees Samuel rising up. A shriek from her indicates that she is as much astonished and for the moment frightened as anyone can be. Evidently she did not expect such an apparition. The effect was much too great for the cause. She sees that in this apparition a power is concerned much beyond what she can wield. Instinctively she apprehends that the only man of importance enough to receive such a supernatural visit must be the head of the nation. “Why did you deceive me?” she said, “for thou art Saul.” “Never mind that,” is virtually Saul’s reply; “but tell me what you have seen.” The Revised Version gives her answer better than the older one—“I saw a god arise out of the earth.” “What is his appearance?” earnestly asks Saul. “He is an old man, and he is covered with a mantle.” And Saul sees that it is really Samuel.

But what was it that really happened, and how did it come about? That the woman was able, even if she really had the aid of evil spirits, to bring Samuel into Saul’s presence we cannot believe. Nor could she believe it herself. If Samuel really appeared—and the narrative assumes that he did—it must have been by a direct miracle, God supernaturally clothing his spirit in something like its old form, and bringing him back to earth to speak to Saul. In judgment it seemed good to God to let Saul have his desire, and to give him a real interview with Samuel. “He gave him his request, but sent leanness to his soul.” So far from having his fears allayed and his burden removed, Saul was made to see from Samuel’s communication that there was nothing but ruin before him; and he must have gone back to the painful duty of the morrow staggering under a load heavier than before.

Samuel begins the conversation; and he does so by reproaching Saul for having disquieted him, and brought him back from his peaceful home above to mingle again in the strife and turmoil of human things. Nothing can exceed the haggard and weird desolation of Saul’s answer. “I am

sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.” Was ever a king in such a plight? Who would have thought, when Samuel and Saul first came together, and Saul listened so respectfully to the prophet counselling him concerning the kingdom, that their last meeting should be like this? In all Saul’s statement there is no word that carries such a load of meaning and of despair as this—“God is departed from me.” It is the token of universal confusion and calamity. And Saul felt it, and as no one understood these things like Samuel, he had sought Samuel to counsel his wayward son, to tell him what to do.

It is not every sinner that makes the discovery in this life what awful results follow when God is departed from him. But if the discovery does not dawn on one in this life, it will come on him with overwhelming force in the life to come. Men little think what they are preparing for themselves when they say to God, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.” The service of God is irksome; the restraints of God’s law are distressing; they like a free life, freedom to please themselves. And so they part company with God. The form of Divine service may be kept up or it may not: but God is not their God, and God’s will is not their rule. They have left God’s ways, they have followed their own. And when conscience has sometimes given them a twinge, when God has reminded them by the silent monitor of His claims, their answer has been, Let us alone, what have we to do with Thee? Depart from us, leave us in peace. Ah! how little have you considered that the most awful thing that could happen to you is just for God to depart from you! If we could conceive the earth a sensitive being, and somehow to get a dislike for the sun, and to pray the sun to depart from her, how awful would be the fulfilment! Losing all the genial influences that brighten her surface, that cover her face with beauty and enrich her soil with abundance, all the foul and slimy creatures of darkness would creep out, all the noxious influences of dissolution and death would riot in their terrible freedom! And is not this but a poor faint picture of man forsaken by God! O sinner, if ever thy wish should be fulfilled, how wilt thou curse the day in which thou didst utter it! When vile lusts rise to uncontrollable authority—when those whom you love turn hopelessly wicked, when you find yourselves joyless, helpless, hopeless, when you try to repent and cannot repent, when you try to pray and cannot pray, when you try to be pure and cannot be pure—what a terrible calamity you will then feel it that God is departed from you! Trifle not, O man, with thy relation to God; and let not thy history be such that it shall have to be written in the words of the prophet—“But they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy and He fought against them” (Isaiah lxiii. 10).

There was no comfort for Saul in Samuel’s reply, but much the contrary. Why should he have asked advice of the Lord’s servant, when he owned that he was forsaken by the Lord Himself? What could the servant do for him if the Master was become his enemy? What can a priest or a minister do for any man if God has turned His face away from him? Can he make God deny

Himself, and become favourable to one who has scorned or sinned away His Holy Spirit? Saul was experiencing no more than he had just reason to expect since that fatal day when he had first deliberately set up his own will above God's will in the affair of Amalek. In the course which he began then, he had persistently continued, and God was now just executing the threatenings which Saul had braved. And next day would witness the last of his sad history. The Lord would deliver Israel into the hands of the Philistines; in the collision of the armies he and his sons would be slain; disaster to his arms, death to himself, and destruction to his dynasty would all come together on that miserable day.

It is no wonder that Saul was utterly prostrated: "He fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel; and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night." He could not have expected that the interview with Samuel would be a pleasant one, but he never imagined that it would announce such awful calamities. Have you not known sometimes the terrible sensation when you had heard there was something wrong with some of your friends, and on going to inquire, discovered that the calamity was infinitely worse than you had ever dreamt of? A momentary paralysis comes over one; you are stunned and made helpless by the tidings. We may even be tempted to think that surely Samuel was too hard on Saul; might he not have tempered his awful message by some qualifying word of hope and mercy? The answer is, Samuel spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We are all prone to the thought that when evil men get their doom there will surely be something to modify or mitigate its rigour. Samuel's words to Saul indicate no such relaxation. Moral law will vindicate itself as natural law vindicates itself—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

The last incident in the chapter is interesting and pleasing. We might have thought that such a calling as that followed by the witch of Endor would have destroyed all the humanities in her nature; that she would have looked on the king's distress with a cold, stoical eye, and that her only concern would be to obtain for herself a fee adapted to the occasion. But she shows much of the woman left in her after all. When she rehearses her service, and the peril of her life at which it has been rendered, to prepare the way for her asking a favour, the favour which she does ask is not for herself at all,—it is on Saul's own behalf, that she might be permitted the honour of preparing for him a meal. Saul's mind is too much occupied and too much agitated to care for anything of the kind. Still prostrate on the ground he says, "I will not eat." Men overwhelmed by calamity hate to eat, they are too excited to experience hunger. It was only when his servants, thinking how much he had gone through already, how much more he had to go through on the morrow, and how utterly unfit his exhausted body was for the strain—it was then only that he yielded to the request of the woman. And the woman showed that for all her sinister business, she was equal to the occasion of entertaining a king. The "fat calf in the house" corresponded to the "fatted calf" in the parable of the prodigal son. It was not the custom even in families of the richer class to eat meat at ordinary meals; it was reserved for feasts and extraordi-

nary occasions; and in order to be ready for any emergency a calf was kept close to the house, whose flesh, from the delicate way in which it was reared and fed, was tender enough to be served even at so hasty a meal. With cakes of unleavened bread, this dish could be presented very rapidly, and, unlike the hasty meals which are common among us, was really a more substantial and nourishing entertainment than ordinary. It is touching to mark these traces of womanly feeling in this unhappy being, reminding us of the redeeming features of Rahab the harlot. What effect the whole transaction had on the woman we are not told, and it would be vain to conjecture.

And now Saul retraces his dark and dreary way southward to the heights of Gilboa. We can hardly exaggerate his miserable condition. He had much to think of, and he would have needed a clear, unclouded mind. We can think of him only as miserably distracted, and unable to let his mind settle on anything. It would have needed his utmost resources to arrange for the battle of to-morrow, a battle in which he knew that defeat was coming, but which he might endeavour, nevertheless, to make as little disastrous as possible. Moreover, he knew it was to be the last day of his life, and troubled thoughts could not but steal in on him as to what should happen when he stood before God. No doubt, too, there were many sad thoughts about his sons, who were to be involved in the same fate as himself. Was there no way of saving any of them? The arrangement of his temporal effects, too, would claim attention, for, restless and excitable as he had been, it was not likely that his private affairs would be in very good order. Anon his thoughts might wander back to his first interview with Samuel, and bitter remorse would send its pang through him as he thought how differently he might have left the kingdom if he had faithfully followed the counsels of the prophet. Possibly amid all these gloomy thoughts one thought of a brighter order might steal into his mind—how thoroughly David, who would come to the throne after him, would retrieve his errors and restore prosperity, and make the kingdom what it had never been under him, a model kingdom, worthy to shadow forth the glories of Messiah's coming reign. Poor distracted man, he was little fitted either to fight a battle with the Philistines or to encounter the last enemy on his own account. What a lesson to be prepared beforehand! On a deathbed, especially a sudden one, distractions can hardly fail to visit us—this thing and the other thing needing to be arranged and thought of. Happy they who at such a moment can say, "I am now ready to depart." "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

CHAPTER XXXV.

DAVID AT ZIKLAG.

I SAMUEL xxx.

AFTER David had received from King Achish the appointment of captain of his body guard, he had with his troops accompanied the Philistine army, passing along the maritime plain to the very end of their journey—to the spot selected for battle, close to "the fountain which is in Jezreel." It seems to have been only after the whole Philistine host were ranged in battle array that the

presence of David and his men, who remained in the rear to protect the king, arrested the attention of the lords of the Philistines, and on their remonstrance they were sent away. It is probable that David's return to Ziklag, and the expedition in which he had to engage to recover his wives and his property, took place at or about the very time when Saul made his journey to Endor, and when the fatal battle of Gilboa was raging. We have seen that though David never, like Saul, threw off the authority of God, he had been following ways of his own, ways of deceit and unfaithfulness. He too had been exposing himself to the displeasure of God, and on him, as on Saul, some retribution behoved to fall. But in the two cases we see the difference between judgment and chastisement. In the case of Saul it was judgment that came down; his life and his career were terminated avowedly as the punishment of his offence. In the case of David the rod was lifted to correct, not to destroy; to bring him back, not to drive him for ever away; to fit him for service, not to cut him asunder, or appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There is every reason to believe that the awful disaster that befell David on his return to Ziklag was the means of restoring him to a trustful and truthful frame.

It appears from the chapter now before us that, in the absence of David and his troop, severe reprisals had been taken by the Amalekites for the defeat and utter destruction which they had lately inflicted on a portion of their tribe. We must remember that the Amalekites were a widely dispersed people, consisting of many tribes, each living separately from the rest, but so related that in any emergency they would readily come to one another's help. News of the extermination of the tribes whom David had attacked, and whom he had utterly destroyed lest any of them should bring word to Achish of his real employment, had been brought to their neighbours; and these neighbours determined to take revenge for the slaughter of their kinsmen. The opportunity of David's absence was taken for invading Ziklag, for which purpose a large and well-equipped expedition had been got together; and as they met with no opposition, they carried everything before them. Happily, however, as they found no enemies they did not draw the sword; they counted it better policy to carry off all that could be transported, so as to make use of the goods, and sell the women and children into slavery, and as they had a great multitude of beasts of burden with them (ver. 17) there could be no difficulty in carrying out this plan. It seems very strange that David should have left Ziklag apparently without the protection of a single soldier; but what seems to us folly had all the effect of consummate wisdom in the end; the passions of the Amalekites were not excited by opposition or by bloodshed; their destructive propensities were satisfied with destroying the town of Ziklag, and every person and thing that could be removed was carried away unhurt. But for days to come David could not know that their expedition had been conducted in this unusually peaceful way; his imagination and his fears would picture far darker scenes.

It must have been an awful moment to David—hardly less so than to Saul when he saw the host of the Philistines near Jezreel—to reach what had been recently so peaceful a home and find it a mass of smoking ruins. If he had been disposed to congratulate himself on the success of the policy

which had dictated his escape from the land of Judah, and his settling at Ziklag under protection of King Achish, how in one moment must the rottenness of the whole plan have flashed upon him, and how awed must he have been at the proof now so clearly afforded that the whole arrangement had been frowned on by the God of heaven! What an agony of suspense and distress he must have been in till more definite news could be obtained; and what a burst of despair must have been heard through the camp when it became known to his followers that the worst that could be conceived had happened—that their houses were all destroyed, their property seized, and their wives and children carried off, to be disgraced, or sold, or butchered, as might suit the fancy of their masters! And then, that remorseless massacre that they had lately inflicted on the kinsmen of their invaders, how likely it would be to exasperate their passions against them! What mercy would they show whose neighbours had received no mercy? What a dreadful fate would these helpless women and children be now experiencing!

It was probably one of the bitterest of the many bitter hours that David ever spent. First there was the natural feeling of disappointment, after a long and weary march, when the comforts of home had been so eagerly looked forward to, and each man seemed already in the embrace of his family, to find home utterly obliterated, and its place marked by blackened ruins. Then there was the far more intense pang to every affectionate heart, caused by the carrying off of the members of their families; this, it appears, was the predominant feeling of the camp: "the soul of the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters." And somehow David was the person blamed, partly perhaps through that hasty but unjust feeling that blames the leader of an expedition for all the mishaps attending it, and partly also, it may be, because Ziklag had been left utterly undefended. "What business had he to march us all at the heels of these uncircumcised Philistines, as if we ought to make common cause with them only to march us back again just as we came, to gain nothing there and to lose everything here!" To all this was added a further element of excitement: it was not merely calamities known and seen that worked in the minds of the people; the gloom of dreaded but uncertain horrors helped to excite them still more. Imagination would quickly supply the place of evidence in picturing the situation of their wives and children. The feelings of the troops were so fearfully excited against David that they spoke of stoning him. The very men that had lately approached him with the beautiful salutation, "Peace, peace be to thee, and peace be to thine helpers, for thy God helpeth thee," now spoke of stoning him. How like the spirit and the conduct of their descendants a thousand years later, shouting at one time, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and but a few days after, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." The state of David's feelings must have been all the more terrible for the uneasy conscience he had in the matter, for he had too much cause to feel that the dissembling policy which he had been pursuing had caused another massacre, more frightful than that of the priests after his visit to Nob.

It is probable that at this awful moment the mind of David was visited by a blessed influence from above. The wail of woe that spread through his camp, and the dismal ruins that covered the site of his recent home, seem to have spoken to

him in that tone of rebuke which the words of the prophet afterwards conveyed, "Thou art the man!" Under great excitement the mind works with great rapidity, and passes almost with the speed of lightning from one mood to another. It is quite possible that under the same electric shock, as we may call it, that brought David to a sense of his sin he was guided back to his former confidence in the mercy and grace of his covenant God. In one instant, we may believe, the miserable hollowness of all those carnal devices in which he had been trusting would flash upon his mind, and God—his own loving Father and covenant God—would appear waiting to be gracious and longing for his return. And now the prodigal son is in his Father's arms, weeping, sobbing, confessing, but at the same time feeling the luxury of forgiveness, rejoicing, trusting and delighting in His protection and blessing.

It may indeed be objected that we are proceeding too much on mere imagination in supposing that David's return to a condition of holy trust in God was effected in this rapid way. The view may be wrong, and we do not insist on it. What we found on is the very short interval between his last act of dissimulation in professing to desire to accompany Achish to battle, and his manifest restoration to the spirit of trust, evinced in the words, applied to him when the people spoke of stoning him, "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (ver. 6). These words show that he has got back to the true track at last, and from that moment prosperity returns. What a blessed thing it was for him that in that hour of utmost need he was able to derive strength from the thought of God,—able to think of the Most High as watching him with interest, and still ready to deliver him!

It was a somewhat similar incident, though not preceded by any such previous backsliding—a similar manifestation of the magical power of trust—that took place in the life of a more modern David, one who in serving God and doing good to man had to encounter a life of wandering, privation, and danger seldom surpassed—the African missionary and explorer, David Livingstone. In the course of his great journey from St. Paul de Loanda on the west coast of Africa to Quilimane on the east, he had to encounter many an angry and greedy tribe, whom he was too poor to be able to pacify by the ordinary method of valuable presents. On one occasion, in the fork at the confluence of the river Loangwa and the river Zambezi, he found one of those hostile tribes. It was necessary for him to have canoes to cross—they would lend him only one. In other respects they showed an attitude of hostility, and the appearances all pointed to a furious attack the following day. Livingstone was troubled at the prospect,—not that he was afraid to die, but because it seemed as if all his discoveries in Africa would be lost, and his sanguine hopes for planning commerce and Christianity among its benighted and teeming tribes knocked on the head. But he remembered the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Go ye therefore into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." On this promise he rested, and steadied his fluttering heart. "It is the word of a gentleman," he said, "the word of one of the most perfect honour. I will not try, as I once thought, to escape by night, but I will wait till to-morrow, and leave before them all. Should such a man as I be afraid? I

will take my observations for longitude to-night, though it should be my last. My mind is now quite at rest, thank God." He waited as he had said, and next morning, though the arrangements of the natives still betokened battle, he and his men were allowed to cross the river in successive detachments, without molestation, he himself waiting to the last, and not a hair of their heads being hurt. It was a fine instance of a believing Christian strengthening himself in his God. When faith is genuine, and the habit of exercising it is active, it can remove mountains.

The first result of the restored feeling of trust in David was his giving honour to God's appointed ordinance by asking counsel of Him, through Abiathar the priest, as to the course he should follow. It is the first time we read of him doing so since he left his own country. At first one wonders how he could have discontinued so precious a means of ascertaining the will of God and the path of duty. But the truth is, when a man is left to himself he cares for no advice or direction but his own inclination. He is not desirous to be led; he wishes only to go comfortably. Indifference to God's guidance explains much neglect of prayer.

David has now made his application, and he has got a clear and decided answer. He can feel now that he is treading on solid ground. How much happier he must have been than when driving hither and thither, scheming and dissembling, and floundering from one device of carnal wisdom to another! As for his people, he can think of them now with far more tranquillity; have they not been all along in God's keeping, and is it not true that He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps?

We need not dwell at great length on the incidents that immediately followed. No events could have fallen out more favourably. One-third of his troops was indeed so exhausted that they had to be left at the brook Besor. With the other four hundred he set out in search of the foe. The special providence of God, so clearly and frequently displayed on this occasion, provided a guide for David in the person of an Egyptian slave, who, having fallen sick, had been abandoned by his master, and had been three days and nights without meat or drink. Careful treatment having resuscitated this young man, and a solemn assurance having been given him that he would neither be killed nor given back to his master (the latter alternative seems to have been as terrible as the other), he conducts them without loss of time to the camp of the Amalekites. Each day's journey brought them nearer and nearer to the great wilderness where, some five or six hundred years before, their fathers had encountered Amalek at Rephidim, and had gained a great victory over them, after not a few fluctuations, through the uplifted arms of Moses, the token of reliance on the strength of God. Through the same good hand on David, the Amalekites, surprised in the midst of a time of careless and uproarious festivity, were completely routed, and all but destroyed. Every article they had stolen, and every woman and child they had carried off, were recovered unhurt. Such a deliverance was beyond expectation. When the Lord turned again the captivity of Ziklag, they were like men that dream.

The happy change of circumstances was signalled by David by two memorable acts, the one an act of justice, the other an act of generosity. The act of justice was his interfering to repress the selfishness of the part of his troops who were

engaged in the fight with Amalek, some of whom wished to exclude the disabled portion, who had to remain at the brook Besor, from sharing the spoil. The objectors are called "the wicked men and the men of Belial." It is a significant circumstance that David had been unable to inspire all his followers with his own spirit—that even at the end of his residence in Ziklag there were wicked men and men of Belial among them. No doubt these were the very men that had been loudest in their complaints against David, and had spoken of stoning him when they came to know of the calamity at Ziklag. Complaining men are generally selfish men. They objected to David's proposal to share the spoil with the whole body of his followers. Their proposal was especially displeasing to David at a time when God had given them such tokens of undeserved goodness. It was of the same sort as the act of the unforgiving servant in the parable, who, though forgiven his ten thousand talents, came down with unmitigated ferocity on the fellow-servant that owed him an hundred pence.

The act of generosity was his distribution over the cities in the neighbourhood of the spoil which he had taken from the Amalekites. If he had been of a selfish nature he might have kept it all for himself and his people. But it was "the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." It was David's desire to recognise God in connection with this spoil, both to show that he had not made his onslaught on the Amalekites for personal ends, and to acknowledge, in royal style, the goodness which God had shown him. That it was an act of policy as well as a recognition of God may be readily acknowledged. Undoubtedly David was desirous to gain the favourable regard of his neighbours, as a help toward his recognition when the throne of Israel should become empty. But we may surely admit this, and yet recognise in his actions on this occasion the generosity as well as the godliness of his nature. He was one of those men to whom it is more blessed to give than to receive, and who are never so happy themselves as when they are making others happy. The Bethel mentioned in ver. 27 as first among the places benefited can hardly be the place ordinarily known by that name, which was far distant from Ziklag, but some other Bethel much nearer the southern border of the land. The most northerly of the places specified of whose situation we are assured was Hebron, itself well to the south of Judah, and soon to become the capital where David reigned. The large number of places that shared his bounty was a proof of the royal liberality with which it was spread abroad.

And in this bounty, this royal profusion of gifts, we may surely recognise a fit type of "great David's greater Son." How clearly it appeared from the very first that the spirit of Jesus Christ exemplified His own maxim which we have just quoted, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Once only, and that in His infancy, when the wise men laid at His feet their myrrh, frankincense, and gold, do we read of anything like a lavish contribution of the gifts of earth being given to Him. But follow Him through the whole course of His earthly life and ministry, and see how just was the image of Malachi that compared Him to the sun—"the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings." What a gloriously diffusive nature He had, dropping gifts of fabulous price in every direction without money and without price! "Jesus went about in all Galilee" (it

was now the turn of the north to enjoy the benefit), "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of diseases and all manner of sickness among the people." Listen to the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount; what a dropping of honey as from the honeycomb we have in those beatitudes, which so wonderfully commend the precious virtues to which they are attached! Follow Jesus through any part of His earthly career, and you find the same spirit of royal liberality. Stand by Him even in the last hour of His mortal life, and count His deeds of kindness. See how He heals the ear of Malchus, though He healed no wounds of His own. Listen to Him deprecating the tears of the weeping women, and turning their attention to evils among themselves that had more need to be wept for. Hear the tender tones of His prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Observe the gracious look He casts on the thief beside Him in answer to his prayer—"Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Mark how affectionately He provides for His mother. See Him after His resurrection saying to the weeping Mary, Woman, why weepest thou? Count that multitude of fishes which He has brought to the nets of His disciples, in token of the riches of spiritual success with which they are to be blessed. And mark, on the day of Pentecost, how richly from His throne in glory He sheds down the Holy Spirit, and quickens thousands together with the breath of spiritual life. "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive. Thou hast received gifts for yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

It is a most blessed and salutary thing for you all to cherish the thought of the royal munificence of Christ. Think of the kindest and most lavish giver you ever knew, and think how Christ surpasses him in this very grace as far as the heavens are above the earth. What encouragement does this give you to trust in Him! What a sin it shows you to commit when you turn away from Him! But remember, too, that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. Remember that He came to reveal the Father. Perhaps we are more disposed to doubt the royal munificence of the Father than that of the Son. But how unreasonable is this! Was not Jesus Christ Himself, with all the glorious fulness contained in him, the gift of God—His unspeakable gift? And in every act of generosity done by Christ have we not just an exhibition of the Father's heart? Sometimes we think hardly of God's generosity in connection with His decree of election. Leave that alone; it is one of the deep things of God; remember that every soul brought to Christ is the fruit of God's unmerited love and infinite grace; and remember too what a vast company the redeemed are, when in the Apocalyptic vision, an early section of them—those that came out of "the great tribulation"—formed a great multitude that no man could number. Sometimes we think that God is not generous when He takes away very precious comforts, and even the most cherished treasures of our hearts and our homes. But that is love in disguise; "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." And sometimes we think that He is not generous when He is slow to answer our prayers. But He designs only to encourage us to perseverance, and to increase and finally all the more reward our faith. Yes, truly, whatever anomalies Providence may present, and

they are many; whatever seeming contradictions we may encounter to the doctrine of the exceeding riches of the grace of God, let us ascribe all that to our imperfect vision and our imperfect understanding. Let us correct all such narrow impressions at the cross of Christ. Let us reason, like the Apostle: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" And let us feel assured that when at last God's ways and dealings even with this wayward world are made plain, the one conclusion which they will go to establish for evermore is—that GOD IS LOVE.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DEATH OF SAUL.

I SAMUEL xxxi.

THE plain of Esdraelon, where the battle between Saul and the Philistines was fought, has been celebrated for many a deadly encounter, from the very earliest period of history. Monuments of Egypt lately deciphered make it very plain that long before the country was possessed by the Israelites the plain had experienced the shock of contending armies. The records of the reign of Thotmes III., who has sometimes been called the Alexander the Great of Egypt, bear testimony to a decisive fight in his time near Megiddo, and enumerate the names of many towns in the neighbourhood, most of which occur in Bible history, of which the spoil was carried to Egypt and placed in the temples of the Egyptian gods. Here, too, it was afterwards that Barak encountered the Canaanites, and Gideon the Midianites and Amalekites; here "Jehu smote all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his familiar friends, and his priests, until he left none remaining;" here Josiah was slain in his great battle with the Egyptians; here was the great lamentation after Josiah's death, celebrated by Zechariah, "the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo;" in short, in the words of Dr. Clarke, "Esdraelon has been the chosen place of encampment in every great contest carried on in the country, until the disastrous march of Napoleon Bonaparte from Egypt into Syria. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Crusaders, Egyptians, Persians, Druses, Turks, Arabs, and French, warriors out of every nation which is under heaven, have pitched their tents upon the plains of Esdraelon, and have beheld their banners wet with the dews of Tabor and Hermon." So late as 1840, when the Pacha of Egypt had seized upon Syria, he was compelled to abandon the country when the citadel of Acre, which guards the entrance of the plain of Esdraelon by sea, was bombarded and destroyed by the British fleet. It is no wonder that in the symbolical visions of the Apocalypse, a town in this plain, Ar-Mageddon, is selected as the battle-field for the great conflict when the kings of the whole earth are to be gathered together unto the battle of the great day of Almighty God. As in the plains of Belgium, the plains of Lombardy, or the carse of Stirling, battle after battle has been fought in the space between Jezreel and Gilboa, to decide who should be master of the whole adjacent territory.

The Philistine host are said to have gathered themselves together and pitched in Shunem (chap.

xxviii. 4), and afterwards to have gathered all their hosts to Aphek, and pitched by the fountain which is in Jezreel (xxix. 1). That is to say, they advanced from a westward to a northward position, which last they occupied before the battle. Saul appears from the beginning to have arranged his troops on the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa, and to have remained in that position during the battle. It was an excellent position for fighting, but very unfavourable for a retreat. Apparently the Philistines began the battle by moving southwards across the plain till they reached the foot of Gilboa, where the tug of war began. Notwithstanding the favourable position of the Hebrews, they were completely defeated. The archers appear to have done deadly execution; as they advanced nearer to the host of Israel, the latter would move backward to get out of range; while the Philistines, gaining confidence, would press them more and more, till the orderly retreat became a terrible rout. So utterly routed was the Israelite army that they do not appear to have tried a single rally, which, as they had to retreat over Mount Gilboa, it would have been so natural for them to do. Panic and consternation seem to have seized them very early in the battle; that they would be defeated was probably a foregone conclusion, but the attitude of a retreating army seems to have been assumed more quickly and suddenly than could have been supposed. If the Philistine army, seeing the early confusion of the Israelites, had the courage to pour themselves along the valleys on each side of Gilboa, no way of retreat would be left to their enemy except over the top of the hill. And when that was reached, and the Israelites began to descend, the arrows of the pursuing Philistines would fall on them with more deadly effect than ever, and the slaughter would be tremendous.

Saul seems never to have been deficient in personal courage, and in the course of the battle he and his staff were evidently in the very thickest of the fight. "The Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, the sons of Saul." Saul himself was greatly distressed in his flight by reason of the archers. Finding himself wounded, and being provided with neither chariot nor other means of escape, a horror seized him that if once the enemy got possession of him alive they would subject him to some nameless mutilation or horrible humiliation too terrible to be thought of. Hence his request to his armour-bearer to fall on him. When the armour-bearer refused, he took a sword from him and killed himself.

It may readily be allowed that to one not ruled habitually by regard to the will of God this was the wisest course to follow. If the Philistine treatment of captive kings resembled the Assyrian, death was far rather to be chosen than life. When we find on Assyrian monuments such frightful pictures as those of kings obliged to carry the heads of their sons in processions, or themselves pinned to the ground by stakes driven through their hands and feet, and undergoing the horrible process of being flayed alive, we need not wonder at Saul shrinking with horror from what he might have had to suffer if he had been taken prisoner.

But what are we to think of the moral aspect of his act of suicide? That in all ordinary cases suicide is a daring sin, who can deny? God has not given to man the disposal of his life in such a sense. It is a daring thing for man to close his

day of grace sooner than God would have closed it. It is a reckless thing to rush into the presence of his Maker before his Maker has called him to appear. It is a presumptuous thing to calculate on bettering his condition by plunging into an untried eternity. No doubt one must be tender in judging of men pressed hard by real or imaginary terrors, perhaps their reason staggering, their instincts trembling, and a horror of great darkness obscuring everything. Yet how often, in his last written words, does the suicide bear testimony against himself when he hopes that God will forgive him, and beseeches his friends to forgive him. Does not this show that in his secret soul he is conscious that he ought to have borne longer, ought to have quitted himself more like a man, and suffered every extremity of fortune before quenching the flame of life within him?

The truth is, that the suicide of Saul, as of many another, is an act that cannot be judged by itself, but must be taken in connection with the course of his previous life. We have said that to one not habitually ruled by regard to the will of God, self-destruction at such a moment was the wisest course. That is to say, if he merely balanced what appeared to be involved in terminating his life against what was involved in the Philistines taking him and torturing him, the former alternative was by far the more tolerable. But the question comes up,—if he had not habitually disregarded the will of God, would he ever have been in that predicament? The criminality of many an act must be thrown back on a previous act, out of which it has arisen. A drunkard in a midnight debauch quarrels with his father, and plunges a knife into his heart. When he comes to himself he is absolutely unconscious of what he has done. He tells you he had no wish nor desire to injure his father. It was not his proper self that did it, but his proper self over-mastered, overthrown, brutalised by the monster drink. Do you excuse him on this account? Far from it. You excuse him of a deliberate design against his father's life. But you say the possibility of that deed was involved in his getting drunk. For a man to get drunk, to deprive himself for the time of his senses, and expose himself to an influence that may cause him to commit a most horrible and unnatural crime, is a fearful sin. Thus you carry back the criminality of the murder to the previous act of getting drunk. So in regard to the suicide of Saul. The criminality of that act is to be carried back to the sin of which he was guilty when he determined to follow his own will instead of the will of God. It was through that sin that he was brought into his present position. Had he been dutiful to God he would never have been in such a dilemma. On the one hand he never would have been so defeated and humiliated in battle; and on the other hand he would have had a trust in the Divine protection even when a bloody enemy like the Philistines was about to seize him. It was the true source alike of his public defeat and of his private despair that he indicated when he said to Samuel, "God is departed from me;" and he might have been sure that God would not have departed from him if he had not first departed from God.

It is a most important principle of life we thus get sight of, when we see the bearing that one act of sin has upon another. It is very seldom indeed that the consequences of any sin terminate with itself. Sin has a marvellous power of begetting, of leading you on to other acts that you

did not think of at first, of involving you in meshes that were then quite out of your view. And this multiplying process of sin is a course that may begin very early. Children are warned of it in the hymn—"He that does one fault at first, and lies to hide it, makes it two." A sin needs to be covered, and another sin is resorted to in order to provide the covering. Nor is that all. You have a partner in your sin, and to free yourself you perhaps betray your partner. That partner may be not only the weaker vessel, but also by far the heavier sufferer, and yet, in your wretched selfishness, you deny all share of the sin, or you leave your partner to be ruined. Alas! alas! how terrible are the ways of sin. How difficult it often is for the sinner to retrace his steps! And how terrible is the state of mind when one says, I must commit this sin or that—I have no alternative! How terrible was Saul's position when he said, "I must destroy myself." Truly sin is a hard, unfeeling master—"The way of transgressors is hard." He only that walketh uprightly walketh surely. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, that walk in the law of the Lord."

The terrible nature of the defeat which the Israelites suffered on this day from the Philistines is apparent from what is said in the seventh verse—"And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were beyond Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them." The plain of Esdraelon is interrupted, and in a sense divided into two, by three hills—Tabor, Gilboa, and Little Hermon. On the eastern side of these hills the plain is continued on to the Jordan valley. The effect of the battle of Gilboa was that all the rich settlements in that part of the plain had to be forsaken by the Israelites and given up to the Philistines. More than that, the Jordan valley ceased to afford the protection which up to this time it had supplied against enemies from the west. For the most part, the trans-Jordanic tribes were exposed to quite a different set of enemies. It was the Syrians from the north, the Moabites and the Ammonites from the east, and the Midianites and Amalekites from the remoter deserts, that were usually the foes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. But on this occasion, a new foe assailed them. The Philistines actually crossed the Jordan, and the rich pastures of Gil-ead and Bashan, with the flocks and herds that swarmed upon them, became the prey of the un-circumcised. Thus the terror of the Philistines, hitherto confined to the western portion of the country, was spread, with all its attendant horrors, over the length and breadth of Israel. We get a vivid view of the state of the country when David was called to take charge of it. And we get a vivid view of the worse than embarrassment, the fatal crime, into which David would have been led if he had remained in the Philistine camp and taken any part in this campaign.

How utterly crushed the Philistines considered the Israelites to be, and how incapable of striking any blow in their own defence, is apparent from the humiliating treatment of the bodies of Saul and his sons, the details of which are given in this chapter and in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles (chap. x.). If there had been any possibility of the Israelites being stung into a new effort by the dishonour done to their king and princes, that dishonour would not have been so terribly insulting. But there was no such possibility. The treatment

was doubly insulting. Saul's head, severed from his body, was put in the temple of Dagon (1 Chron. x.); his armour was hung up in the house of Ashtaroth; and his body was fastened to the wall of Beth-shan. The same treatment seems to have been bestowed on his three sons. The other part of the insult arose from the idolatrous spirit in which all this was done. The tidings of the victory were ordered to be carried to the house of their idols as well as to their people (1 Sam. xxxi. 9). The trophies were displayed in the temples of these idols. The spirit of vaunting, which had so roused David against Goliath because he defied the armies of the living God, appeared far more offensively than ever. Not only was Israel defeated, but in the view of the Philistines Israel's God as well; Dagon and Ashtaroth had triumphed over Jehovah. The humiliation suffered in the days when the ark of God brought such calamities to them and their gods was now amply avenged. The image of Dagon was not found lying on its face, all shattered save the stump, after the heads of Saul and his sons had been placed in his temple. Yes, and the nobles at least of the Philistines would boast that the slaughter of Goliath by David, and the placing of his head and his armour near Jerusalem—probably in the holy place of Israel—were amply avenged. Well was it for David, we may say again, that he had no share in this terrible battle! Henceforth undoubtedly there would be no more truce on his part towards the Philistines. Had they not dishonoured the person of his king? had they not insulted the dead body of Jonathan his noble friend? had they not hurled new defiance against the God of Israel? had they not spread robbery and devastation over the whole length and breadth of the country, and turned every happy family into a group of cowering slaves? Were this people to be any longer honoured with his friendship? "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!"

The only redeeming incident, in all this painful narrative, is the spirited enterprise of the men of Jabesh-gilead, coming to Beth-shan by night, removing the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall, and burying them with all honour at Jabesh. Beth-shan was a considerable distance from Gilboa, where Saul and his sons appear to have fallen; but probably it was the largest city in the neighbourhood, and therefore the best adapted to put the remains of the king and the princes to open shame. Jabesh-gilead was somewhere on the other side of the Jordan, distant from Beth-shan several miles. It was highly creditable to its people that, after a long interval, the remembrance of Saul's first exploit, when he relieved them from the cruel threats of the Ammonites, was still strong enough to impel them to the gallant deed which secured honourable burial for the bodies of Saul and his sons. We are conscious of a reverential feeling rising in our hearts toward this people as we think of their kindness to the dead, as if the whole human race were one family, and a kindness done nearly three thousand years ago were in some sense a kindness to ourselves.

That first exploit of Saul's, rescuing the men of Jabesh-gilead, seems never to have been surpassed by any other enterprise of his reign. As we now look back on the career of Saul, which occupies so large a portion of this book, we do not find much to interest or refresh us. He belonged to the order of military kings. He was not one

of those who were devoted to the intellectual, or the social, or the religious elevation of his kingdom. His one idea of a king was to rid his country of its enemies. "He fought," we are told, "against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the king of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself he vexed them. And he did valiantly and smote Amalek, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them." That success gave him a good name as king, but it did not draw much affection to him; and it had more effect in ridding the people of evil than in conferring on them positive good. Royalty bred in Saul what it bred in most kings of the East, an imperious temper, a despotic will. Even in his own family he played the despot. And if he played the despot at home he did so not less in public. All that we can say in his favour is, that he did not carry his despotism so far as many. But his jealous and in so far despotic temper could not but have had an evil effect on his people. We cannot suppose that when jealousy was so deep in his nature David was the only one of his officers who experienced it. The secession of so many very able men to David, about the time when he was with the Philistines, looked as if Saul could not but be jealous of any man who rose to high military eminence. That Saul was capable of friendly impulses is very different from saying that his heart was warm and winning. The most vital want in him was the want of godliness. He had little faith in the nation as God's nation, God's heritage. He had little love for prophets, or for men of faith, or for any who attached great importance to moral and spiritual considerations. His persecution of David and his murder of the priests are deep stains that can never be erased. And that godless nature of his became worse as he went on. It is striking that the last transaction in his reign was a decided failure in the very department in which he had usually excelled. He who had gained what eminence he had as a military king, utterly failed, and involved his people in utter humiliation, in that very department. His abilities failed him because God had forsaken him. The Philistines whom he had so often defeated crushed him in the end. To him the last act of life was very different from that of Samson—Samson conquering in his death; Saul defeated and disgraced in his.

Need we again urge the lesson? "Them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." You dare not leave God out in your estimate of the forces that bear upon your life. You dare not give Him a secondary place. God must have the first place in your regards. Are you really honouring Him above all, prizing His favour, obeying His will, trusting in His word? Are you even trying, amid many mortifying failures, to do so? It is not the worst life that numbers many a failure, many a confession, many a prayer for mercy and for grace to help in time of need, provided always your heart is habitually directed to God as the great end of existence, the Pole Star by which your steps are habitually to be directed, the Sovereign whose holy will must be your great rule, the Pattern whose likeness should be stamped on your hearts, the God and Father of your Lord Jesus Christ, whose love, and favour, and blessing are evermore the best and brightest inheritance for all the children of men.

THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		CHAPTER XVIII.	
David's Lament for Saul and Jonathan, . . .	117	Absalom Banished and Brought Back, . . .	165
CHAPTER II.		CHAPTER XIX.	
Beginning of David's Reign at Hebron, . . .	120	Absalom's Revolt,	168
CHAPTER III.		CHAPTER XX.	
Beginning of Civil War,	123	David's Flight from Jerusalem,	171
CHAPTER IV.		CHAPTER XXI.	
Conclusion of Civil War,	125	From Jerusalem to Mahanaim,	174
CHAPTER V.		CHAPTER XXII.	
Assassination of Abner and Ishbosheth, . . .	128	Absalom in Council,	177
CHAPTER VI.		CHAPTER XXIII.	
David King of All Israel,	131	Absalom's Defeat and Death	180
CHAPTER VII.		CHAPTER XXIV.	
The Kingdom Established,	134	David's Grief for Absalom,	183
CHAPTER VIII.		CHAPTER XXV.	
The Ark Brought Up to Jerusalem,	137	The Restoration,	185
CHAPTER IX.		CHAPTER XXVI.	
Proposal to Build a Temple,	140	David and Barzillai,	188
CHAPTER X.		CHAPTER XXVII.	
Foreign Wars,	142	The Insurrection of Sheba,	191
CHAPTER XI.		CHAPTER XXVIII.	
Administration of the Kingdom,	145	The Famine,	194
CHAPTER XII.		CHAPTER XXIX.	
David and Mephibosheth,	148	Last Battles and the Mighty Men,	197
CHAPTER XIII.		CHAPTER XXX.	
David and Hanun,	151	The Song of Thanksgiving,	200
CHAPTER XIV.		CHAPTER XXXI.	
David and Uriah,	154	The Last Words of David,	203
CHAPTER XV.		CHAPTER XXXII.	
David and Nathan,	157	The Numbering of Israel,	206
CHAPTER XVI.		CHAPTER XXXIII.	
Penitence and Chastisement,	160	The Two Books of Samuel,	209
CHAPTER XVII.			
Absalom and Amnon,	162		

THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

BY W. G. BLAIKIE, D. D., LL. D.

CHAPTER I.

DAVID'S LAMENT FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN.

2 SAMUEL I.

DAVID had returned to Ziklag from the slaughter of the Amalekites only two days before he heard of the death of Saul. He had returned weary enough, we may believe, in body, though refreshed in spirit by the recovery of all that had been taken away, and by the possession of a vast store of booty besides. But in the midst of his success, it was discouraging to see nothing but ruin and confusion where the homes of himself and his people had recently been; and it must have needed no small effort even to plan, and much more to execute, the reconstruction of the city. But besides this, a still heavier feeling must have oppressed him. What had been the issue of that great battle at Mount Gilboa? Which army had conquered? If the Israelites were defeated, what would be the fate of Saul and Jonathan? Would they be prisoners now in the hands of the Philistines? And if so, what would be his duty in regard to them? And what course would it be best for him to take for the welfare of his ruined and distracted country?

He was not kept long in suspense. An Amalekite from the camp of Israel, accustomed, like the Bedouin generally, to long and rapid runs, arrived at Ziklag, bearing on his body all the tokens of a disaster, and did obeisance to David, as now the legitimate occupant of the throne. David must have surmised at a glance how matters stood. His questions to the Amalekite elicited an account of the death of Saul materially different from that given in a former part of the history, "As I happened by chance upon Mount Gilboa, behold Saul leaned upon his spear; and lo, the chariots and the horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And he said unto me, Stand, I pray thee, beside me, and slay me, for anguish hath taken hold of me: because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood beside him and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen; and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was upon his arm, and have brought them hither to my lord." There is no reason to suppose that this narrative of Saul's death, in so far as it differs from the previous one, is correct. That this Amalekite was somehow near the place where Saul fell, and that he witnessed all that took place at his death, there is no cause to doubt. That when he saw that both Saul and his armour-bearer were dead he removed the crown and the bracelet from the person of the fallen king, and stowed them away among his own accoutrements, may likewise be accepted without any difficulty. Then, managing to escape, and considering what he would do with the ensigns of royalty, he decided to carry them to David. To David he accordingly brought them, and no doubt it was to ingratiate himself the more with him, and to establish the stronger claim

to a splendid recompense, that he invented the story of Saul asking him to kill him, and of his complying with the king's order, and thus putting an end to a life which already was obviously doomed.

In his belief that his pretended despatching of the king would gratify David, the Amalekite undoubtedly reckoned without his host; but such things were so common, so universal in the East, that we can hardly divest ourselves of a certain amount of compassion for him. Probably there was no other kingdom, round and round, where this Amalekite would not have found that he had done a wise thing in so far as his own interests were concerned. For helping to despatch a rival, and to open the way to a throne, he would probably have received cordial thanks and ample gifts from one and all of the neighbouring potentates. To David, the matter appeared in a quite different light. He had none of that eagerness to occupy the throne on which the Amalekite reckoned as a universal instinct of human nature. And he had a view of the sanctity of Saul's life which the Amalekite could not understand. His being the Lord's anointed ought to have withheld this man from hurting a hair of his head. Sadly though Saul had fallen back, the divinity that doth hedge a king still encompassed him. "Touch not mine anointed" was still God's word concerning him. This miserable Amalekite, a member of a doomed race, appeared to David by his own confession not only a murderer, but a murderer of the deepest dye. He had destroyed the life of one who in an eminent sense was "the Lord's anointed." He had done what once and again David had himself shrunk from doing. It is no wonder that David was at once horrified and provoked,—horrified at the unblushing criminality of the man; provoked at his effrontery, at his doing without the slightest compunction what, at an immense sacrifice, he had twice restrained himself from doing. No doubt he was irritated, too, at the bare supposition on which the Amalekite reckoned so securely, that such a black deed could be gratifying to David himself. So without a moment's hesitation, and without allowing the astonished youth a moment's preparation, he caused an attendant to fall upon him and kill him. His sentence was short and clear, "Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed."

In this incident we find David in a position in which good men are often placed, who profess to have regard to higher principles than the men of the world in regulating their lives, and especially in the estimate which they form of their worldly interests and considerations. That such men are sincere in the estimate they thus profess to follow is what the world is very slow to believe. Faith in any moral virtue that rises higher than the ordinary worldly level is extremely rare among men. The world fancies that every man has his price—sometimes that every woman has her price. Virtue of the heroic quality that will face death itself rather than do wrong is what it is most unwilling to believe in. Was it not this that gave rise to the memorable trial of Job? Did not the great enemy, representing here the spirit of the world, scorn the notion that at bottom Job was in any way better

than his neighbours, although the wonderful prosperity with which he had been gifted made him appear more ready to pay honour to God? It is all a matter of selfishness, was Satan's plea; take away his prosperity, and lay a painful malady on his body, his religion will vanish, he will curse Thee to Thy face. He would not give Job credit for anything like disinterested virtue—anything like genuine reverence for God. And was it not on the same principle the tempter acted when he brought his threefold temptation to our Lord in the wilderness? He did not believe in the superhuman virtue of Jesus; he did not believe in His unswerving loyalty to truth and duty. He did not believe that He was proof at once against the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. At least he did not believe till he tried, and had to retreat defeated. When the end of His life drew near Jesus could say, "The prince of this world cometh, but hath nothing in Me." There was no weakness in Jesus to which he could fasten his cord—no trace of that worldliness by which he had so often been able to entangle and secure his victims.

So likewise Simon the sorcerer fancied that he only needed to offer money to the Apostles to secure from them the gift of the Holy Ghost. "Thy money perish with thee!" was the indignant rebuke of Peter. It is the same refusal to believe in the reality of high principle that has made so many a persecutor fancy that he could bend the obstinacy of the heretic by the terrors of suffering and torture. And on the other hand, no nobler sight has ever been presented than when this incredulous scorn of the world has been rebuked by the firmness and triumphant faith of the noble martyr. What could Nebuchadnezzar have thought when the three Hebrew children were willing to enter the fiery furnace? What did Darius think of Daniel when he shrank not from the lions' den? How many a rebuke and surprise was furnished to the rulers of this world in the early persecutions of the Christians, and to the champions of the Church of Rome in the splendid defiance hurled against them by the Protestant martyrs! The men who formed the Free Church of Scotland were utterly discredited when they affirmed that rather than surrender the liberties of their Church they would part with every temporal privilege which they had enjoyed from connection with the State. Such is the spirit of the world; if it will not rise to the apparent level of the saints, it delights to pull down the saints to its own. These pretences to superior virtue are hypocrisy and pharisaism; test their professions by their worldly interests, and you will find them soon enough on a level with yourselves.

The Amalekite that thought to gratify David by pretending that he had slain his rival had no idea that he was wronging him; in his blind innocence he seems to have assumed as a matter of course that David would be pleased. It is not likely the Amalekite had ever heard of David's noble magnanimity in twice sparing Saul's life when he had an excellent pretext for taking it, if his conscience had allowed him. He just assumed that David would feel as he would have felt himself. He simply judged of him by his own standard. His object was to show how great a service he had rendered him, and thus establish a claim to a great reward. Never did heartless selfishness more completely overreach itself. Instead of a reward, this impious murderer had earned a fearful punishment. An Israelite might have had a chance of

mercy, but an Amalekite had none—the man was condemned to instant death. One can hardly fancy his bewilderment,—what a strange man was this David! What a marvellous reverence he had for God! To place him on a throne was no favour, if it involved doing anything against "the Lord's anointed!" And yet who shall say that in his estimate of this proceeding David did more than recognise the obligation of the first commandment? To him God's will was all in all.

Dismissing this painful episode, we now turn to contemplate David's conduct after the intelligence reached him that Saul was dead. David was now just thirty (2 Sam. v. 4); and never did man at that age, or at any age, act a finer part. The death, and especially the sudden death, of a relative or a friend has usually a remarkable effect on the tender heart, and especially in the case of the young. It blots out all remembrance of little injuries done by the departed; it fills one with regret for any unkind words one may have spoken, or any unkind deeds one may ever have done to him. It makes one very forgiving. But it must have been a far more generous heart than the common that could so soon rid itself of every shred of bitter feeling toward Saul—that could blot out, in one great act of forgiveness, the remembrance of many long years of injustice, oppression, and toil, and leave no feelings but those of kindness, admiration, and regret, called forth by the contemplation of what was favourable in Saul's character. How beautiful does the spirit of forgiveness appear in such a light! Yet how hard do many feel it to be to exercise this spirit in any case, far less in all cases! How terrible a snare the unforgiving spirit is liable to be to us, and how terrible an obstacle to peaceful communion with God! "For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

The feelings of David toward Saul and Jonathan were permanently embodied in a song which he composed for the occasion. It seems to have been called "The Song of the Bow," so that the rendering of the Revised Version—"he taught them the Song of the Bow," gives a much better sense than the old—"he taught them the use of the bow." The song was first written in the book of Jasher; and it was ordered by David to be taught to the people as a permanent memorial of their king and his eldest son. The writing of such a song, the spirit of admiration and eulogy which pervades it, and the unusual enactment that it should be taught to the people, show how far superior David was to the ordinary feelings of jealousy, how full his heart was of true generosity. There was, indeed, a political end which it might advance; it might conciliate the supporters of Saul, and smooth David's way to the throne. But there is in it such depth and fulness of feeling that one can think of it only as a genuine cardiphonia—a true voice of the heart. The song dwells on all that could be commended in Saul, and makes no allusion to his faults. His courage and energy in war, his happy co-operation with Jonathan, his advancement of the kingdom in elegance and comfort, are all duly celebrated. David appears to have had a real affection for Saul, if only it had been allowed to bloom and flourish. His martial energy had probably awakened his admiration before he knew him personally; and when he became his minstrel, his distressed countenance would excite his pity, while his occasional gleams of generous feeling would thrill his heart with sympathy. The terrible effort of Saul to crush David was now

at an end, and like a lily released from a heavy stone, the old attachment bloomed out speedily and sweetly. There would be more true love in families and in the world, more of expansive, responsive affection, if it were not so often stunted by reserve on the one hand, and crushed by persecution on the other.

The song embalms very tenderly the love of Jonathan for David. Years had probably elapsed since the two friends met, but time had not impaired the affection and admiration of David. And now that Jonathan's light was extinguished, a sense of desolation fell on David's heart, and the very throne that invited his occupation seemed dark and dull under the shadow cast on it by the death of Jonathan. As a prize of earthly ambition it would be poor indeed; and if ever it had seemed to David a proud distinction to look forward to, such a feeling would appear very detestable when the same act that opened it up to him had deprived him for ever of his dearest friend, his sweetest source of earthly joy. The only way in which it was possible for David to enjoy his new position was by losing sight of himself; by identifying himself more closely than ever with the people; by regarding the throne as only a position for more self-denying labours for the good of others. And in the song there is evidence of the great strength and activity of this feeling. The sentiment of patriotism burns with a noble ardour; the national disgrace is most keenly felt; the thought of personal gain from the death of Saul and Jonathan is entirely swallowed up by grief for the public loss. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph!" In David's view, it is no ordinary calamity that has fallen on Israel. It is no common men that have fallen, but "the beauty of Israel," her ornament and her glory, men that were never known to flinch or to flee from battle, men that were "swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions." It is not in any obscure corner that they have fallen, but "on her high places," on Mount Gilboa, at the head of a most conspicuous and momentous enterprise. Such a national loss was unprecedented in the history of Israel, and it seems to have affected David and the nation generally as the slaughter at Flodden affected the Scots, when it seemed as if all that was great and beautiful in the nation perished—"the flowers o' the forest were a' weed awa'."

A word on the general structure of this song. It is not a song that can be classed with the Psalms. Nor can it be said that in any marked degree it resembles the tone or spirit of the Psalms. Yet this need not surprise us, nor need it throw any doubt either as to the authorship of the song or the authorship of the Psalms. The Psalms, we must remember, were avowedly composed and designed for use in the worship of God. If the Greek term *psalmoi* denotes their character, they were songs designed for use in public worship, to be accompanied with the lyre, or harp, or other musical instruments suitable for them. The special sphere of such songs was—the relation of the human soul to God. These songs might be of various kinds—historical, lyrical, dramatical; but in all cases the paramount subject was, the dealings of God with man, or the dealings of man with God. It was in this class of composition that David excelled, and became the organ of the Holy Ghost for the highest instruction and edification of the Church in all ages. But it does not by any means

follow that the poetical compositions of David were restricted to this one class of subject. His muse may sometimes have taken a different course. His poems were not always directly religious. In the case of this song, whose original place in the book of Jasher indicated its special character, there is no mention of the relation of Saul and Jonathan to God. The theme is, their services to the nation, and the national loss involved in their death. The soul of the poet is profoundly thrilled by their death, occurring in such circumstances of national disaster. No form of words could have conveyed more vividly the idea of unprecedented loss, or thrilled the nation with such a sense of calamity. There is not a line of the song but is full of life, and hardly one that is not full of beauty. What could more touchingly indicate the fatal nature of the calamity than that plaintive entreaty—"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon"? How could the hills be more impressively summoned to show their sympathy than in that invocation of everlasting sterility—"Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, or fields of offerings"? What gentler veil could be drawn over the horrors of their bloody death and mutilated bodies than in the tender words, "Saul and Jonathan were loving and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided"? And what more fitting theme for tears could have been furnished to the daughters of Israel, considering what was probably the prevalent taste, than that Saul had "clothed them with scarlet and other delights, and put on ornaments of gold upon their apparel"? Up to this point Saul and Jonathan are joined together; but the poet cannot close without a special lamentation for himself over him whom he loved as his own soul. And in one line he touches the very kernel of his own loss, as he touches the very core of Jonathan's heart—"thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Such is the Song of the Bow. It hardly seems suitable to attempt to draw spiritual lessons out of a song, which, on purpose, was placed in a different category. Surely it is enough to point out the exceeding beauty and generosity of spirit which sought in this way to embalm the memory and perpetuate the virtues of Saul and Jonathan; which blended together in such melodious words a deadly enemy and a beloved friend; which transfigured one of the lives so that it shone with the lustre and the beauty of the other; which sought to bury every painful association, and gave full and unlimited scope to the charity that thinketh no evil. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, was a heathen maxim—"Say nothing but what is good of the dead." Surely no finer exemplification of the maxim was ever given than in this "Song of the Bow."

To "thoughts that breathe and words that burn," like those of this song, David could not have given expression without having his whole soul stirred with the desire to repair the national disaster, and by God's help bring back prosperity and honour to Israel. Thus, both by the afflictions that saddened his heart and the stroke of prosperity that raised him to the throne, he was impelled to that course of action which is the best safeguard under God against the hurtful influences both of adversity and prosperity. Affliction might have driven him into his shell, to think only of his own comfort; prosperity might have swollen him with a sense of his importance, and tempted him to expect universal admiration;—both would

have made him unfit to rule; by the grace of God he was preserved from both. He was induced to gird himself for a course of high exertion for the good of his country; the spirit of trust in God, after its long discipline, had a new field opened for its exercise; and the self-government acquired in the wilderness was to prove its usefulness in a higher sphere. Thus the providence of his heavenly Father was gradually unfolding His purposes concerning him; the clouds were clearing off his horizon; and the "all things" that once seemed to be "against him" were now plainly "working together for his good."

CHAPTER II.

BEGINNING OF DAVID'S REIGN AT HEBRON.

2 SAMUEL ii. 1-7.

THE death of Saul did not end David's troubles, nor was it for a good many years that he became free to employ his whole energies for the good of the kingdom. It appears that his chastisement for his unbelieving spirit, and for the alliance with Achish to which it led, was not yet completed. The more remote consequences of that step were only beginning to emerge, and years elapsed before its evil influence ceased altogether to be felt. For in allying himself with Achish, and accompanying his army to the plain of Esdraelon, David had gone as near to the position of a traitor to his country as he could have gone without actually fighting against it. That he should have acted as he did is one of the greatest mysteries of his life; and the reason why it has not attracted more notice is simply because the worst consequences of it were averted by his dismissal from the Philistine army through the jealousy and suspicion of their lords. But for that step David must have been guilty of gross treachery either in one direction or another; either to his own countrymen, by fighting against them in the Philistine army; or to King Achish, by suddenly turning against him in the heat of the battle, and creating a diversion which might have given a new chance to his countrymen. In either case the proceeding would have been most reprehensible.

But to his own countrymen he would have made himself especially obnoxious if he had lent himself to Achish in the battle. Whether he contemplated treachery to Achish is a secret that seems never to have gone beyond his own bosom. All the appearances favoured the supposition that he would fight against his country, and we cannot wonder if, for a long time, this made him an object of distrust and suspicion. If we would understand how the men of Israel must have looked on him, we have only to fancy how we should have viewed a British soldier if, with a troop of his countrymen, he had followed Napoleon to the field of Waterloo, and had been sent away from the French army only through the suspicion of Napoleon's generals. In David's case, all his former achievements against the Philistines, all that injustice from Saul which had driven him in despair to Achish, his services against the Amalekites, his generous use of the spoil, as well as his high personal character, did not suffice to counteract the bad impression of his having followed Achish to battle. For after a great disaster the public mind is exasperated; it is eager to find a scapegoat on

whom to throw the blame, and it is unmeasured in its denunciations of any one who can be plausibly assailed. Beyond all doubt, angry and perplexed as the nation was David would come in for a large share of the blame; his alliance with Achish would be denounced with unmeasured bitterness; and, probably enough, he would have to bear the brunt of many a bitter calumny in addition, as if he had instigated Achish, and given him information which had helped him to conquer.

His own tribe, the tribe of Judah, was far the friendliest, and the most likely to make allowance for the position in which he had been placed. They were his own flesh and blood; they knew the fierce and cruel malignity with which Saul had hunted him down, and they knew that, as far as appearances went, his chances of getting the better of Saul's efforts were extremely small, and the temptation to throw himself into the hands of Achish correspondingly great. Evidently, therefore, the most expedient course he could now take was to establish himself in some of the cities of Judah. But in that frame of recovered loyalty to God in which he now was, he declined to take this step, indispensable though it seemed, until he had got Divine direction regarding it. "It came to pass, after this, that David inquired of the Lord saying, Shall I go up to 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." The form in which he made the inquiry shows that to his mind it was very clear that he ought to go up to one or another of the cities of Judah; his advisers and companions had probably the same conviction; but notwithstanding, it was right and fitting that no such step should be taken without his asking direction from God. And let us observe that, on this occasion, prayer was not the last resort of one whom all other refuge had failed, but the first resort of one who regarded the Divine approval as the most essential element for determining the propriety of the undertaking.

It is interesting and instructive to ponder this fact. The first thing done by David, after virtually acquiring a royal position, was to ask counsel of God. His royal administration was begun by prayer. And there was a singular appropriateness in this act. For the great characteristic of David, brought out especially in his Psalms, is the reality and the nearness of his fellowship with God. We may find other men who equalled him in every other feature of character—who were as full of human sympathy, as reverential, as self-denying, as earnest in their efforts to please God and to benefit men; but we shall find no one who lived so closely under God's shadow, whose heart and life were so influenced by regard to God, to whom God was so much of a personal Friend, so blended, we may say, with his very existence. David therefore is eminently himself when asking counsel of the Lord. And would not all do well to follow him in this? True, he had supernatural methods of doing this, and you have only natural; he had the Urim and Thummim, you have only the voice of prayer; but this makes no real difference, for it was only in great national matters that he made use of the supernatural method; in all that concerned his personal relations to God it was the other that he employed. And so may you. But the great matter is to resemble David in his profound sense of the infinite value and reality of Divine direction. Without this your prayers will always be more or less matters of formality. And being formal, you will not feel that you get any

good of them. Is it really a profound conviction of yours that in every step of your life God's direction is of supreme value? That you dare not even change your residence with safety without being directed by Him? That you dare not enter on new relations in life,—new business, new connections, new recreations—without seeking the Divine countenance? That endless difficulties, troubles, complications, are liable to arise, when you simply follow your own notions or inclinations without consulting the Lord? And under the influence of that conviction do you try to follow the rule, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him"? And do you endeavour to get from prayer a trustful rest in God, an assurance that He will not forsake you, a calm confidence that He will keep His word? Then, indeed, you are treading in David's footsteps, and you may expect to share his privilege—Divine direction in your times of need.

The city of Hebron, situated about eighteen miles to the south of Jerusalem, was the place to which David was directed to go. It was a place abounding in venerable and elevating associations. It was among the first, if not the very first, of the haunts of civilised men in the land—so ancient that it is said to have been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt (Numb. xiii. 22). The father of the faithful had often pitched his tent under its spreading oaks, and among its olive groves and vine-clad hills the gentle Isaac had meditated at eventide. There Abraham had watched the last breath of his beloved Sarah, the partner of his faith and the faithful companion of his wanderings; and there from the sons of Heth he had purchased the sepulchre of Machpelah, where first Sarah's body, then his own, then that of Isaac were laid to rest. There Joseph and his brethren had brought up the body of Jacob, in fulfilment of his dying command, laying it beside the bones of Leah. It had been a halting-place of the twelve spies when they went up to search the land; and the cluster of grapes which they carried back was cut from the neighbouring valley, where the finest grapes of the country are found to this day. The sight of its venerable cave had doubtless served to raise the faith and courage of Joshua and Caleb, when the other spies became so feeble and so faithless. In the division of the land it had been assigned to Caleb, one of the best and noblest spirits the nation ever produced; afterwards it was made one of the Levitical cities of refuge. More recently, it had been one of the places selected by David to receive a portion of the Amalekite spoil. No place could have recalled more vividly the lessons of departed worth and the victories of early faith, or abounded more in tokens of the blessedness of fully following the Lord. It was a token of God's kindness to David that He directed him to make this city his headquarters. It was equivalent to a new promise that the God of Abraham and of Isaac and Jacob would be the God of David, and that his public career would prepare the way for the mercies in the prospect of which they rejoiced, and sustain the hope to which they looked forward, though they did not in their time see the promise realised.

It was a further token of God's goodness that no sooner had David gone up to Hebron than "the men of Judah came and anointed him king over the house of Judah." Judah was the imperial or premier tribe, and though this was not all that God had promised to David, it was a large instalment. The occasion might well awaken mingled emotions in his breast—gratitude for mercies given

and solicitude for the responsibility of a royal position. With his strong sense of duty, his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness, we should expect to find him strengthening himself in the purpose to rule only in the fear of God. It is just such views and purposes as these we find expressed in the hundred and first Psalm, which internal evidence would lead us to assign to this period of his life:—

"I will sing of mercy and of judgment:
Unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing.
I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.
O when wilt Thou come unto me?
I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.
I will set no base thing before mine eyes:
I hate the work of them that turn aside;
It shall not cleave to me.
A froward heart shall depart from me:
I will know no evil thing.
Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I destroy;
Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.
Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me:
He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall minister unto me.
He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house;
He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes.
Morning by morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land;
To cut off all the workers of iniquity from the city of the Lord." *

By a singular coincidence, the first place to which the attention of David was called, after his taking possession of the royal position, was the same as that to which Saul had been directed in the same circumstances—namely, Jabesh-gilead. It was far away from Hebron, on the other side of Jordan, and quite out of the scope of David's former activities; but he recognised a duty to its people, and he hastened to perform it. In the first place, he sent them a gracious and grateful message of thanks for the kindness shown to Saul, the mark of respect they had paid him in burying his body. Every action of David's in reference to his great rival evinces the superiority of his spirit to that which was wont to prevail in similar circumstances. Within the Scriptures themselves we have instances of the dishonour that was often put on the body of a conquered rival. The body of Jehoram, cast ignominiously by Jehu, in mockery of his royal state, into the vineyard of Naboth, which his father Ahaz had unrighteously seized, and the body of Jezebel, flung out of the window, trodden under foot, and devoured by dogs are instances readily remembered. The shocking fate of the dead body of Hector, dragged thrice round the walls of Troy after Achilles' chariot, was regarded as only such a calamity as might be looked for amid the changing fortunes of war. Mark Antony is said to have broken out into laughter at the sight of the hands and head of Cicero, which he had caused to be severed from his body. The respect of David for the person of Saul was evidently a sincere and genuine feeling; and it was a sincere pleasure to him to find that this

* From the use of the expression "city of the Lord," it has been inferred by some critics that this Psalm must have been written after the capture and consecration of Jerusalem. But there is no reason why Hebron might not have been called at that time "the city of the Lord." The Lord had specially designated it as the abode of David; and that alone entitled it to be so called. Those who have regarded this Psalm as a picture of a model household or family have never weighed the force of the last line, which marks the position of a king, not a father. The Psalm is a true statement of the principles usually followed by David in public rule, but not in domestic administration.

feeling had been shared by the Jabeshites, and manifested in their rescuing Saul's body and consigning it to honourable burial.

In the next place, he invokes on these people a glowing benediction from the Lord: "The Lord show kindness and truth to you;" and he expresses his purpose also to requite their kindness himself. "Kindness and truth." There is something instructive in the combination of these two words. It is the Hebrew way of expressing "true kindness," but even in that form, the words suggest that kindness is not always true kindness, and mere kindness cannot be a real blessing unless it rest on a solid basis. There is in many men an amiable spirit which takes pleasure in gratifying the feelings of others. Some manifest it to children by loading them with toys and sweetmeats, or taking them to amusements which they know they like. But it does not follow that such kindness is always true kindness. To please one is not always the kindest thing you can do for one, for sometimes it is a far kinder thing to withhold what will please. True kindness must be tested by its ultimate effects. The kindness that loves best to improve our hearts, to elevate our tastes, to strengthen our habits, to give a higher tone to our lives, to place us on a pedestal from which we may look down on conquered spiritual foes, and on the possession of what is best and highest in human attainment,—the kindness that bears on the future, and especially the eternal future, is surely far more true than that which, by gratifying our present feelings, perhaps confirms us in many a hurtful lust. David's prayer for the men of Jabesh was an enlightened benediction: "God show you kindness and truth." And so far as he may have opportunity, he promises that he will show them the same kindness too.

We need not surely dwell on the lesson which this suggests. Are you kindly disposed to any one? You wish sincerely to promote his happiness, and you try to do so. But see well to it that your kindness is true. See that the day shall never come when that which you meant so kindly will turn out to have been a snare, and perhaps a curse. Think of your friend as an immortal being, with either heaven or hell before him, and consider what genuine kindness requires of you in such a case. And in every instance beware of the kindness which shakes the stability of his principles, which increases the force of his temptations, and makes the narrow way more distasteful and difficult to him than ever.

There can be no doubt that David was moved by considerations of policy as well as by more disinterested motives in sending this message and offering this prayer for the men of Jabesh-gilead. Indeed, in the close of his message he invites them to declare for him, and follow the example of the men of Judah, who have made him king. The kindly proceeding of David was calculated to have a wider influence than over the men of Jabesh, and to have a conciliating effect on all the friends of the former king. It would have been natural enough for them to fear, considering the ordinary ways of conquerors and the ordinary fate of the friends of the conquered, that David would adopt very rigid steps against the friends of his persecutors. By this message sent across the whole country and across the Jordan, he showed that he was animated by the very opposite spirit: that, instead of wishing to punish those who had served with Saul, he was quite disposed to show them favour. Divine grace, acting on his kindly nature, made

him forgiving to Saul and all his comrades, and presented to the world the spectacle of an eminent religious profession in harmony with a noble generosity.

But the spirit in which David acted towards the friends of Saul did not receive the fitting return. The men of Jabesh-gilead appear to have made no response to his appeal. His peaceable purpose was defeated through Abner, Saul's cousin and captain-general of his army, who set up Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, as king in opposition to David. Ishbosheth himself was but a tool in Abner's hands, evidently a man of no spirit or activity; and in setting him up as a claimant for the kingdom, Abner very probably had an eye to the interests of himself and his family. It is plain that he acted in this matter in that spirit of ungodliness and wilfulness of which his royal cousin had given so many proofs; he knew that God had given the kingdom to David, and afterwards taunted Ishbosheth with the fact (iii. 9); perhaps he looked for the reversion of the throne if Ishbosheth should die, for it needed more than an ordinary motive to go right in opposition to the known decree of God. The world's annals contain too many instances of wars springing from no higher motive than the ambition of some Diotrephes to have the pre-eminence. You cry shame on such a spirit; but while you do so take heed lest you share it yourselves. To many a soldier war is welcome because it is the pathway to promotion, to many a civilian because it gives for the moment an impulse to the business with which he is connected. How subtle and dangerous is the feeling that secretly welcomes what may spread numberless woes through a community if only it is likely to bring some advantage to ourselves! O God, drive selfishness from the throne of our hearts, and write on them in deepest letters thine own holy law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The place chosen for the residence of Ishbosheth was Mahanaim, in the half-tribe of Manasseh, on the east side of the Jordan. It is a proof how much the Philistines must have dominated the central part of the country that no city in the tribe of Benjamin and no place even on the western side of the Jordan could be obtained as a royal seat for the son of Saul. Surely this was an evil omen. Ishbosheth's reign, if reign it might be called, lasted but two short years. No single event took place to give it lustre. No city was taken from the Philistines, no garrison put to flight, as at Michmash. No deed was ever done by him or done by his adherents of which they might be proud, and to which they might point in justification of their resistance to David. Ishbosheth was not the wicked man in great power, spreading himself like the green bay-tree, but a short-lived, shrivelled plant, that never rose above the humiliating circumstances of its origin. Men who have defied the purpose of the Almighty have often grown and prospered, like the little horn of the Apocalypse; but in this case of Ishbosheth little more than one breath of the Almighty sufficed to wither him up. Yes, indeed, whatever may be the immediate fortunes of those who unfurl their own banner against the clear purpose of the Almighty, there is but one fate for them all in the end—utter humiliation and defeat. Well may the Psalm counsel all, "Kiss ye the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, if once His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING OF CIVIL WAR.

2 SAMUEL ii. 12-32.

THE well-meant and earnest efforts of David to ward off strife and bring the people together in recognising him as king were frustrated, as we have seen, through the efforts of Abner. Unmoved¹ by the solemn testimony of God, uttered again and again through Samuel, that He had rejected Saul and found as king a man after His own heart: unmoved by the sad proceedings at Endor, where, under such awful circumstances, the same announcement of the purpose of the Almighty had been repeated; unmoved by the doom of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa, where such a striking proof of the reality of God's judgment on his house had been given; unmoved by the miserable state of the kingdom, overrun and humiliated by the Philistines and in the worst possible condition to bear the strain of a civil war,—this Abner insisted on setting up Ishbosheth and endeavouring to make good his claims by the sword. It was never seen more clearly how "one sinner destroyeth much good."

As to the immediate occasion of the war, David was quite innocent, and Abner alone was responsible; but to a feeling and patriotic heart like David's, the war itself must have been the occasion of bitter distress. Did it ever occur to him to think that in a sense he was now brought, against his will, into the position which he had professed to King Achish to be willing to occupy, or that, placed as he now was in an attitude of opposition to a large section of his countrymen, he was undergoing a chastisement for what he was rash enough to say and to do then?

In the commencement of the war, the first step was taken by Abner. He went out from Mahanaim, descended the Jordan valley, and came to Gibeon, in the tribe of Benjamin, a place but a few miles distant from Gibeah, where Saul had reigned. His immediate object probably was to gain such an advantage over David in that quarter as would enable him to establish Ishbosheth at Gibeah, and thus bring to him all the prestige due to the son and successor of Saul. We must not forget that the Philistines had still great influence in the land, and very likely they were in possession of Gibeah, after having rifled Saul's palace and appropriated all his private property. With this powerful enemy to be dealt with ultimately, it was the interest of Abner to avoid a collision of the whole forces on either side, and spare the slaughter which such a contest would have involved. There is some obscurity in the narrative now before us, both at this point and at other places. But it would appear that, when the two armies were ranged on opposite sides of the "pool" or reservoir at Gibeon, Abner made the proposal to Joab that the contest should be decided by a limited number of young men on either side, whose encounter would form a sort of play or spectacle, that their brethren might look on, and, in a sense, enjoy. In the circumstances, it was a wise and humane proposal, although we get something of a shock from the frivolous spirit that could speak of such a deadly encounter as "play."

David was not present with his troops on this occasion, the management of them being entrusted to Joab, his sister's son. Here was another of the difficulties of David—a difficulty which embar-

rassed him for forty years. He was led to commit the management of his army to his warlike nephew, although he appears to have been a man very unlike himself. Joab is much more of the type of Saul than of David. He is rough, impetuous, worldly, manifesting no faith, no prayerfulness, no habit or spirit of communion with God. Yet from the beginning he threw in his lot with David; he remained faithful to him in the insurrection of Absalom; and sometimes he gave him advice which was more worthy to be followed than his own devices. But though Joab was a difficulty to David, he did not master him. The course of David's life and the character of his reign were determined mainly by those spiritual feelings with which Joab appears to have had no sympathy. It was unfortunate that the first stage of the war should have been in the hands of Joab; he conducted it in a way that must have been painful to David; he stained it with a crime that gave him bitter pain.

The practice of deciding public contests by a small and equal number of champions on either side, if not a common one in ancient times, was, at any rate, not very rare. Roman history furnishes some memorable instances of it: that of Romulus and Aruns, and that of the Horatii and the Curiatii; while the challenge of Goliath and the proposal to settle the strife between the Philistines and the Hebrews according to the result of the duel with him had taken place not many years before. The young men were accordingly chosen, twelve on either side; but they rushed against each other with such impetuosity that the whole of them fell together, and the contest remained undecided as before. Excited probably by what they had witnessed, the main forces on either side now rushed against each other; and when the shock of battle came, the victory fell to the side of David, and Abner and his troops were signally defeated. On David's side, there was not a very serious loss, the number of the slain amounting to twenty; but on the side of Abner the loss was three hundred and sixty. To account for so great an inequality we must remember that in Eastern warfare it was in the pursuit that by far the greatest amount of slaughter took place. That obstinate maintenance of their ground which is characteristic of modern armies seems to have been unknown in those times. The superiority of one of the hosts over the other appears usually to have made itself felt at the beginning of the engagement; the opposite force, seized with panic, fled in confusion, followed close by the conquerors, whose weapons, directed against the backs of the fugitive, were neither caught on shields, nor met by counter-volley. Thus it was that Joab's loss was little more than the twelve who had fallen at first, while that of Abner was many times more.

Among those who had to save themselves by flight after the battle was Abner, the captain of the host. Hard in pursuit of him, and of him only, hastened Asahel, the brother of Joab. It is not easy to understand all the circumstances of this pursuit. We cannot but believe that Asahel was bent on killing Abner, but probably his hope was that he would get near enough to him to discharge an arrow at him, and that in doing so he would incur no personal danger. But Abner appears to have remarked him, and to have stopped his flight and faced round to meet him. Abner seems to have carried sword and spear; Asahel had probably nothing heavier than a bow. It was fair enough in Abner to propose that if they were

to be opponents, Asahel should borrow armour, that they might fight on equal terms. But this was not Asahel's thought. He seems to have been determined to follow Abner, and take his opportunity for attacking him in his own way. This Abner would not permit; and, as Asahel would not desist of his pursuit, Abner, rushing at him, struck him with such violence with the hinder end of his spear that the weapon came out behind him. "And Asahel fell down there, and died in the same place; and it came to pass that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still." Asahel was a man of consequence, being brother of the commander of the army and nephew of the king. The death of such a man counted for much, and went far to restore the balance of loss between the two contending armies. It seems to have struck a horror into the hearts of his fellow-soldiers; it was an awful incident of the war. It was strange enough to see one who an hour ago was so young, so fresh and full of life, stretched on the ground a helpless lump of clay; but it was more appalling to remember his relation to the two greatest men of the nation—David and Joab. Certainly war is most indiscriminate in the selection of its victims; commanders and their brothers, kings and their nephews, being as open to its catastrophes as any one else. Surely it must have sent a thrill through Abner to see among the first victims of the strife which he had kindled one whose family stood so high, and whose death would exasperate against him so important a person as his brother Joab.

The pursuit of the defeated army was by-and-bye interrupted by nightfall. In the course of the evening the fugitives somewhat rallied, and concentrated on the top of a hill, in the wilderness of Gibeon. And here the two chiefs held parley together. The proceedings were begun by Abner, and begun by a question that was almost insolent. "Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" It was an audacious attempt to throw on Joab and Joab's master the responsibility of the war. We get a new glimpse of Abner's character here. If there was a fact that might be held to be beyond the possibility of question, it was that Abner had begun the contest. Had not he, in opposition to the Divine King of the nation, set up Ishbosheth against the man called by Jehovah? Had not he gathered the army at Mahanaim, and moved towards Gibeon, on express purpose to exclude David, and secure for his nominee what might be counted in reality, and not in name only, the kingdom of Israel? Yet he insolently demanded of Joab, "Shall the sword devour for ever?" He audaciously applies to Joab a maxim that he had not thought of applying to himself in the morning—"Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" This is a war that can be terminated only by the destruction of one half of the nation; it will be a bitter enough consummation, which half soever it may be. Have you no regard for your "brethren," against whom you are fighting, that you are holding on in this remorseless way?

It may be a marvellously clever thing, in this audacious manner, to throw upon an opponent all the blame which is obviously one's own. But no good man will do so. The audacity that ascribes its own sins to an opponent is surely the token of a very evil nature. We have no reason to form a very high opinion of Joab, but of his opponent in

this strife our judgment must be far worse. An insincere man, Abner could have no high end before him. If David was not happy in his general, still less was Ishbosheth in his.

Joab's answer betrayed a measure of indignation. "As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother." There is some ambiguity in these words. The Revised Version renders, "If thou hadst not spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone away, nor followed every one his brother." The meaning of Joab seems to be that apart from any such ill-tempered appeal as Abner's, it was his full intention in the morning to recall his men from the pursuit, and let Abner and his people go home without further harm. Joab shows the indignation of one credited with a purpose he never had, and with an inhumanity and unbrotherliness of which he was innocent. Why Joab had resolved to give up further hostilities at that time, we are not told. One might have thought that had he struck another blow at Abner he might have so harassed his force as to ruin his cause, and thus secure at once the triumph of David. But Joab probably felt very keenly what Abner accused him of not feeling; that it was a miserable thing to destroy the lives of so many brethren. The idea of building up David's throne on the dead bodies of his subjects he must have known to be extremely distasteful to David himself. Civil war is such a horrible thing, that a general may well be excused who accepts any reason for stopping it. If Joab had known what was to follow, he might have taken a different course. If he had foreseen the "long war" that was to be between the house of Saul and the house of David, he might have tried on this occasion to strike a decisive blow, and pursued Abner's men until they were utterly broken. But that day's work had probably sickened him, as he knew it would sicken David; and leaving Abner and his people to make their way across the Jordan, he returned to bury his brother, and to report his proceedings to David at Hebron.

And David must have grieved exceedingly when he heard what had taken place. The slaughter of nearly four hundred of God's nation was a terrible thought; still more terrible it was to think that in a sense he had been the occasion of it—it was done to prevent him from occupying the throne. No doubt he had reason to be thankful that when fighting had to be done, the issue was eminently favourable to him and his cause. But he must have been grieved that there should be fighting at all. He must have felt somewhat as the Duke of Wellington felt when he made the observation that next to the calamity of losing a battle was that of gaining a victory. Was this what Samuel had meant when he came that morning to Bethlehem and anointed him in presence of his family? Was this what God designed when He was pleased to put him in the place of Saul? If this was a sample of what David was to bring to his beloved people, would it not have been better had he never been born? Very strange must God's ways have appeared to him. How different were his desires, how different his dreams of what should be done when he got the kingdom, from this day's work! Often he had thought how he would drive out the enemies of his people; how he would secure tranquillity and prosperity to every Hebrew homestead; how he would aim at their all living under their vine and under their fig-tree, none making them afraid. But now his reign had begun with blood-

shed, and already desolation had been carried to hundreds of his people's homes. Was this the work, O God, for which Thou didst call me from the sheep-folds? Should I not have been better employed "following the ewes great with young," and protecting my flock from the lion and the bear, rather than sending forth men to stain the soil of the land with the blood of the people and carry to their habitations the voice of mourning and woe?

If David's mind was exercised in this way by the proceedings near the pool of Gibeon, all his trust and patience would be needed to wait for the time when God would vindicate His way. After all, was not his experience somewhat like that of Moses when he first set about the deliverance of his people? Did he not appear to do more harm than good? Instead of lightening the burdens of his people, did he not cause an increase of their weight? But has it not been the experience of most men who have girded themselves for great undertakings in the interest of their brethren? Nay, was it not the experience of our blessed Lord Himself? At His birth the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; goodwill to men!" And almost the next event was the massacre at Bethlehem, and Jesus Himself even in His lifetime found cause to say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword." What a sad evidence of the moral disorder of the world! The very messengers of the God of peace are not allowed to deliver their messages in peace, but even as they advance toward men with smiles and benedictions, are fiercely assailed, and compelled to defend themselves by violence. Nevertheless the angels' song is true. Jesus did come to bless the world with peace. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." The resistance of His enemies was essentially a feeble resistance, and that stronger spirit of peace which Jesus brought in due time prevailed mightily in the earth. So with the bloodshed in David's reign. It did not hinder David from being a great benefactor to his kingdom in the end. It did not annul the promise of God. It did not neutralise the efficacy of the holy oil. This was just one of the many ways in which his faith and his patience were tried. It must have shown him even more impressively than anything that had yet happened the absolute necessity of Divine direction in all his ways. For it is far easier for a good man to bear suffering brought on himself by his actions, than to see suffering and death entailed on his brethren in connection with a course which has been taken by him.

In that audacious speech which Abner addressed to Joab, there occurs an expression worthy of being taken out of the connection in which it was used and of being viewed with wider reference. "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" Things are to be viewed by rational beings not merely in their present or immediate result, but in their final outcome, in their ultimate fruits. A very commonplace truth, I grant you, this is, but most wholesome, most necessary to be cherished. For how many of the miseries and how many of the worst sins of men come of forgetting the "bitterness in the latter end" which evil beginnings give rise to! It is one of the most wholesome rules of life never to do to-day what you shall repent of to-morrow. Yet how constantly is the rule disregarded! Youthful child of fortune, who are revelling to-day in wealth

which is counted by hundreds of thousands, and which seems as if it could never be exhausted, remember how dangerous those gambling habits are into which you are falling; remember that the gambler's biography is usually a short, and often a tragic one; and when you hear the sound of the pistol with which one like yourself has ended his miserable existence, remember it all began by disregarding the motto, written over the gambler's path, "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" You merry-hearted and amusing companion, to whom the flowing bowl, and the jovial company, and the merry jest and lively song are so attractive, the more you are tempted to go where they are found remember that rags and dishonour, dirt and degradation, form the last stage of the journey,—“the latter end bitterness” of the course you are now following. You who are wasting in idleness the hours of the morning, remember how you will repent of it when you have to make up your leeway by hard toil at night. I have said that things are to be viewed by rational beings in their relations to the future as well as the present. It is not the part of a rational being to accumulate disaster, distress, and shame for the future. Men that are rational will far rather suffer for the present if they may be free from suffering hereafter. Benefit societies, life insurance, annuity schemes—what are they all but the devices of sensible men desirous to ward off even the possibility of temporal "bitterness in the latter end"? And may not this wisdom, this good sense, be applied with far more purpose to the things that are unseen and eternal? Think of the "bitterness in the end" that must come of neglecting Christ, disregarding conscience, turning away from the Bible, the church, the Sabbath, grieving the Spirit, neglecting prayer! Will not many a foretaste of this bitterness visit you even while yet you are well, and all things are prospering with you? Will it not come on you with overpowering force while you lie on your death-bed? Will it not wrap your soul in indescribable anguish through all eternity?

Think then of this "bitterness in the latter end"! Now is the accepted time. In the deep consciousness of your weakness, let your prayer be that God would restrain you from the folly to which your hearts are so prone, that, by His Holy Spirit, He would work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSION OF THE CIVIL WAR.

2 SAMUEL iii. 1-21.

THE victory at the pool of Gibeon was far from ending the opposition to David. In vain, for many a day, weary eyes looked out for the dove with the olive leaf. "There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." The war does not seem to have been carried on by pitched battles, but rather by a long series of those fretting and worrying little skirmishes which a state of civil war breeds, even when the volcano is comparatively quiet. But the drift of things was manifest. "David waxed stronger and stronger; but the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." The cause of the house of Saul was weak in its invisible support because God was against it; it was

weak in its champion Ishbosheth, a feeble man, with little or no power to attract people to his standard; its only element of strength was Abner, and even he could not make head against such odds. Good and evil so often seem to balance each other, existing side by side in a kind of feeble stagnation, and giving rise to such a dull feeling on the part of onlookers that we cannot but think with something like envy of the followers of David even under the pain of a civil war, cheered as they were by constant proofs that their cause was advancing to victory.

And now we get a glimpse of David's domestic mode of life, which, indeed, is far from satisfactory. His wives were now six in number; of some of them we know nothing; of the rest what we do know is not always in their favour. The earliest of all was "Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess." Her native place, or the home of her family, was Jezreel, that part of the plain of Esdraelon where the Philistines encamped before Saul was defeated (1 Sam. xxix. 12), and afterwards, in the days of Ahab, a royal residence of the kings of Israel (1 Kings xviii. 46) and the abode of Naboth, who refused to part with his vineyard in Jezreel to the king (1 Kings xxi.). Of Ahinoam we find absolutely no mention in the history; if her son Amnon, the oldest of David's family, reflected her character, we have no reason to regret the silence (2 Sam. xiii.). The next of his wives was Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, of whose smartness and excellent management we have a full account in a former part of the history. Her son is called Chileab, but in the parallel passage in Chronicles Daniel; we can only guess the reason of the change; but whether it was another name for the same son, or the name of another son, the history is silent concerning him, and the most probable conjecture is that he died early. His third wife was Maachah, the daughter of Talmi the Geshurite. This was not, as some have rather foolishly supposed, a member of those Geshurites in the south against whom David led his troop (1 Sam. xxvii. 8), for it is expressly stated that of that tribe "he left neither man nor woman alive." It was of Geshur in Syria that Talmi was king (2 Sam. xv. 8); it formed one of several little principalities lying between Mount Hermon and Damascus; but we cannot commend the alliance; for these kingdoms were idolatrous, and unless Maachah was an exception, she must have introduced idolatrous practices into David's house. Of the other three wives we have no information. And in regard to the household which he thus established at Hebron, we can only regret that the king of Israel did not imitate the example that had been set there by Abraham, and followed in the same neighbourhood by Isaac. What a different complexion would have been given to David's character and history if he had shown the self-control in this matter that he showed in his treatment of Saul! Of how many grievous sins and sorrows did he sow the seed when he thus multiplied wives to himself! How many a man, from his own day down to the days of Mormonism, did he silently encourage in licentious conduct, and furnish with a respectable example and a plausible excuse for it! How difficult did he make it for many who cannot but acknowledge the bright aspect of his spiritual life to believe that even in that it was all good and genuine! We do not hesitate to ascribe to the life of David as influence on successive generations on the whole, pure and elevating; but it is impossible not to own

that by many, a justification of relaxed principle and unchaste living has been drawn from his example.

We have already said that polygamy was not imputed to David as a sin in the sense that it deprived him of the favour of God. But we cannot allow that this permission was of the nature of a boon. We cannot but feel how much better it would have been if the seventh commandment had been read by David with the same absolute, unbending limitation with which it is read by us. It would have been better for him and better for his house. Puritan strictness of morals is, after all, a right wholesome and most blessed thing. Who shall say that the sum of a man's enjoyment is not far greatest in the end of life when he has kept with unflinching steadfastness his early vow of faithfulness, and, as his reward, has never lost the freshness and the flavour of his first love, nor ceased to find in his ever-faithful partner that which fills and satisfies his heart? Compared to this, the life of him who has flitted from one attachment to another, heedless of the soured feelings or, it may be, the broken hearts he has left behind, and whose children, instead of breathing the sweet spirit of brotherly and sisterly love, scowl at one another with the bitter feelings of envy, jealousy, and hatred, is like an existence of wild fever compared to the pure tranquil life of a child.

In such a household as David's, occasions of estrangement must have been perpetually arising among the various branches, and it would require all his wisdom and gentleness to keep these quarrels within moderate bounds. In his own breast, that sense of delicacy, that instinct of purity, which exercises such an influence on a godly family, could not have existed; the necessity of reining in his inclinations in that respect was not acknowledged; and it is remarkable that in the confessions of the fifty-first Psalm, while he specifies the sins of blood-guiltiness and seems to have been overwhelmed by a sense of his meanness, injustice, and selfishness, there is no special allusion to the sin of adultery, and no indication of that sin pressing very heavily upon his conscience.

Whether it be by design or not, it is an instructive circumstance that it is immediately after this glimpse of David's domestic life that we meet with a sample of the kind of evils which the system of royal harems is ever apt to produce. Saul too had had his harem; and it was a rule of succession in the East that the harem went with the throne. To take possession of the one was regarded as equivalent to setting up a claim to the other. When therefore Ishbosheth heard that Abner had taken one of his father's concubines, he looked on it as a proof that Abner had an eye to the throne for himself. He accordingly demanded an explanation from Abner, but instead of explanation or apology, he received a volley of rudeness and defiance. Abner knew well that without him Ishbosheth was but a figure-head, and he was enraged by treatment that seemed to overlook all the service he had rendered him and to treat him as if he were some second or third-rate officer of a firm and settled kingdom. Perhaps Abner had begun to see that the cause of Ishbosheth was hopeless, and was even glad in his secret heart of an excuse for abandoning an undertaking which could bring neither success nor honour. "Am I a dog's head, which against Abner should show kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his

friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to day with a fault concerning this woman? So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him, to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah from Dan even to Beersheba."

The proverb says, "When rogues fall out, honest men get their own." How utterly unprincipled the effort of Abner and Ishbosheth was is evident from the confession of the former that God had sworn to David to establish his throne over the whole land. Their enterprise therefore bore impiety on its very face; and we can only account for their setting their hands to it on the principle that keen thirst for worldly advantage will drive ungodly men into virtual atheism, as if God were no factor in the affairs of men, as if it mattered not that He was against them, and that it is only when their schemes show signs of coming to ruin that they awake to the consciousness that there is a God after all! And how often we see that godless men banded together have no firm bond of union; the very passions which they are united to gratify begin to rage against one another; they fall into the pit which they digged for others; they are hanged on the gallows which they erected for their foes.

The next step in the narrative brings us to Abner's offer to David to make a league with him for the undisputed possession of the throne. Things had changed now very materially from that day when, in the wilderness of Judah, David reproached Abner for his careless custody of the king's person (1 Sam. xxvi. 14). What a picture of feebleness David had seemed then, while Saul commanded the whole resources of the kingdom! Yet in that day of weakness David had done a noble deed, a deed made nobler by his very weakness, and he had thereby shown to any that had eyes to see which party it was that had God on its side. And now this truth concerning him, against which Abner had kicked and struggled in vain, was asserting itself in a way not to be resisted. Yet even now there is no trace of humility in the language of Abner. He plays the great man still. "Behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel to thee." He approaches King David, not as one who has done him a great wrong, but as one who offers to do him a great favour. There is no word of regret for his having opposed what he knew to be God's purpose and promise, no apology for the disturbance he had wrought in Israel, no excuse for all the distress which he had caused to David by keeping the kingdom and the people at war. He does not come as a rebel to his sovereign, but as one independent man to another. Make a league with me. Secure me from punishment; promise me a reward. For this he simply offers to place at David's disposal that powerful hand of his that had been so mighty for evil. If he expected that David would leap into his arms at the mention of such an offer, he was mistaken. This was not the way for a rebel to come to his king. David was too much dissatisfied with his past conduct, and saw too clearly that it was only stress of weather that was driving him into harbour now, to show any great enthusiasm about his offer. On the contrary, he laid down a stiff preliminary condition; and with the air of one who knew his place and his power, he let Abner know that if that condition were not complied with, he should

not see his face. We cannot but admire the firmness shown in this mode of meeting Abner's advances; but we are somewhat disappointed when we find what the condition was—that Michal, Saul's daughter, whom he had espoused for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, should be restored to him as his wife. The demand was no doubt a righteous one, and it was reasonable that David should be vindicated from the great slur cast on him when his wife was given to another; moreover, it was fitted to test the genuineness of Abner's advances, to show whether he really meant to acknowledge the royal rights of David; but we wonder that, with six wives already about him, he should be so eager for another, and we shrink from the reason given for the restoration—not that the marriage tie was inviolable, but that he had paid for her a very extraordinary dowry. And most readers, too, will feel some sympathy with the second husband, who seems to have had a strong affection for Michal, and who followed her weeping, until the stern military voice of Abner compelled him to return. All we can say about him is, that his sin lay in receiving another man's wife and treating her as his own; the beginning of the connection was unlawful, although the manner of its ending on his part was creditable. Connections formed in sin must sooner or later end in suffering; and the tears of Phaltiel would not have flowed now if that unfortunate man had acted firmly and honourably when Michal was taken from David.

But it is not likely that in this demand for the restoration of Michal David acted on purely personal considerations. He does not seem to have been above the prevalent feeling of the East which measured the authority and dignity of the monarch by the rank and connections of his wives. Moreover, as David laid stress on the way in which he got Michal as his wife, it is likely that he desired to recall attention to his early exploits against the Philistines. He had probably found that his recent alliance with King Achish had brought him into suspicion; he wished to remind the people therefore of his ancient services against those bitter and implacable enemies of Israel, and to encourage the expectation of similar exploits in the future. The purpose which he thus seems to have had in view was successful. For when Abner soon after made a representation to the elders of Israel in favour of King David and reminded them of the promise which God had made regarding him, it was to this effect: "By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines and out of the hand of all their enemies." It seems to have been a great step towards David's recognition by the whole nation that they came to have confidence in him in leading them against the Philistines. Thus he received a fresh proof of the folly of his distrustful conclusion, "There is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines." It became more and more apparent that nothing could have been worse.

One is tempted to wonder if David ever sat down to consider what would probably have happened if, instead of going over to the Philistines, he had continued to abide in the wilderness of Judah, braving the dangers of the place and trusting in the protection of his God. Some sixteen months after, the terrible invasion of the Philistines took place, and Saul, overwhelmed with terror and despair, was at his wits' end for help. How natural it would have been for him in that

hour of despair to send for David if he had been still in the country and ask his aid! How much more in his own place would David have appeared bravely fronting the Philistines in battle than hovering in the rear of Achish and pretending to feel himself treated ill because the Philistine lords had required him to be sent away! Might he not have been the instrument of saving his country from defeat and disgrace? And if Saul and Jonathan had fallen in the battle, would not the whole nation have turned as one man to him, and would not that long and cruel civil war have been entirely averted? It is needless to go back on the past and think how much better we could have acted if unavailing regret is to be the only result of the process; but it is a salutary and blessed exercise if it tends to fix in our minds—what we doubt not it fixed in David's—how infinitely better for us it is to follow the course marked out for us by our heavenly Father, with all its difficulties and dangers, than to walk in the light of our own fire and in the sparks of our own kindling.

It appears that Abner set himself with great vigour to fulfil the promise made by him in his league with David. First, he held communication with the representatives of the whole nation, "the elders of Israel," and showed to them, as we have seen—no doubt to his own confusion and self-condemnation—how God had designated David as the king through whom deliverance would be granted to Israel from the Philistines and all their other enemies. Next, remembering that Saul was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, and believing that the feeling in favour of his family would be eminently strong in that tribe, he took special pains to attach them to David, and as he was himself likewise a Benjamite, he must have been eminently useful in this service. Thirdly, he went in person to Hebron, David's seat, to speak in the ears of David all that seemed good to Israel and to the whole house of Benjamin." Finally, after being entertained by David at a great feast, he set out to bring about a meeting of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might solemnly ratify the appointment of David as king, in the same way as, in the early days of Saul, Samuel had convened the representatives of the nation at Gilgal (1 Sam. xi. 15). That in all this Abner was rendering a great service both to David and the nation cannot be doubted. He was doing what no other man in Israel could have done at the time for establishing the throne of David and ending the civil war. Having once made overtures to David, he showed an honourable promptitude in fulfilling the promise under which he had come. No man can atone for past sin by doing his duty at a future time; but if anything could have blotted out from David's memory the remembrance of Abner's great injury to him and to the nation, it was the zeal with which he exerted himself now to establish David's claims over all the country, and especially where his cause was feeblest—in the tribe of Benjamin.

It must have been a happy day in David's history when Abner set out from Hebron to convene the assembly of the tribes that was to call him with one voice to the throne. It was the day long looked for come at last. The dove had at length come with the olive leaf, and peace would now reign among all the tribes of Israel. And we may readily conceive him, with this prospect so near, expressing his feelings, if not in the very words of the thirty-seventh Psalm, at any rate in language of similar import:—

"Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,
Neither be thou envious against them that work un-
righteousness
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb;
Trust in the Lord and do good;
Dwell in the land, and follow after faithfulness.
Delight thyself also in the Lord,
And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.
Commit thy way unto the Lord,
Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.
And He shall make thy righteousness to go forth as the
light,
And thy judgment as the noonday.
Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;
Fret not thyself because of him that prospereth in his
way,
Because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to
pass.
For evil-doers shall be cut off;
But those that wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the
land."

But a crime was now on the eve of being perpetrated destined for the time to scatter all King David's pleasing expectations and plunge him anew into the depths of distress.

CHAPTER V.

ASSASSINATION OF ABNER AND ISH-BOSHETH.

2 SAMUEL iii. 22-39; iv.

It is quite possible that, in treating with Abner, David showed too complacent a temper, that he treated too lightly his appearance in arms against him at the pool of Gibeon, and that he neglected to demand an apology for the death of Asahel. Certainly it would have been wise had some measures been taken to soothe the ruffled temper of Joab and reconcile him to the new arrangement. This, however, was not done. David was so happy in the thought that the civil war was to cease, and that all Israel were about to recognise him as their king, that he would not go back on the past, or make reprisals even for the death of Asahel. He was willing to let bygones be bygones. Perhaps, too, he thought that if Asahel met his death at the hand of Abner, it was his own rashness that was to blame for it. Anyhow he was greatly impressed with the value of Abner's service on his behalf, and much interested in the project to which he was now going forth—gathering all Israel to the king, to make a league with him and bind themselves to his allegiance.

In these measures Joab had not been consulted. When Abner was at Hebron, Joab was absent on a military enterprise. In that enterprise he had been very successful, and he was able to appear at Hebron with the most popular evidence of success that a general could bring—a large amount of spoil. No doubt Joab was elated with his success, and was in that very temper when a man is most disposed to resent his being overlooked and to take more upon him than is meet. When he heard of David's agreement with Abner, he was highly displeased. First he went to the king, and scolded him for his simplicity in believing Abner. It was but a stratagem of Abner's to allow him to come to Hebron, ascertain the state of David's affairs, and take his own steps more effectively in the interest of his opponent. Suspicion reigned in Joab's heart; the generosity of David's nature was not only not shared by him, but seemed silliness itself. His rudeness to David is highly offensive. He speaks to him in the tone of a master

to a servant, or in the tone of those servants who rule their master. "What hast thou done? Behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest." David is spoken to like one guilty of inexcusable folly, as if he were accountable to Joab, and not Joab to him. Of the king's answer to Joab, nothing is recorded; but from David's confession (ver. 39) that the sons of Zeruiah were too strong for him, we may infer that it was not very firm or decided, and that Joab set it utterly at nought. For the very first thing that Joab did after seeing the king was to send a message to Abner, most likely in David's name, but without David's knowledge, asking him to return. Joab was at the gate ready for his treacherous business, and taking Abner aside as if for private conversation, he plunged his dagger in his breast, ostensibly in revenge for the death of his brother Asahel. There was something eminently mean and dastardly in the deed. Abner was now on the best of terms with Joab's master, and he could not have apprehended danger from the servant. If assassination be mean among civilians, it is eminently mean among soldiers. The laws of hospitality were outraged when one who had just been David's guest was assassinated in David's city. The outrage was all the greater, as was also the injury to King David and to the whole kingdom, that the crime was committed when Abner was on the eve of an important and delicate negotiation with the other tribes of Israel, since the arrangement which he hoped to bring about was likely to be broken off by the news of his shameful death. At no moment are the feelings of men less to be trifled with than when, after long and fierce alienation, they are on the point of coming together. Abner had brought the tribes of Israel to that point, but now, like a flock of birds frightened by a shot, they were certain to fly asunder. All this danger Joab set at nought, the one thought of taking revenge for the death of his brother absorbing every other, and making him, like so many other men when excited by a guilty passion, utterly regardless of every consequence provided only his revenge was satisfied.

How did David act toward Joab? Most kings would at once have put him to death, and David's subsequent action towards the murderers of Ishbosheth shows that, even in his judgment, this would have been the proper retribution on Joab for his bloody deed. But David did not feel himself strong enough to deal with Joab according to his deserts. It might have been better for him during the rest of his life if he had acted with more vigour now. But instead of making an example of Joab, he contented himself with pouring out on him a vial of indignation, publicly washing his hands of the nefarious transaction, and pronouncing on its author and his family a terrible malediction. We cannot but shrink from the way in which David brought in Joab's family to share his curse: "Let there not fall from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread." Yet we must remember that according to the sentiment of those times a man and his house were so identified that the punishment due to the head was regarded as due to the whole. In our day we see a law in constant operation which visits iniquities of the parents upon the children with a terrible retribution. The

drunkard's children are woeful sufferers for their parent's sin; the family of the felon carries a stigma for ever. We recognise this as a law of Providence; but we do not act on it ourselves in inflicting punishment. In David's time, however, and throughout the whole Old Testament period, punishments due to the fathers were formally shared by their families. When Joshua sentenced Achan to die for his crime in stealing from the spoils of Jericho a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment, his wife and children were put to death along with him. In denouncing the curse on Joab's family as well as himself, David therefore only recognised a law which was universally acted on in his day. The law may have been a hard one, but we are not to blame David for acting on a principle of retribution universally acknowledged. We are to remember, too, that David was now acting in a public capacity, and as the chief magistrate of the nation. If he had put Joab to death, his act would have involved his family in many a woe; in denouncing his deeds and calling for retribution on them generation after generation, he only carried out the same principle a little further. That Joab deserved to die for his dastardly crime, none could have denied; if David abstained from inflicting that punishment, it was only natural that he should be very emphatic in proclaiming what such a criminal might look for, in never-failing visitations on himself and his seed, when he was left to be dealt with by the God of justice.

Having thus disposed of Joab, David had next to dispose of the dead body of Abner. He determined that every circumstance connected with Abner's funeral should manifest the sincerity of his grief at his untimely end. In the first place, he caused him to be buried at Hebron. We know of the tomb at Hebron where the bodies of the patriarchs lay; if it was at all legitimate to place others in that grave, we may believe that a place in it was found for Abner. In the second place, the mourning company attended the funeral with rent clothes and girdings of sackcloth, while the king himself followed the bier, and at the grave both king and people gave way to a burst of tears. In the third place, the king pronounced an elegy over him, short, but expressive of his sense of the unworthy death which had come to such a man:—

"Should Abner die as a fool dieth?

Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters;

As a man falleth before the children of iniquity, so didst thou fall."

Had he died the death of one taken in battle, his bound hands and his feet in fetters would have denoted that after honourable conflict he had been defeated in the field, and that he died the death due to a public enemy. Instead of this, he had fallen before the children of iniquity, before men mean enough to betray him and murder him, while he was under the protection of the king. In the fourth place, he sternly refused to eat bread till that day, so full of darkness and infamy, should have passed away. The public manifestations of David's grief showed very clearly how far he was from approving of the death of Abner. And they had the desired effect. The people were pleased with the evidence afforded of David's feelings, and the event that had seemed likely to destroy his prospects turned out in this way in his favour. "The people took notice of this, and it pleased them, as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people." It was another evidence of the conquer-

ing power of goodness and forbearance. By his generous treatment of his foes, David secured a position in the hearts of his people, and established his kingdom on a basis of security which he could not have obtained by any amount of severity. For ages and ages, the two methods of dealing with a reluctant people, generosity and severity, have been pitted against each other, and always with the effect that severity fails and generosity succeeds. There were many who were indignant at the clemency shown by Lord Canning after the Indian mutiny. They would have had him inspire terror by acts of awful severity. But the peaceful career of our Indian empire and the absence of any attempt to renew the insurrection since that time show that the policy of clemency was the policy of wisdom and of success.

Still another step was taken by David that shows how painfully he was impressed by the death of Abner. To "his servants"—that is, his cabinet or his staff—he said in confidence, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" He recognised in Abner one of those men of consummate ability who are born to rule, or at least to render the highest service to the actual ruler of a country by their great influence over men. It seems very probable that he looked to him as his own chief officer for the future. Rebel though he had been, he seemed quite cured of his rebellion, and now that he cordially acknowledged David's right to the throne, he would probably have been his right-hand man. Abner, Saul's cousin, was probably a much older man than Joab, who was David's nephew, and who could not have been much older than David himself. The loss of Abner was a great personal loss especially as it threw him more into the hands of these sons of Zeruiah, Joab and Abishai, whose impetuous, lordly temper was too much for him to restrain. The representation to his confidential servants, "I am weak, and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too strong for me," was the appeal to them for cordial help in the affairs of the kingdom, in order that Joab and his brother might not be able to carry everything their own way. David, like many another man, needed to say, Save me from my friends. We get a vivid glimpse of the perplexities of kings, and of the compensations of a humbler lot. Men in high places, worried by the difficulties of managing their affairs and servants, and by the endless annoyances to which their jealousies and their self-will give rise, may find much to envy in the simple, unembarrassed life of the humblest of the people.

From the assassination of Abner, the real source of the opposition that had been raised to David, the narrative proceeds to the assassination of Ishbosheth, the titular king. "When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled." The contrast is striking between his conduct under difficulty and that of David. In the history of the latter, faith often faltered in times of trouble, and the spirit of distrust found a footing in his soul. But these occasions occurred in the course of protracted and terrible struggles; they were exceptions to his usual bearing; faith commonly bore him up in his darkest trials. Ishbosheth, on the other hand, seems to have had no resource, no sustaining power whatever, under visible reverses, David's slips were like the temporary falling back of the gallant soldier when surprised by a sudden onslaught, or when, fagged and weary, he is driven back by superior numbers; but as soon as he has

recovered himself, he dashes back undaunted to the conflict. Ishbosheth was like the soldier who throws down his arms and rushes from the field as soon as he feels the bitter storm of battle. With all his falls, there was something in David that showed him to be cast in a different mould from ordinary men. He was habitually aiming at a higher standard, and upheld by the consciousness of a higher strength; he was ever and anon resorting to "the secret place of the Most High," taking hold of Him as his covenant God, and labouring to draw down from Him the inspiration and the strength of a nobler life than that of the mass of the children of men.

The godless course which Ishbosheth had followed in setting up a claim to the throne in opposition to the Divine call of David not only lost him the distinction he coveted, but cost him his life. He made himself a mark for treacherous and heartless men; and one day while lying in his bed at noon, was despatched by two of his servants. The two men that murdered him seem to have been among those whom Saul enriched with the spoil of the Gibeonites. They were brothers, men of Beeroth, which was formerly one of the cities of the Gibeonites, but was now reckoned to Benjamin.

Saul appears to have attacked the Beerothites, and given their property to his favourites (comp. 1 Sam. xxii. 7 and 2 Sam. xxi. 2). A curse went with the transaction; Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, was murdered by two of those who were enriched by the unhallowed deed; and many years after, his bloody house had to yield up seven of his sons to justice, when a great famine showed that for this crime wrath rested on the land.

The murderers of Ishbosheth, Baanah and Rechab, mistaking the character of David as much as it had been mistaken by the Amalekite who pretended that he had slain Saul, hastened to Hebron, bearing with them the head of their victim, a ghastly evidence of the reality of the deed. This revolting trophy they carried all the way from Mahanaim to Hebron, a distance of some fifty miles. Mean and selfish themselves, they thought other men must be the same. They were among those poor creatures who are unable to rise above their own poor level in their conceptions of others. When they presented themselves before David, he showed all his former superiority to selfish, jealous feelings. He was roused indeed to the highest pitch of indignation. We can hardly conceive the astonishment and horror with which they would receive his answer, "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold on him and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings. How much more when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed! Shall I not therefore require his blood at your hand, and take you away from the earth?" Simple death was not judged a severe enough punishment for such guilt; as they had cut off the head of Ishbosheth after killing him, so after they were slain their hands and their feet were cut off; and thereafter they were hanged over the pool in Hebron—a token of the execration in which the crime was held. Here was another evidence that deeds of violence done to his rivals, so far from finding acceptance, were detestable in the eyes of David. And here was another fulfilment of the resolution which he had made when he took possession of the throne—"I

will early destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord."

These rapid, instantaneous executions by order of David have raised painful feelings in many. Granting that the retribution was justly deserved, and granting that the rapidity of the punishment was in accord with military law, ancient and modern, and that it was necessary in order to make a due impression on the people, still it may be asked, How could David, as a pious man, hurry these sinners into the presence of their Judge without giving them any exhortation to repentance or leaving them a moment in which to ask for mercy? The question is undoubtedly a difficult one. But the difficulty arises in a great degree from our ascribing to David and others the same knowledge of the future state and the same vivid impressions regarding it that we have ourselves. We often forget that to those who lived in the Old Testament the future life was wrapped in far greater obscurity than it is to us. That good men had no knowledge of it, we cannot allow; but certainly they knew vastly less about it than has been revealed to us. And the general effect of this was that the consciousness of a future life was much fainter even among good men than than now. They did not think about it; it was not present to their thoughts. There is no use trying to make David either a wiser or a better man than he was. There is no use trying to place him high above the level or the light of his age. If it be asked, How did David feel with reference to the future life of these men? the answer is, that probably it was not much, if at all, in his thoughts. That which was prominent in his thoughts was that they had sacrificed their lives by their atrocious wickedness, and the sooner they were punished the better. If he thought of their future, he would feel that they were in the hands of God, and that they would be judged by Him according to the tenor of their lives. It cannot be said that compassion for them mingled with David's feelings. The one prominent feeling he had was that of their guilt; for that they must suffer. And David, like other soldiers who have shed much blood, was so accustomed to the sight of violent death, that the horror which it usually excites was no longer familiar to him.

It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has brought life and immortality to light. So far from the future life being a dim and shadowy revelation, it is now one of the clearest doctrines of the faith. It is one of the doctrines which every earnest preacher of the Gospel is profoundly earnest in dwelling on. That death ushers us into the presence of God, that after death cometh the judgment, that every one of us is to give account of himself to God, that the final condition of men is to be one of misery or one of life, are among the clearest revelations of the Gospel. And this fact invests every man's death with profound significance in the Christian's view. That the condemned criminal may have time to prepare, our courts of law invariably interpose an interval between the sentence and the punishment. Would only that men were more consistent here! If we shudder at the thought of a dying sinner appearing in all the blackness of his guilt before God, let us think more how we may turn sinners from their wickedness while they live. Let us see the atrocious guilt of encouraging them in ways of sin that cannot but bring on them the retribution of a righteous God. O ye who, careless yourselves, laugh at the serious

impressions and scruples of others; ye who teach those that would otherwise do better to drink and gamble and especially to scoff; ye who do your best to frustrate the prayers of tender-hearted fathers and mothers whose deepest desire is that their children may be saved; ye, in one word, who are missionaries of the devil and help to people hell—would that you pondered your awful guilt! For "whosoever shall cause any of the least of these to offend, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depths of the sea."

CHAPTER VI.

DAVID KING OF ALL ISRAEL.

2 SAMUEL V. 1-9.

AFTER seven and a half years of opposition,* David was now left without a rival, and the representatives of the whole tribes came to Hebron to anoint him king. They gave three reasons for their act, nearly all of which, however, would have been as valid at the death of Saul as they were at this time.

The first was that David and they were closely related—"Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh;" rather an unusual reason, but in the circumstances not unnatural. For David's alliance with the Philistines had thrown some doubt on his nationality; it was not very clear at that time whether he was to be regarded as a Hebrew or as a naturalised Philistine; but now the doubts that had existed on that point had all disappeared; conclusive evidence had been afforded that David was out-and-out a Hebrew, and therefore that he was not disqualified for the Hebrew throne.

This conclusion is confirmed by what they give as their second reason—his former exploits and services against their enemies. "Also, in time past, when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel." In former days, David had proved himself Saul's most efficient lieutenant; he had been at the head of the armies of Israel, and his achievements in that capacity pointed to him as the fit and natural successor of Saul.

The third reason is the most conclusive—"The Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel." It was little to the credit of the elders that this reason, which should have been the first, and which needed no other reasons to confirm it, was given by them as the last. The truth, however, is, that if they had made it their first and great reason, they would on the very face of their speech have condemned themselves. Why, if this was the command of God, had they been so long of carrying it out? Ought not effect to have been given to it at the very first, independent of all other reasons whatsoever? The elders cannot but give it a place among their reasons for offering him the throne; but it is not allowed to have its own place, and it is added to the others as if they needed to be sup-

* There is difficulty in adjusting all the dates. In chap. ii. 10, it is said that Ishbosheth reigned two years. The usual explanation is that he reigned two years before war broke out between him and David. Another supposition is that there was an interregnum in Israel of five and a half years, and that Ishbosheth reigned the last two years of David's seven and a half. The accuracy of the text has been questioned, and it has been proposed (on very slender MS. authority) to read that Ishbosheth reigned six years in place of two.

plemented before effect could be given to it. The elders did not show that supreme regard to the will of God which ought ever to be the first consideration in every loyal heart. It is the great offence of multitudes, even among those who make a Christian profession, that while they are willing to pay regard to God's will as one of many considerations, they are not prepared to pay supreme regard to it. It may be taken along with other considerations, but it is not allowed to be the chief consideration. Religion may have a place in their life, but not the first place. But can a service thus rendered be acceptable to God? Can God accept the second or the third place in any man's regard? Does not the first commandment dispose of this question: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"?

"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."

It was a happy circumstance that David was able to neutralise the effects of the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth, and to convince the people that he had no share in these crimes. Notwithstanding the prejudice against his side which in themselves they were fitted to create in the supporters of Saul's family, they did not cause any further opposition to his claims. The tact of the king removed any stumbling-block that might have arisen from these untoward events. And thus the throne of David was at last set up, amid the universal approval of the nation.

This was a most memorable event in David's history. It was the fulfilment of one great instalment of God's promises to him. It was fitted very greatly to deepen his trust in God, as his Protector and his Friend. To be able to look back on even one case of a Divine promise distinctly fulfilled to us is a great help to faith in all future time. For David to be able to look back on that early period of his life, so crowded with trials and sufferings, perplexities and dangers, and to mark how God had delivered him from every one of them, and, in spite of the fearful opposition that had been raised against him, had at last seated him firmly on the throne, was well fitted to advance the spirit of trust to that place of supremacy which it gained in him. After such an overwhelming experience, it was little wonder that his trust in God became so strong, and his purpose to serve God so intense. The sorrows of death had compassed him, and the pains of Hades had taken hold on him, yet the Lord had been with him, and had most wonderfully delivered him. And in token of his deliverance he makes his vow of continual service, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to Thee the sacrifices of praise, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

We can hardly pass from this event in David's history without recalling his typical relation to Him who in after-years was to be known as the "Son of David." The resemblance between the early history of David and that of our blessed Lord in some of its features is too obvious to need to be pointed out. Like David, Jesus spends His early years in the obscurity of a country village. Like him, He enters on His public life under a striking and convincing evidence of the Divine favour—David by conquering Goliath, Jesus by the descent of the Spirit at His baptism, and the voice from heaven which proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Like

David, soon after His Divine call Jesus is led out to the wilderness, to undergo hardship and temptation; but, unlike David, He conquers the enemy at every onset. Like David, Jesus attaches to Himself a small but valiant band of followers, whose achievements in the spiritual warfare rival the deeds of David's "worthies" in the natural. Like David, Jesus is concerned for His relatives; David, in his extremity, commits his father and mother to the king of Moab; Jesus, on the cross, commits His mother to the beloved disciple. In the higher exercises of David's spirit, too, there is much that resembles the experiences of Christ. The convincing proof of this is, that most of the Psalms which the Christian Church has ever held to be Messianic have their foundation in the experiences of David. It is impossible not to see that in one sense there must have been a measureless distance between the experience of a sinful man like David and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Divinity of His person, the atoning efficacy of His death, and the glory of His resurrection, Jesus is high above any of the sons of men. Yet there must likewise have been some marvellous similarity between Him and David, seeing that David's words of sorrow and of hope were so often accepted by Jesus to express His own emotions. Strange indeed it is that the words in which David, in the twenty-second Psalm, pours out the desolation of his spirit, were the words in which Jesus found expression for His unexampled distress upon the cross. Strange, too, that David's deliverances were so like Christ's that the same language does for both; nay, that the very words in which Jesus commended His soul to the Father, as it was passing from His body, were words which had first been used by David.

But it does not concern us at present to look so much at the general resemblances between David and our blessed Lord, as at the analogy in the fortunes of their respective kingdoms. And here the most obvious feature is the bitter opposition to their claims offered in both instances even by those who might have been expected most cordially to welcome them. Of both it might be said, "They came unto their own, but their own received them not." First, David is hunted almost to death by Saul; and then, even after Saul's death, his claims are resisted by most of the tribes. So in His lifetime Jesus encounters all the hatred and opposition of the scribes and Pharisees; and even after His resurrection, the council do their utmost to denounce His claims and frighten His followers. Against the one and the other the enemy brings to bear all the devices of hatred and opposition. When Jesus rose from the grave, we see Him personally raised high above all the efforts of His enemies; when David was acknowledged king by all Israel, he reached a corresponding elevation. And now that David is recognised as king, how do we find him employing his energies? It is to defend and bless his kingdom, to obtain for it peace and prosperity, to expel its foes, to secure to the utmost of his power the welfare of all his people. From His throne in glory, Jesus does the same. And what encouragement may not the friends and subjects of Christ's kingdom derive from the example of David! For if David, once he was established in his kingdom, spared no effort to do good to his people, if he scattered blessings among them from the stores which he was able to command, how much more may Christ be relied on to do the same! Has He not been placed far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, and been

made "Head over all things for the Church which is His body"? Rejoice then, ye members of Christ's kingdom! Raise your eyes to the throne of glory, and see how God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion! And be encouraged to tell Him of all your own needs and the troubles and needs of His Church; for has He not ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men? And if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, will you not ask, and shall you not receive according to your faith? Will not God supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus?

From the spectacle at Hebron, when all the elders of Israel confirmed David on the throne, and entered into a solemn league with reference to the kingdom, we pass with David to the field of battle. The first enterprise to which he addressed himself was the capture of Jerusalem, or rather of the stronghold of Zion. It is not expressly stated that he consulted God before taking this step, but we can hardly suppose that he would do it without Divine direction. From the days of Moses, God had taught His people that a place would be appointed by Him where He would set His name; Jerusalem was to be that place; and it cannot be thought that when David would not even go up to Hebron without consulting the Lord, he would proceed to make Jerusalem his capital without a Divine warrant.

No doubt the place was well known to him. It had already received consecration when Melchizedek reigned in it, "king of righteousness and king of peace." In the days of Joshua its king was Adonizedek, "lord of righteousness"—a noble title, brought down from the days of Melchizedek, however unworthy the bearer of it might be of the designation, for he was the head of the confederacy against Joshua (Josh. x. 1, 3), and he ended his career by being hanged on a tree. After the slaughter of the Philistine, David had carried his head to Jerusalem, or to some place so near that it might be called by that name; very probably Nob was the place, which, according to an old tradition, was situated on the slope of Mount Olivet. Often in his wanderings, when his mind was much occupied with fortresses and defences, the image of this place would occur to him; observing how the mountains were round about Jerusalem, he would see how well it was adapted to be the metropolis of the country. But this could not be done while the stronghold of Zion was in the hands of the Jebusites, and while the Jebusites were so numerous that they might be called "the people of the land."

So impregnable was this stronghold deemed, that any attempt that David might make to get possession of it was treated with contempt. The precise circumstances of the siege are somewhat obscure; if we compare the marginal readings and the text in the Authorised Version, and still more in the Revised Version, we may see what difficulty our translators had in arriving at the meaning of the passage. The most probable supposition is that the Jebusites placed their lame and blind on the walls, to show how little artificial defence the place needed, and defied David to touch even these sorry defenders. Such defiance David could not but have regarded as he regarded the defiance of Goliath—as an insult to that mighty God in whose name and in whose strength he carried on his work. Advancing in the same strength in which he advanced against Goliath, he got possession of

the stronghold. To stimulate the chivalry of his men he had promised the first place in his army to whoever, by means of the watercourse, should first get on the battlements and defeat the Jebusites. Joab was the man who made this daring and successful attempt. Reaping the promised reward, he thereby raised himself to the first place in the now united forces of the twelve tribes of Israel. After the murder of Abner, he had probably been degraded; but now, by his dash and bravery, he established his position on a firmer basis than ever. While he contributed by this means to the security and glory of the kingdom, he diminished at the same time the king's personal satisfaction, inasmuch as David could not regard without anxiety the possession of so much power and influence by so daring and useful, but unscrupulous and bold-tempered, a man.

The place thus taken was called the city, and sometimes the castle, of David, and it became from this time his residence and the capital of his kingdom. Much though the various sites in Jerusalem have been debated, it is surely beyond reasonable doubt that the fortress thus occupied was Mount Zion, the same height which still exists in the southwestern corner of the area which came to be covered by Jerusalem. This seems to have been the only part that the Jebusites had fortified, and with the loss of this stronghold their hold of other parts of Jerusalem was lost. Henceforth, as a people, they disappear from Jerusalem, although individual Jebusites might still, like Araunah, hold patches of land in the neighbourhood (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). The captured fortress was turned by David into his royal residence. And seeing that a military stronghold was very inadequate for the purposes of a capital, he began, by the building of Millo, that extension of the city which was afterwards carried out by others on so large a scale.

By thus taking possession of Mount Zion and commencing those extensions which helped to make Jerusalem so great and celebrated a city, David introduced two names into the sacred language of the Bible which have ever since retained a halo, surpassing all other names in the world. Yet, very obviously, it was nothing in the little hill which has borne the name of Zion for so many centuries, nor in the physical features of the city of Jerusalem, that has given them their remarkable distinction. Neither is it for mere historical or intellectual associations, in the common sense of the term, that they have attained their eminence. It would not be difficult to find more picturesque rocks than Zion and more striking cities than Jerusalem. It would not be difficult to find places more memorable in art, in science, and intellectual culture. That which gives them their unrivalled pre-eminence is their relation to God's revelation of Himself to man. Zion was memorable because it was God's dwelling-place, Jerusalem because it was the city of the great King. If Jerusalem and Zion impress our imagination even above other places, it is because God had so much to do with them. The very idea of God makes them great.

But they impress much more than our imagination. We recall the unrivalled moral and spiritual forces that were concentrated there: the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of the martyrs, the glorious company of the apostles, all living under the shadow of Mount Zion, and uttering those words that have moved the world as they received them from the mouth of the Lord. We recall Him who claimed to be Himself God, whose blessed lessons, and holy life, and atoning death

were so closely connected with Jerusalem, and would alone have made it for ever memorable, even if it had been signalised by nothing else. Unless David was illuminated from above to a far greater degree than we have any reason to believe, he could have little thought, when he captured that citadel, what a marvellous chapter in the world's history he was beginning. Century after century, millennium after millennium has passed; and still Zion and Jerusalem draw all eyes and hearts, and pilgrims from the ends of the earth, as they look even on the ruins of former days, are conscious of a thrill which no other city in all the world can give. Nor is that all. When a name has to be found on earth for the home of the blessed in heaven, it is the new Jerusalem; when the scene of heavenly worship, vocal with the voice of harpers harping with their harps, has to be distinguished, it is said to be Mount Zion. Is not all this a striking testimony that nothing so ennobles either places or men as the gracious fellowship of God? View this distinction of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, if you choose, as the result of mere natural causes. Though the effect must be held far beyond the efficacy of the cause, yet you have this fact; that the places in all the world that to civilised mankind have become far the most glorious are those with which it is believed that God maintained a close and unexampled connection. View it, as it ought to be viewed, as a supernatural result; count the fellowship of God at Jerusalem a real fellowship, and His Spirit a living Spirit; count the presence of Jesus Christ to have been indeed that of God manifest in the flesh; you have now a cause really adequate to the effect, and you have a far more striking proof than before of the dignity and glory which God's presence brings. Would that every one of you might ponder the lesson of Jerusalem and Zion! O ye sons of men, God has drawn nigh to you, and He has drawn nigh to you as a God of salvation. Hear then His message! "For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we refuse Him that speaketh from heaven."

CHAPTER VII.

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED.

2 SAMUEL V. 10-25.

THE events in David's reign that followed the capture of Mount Zion and the appointment of Jerusalem as the capital of the country were all of a prosperous kind. "David," we are told, "waxed greater and greater, for the Lord of hosts was with him." "And David perceived that the Lord had established him to be king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake."

In these words we find two things: a fact and an explanation. The fact is, that now the tide fairly turned in David's history, and that, instead of a sad chronicle of hardship and disappointment, the record of his reign becomes one of unmingled success and prosperity. The fact is far from an unusual one in the history of men's lives. How often, even in the case of men who have become eminent, has the first stage of life been one of disappointment and sorrow, and the last part one of prosperity so great as to exceed the fondest dreams of youth. Effort after effort has been made by a young man to get a footing in the literary world, but his books have proved comparative

failures. At last he issues one which catches in a remarkable degree the popular taste, and thereafter fame and fortune attend him, and lay their richest offerings at his feet. A similar tale is to be told of many an artist and professional man. And even persons of more ordinary gifts, who have found the battle of life awfully difficult in its earlier stages, have gradually, through diligence and perseverance, acquired an excellent position, more than fulfilling every reasonable desire for success. No man is indeed exempt from the risk of failure if he chooses a path of life for which he has no special fitness, or if he encounters a storm of unfavourable contingencies; but it is an encouraging thing for those who begin life under hard conditions, but with a brave heart and a resolute purpose to do their best, that, as a general rule, the sky clears as the day advances, and the troubles and struggles of the morning yield to success and enjoyment later in the day.

But in the present instance we have not merely a statement of the fact that the tide turned in the case of David, giving him prosperity and enlargement in every quarter, but an explanation of the fact—it was due to the gracious presence and favour of God. This by no means implies that his adversities were due to an opposite cause. God had been with him in the wilderness, save when he resorted to deceit and other tricks of carnal policy; but He had been with him to try him and to train him, not to crown him with prosperity. But now, the purpose of the early training being accomplished, God is with him to "grant him all his heart's desire and fulfil all his counsel." If God, indeed, had not been with him, sanctifying his early trials, He would not have been with him in the end, crowning him with loving-kindness and tender mercies. But in the time of their trials, God is with His people more in secret, hid, at least, from the observation of the world; when the time comes for conspicuous blessing and prosperity, He comes more into view in His own gracious and bountiful character. In the case of David, God was not only with him, but David "perceived" it; he was conscious of the fact. His filial spirit recognised the source of all his prosperity and blessing, as it had done when he was enabled in his boyhood to slay the lion and the bear, and in his youth to triumph over Goliath. Unlike many successful men, who ascribe their success so largely to their personal talents and ways of working, he felt that the great factor in his success was God. If he possessed talents and had used them to advantage, it was God who had given them originally, and it was God who had enabled him to employ them well. But in every man's career, there are many other elements to be considered besides his own abilities. There is what the world calls "luck," that is to say those conditions of success which are quite out of our control; as for instance in business the unexpected rise or fall of markets, the occurrence of favourable openings, the honesty or dishonesty of partners and connections, the stability or the vicissitudes of investments. The difference between the successful man of the world and the successful godly man in these respects is, that the one speaks only of his luck, the other sees the hand of God in ordering all such things for his benefit. This last was David's case. Well did he know that the very best use he could make of his abilities could not ensure success unless God was present to order and direct to a prosperous issue the ten thousand incidental influences that bore on the outcome of his undertak-

ings. And when he saw that these influences were all directed to this end, that nothing went wrong, that all conspired steadily and harmoniously to the enlargement and establishment of his kingdom, he perceived that the Lord was with him, and was now visibly fulfilling to him that great principle of His government which He had so solemnly declared to Eli, "Them that honour Me, I will honour."

But is this way of claiming to be specially favoured and blessed by God not objectionable? Is it not what the world calls "cant"? Is it not highly offensive in any man to claim to be a favourite of Heaven? Is this not what hypocrites and fanatics are so fond of doing, and is it not a course which every good, humble-minded man will be careful to avoid?

This may be a plausible way of reasoning, but, one thing is certain—it has not the support of Scripture. If it be an offence publicly to recognise the special favour and blessing with which it has pleased God to visit us, David himself was the greatest offender in this respect the world has ever known. What is the great burden of his psalms of thanksgiving? Is it not an acknowledgment of the special mercies and favours that God bestowed on him, especially in his times of great necessity? And does not the whole tenor of the Psalms and the whole tenor of Scripture prove that good men are to take especial note of all the mercies they receive from God, and are not to confine them to their own bosom, but to tell of all His gracious acts and bless His name for ever and ever? "They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness." That God is to be acknowledged in all our ways, that God's mercy in choosing us in Christ Jesus and blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Him is to be especially recognised, and that we are not to shrink from extolling God's name for conferring on us favours infinitely beyond what belong to the men of the world, are among the plainest lessons of the word of God.

What the world is so ready to believe is, that this cannot be done save in the spirit of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men. And whenever a worldly man falls foul of one who owns the distinguishing spiritual mercies that God has bestowed on him, it is this accusation he is sure to hurl at his head. But this just shows the recklessness and injustice of the world. Strange indeed if God in His word has imposed on us a duty which cannot be discharged but in company with those who say, "Stand by thyself; come not nigh; I am holier than thou"! The truth is, the world cannot or will not distinguish between the Pharisee, puffed up with the conceit of his goodness, and for this goodness of his deeming himself the favourite of Heaven, and the humble saint, conscious that in him dwelleth no good thing, and filled with adoring wonder at the mercy of God in making of one so unworthy a monument of His grace. The one is as unlike the other as light is to darkness. What good men need to bear in mind is, that when they do make mention of the special goodness of God to them they should be most careful to do so in no boastful mood, but in the spirit of a most real, and not an assumed or formal, humility. And seeing how ready the world is to misunderstand and misrepresent the feeling, and to turn into a reproach what is done as a most sincere act of gratitude to God, it becomes them to be cautious how they introduce such

topics among persons who have no sympathy with their view. "Cast not your pearls before swine," said our Lord, "lest they turn again and rend you." "Come near," said the Psalmist, "and hear, *all ye that fear God*, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

Midway between the two statements before us on the greatness and prosperity which God conferred on David, mention is made of his friendly relations with the king of Tyre (vcr. 11). The Phœnicians were not included among the seven nations of Palestine whom the Israelites were to extirpate, so that a friendly alliance with them was not forbidden. It appears that Hiram was disposed for such an alliance, and David accepted of his friendly overtures. There is something refreshing in this peaceful episode in a history and in a time when war and violence seem to have been the normal condition of the intercourse of neighbouring nations. Tyre had a great genius for commerce; and the spirit of commerce is alien from the spirit of war. That it is always a nobler spirit cannot be said; for while commerce *ought* to rest on the idea of mutual benefit, and many of its sons honourably fulfil this condition, it often degenerates into the most atrocious selfishness, and heeds not what havoc it may inflict on others provided it derives personal gain from its undertakings. What an untold amount of sin and misery has been wrought by the opium traffic, as well as by the traffic in strong drink, when pressed by cruel avarice on barbarous nations that have so often lost all of humanity they possessed through the fire-water of the *Christian* trader! But we have no reason to believe that there was anything specially hurtful in the traffic which Tyre now began with Israel, although the intercourse of the two countries afterwards led to other results pernicious to the latter—the introduction of Phœnician idolatry and the overthrow of pure worship in the greater part of the tribes of Israel. Meanwhile what Hiram does is to send to David cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, by means of whom a more civilised style of dwelling is introduced; and the new city which David has commenced to build, and especially the house which is to be his own, present features of skill and beauty hitherto unknown in Israel. For, amid all his zeal for higher things, the young king of Israel does not disdain to advance his kingdom in material comforts. Of these, as of other things of the kind, he knows well that they are good if a man use them lawfully; and his effort is at once to promote the welfare of the kingdom in the amenities and comforts of life, and to deepen that profound regard for God and that exalted estimate of His favour which will prevent His people from relying for their prosperity on mere outward conditions, and encourage them ever to place their confidence in their heavenly Protector and King.

We pass by, as not requiring more comment than we have already bestowed on a parallel passage (2 Sam. iii. 2-5), the unsavoury statement that "David took to him more concubines and wives" in Jerusalem. With all his light and grace, he had not overcome the prevalent notion that the dignity and resources of a kingdom were to be measured by the number and rank of the king's wives. The moral element involved in the arrangement he does not seem to have at all apprehended; and consequently, amid all the glory and prosperity that God has given him, he thoughtlessly multiplies the evil that was to spread havoc and desolation in his house.

We proceed, therefore, to what occupies the remainder of this chapter—the narrative of his wars with the Philistines. Two campaigns against these inveterate enemies of Israel are recorded, and the decisive encounter in both cases took place in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

The narrative is so brief that we have difficulty in apprehending all the circumstances. The first invasion of the Philistines took place soon after David was anointed king over all Israel. It is not said whether this occurred before David possessed himself of Mount Zion, nor, considering the structure common in Hebrew narrative, does the circumstance that in the history it follows that event prove that it was subsequent to it in the order of time. On the contrary, there is an expression that seems hardly consistent with this idea. We read (ver. 17) that when David heard of the invasion he “went *down* into the hold.” Now, this expression could not be used of the stronghold of Zion, for that hill is on the height of the central plateau, and invariably the Scriptures speak of “going up to Zion.” If he had possession of Mount Zion, he would surely have gone to it when the Philistines took possession of the plain of Rephaim. The hold to which he went down must have been in a lower position; indeed, “the hold” is the expression used of the place or places of protection to which David resorted when he was pursued by Saul (see 1 Sam. xxii. 4). Further, when we turn to the twenty-third chapter of this book, which records some memorable incidents of the war with the Philistines, we find (vers. 13, 14) that when the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim David was in a hold near the cave of Adullam. The valley of Rephaim, or “the giants,” is an extensive plain to the southwest of Jerusalem, forming a great natural entrance to the city. When we duly consider the import of these facts, we see that the campaign was very serious, and David’s difficulties very great. The Philistines were encamped in force on the summit of the plateau near the natural metropolis of the country. David was encamped in a hold in the low country in the southwest, making use of that very cave of Adullam where he had taken refuge in his conflicts with Saul. This was far from a hopeful state of matters. To the eye of man, his position may have appeared very desperate. Such an emergency was a fit time for a solemn application to God for direction. “David inquired of the Lord, saying Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.” Up, accordingly, David went, attacked the Philistines and smote them at a place called Baal-perazim, somewhere most likely between Adullam and Jerusalem. The expression “The Lord hath broken forth on mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters,” seems to imply that He broke the Philistine host into two, like flooded water breaking an embankment, preventing them from uniting and rallying, and sending them in two detachments into flight and confusion. Considering the superior position of the Philistines, and the great advantage they seem to have had over David in numbers also, this was a signal victory, even though it did not reduce the foe to helplessness.

For when the Philistines had got time to recover, they again came up, pitched again in the plain of Rephaim, and appeared to render unavailing the signal achievement of David at Baal-perazim. Again David inquired what he should do. The

reply was somewhat different from before. David was not to go straight up to face the enemy, as he had done before. He was to “fetch a compass behind them,” that is, as we understand it, to make a circuit, so as to get in the enemy’s rear over against a grove of mulberry trees. That tree has not yet disappeared from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem; a mulberry tree still marks the spot in the valley of Jehoshaphat where, according to tradition, Isaiah was slain (Stanley’s “Sinai and Palestine”). When he should hear “the sound of a going” (Revised Version, “the sound of a march”) in the tops of the mulberry trees, then he was to bestir himself. It is difficult to conceive any natural cause that should give rise to a sound like that of a march “in the tops of the mulberry trees;” but if not a natural, it must have been a supernatural indication of some sound that would alarm the Philistines and make the moment favourable for an attack. It is probable that the presence of David and his troop in the rear of the Philistines was not suspected, the mulberry trees forming a screen between them. When David got his opportunity, he availed himself of it to great advantage; he inflicted a thorough defeat on the Philistines, and smiting them from Geba to Gazer, he appears to have all but annihilated their force. In this way, he gave the *coup de grâce* to his former allies.

We have said that it appears to have been during these campaigns against the Philistines that the incidents took place which are recorded fully in the twenty-third chapter of this book. It does not seem possible that these incidents occurred at or about the time when David was flying from Saul, at which time the cave of Adullam was one of his resorts. Neither is it likely that they occurred during the early years of David’s reign, while he was yet at strife with the house of Saul. At least, it is more natural to refer them to the time when the Philistines, having heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, came up to seek David, although we do not consider it impossible that they occurred in the earlier period of his reign. The record shows how wonderfully the spirit of David had passed into his men, and what splendid deeds of courage were performed by them, often in the face of tremendous odds. We get a fine glimpse here of one of the great sources of David’s popularity—his extraordinary *pluck* as we now call it, and readiness for the most daring adventures, often crowned with all but miraculous success. In all ages, men of this type have been marvellous favourites with their comrades. The annals of the British army, and still more the British navy, contain many such records. And even when we go down to pirates and freebooters, we find the odium of their mode of life in many cases remarkably softened by the splendour of their valour, by their running unheard-of risks, and sometimes by sheer daring and bravery obtaining signal advantages over the greatest odds. The achievements of David’s “three mighties,” as well as of his “thirty,” formed a splendid instance of this kind of warfare. All that we know of them is comprised within a few lines, but when we call to mind the enthusiasm that used to be awakened all over our own country by the achievements of Nelson and his officers, or more recently by General Gordon, of China and Egypt, we can easily understand the thrilling effect which these wonderful tales of valour would have throughout all the tribes of Israel.

The personal affection for David and his heroes

which would thus be formed must have been very warm, nay, even enthusiastic. In the case of David, whatever may have been true of the others, all the influence thus acquired was employed for the welfare of the nation and the glory of God. The supreme desire of his heart was that the people might give all the glory to Jehovah, and derive from these brilliant successes fresh assurances how faithful God was to His promises to Israel. Alike as a man of piety and a man of patriotism, he made this his aim. Knowing as he did what was due to God, and animated by a profound desire to render to God His due, he would have been horrified had he intercepted in his own person ought of the honour and glory which were His. But for the people's sake also, as a man of patriotism, his desire was equally strong that God should have all the glory. What were military successes however brilliant to the nation, or a reputation however eminent, compared to their enjoying the favour and friendship of God? Success—how ephemeral it was; reputation—as transient as the glow of a cloud beside the setting sun; but God's favour and gracious presence with the nation was a perpetual treasure, enlivening, healing, strengthening, guiding for evermore. "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARK BROUGHT UP TO JERUSALEM.

2 SAMUEL VI.

THE first care of David when settled on the throne had been to obtain possession of the stronghold of Zion, on which and on the city which was to surround it he fixed as the capital of the kingdom and the dwelling-place of the God of Israel. This being done, he next set about bringing up the ark of the testimony from Kirjath-jearim, where it had been left after being restored by the Philistines in the early days of Samuel. David's first attempt to place the ark on Mount Zion failed through want of due reverence on the part of those who were transporting it; but after an interval of three months the attempt was renewed, and the sacred symbol was duly installed on Mount Zion, in the midst of the tabernacle prepared by David for its reception.

In bringing up the ark to Jerusalem, the king showed a commendable desire to interest the whole nation, as far as possible, in the solemn service. He gathered together the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand, and went with them to bring up the ark from Baale of Judah, which must be another name for Kirjath-jearim, distant from Jerusalem about ten miles. The people, numerous as they were, grudged neither the time, the trouble, nor the expense. A handful might have sufficed for all the actual labour that was required; but thousands of the chief people were summoned to be present, and that on the principle both of rendering due honour to God, and of conferring a benefit on the people. It is not a handful of professional men only that should be called to take a part in the service of religion; Christian people generally should have an interest in the ark of God; and other things being equal, that Church which interests the greatest number of people and attracts them to active work will not only do most

for advancing God's kingdom, but will enjoy most of inward life and prosperity.

The joyful spirit in which this service was performed by David and his people is another interesting feature of the transaction. Evidently it was not looked on as a toilsome service, but as a blessed festival, adapted to cheer the heart and raise the spirits. What was the precise nature of the service? It was to bring into the heart of the nation, into the new capital of the kingdom, the ark of the covenant, that piece of sacred furniture which had been constructed nearly five hundred years before in the wilderness of Sinai, the memorial of God's holy covenant with the people, and the symbol of His gracious presence among them. In spirit it was bringing God into the very midst of the nation, and on the choicest and most prominent pedestal the country now supplied setting up a constant memento of the presence of the Holy One. Rightly understood, the service could bring joy only to spiritual hearts; it could give pleasure to none who had reason to dread the presence of God. To those who knew Him as their reconciled Father, and the covenant God of the nation, it was most attractive. It was as if the sun were again shining on them after a long eclipse, or as if the father of a loved and loving family had returned after a weary absence. God enthroned on Zion, God in the midst of Jerusalem—what happier or more thrilling thought was it possible to cherish? God, the sun and shield of the nation, occupying for His residence the one fitting place in all the land, and sending over Jerusalem and over all the country emanations of love and grace, full of blessing for all that feared His name! The happiness with which this service was entered on by David and his people is surely the type of the spirit in which all service to God should be rendered by those whose sins He has blotted out, and on whom He has bestowed the privileges of His children.

But the best of services may be gone about in a faulty way. There may be some criminal neglect of God's will that, like the dead fly in the apothecary's pot of ointment, causes the perfume to send forth a stinking savour. And so it was on this occasion. God had expressly directed that when the ark was moved from place to place it should be borne on poles on the shoulders of the Levites, and never carried in a cart, like a common piece of furniture. But in the removal of the ark from Kirjath-jearim, this direction was entirely overlooked. Instead of following the directions given to Moses, the example of the Philistines was copied when they sent the ark back to Bethshe-mesh. The Philistines had placed it in a new cart, and the men of Israel now did the same. What induced them to follow the example of the Philistines rather than the directions of Moses, we do not know, and can hardly conjecture. It does not appear to have been a mere oversight. It had something of a deliberate plan about it, as if the law given in the wilderness were now obsolete, and in so small a matter any method might be chosen that the people liked. It was substituting a heathen example for a Divine rule in the worship of God. We cannot suppose that David was guilty of deliberately setting aside the authority of God. On his part, it may have been an error of inadvertence. But that somewhere there was a serious offence is evident from the punishment with which it was visited (1 Chron. xv. 13). The jagged bride-paths of those parts are not at all adapted for wheeled conveyances, and when the oxen stum-

bled, and the ark was shaken, Uzzah, who was driving the cart, put forth his hand to steady it. "The anger of God," we are told, "was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." His effort to steady the ark must have been made in a presumptuous way, without reverence for the sacred vessel. Only a Levite was authorised to touch it, and Uzzah was apparently a man of Judah. The punishment may seem to us hard for an offence which was ceremonial rather than moral; but in that economy moral truth was taught through ceremonial observances, and neglect of the one was treated as involving neglect of the other. The punishment was like the punishment of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, for offering strange fire in their censers. It may be that both in their case, and in the case of Uzzah, there were unrecorded circumstances, unknown to us, making it clear that the ceremonial offence was not a mere accident, but that it was associated with evil personal qualities well fitted to provoke the judgment of God. The great lesson for all time is to beware of following our own devices in the worship of God when we have clear instructions in His word how we are to worship Him.

This lamentable event put a sudden end to the joyful service. It was like the bursting of a thunderstorm on an excursion party that rapidly sends every one to flight. And it is doubtful whether the spirit shown by David was altogether right. He was displeased "because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah, and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord into the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." The narrative reads as if David resented the judgment which God had inflicted, and in a somewhat petulant spirit abandoned the enterprise because he found God too hard to please. That some such feeling should have fluttered about his heart was not to be wondered at; but surely it was a feeling to which he ought not to have given entertainment, as it certainly was one on which he ought not to have acted. If God was offended, David surely knew that He must have had good ground for being so. It became him and the people, therefore, to accept God's judgment, humble themselves before Him, and seek forgiveness for the negligent manner in which they had addressed themselves to this very solemn service. Instead of this David throws up the matter in a fit of sullen temper, as if it were impossible to please God in it, and the enterprise must therefore be abandoned. He leaves the ark in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, returning to Jerusalem crestfallen and displeased, altogether in a spirit most opposite to that in which he had set out.

It may happen to you that some Christian undertaking on which you have entered with great zeal and ardour, and without any surmise that you are not doing right, is not blessed, but meets with some rough shock, that places you in a very painful position. In the most disinterested spirit, you have tried perhaps to set up in some neglected district a school or a mission, and you expect all encouragement and approbation from those who are most interested in the welfare of the district. Instead of receiving approval, you find that you are regarded as an enemy and an intruder. You are attacked with unexampled rudeness, sin-

ister aims are laid to your charge, and the purpose of your undertaking is declared to be to hurt and discourage those whom you were bound to aid. The shock is so violent and so rude that for a time you cannot understand it. On the part of man it admits of no reasonable justification whatever. But when you go into your closet, and think of the matter as permitted by God, you wonder still more why God should thwart you in your endeavour to do good. Rebellious feelings hover about your heart that if God is to treat you in this way, it were better to abandon His service altogether. But surely no such feeling is ever to find a settled place in your heart. You may be sure that the rebuff which God has permitted you to encounter is meant as a trial of your faith and humility; and if you wait on God for further light and humbly ask a true view of God's will; if, above all, you beware of retiring in sullen silence from God's active service, good may come out of the apparent evil, and you may yet find cause to bless God even for the shock that made you so uncomfortable at the time.

The Lord does not forsake His people, nor leave them for ever under a cloud. It was not long before the downcast heart of David was reassured. When the ark had been left at the house of Obed-edom, Obed-edom was not afraid to take it in. Its presence in other places had hitherto been the signal for disaster and death. Among the Philistines, in city after city, at Bethshemesh, and now at Perez-uzzah, it had spread death on every side. Obed-edom was no sufferer. Probably he was a God-fearing man, conscious of no purpose but that of honouring God. A manifest blessing rested on his house. "The God of heaven," says Bishop Hall, "pays liberally for His lodging." It is not so much God's ark in our time and country that needs a lodging, but God's servants, God's poor, sometimes persecuted fugitives flying from an oppressor, very often pious men in foreign countries labouring under infinite discouragements to serve God. The Obed-edom who takes them in will not suffer. Even should he be put to loss or inconvenience, the day of recompense draweth nigh. "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in."

Again, then, King David, encouraged by the experience of Obed-edom, goes forth in royal state to bring up the ark to Jerusalem. The error that had proved so fatal was now rectified. "David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God and to minister unto Him for ever" (1 Chron. xv. 2). In token of his humility and his conviction that every service that man renders to God is tainted and needs forgiveness, oxen and fatlings were sacrificed ere the bearers of the ark had well begun to move. The spirit of enthusiastic joy again swayed the multitude, brightened probably by the assurance that no judgment need now be dreaded, but that they might confidently look for the smile of an approving God. The feelings of the king himself were wonderfully wrought up, and he gave free expression to the joy of his heart. There are occasions of great rejoicing when all ceremony is forgotten, and no forms or appearances are suffered to stem the tide of enthusiasm as it gushes right from the heart. It was an occasion of this kind to David. The check he had sustained three months before had only dammed up his feelings, and they rolled out now with all the greater volume. His soul was stirred by the thought that the symbol of Godhead was now to be placed in his own city;

close to his own dwelling; that it was to find an abiding place of rest in the heart of the kingdom, on the heights where Melchizedek had reigned, close to where he had blessed Abraham, and which God had destined as His own dwelling from the foundations of the world. Glorious memories of the past, mingling with bright anticipations of the future, recollections of the grace revealed to the fathers, and visions of the same grace streaming forth to distant ages, as generation after generation of the faithful came up here to attend the holy festivals, might well excite that tumult of emotion in David's breast before which the ordinary restraints of royalty were utterly flung aside. He sacrificed, he played, he sang, he leapt and danced before the Lord, with all his might; he made a display of enthusiasm which the cold-hearted Michal, as she could not understand it nor sympathise with it, had the folly to despise and the cruelty to ridicule. The ordinary temper of the sexes was reversed—the man was enthusiastic; the woman was cold. Little did she know of the springs of true enthusiasm in the service of God! To her faithless eye, the ark was little more than a chest of gold, and where it was kept was of little consequence; her carnal heart could not appreciate the glory that excelleth; her blind eye could see none of the visions that had overpowered the soul of her husband.

A few other circumstances are briefly noticed in connection with the close of the service, when the ark had been solemnly enshrined within the tabernacle that David had reared for it on Mount Zion.

The first is that "David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord." The burnt-offering was a fresh memorial of sin, and therefore a fresh confession that even in connection with that very holy service there were sins to be confessed, atoned for, and forgiven. For there is this great difference between the service of the formalist and the service of the earnest worshipper: that while the one can see nothing faulty in his performance, the other sees a multitude of imperfections in his. Clearer light and a clearer eye, even the light thrown by the glory of God's purity on the best works of man, reveal a host of blemishes, unseen in ordinary light and by the carnal eye. Our very prayers need to be purged, our tears to be wept over, our repentances repented of. Little could the best services ever done by him avail the spiritual worshipper if it were not for the High-priest over the house of God who ever liveth to make intercession for him.

Again, we find David after the offering of the burnt-offerings and the peace-offerings "blessing the people in the name of the Lord of hosts." This was something more than merely expressing a wish or offering a prayer for their welfare. It was like the benediction with which we close our public services. The benediction is more than a prayer. The servant of the Lord appears in the attitude of dropping on the heads of the people the blessing which he invokes. Not that he or any man can convey heavenly blessings to a people that do not by faith appropriate them and rejoice in them. But the act of benediction implies this: These blessings are yours if you will only have them. They are provided, they are made over to you, if you will only accept them. The last act of public worship is a great encouragement to faith. When the peace of God that passeth all understanding, or the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, or the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the com-

munion of the Holy Ghost are invoked over your heads, it is to assure you that if you will but accept of them through Jesus Christ, these great blessings are actually yours. True, there is no part of our service more frequently spoiled by formality; but there is none richer with true blessing to faith. So when David blessed the people, it was an assurance to them that God's blessing was within their reach; it was theirs if they would only take it. How strange that any hearts should be callous under such an announcement; that any should fail to leap to it, as it were, and rejoice in it, as glad tidings of great joy!

The third thing David did was to deal to every one of Israel, both man and woman, a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. It was a characteristic act, worthy of a bountiful and generous nature like David's. It may be that associating bodily gratifications with Divine service is liable to abuse, that the taste which it gratifies is not a high one, and that it tempts some men to attend religious services for the same reason as some followed Jesus—for the loaves and fishes. Yet Jesus did not abstain on some rare occasions from feeding the multitude, though the act was liable to abuse. The example both of David and of Jesus may show us that though not habitually, yet occasionally, it is both right and fitting that religious service should be associated with a simple repast. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant the practice, adopted in some missions in very poor districts, of feeding the people habitually when they come up for religious service, and there is much in the argument that such a practice degrades religion and obscures the glory of the blessings which Divine service is designed to bring to the poor. But occasionally the rigid rule may be somewhat relaxed, and thus a sort of symbolical proof afforded that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

The last thing recorded of David is, that he returned to bless his house. The cares of the State and the public duties of the day were not allowed to interfere with his domestic duty. Whatever may have been his ordinary practice, on this occasion at least he was specially concerned for his household, and desirous that in a special sense they should share the blessing. It is plain from this that, amid all the imperfections of his motley household, he could not allow his children to grow up ignorant of God, thus dealing a rebuke to all who; outdoing the very heathen in heathenism, have houses without an altar and without a God. It is painful to find that the spirit of the king was not shared by every member of his family. It was when he was returning to this duty that Michal met him and addressed to him these insulting words: "How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamefully uncovers himself." On the mind of David himself, this ebullition had no effect but to confirm him in his feeling, and reiterate his conviction that his enthusiasm reflected on him not shame but glory. But a woman of Michal's character could not but act like an icicle on the spiritual life of the household. She belonged to a class that cannot tolerate enthusiasm in religion. In any other cause, enthusiasm may be excused, perhaps extolled and admired; in the painter, the musician, the traveller, even the child of pleasure; the only persons whose enthusiasm is unbearable are those who are enthusiastic in their regard for

their Saviour, and in the answer they give to the question, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" There are, doubtless, times to be calm, and times to be enthusiastic; but can it be right to give all our coldness to Christ and all our enthusiasm to the world?

CHAPTER IX.

PROPOSAL TO BUILD A TEMPLE.

2 SAMUEL vii.

THE spirit of David was essentially active and fond of work. He was one of those who are ever pressing on, not content to keep things as they are, moving personally towards improvement, and urging others to do the same. Even in Eastern countries, with their proverbial stillness and conservatism, such men are sometimes found, but they are far more common elsewhere. Great undertakings do not frighten them; they have spirit enough for a lifetime of effort, they never seem weary of pushing on. When they look on the disorders of the world they are not content with the languid utterance, "Something must be done;" they consider what it is possible for them to do and gird themselves to the doing of it.

For some time David seems to have found ample scope for his active energies in subduing the Philistines and other hostile tribes that were yet mingled with the Israelites, and that had long given them much annoyance. His friendship with Hiram of Tyre probably gave a new impulse to his mind, and led him to project many improvements in Jerusalem and elsewhere. When all his enemies were quieted, and he sat in his house, he began to consider to what work of internal improvement he would now give his attention. Having recently removed the Ark, and placed it in a tabernacle on Mount Zion, constructed probably in accordance with the instructions given to Moses in the wilderness, he did not at first contemplate the erection of any other kind of building for the service of God. It was while he sat in his new and elegant house that the idea came into his mind that it was not seemly that he should be lodged in so substantial a home, while the Ark of God dwelt between curtains. Curtains might have been suitable, nay, necessary, in the wilderness, where the Ark had constantly to be moved about; and even in the land of Israel, while the nation was comparatively unsettled, curtains might still have been best; but now that a permanent resting-place had been found for the Ark, was it right that there should be such a contrast between the dwelling-place of David and the dwelling-place of God? It was the very argument that was afterwards used by Haggai and Zechariah after the return from captivity, to rouse the languid zeal of their countrymen for the re-erection of the house of God. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses and this house lie waste?"

A generous heart, even though it be a godless one, is uncomfortable when surrounded by elegance and luxury, while starvation and misery prevail in its neighbourhood. We see in our day the working of this feeling in those cases, unhappily too few, where men and women born to gold and grandeur feel wretched unless they are doing something to equalise the conditions of life by helping those who are born to rags and wretchedness. To the feelings of the godly a disreputable

place of worship, contrasting meanly with the taste and elegance of the hall, or even the villa, is a pain and a reproach. There is not much need at the present day for urging the unseemliness of such a contrast, for the tendency of our time is toward handsome church buildings, and in many cases towards extravagance in the way of embellishment. What we have more need to look at is the disproportion of the sums paid by rich men, and even by men who can hardly be called rich, in gratifying their own tastes and in extending the kingdom of Christ. We are far from blaming those who, having great wealth, spend large sums from year to year on yachts, on equipages, on picture galleries, on jewellery and costly furnishings. Wealth which remunerates honest and wholesome labour is not all selfishly thrown away. But it is somewhat strange that we hear so seldom of rich Christian men devoting their superfluous wealth to maintaining a mission station with a whole staff of labourers, or to the rearing of colleges, or hospitals, or Christian institutions, which might provide on a large scale for Christian activity in ways that might be wonderfully useful. It is in this direction that there is most need to press the example of David. When shall this new enlargement of Christian activity take place? Or when shall men learn that the pleasure of spreading the blessings of the Gospel by the equipment and maintenance of a foreign missionary or mission station far exceeds anything to be derived from refinements and luxuries of which they themselves are the object and the centre?

When the thought of building a temple occurred to David, he conferred on the subject with the prophet Nathan. The Scripture narrative is so brief that it gives us no information about Nathan, except in connection with two or three events in which he had a share. Apparently he was a prophet of Jerusalem, on intimate terms with David, and perhaps attached to his court. When first consulted on the subject by the king, he gave him a most encouraging answer, but without having taken any special steps to ascertain the mind of God. He presumed that as the undertaking was itself so good, and as David generally was so manifestly under Divine guidance, nothing was to be said but that he should go on. "Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee." That same night, however, a message came to Nathan that gave a new complexion to the proposal. He was instructed to remind David, first, that God had never complained of His tabernacle-dwelling from the day when He brought up the children of Israel to that hour, and had never given a hint that He desired a house of cedar. Further, he was commissioned to convey to David the assurance of God's continued interest and favour towards him—of that interest which began by taking him from the sheepfold to make him king over Israel, and which had been shown continuously in the success which had been given him in all his enterprises, and the great name he had acquired, entitling him to rank with the great men of the earth. Towards the nation of Israel, too, God was actuated by the same feeling of affectionate interest; they would be planted, set firm in a place of their own, delivered from the thralldom of enemies, and allowed to prosper and expand in peace and comfort. Still further—and this was a very special blessing—Nathan was to inform David that, unlike Saul, he was not to be the only one of his race to occupy the throne; his son would reign after

he was gathered to his fathers, the kingdom would be established in his hands, and the throne of his kingdom would be established for ever. To this favoured son of his would be entrusted the honour of building the temple, God would be his Father, and he would be God's son. If he should fall into sin, he would be chastised for his sin, but not destroyed. The divine mercy would not depart from him as it had departed from Saul. The kernel of the message was in these gracious concluding words—"Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever."

Here, certainly, was a very remarkable message, containing both elements of refusal and elements of encouragement. The proposal which David had made to build a temple was declined. The time for a change, though drawing near, had not yet arrived. The curtain-canopied tabernacle had been designed by God to wean His people from those sensuous ideas of worship to which the magnificent temples of Egypt had accustomed them, and to give them the true idea of a spiritual service, though not without the visible emblem of a present God. The time had not yet arrived for changing this simple arrangement. God could impart His blessing in the humble tent as well as in the stately temple. As long as it was God's pleasure to dwell in the tabernacle, so long might David expect that His grace would be imparted there. So we may say, that so long as it is manifestly God's pleasure that a body of His worshippers shall occupy a humble tabernacle, so long may they expect that He will shine forth there, imparting that fulness of grace and blessing which is the true and only glory of any place of worship.

But the message through Nathan contained also elements of encouragement, chiefly with reference to David's offspring, and to the stability and permanence of his throne. To appreciate the value of this promise for the future, we must bear in mind the great insecurity of new dynasties in Eastern countries, and the fearful tragedies that were often perpetrated to get rid of the old king's family, and prepare the way for some ambitious and unscrupulous usurper.

We hardly need to recall the tragic end of Saul, the base murder of Ishbosheth, or the painful deaths of Asahel and Abner. We have but to think of what happened in the sister kingdom of the ten tribes, from the death of the son of its first king, Jeroboam, on to its final extinction. What an awful record the history of that kingdom presents of conspiracies, murders, and massacres! How miserable a distinction it was to be of the seed royal in those days! It only made one the more conspicuous a mark for the poisoned cup or the assassin's dagger. It associated with the highest families of the realm horrors and butcheries of which the poorest had no cause even to dream. Any one who had been raised to a throne could not but sicken at the thought of the atrocities which his very elevation might one day bring upon his children. A new king could hardly enjoy his dignity but by steeling his heart against every feeling of parental love.

And, moreover, these constant changes of the royal family were very hurtful to the kingdom at large. They divided it into sections that raged against each other with terrible fury. For of all wars civil wars are the worst for the fierceness of the passions they evoke, and the horrors which they inflict. Scotland and England too have had too much experience of these conflicts in other

days. Many generations have elapsed since they were ended, but we have many memorials still of the desolation which they spread, while our progress and prosperity, ever since they passed away, show us clearly of what a multitude of mercies they robbed the land.

To David, therefore, it was an unspeakable comfort to be assured that his dynasty would be a stable dynasty; that his son would reign after him; that a succession of princes would follow with unquestioned right to the throne; and that if his son, or his son's son, should commit sins deserving of chastisement, that chastisement would not be withheld, but it would not be fatal, it would bring the needed correction, and thus the throne would be secure for ever. A father naturally desires peace and prosperity for his children, and if he extends his view down the generations, the desire is strong that it may be well with them and with their seed for ever. But no father, in ordinary circumstances, can flatter himself that his posterity shall escape their share of the current troubles and calamities of life. David, but for this assurance, must have looked forward to his posterity encountering their share of those nameless horrors to which royal children were often born. It was an unspeakable privilege to learn, as he did now, that his dynasty would be alike permanent and secure; that, as a rule, his children would not be exposed to the atrocities of Oriental successions; that they would be under the special care and protection of God; that their faults would be corrected without their being destroyed; and that this state of blessing would continue for ages and ages to come.

The emotions roused in David by this communication were alike delightful and exuberant. He takes no notice of the disappointment—of his not being permitted to build the temple. Any regret that this might occasion is swallowed up by his delight in the store of blessing actually promised. And here we may see a remarkable instance of God's way of dealing with His people's prayers. Virtually, if not formally, David had asked of God to permit him to build a temple to His name. That petition, bearing though it did very directly on God's glory, is not vouchsafed. God does not accord that privilege to David. But in refusing him that request, He makes over to him mercies of far higher reach and importance. He refuses his immediate request only to grant to him far above all that he was able to ask or think. And how often does God do so! How often, when His people are worrying and perplexing themselves about their prayers not being answered, is God answering them in a far richer way! Glimpses of this we see occasionally, but the full revelation of it remains for the future. You pray to the degree of agony for the preservation of a beloved life; it is not granted; God appears deaf to your cry; a year or two after, things happen that would have broken your friend's heart or driven reason from its throne; you understand now why God did not fulfil your petition. Oh for the spirit of trust that shall never charge God foolishly! Oh for the faith that does not make haste, but waits patiently for the Lord.—waits for the explanation that shall come in the end, at the revelation of Jesus Christ!

It is a striking scene that is presented to us when "David went in, and sat before the Lord." It is the only instance in Scripture in which any one is said to have taken the attitude of sitting while pouring his heart out to God. Yet the nature of the

communion was in keeping with the attitude. David was like a child sitting down beside his father, to think over some wonderfully kind expression of his intentions to him, and pour out his full heart into his ear. We may observe in the address of David how pervaded it is by the tone of wonder. This, indeed, is its great characteristic. He expresses wonder at the past, at God's selecting one obscure in family and obscure in person; he wonders at the present: How is it Thou hast brought me thus far? and still more he wonders at the future, the provision made for the stability of his house in all time coming. "And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"* All true religious feeling is pervaded by an element of wonder: it is this element that warns and elevates it. In David's case it kindles intense adoration and gratitude, with reference both to God's dealings with himself and His dealings with Israel. "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?" This wonder at past goodness, moreover, begets great confidence for the future. And David warmly and gratefully expresses this confidence, and looks forward with exulting feelings to the blessings reserved for him and his house. And finally he falls into the attitude of supplication, and prays that it may all come to pass. Not that he doubts God's word; the tone of the whole prayer is the tone of gratitude for the past and confidence in the future. But he feels it right to take up the attitude of a suppliant, to show, as we believe, that it must all come of God's free and infinite mercy; that not one of all the good things which God had promised could be claimed as a right, for the least and the greatest were due alike to the rich grace of a sovereign God. "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." Appropriate ending for a remarkable prayer! appropriate, too, not for David only, but for every Christian praying for his country, and for every Christian father praying for his family! "With Thy blessing," bestowed alike in mercy and in chastisement, in what Thou givest and in what Thou withholdest, but making all things work together for eternal good—"With Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever."

We seem to see in this prayer the very best of David—much intensity of feeling, great humility, wondering gratitude, holy intimacy and trust, and supreme satisfaction in the blessing of God. We see him walking in the very light of God's countenance, and supremely happy. We see Jacob's ladder between earth and heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Moreover, we see the infinite privilege which is involved in having God for our Father, and in being able to realise that He is full of most fatherly feelings to us. The joy of David in this act of fellowship with God was the purest of which human beings

* The expression is very obscure, whether we take the affirmative form of the Revised Version or the interrogative form of the Authorised Version. "And this, too, after the manner of men, O Lord God!" (R. V.) We must choose between these opposite meanings. We prefer the interrogative form of the A. V. David's wonder being the more excited that God's ways were here so much above man's.

are capable. It was indeed a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Oh that men would but acquaint themselves with God and be at peace! Let it be our aim to cherish as warm sentiments of trust in God, and to look forward to the future with equal satisfaction and delight.

A very important question arises in connection with this chapter, to which we have not yet adverted, but which we cannot pass by. In that promise of God respecting the stability of David's throne and the perpetual duration of his dynasty, was there any reference to the Messiah, any reference to the spiritual kingdom of which alone it could be said with truth that it was to last for ever? The answer to this question is very plain, because some of the words addressed by God to David are quoted in the New Testament as having a Messianic reference. "To which of the angels said He at any time, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son?" (Heb. i. 5). If we consider, too, how David's dynasty really came to an end as a reigning family some five hundred years after, we see that the language addressed to him was not exhausted by the fortunes of his family. In the Divine mind the prophecy reached forward to the time of Christ, and only in Christ was it fully verified. And it seems plain from some words of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, that David understood this. He knew that "God had sworn to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne" (Acts ii. 30). From the very exalted emotions which the promise raised in his breast, and the enthusiasm with which he poured forth his thanksgivings for it, we infer that David saw in it far more than a promise that for generations to come his house would enjoy a royal dignity. He must have concluded that the great hope of Israel was to be fulfilled in connection with his race. God's words implied, that it was in His line the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled—"In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." He saw Christ's day afar off and was glad. To us who look back on that day the reasons for gladness and gratitude are far stronger than they were even to him. Then let us prize the glorious fact that the Son of David has come, even the Son of God, who hath given us understanding that we may know Him that is true. And while we prize the truth, let us embrace the privilege; let us become one with Him in whom we too become sons of God, and with whom we may cherish the hope of reigning for ever as kings and priests, when He comes to gather His redeemed that they may sit with Him on the throne of His glory.

CHAPTER X.

FOREIGN WARS.

2 SAMUEL viii. 1-14.

THE transitions of the Bible, like those of actual life, are often singularly abrupt; that which now hurries us from the scene of elevated communion with God to the confused noise and deadly struggles of the battle-field is peculiarly startling. We are called to contemplate David in a remarkable light, as a professional warrior, a man of the sword, a man of blood; wielding the weapons of destruction with all the decision and effect of the most daring commanders. That the sweet singer

of Israel, from whose tender heart those blessed words poured out to which the troubled soul turns for composure and peace, should have been so familiar with the horrors of the battle-field, is indeed a surprise. We can only say that he was led to regard all this rough work as indispensable to the very existence of his kingdom, and to the fulfilment of the great ends for which Israel had been called. Painful and miserable though it was in itself, it was necessary for the accomplishment of greater good. The bloodthirsty spirit of these hostile nations would have swallowed up the kingdom of Israel, and left no trace of it remaining. The promise to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," would have ceased to have any basis for its fulfilment. Painful though it was to deal death and destruction on every side, it would have been worse to see the nation of Israel destroyed, and the foundation of the world's greatest blessings swept for ever away.

The "rest from all his enemies round about," referred to in the first verse of the seventh chapter, seems to refer to the nearer enemies of the kingdom, while the wars mentioned in the present chapter were mostly with enemies more remote. The most important of the wars now to be considered was directed against the occupants of that large territory lying between Palestine and the Euphrates which God had promised to Abraham, although no command had been given to dispossess the inhabitants, and therefore it could be held only in tributary subjection. In some respects, David was the successor of Joshua as well as of Moses. He had to continue Joshua's work of conquest, as well as Moses' work of political arrangement and administration. The nations against whom he had now to go forth were most of them warlike and powerful; some of them were banded together in leagues against him, rendering his enterprise very perilous, and such as could have been undertaken by no one who had not an immovable trust in God. The twentieth Psalm seems to express the feelings with which the godly part of the nation would regard him as he went forth to these distant and perilous enterprises:—

The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble;
The name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high
Send thee help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen thee out of Zion;
Remember all thy offerings,
And accept thy burnt-sacrifice; [Selah
Grant thee thy heart's desire,
And fulfil all thy counsel.
We will triumph in thy salvation,
And in the name of our God we will set up our banners;
The Lord fulfil all thy petitions.
Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.
Some trust in chariots, and some in horses,
But we will make mention of the name of the Lord our
God.
They are bowed down and fallen;
But we are risen, and stand upright.
Save, Lord;
Let the King answer us when we call.

It is an instructive fact that the history of these wars is given so shortly. A single verse is all that is given to most of the campaigns. This brevity shows very clearly that another spirit than that which moulded ordinary histories guided the composition of this book. It would be beyond human nature to resist the temptation to describe great battles, the story of which is usually read with such breathless interest, and which gratify the pride of the people and reflect glory on the

nation. It is not the object of Divine revelation to furnish either brief annals or full details of wars and other national events, except in so far as they have a spiritual bearing—a bearing on the relation between God and the people. From first to last the purpose of the Bible is simply to unfold the dispensation of grace,—God's progress in revelation of His method of making an end of sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness.

We shall briefly notice what is said regarding the different undertakings.

1. The first campaign was against the Philistines. Not even their disastrous discomfiture near the plain of Rephaim had taught submission to that restless people. On this occasion David carried the war into their own country, and took some of their towns, establishing garrisons there, as the Philistines had done formerly in the land of Israel. There is some obscurity in the words which describe one of his conquests. According to the Authorised Version, "He took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines." The Revised Version renders, "He took the bridle of the mother city out of the hand of the Philistines." The parallel passage in 1 Chron. xviii. 1 has it, "He took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines." This last rendering is quite plain; the other passage must be explained in its light. Gath, the city of King Achish, to which David had fled twice for refuge, now fell into his hands. The loss of Gath must have been a great humiliation to the Philistines; not even Samson had ever inflicted on them such a blow. And the policy that led David (it could hardly have been without painful feelings) to possess himself of Gath turned out successful; the aggressive spirit of the Philistines was now fairly subdued, and Israel finally delivered from the attacks of a neighbour that had kept them for many generations in constant discomfort.

2. His next campaign was against Moab. As David himself had at one time taken refuge in Gath, so he had committed his father and mother to the custody of the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4). Jewish writers have a tradition that after a time the king put his parents to death, and that this was the origin of the war which he carried on against them. That David had received from them some strong provocation, and deemed it necessary to inflict a crushing blow for the security of that part of his kingdom, it seems hardly possible to doubt. Ingratitude was none of his failings, nor would he who was so grateful to the men of Jabesh-gilead for burying Saul and his sons have been severe on Moab if Moab had acted the part of a true friend in caring for his father and mother. When we read of the severity practised on the army of Moab, we are shocked. And yet it is recorded rather as a token of forbearance than a mark of severity. How came it that the Moabite army was so completely in David's power? Usually, as we have seen, when an army was defeated it was pursued by the victors, and in the course of the flight a terrible slaughter ensued. But the Moabite army had come into David's power comparatively whole. This could only have been through some successful piece of generalship, by which David had shut them up in a position where resistance was impossible. Many an Eastern conqueror would have put the whole army to the sword; David with a measuring line measured two-thirds for destruction and a full third for preservation. Thus the Moabites in the southeast were subdued as thoroughly as the Phil-

istines in the southwest, and brought tribute to the conqueror, in token of their subjection. The explanation of some commentators that it was not the army, but the fortresses, of Moab that David dealt with is too strained to be for a moment entertained. It proceeds on a desire to make David superior to his age, on unwillingness to believe, what, however, lies on the very surface of the story, that in the main features of his warlike policy he fell in with the maxims and spirit of the time.

3. The third of his campaigns was against Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. It is said in the chapter before us that the encounter with this prince took place "as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates;" in the parallel passage of 1 Chronicles it is "as he went to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates." The natural interpretation is, that David was on his way to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates, when this Hadadezer came out to oppose him. The terms of the covenant of God with Abraham assigned to him the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. xv. 18), and when the territory was again defined to Joshua, its boundary was "from the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Under the provisions of this covenant, as made by Him whose is the earth and the fulness thereof, David held himself entitled to fix the boundary of his dominion by the banks of the river. In what particular form he designed to do this, we are not informed; but whatever may have been his purpose, Hadadezer set himself to defeat it. The encounter with Hadadezer could not but have been serious to David, for his enemy had a great force of military chariots and horsemen against whom he could oppose no force of the same kind. Nevertheless, David's victory was complete; and in dealing with that very force in which he himself was utterly deficient, he was quite triumphant; for he took from his opponent a thousand and seven hundred horsemen, as well as twenty thousand footmen. There must have been some remarkable stroke of genius in this achievement, for nothing is more apt to embarrass and baffle a commonplace general than the presence of an opposing force to which his army affords no counterpart.

4. But though David had defeated Hadadezer, not far, as we suppose, from the base of Mount Hermon, his path to the Euphrates was by no means clear. Another body of Syrians, the Syrians of Damascus, having come from that city to help Hadadezer, seem to have been too late for this purpose, and to have encountered David alone. This, too, was a very serious enterprise for David; for though we are not informed whether, like Hadadezer, they had arms which the king of Israel could not match, it is certain that the army of so rich and civilised a state as Syria of Damascus would possess all the advantages that wealth and experience could bestow. But in his battle with them, David was again completely victorious. The slaughter was very great—two-and-twenty thousand men. This immense figure illustrates our remark a little while ago: that the slaughter of defeated and retreating armies was usually prodigious. So entire was the humiliation of this proud and ancient kingdom, that "the Syrians became servants to David, and brought presents," thus acknowledging his suzerainty over them. Between the precious things that were thus offered to King David and the spoil which he took from

captured cities, he brought to Jerusalem an untold mass of wealth, which he afterwards dedicated for the building of the Temple.

5. In one case, the campaign was a peaceful one. "When Toi, king of Hamath, heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer, then Toi sent Joram his son unto King David to salute him and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and had smitten him, for Hadadezer had wars with Toi." The kingdom of Toi lay in the valley between the two parallel ranges of Lebanon and anti-Lebanon, and it too was within the promised boundary, which extended to "the entering in of Hamath." Accordingly, the son of Toi brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass; these also did King David dedicate to the Lord. The fame of David as a warrior was now such, at least in these northern regions, that further resistance seemed out of the question. Submission was the only course when the conqueror was evidently supported by the might of Heaven.

6. In the south, however, there seems to have been more of a spirit of opposition. No particulars of the campaign against the Edomites are given; but it is stated that David put garrisons in Edom; "throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David." The placing of garrisons through all their country shows how obstinate these Edomites were, and how certain to have returned to fresh acts of hostility had they not been held in restraint by these garrisons. From the introduction to Psalm lx. it would appear that the insurrection of Edom took place while David was in the north contending with the two bodies of Syrians that opposed him—the Syrians of Zobah and those of Damascus. It would appear that Joab was detached from the army in Syria in order that he might deal with the Edomites. In the introduction to the Psalm, twelve thousand of the Edomites are said to have fallen in the Valley of Salt. In the passage now before us, it is said that eighteen thousand Syrians fell in that valley. The Valley of Salt is in the territory of Edom. It may be that a detachment of Syrian troops was sent to aid the Edomites, and that both sustained a terrible slaughter. Or it may be that, as in Hebrew the words for Syria and Edom are very similar (אֲרָם and אֲדָם), the one word may by accident have been substituted for the other.

7. Mention is also made of the Ammonites, the Amalekites, and the Philistines as having been subdued by David. Probably in the case of the Philistines and the Amalekites the reference is to the previous campaign already recorded, while the Ammonite campaign may be the one of which we have the record afterwards. But the reference to these campaigns is accompanied with no particulars.

Twice in the course of this chapter we read that "the Lord gave David victory whithersoever he went." It does not appear, however, that the victory was always purchased with ease, or the situation of David and his armies free from serious dangers. The sixtieth Psalm, the title of which ascribes it to this period, makes very plain allusion to a time of extraordinary trouble and disaster in connection with one of these campaigns. "O God, Thou hast cast us off; Thou hast scattered us: Thou hast been displeased: oh turn Thyself to us again." It is probable that when David first encountered the Syrians he was put to great straits, his difficulty being aggravated by his distance from

home and the want of suitable supplies. If the Edomites, taking advantage of his difficulty, chose the time to make an attack on the southern border of the kingdom, and if the king was obliged to diminish his own force by sending Joab against Edom, with part of his men, his position must have been trying indeed. But David did not let go his trust in God; courage and confidence came to him by prayer, and he was able to say, "Through God we shall do valiantly; for He it is that shall tread down all our enemies."

The effect of these victories must have been very striking. In the Song of the Bow, David had celebrated the public services of Saul, who had "clothed the daughters of Israel in scarlet, with other delights, who had put on ornaments of gold on their apparel"; but all that Saul had done for the kingdom was now thrown into the shade by the achievements of David. With all his bravery, Saul had never been able to subdue his enemies, far less to extend the limits of the kingdom. David accomplished both; and it is the secret of the difference that is expressed in the words, "The Lord gave victory to David whithersoever he went." It is one of the great lessons of the Old Testament that the godly man can and does perform his duty better than any other man, because the Lord is with him: that whether he be steward of a house, or keeper of a prison, or ruler of a kingdom, like Joseph; or a judge and lawgiver, like Moses; or a warrior, like Samson, or Gideon, or Jephthah; or a king, like David, or Jehoshaphat, or Josiah; or a prime minister, like Daniel, his godliness helps him to do his duty as no other man can do his. This is especially a prominent lesson in the book of Psalms; it is inscribed on its very portals; for the godly man, as the very first Psalm tells us, "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

In these warlike expeditions, King David foreshadowed the spiritual conquests of the Son of David, who went forth "conquering and to conquer," staggered for a moment, as in Gethsemane, by the rude shock of confederate enemies, but through prayer regaining his confidence in God, and triumphing in the hour and power of darkness. That noble effusion of fire and feeling, the sixty-eighth Psalm, seems to have been written in connection with these wars. The soul of the Psalmist is stirred to its depths; the majestic goings of Jehovah, recently witnessed by the nation, have roused his most earnest feelings, and he strains every nerve to produce a like feeling in the people. The recent exploits of the king are ranked with His doings when He marched before His people through the wilderness, and Mount Sinai shook before Him. Great delight is expressed in God's having taken up His abode on His holy hill, in the exaltation of His people in connection with that step, and likewise in looking forward to the future and anticipating the peaceful triumphs when "princes should come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia stretch forth her arms to God." Benevolent and missionary longings mingle with the emotions of the conqueror and the feelings of the patriot.

"Sing unto the Lord, ye kingdoms of the earth;
Oh, sing praises unto the Lord,
To Him that rideth upon the heaven of heavens that
are of old,
Lo, He uttereth His voice, and that a mighty voice."

It is interesting to see how in this extension of his influence among heathen nations, the Psalm-

ist began to cherish and express these missionary longings, and to call on the nations to sing praises unto the Lord. It has been remarked that, in the ordinary course of Providence, the Bible follows the sword, that the seed of the Gospel falls into furrows that have been prepared by war. Of this missionary spirit we find many evidences in the Psalms. It was delightful to the Psalmist to think of the spiritual blessings that were to spread even beyond the limits of the great empire that now owned the sway of the king of Israel. Mount Zion was to become the birth-place of the nations; from Egypt and Babylonia, from Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia, additions were to be made to her citizens (Ps. lxxxvii.). "The people shall be gathered together, and the nations, to serve the Lord" (Ps. cii. 22). "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him" (Ps. xxii. 27). "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and they shall glorify Thy name" (Ps. lxxxvi. 9). "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise" (Ps. c. 1, 4).

Alas, the era of wars has not yet passed away. Even Christian nations have been woefully slow to apply the Christian precept, "Inasmuch as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." But let us at least make an earnest endeavour that if there must be war, its course may be followed up by the heralds of mercy, and that wherever there may occur "the battle of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood," there also it may speedily be proclaimed, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government is on His shoulders: and His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6).

CHAPTER XI.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE KINGDOM.

2 SAMUEL viii. 15-18.

IF the records of David's warlike expeditions are brief, still more so are the notices of his work of peace. How he fulfilled his royal functions when there was no war to draw him from home, and to engross the attention both of the king and his officers of state, is told us here in the very briefest terms, barely affording even the outline of a picture. Yet it is certain that the activity of David's character, his profound interest in the welfare of his people, and his remarkable talent for administration, led in this department to very conspicuous and remarkable results. Some of the Psalms afford glimpses both of the principles on which he acted, and the results at which he aimed, that are fitted to be of much use in filling up the bare skeleton now before us. In this point of view, the subject may become interesting and instructive, as undoubtedly it is highly important. For we must remember that it was with reference to the spirit in which he was to rule that David was called the man after God's heart, and that he formed such a contrast to his predecessor. And further we are to bear in mind that in respect of the moral and spiritual qualities of his reign David had for his Successor the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord God will give unto Him the throne of His servant David," said the angel Gabriel to Mary,

"and He shall reign over the house of Judah for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." It becomes us to make the most of what is told us of the peaceful administration of David's kingdom, in order to understand the grounds on which our Lord is said to have occupied His throne.

The first statement in the verses before us is comprehensive and suggestive: "And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people." The first thing pointed out to us here is the catholicity of his kingly government, embracing *all* Israel, *all* people. He did not bestow his attention on one favoured section of the people, to the neglect or careless oversight of the rest. He did not, for example, seek the prosperity of his own tribe, Judah, to the neglect of the other eleven. In a word, there was no favouritism in his reign. This is not to say that he did not like some of his subjects better than the rest. There is every reason to believe that he liked the tribe of Judah best. But whatever preferences of this kind he may have had—and he would not have been man if he had had none—they did not limit or restrict his royal interest; they did not prevent him from seeking the welfare of every portion of the land, of every section of the people. Just as, in the days when he was a shepherd, there were probably some of his sheep and lambs for which he had a special affection, yet that did not prevent him from studying the welfare of the whole flock and of every animal in it with most conscientious care; so was it with his people. The least interesting of them were sacred in his eyes. They were part of his charge, and they were to be studied and cared for in the same manner as the rest. In this he reflected that universality of God's care on which we find the Psalmist dwelling with such complacency: "The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works. The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." And may we not add that this quality of David's rule foreshadowed the catholicity of Christ's kingdom and His glorious readiness to bestow blessing on every side? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "On the last, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." "Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all." "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the next place, we have much to learn from the statement that the most prominent thing that David did was to "execute judgment and justice to the people." That was the solid foundation on which all his benefits rested. And these words are not words of form or words of course. For it is never said that Saul did anything of the kind. There is nothing to show that Saul was really interested in the welfare of the people, or that he took any pains to secure that just and orderly administration on which the prosperity of his kingdom depended. And most certainly they are not words that could have been used of the ordinary government of Oriental kings. Tyranny, injustice, oppression, robbery of the poor by the rich, government by favourites more cruel and unprincipled than their masters, imprisonments, fines, conspiracies, and assassinations, were the usual features of Eastern government. And to a great extent they are features of the government of

Syria and other Eastern countries even at the present day. It is in vivid contrast to all these things that it is said, "David executed judgment and justice." Perhaps there is no need for assigning a separate meaning to each of these words; they may be regarded as just a forcible combination to denote the all-pervading justice which was the foundation of the whole government. He was just in the laws which he laid down, and just in the decisions which he gave. He was inaccessible to bribes, proof against the influence of the rich and powerful, and deaf in such matters to every plea of expediency; he regarded nothing but the scales of justice. What confidence and comfort an administration of this kind brought may in some measure be inferred from the extraordinary satisfaction of many an Eastern people at this day when the administration of justice is committed even to foreigners, if their one aim will be to deal justly with all. On this foundation, as on solid rock, a ruler may go on to devise many things for the welfare of his people. But apart from this any scheme of general improvement which may be devised is sure to be a failure, and all the money and wisdom and practical ability that may be expended upon it will only share the fate of the numberless cart-loads of solid material in the "Pilgrim's Progress" that were cast into the Slough of Despond.

This idea of equal justice to all, and especially to those who had no helper, was a very beautiful one in David's eyes. It gathered round it those bright and happy features which in the seventy-second Psalm are associated with the administration of another King. "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king's son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment." The beauty of a just government is seen most clearly in its treatment of the poor. It is the poor who suffer most from unrighteous rulers. Their feebleness makes them easier victims. Their poverty prevents them from dealing in golden bribes. If they have little individually wherewith to enrich the oppressor, their numbers make up for the small share of each. Very beautiful, therefore, is the government of the king who "shall judge the poor of the people, who shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." The thought is one on which the Psalmist dwells with great delight. "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight." So far from need and poverty repelling him, they rather attract him. His interest and his sympathy are moved by the cry of the destitute. He would fain lighten the burdens that weigh them down so heavily, and give them a better chance in the struggle of life. He would do something to elevate their life above the level of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. He recognises fully the brotherhood of man.

And in all this we find the features of that higher government of David's Son which shows so richly His most gracious nature. The cry of sorrow and need, as it rose from this dark world, did not repel, but rather attracted Him. Though the woes of man sprang from his own misdeeds, He gave Himself to bear them and carry their guilt away. All were in the lowest depths of spiritual poverty, but for that reason His hand was

the more freely offered for their help. The one condition on which that help was given was, that they should own their poverty, and acknowledge Him as their Benefactor, and accept all as a free gift at His hands.

But more than that, the condition of the poor in the natural sense was very interesting to Jesus. It was with that class He threw in His lot. It was among them He lived; it was their sorrows and trials He knew by personal experience; it was their welfare for which He laboured most. Always accessible to every class, most respectful to the rich, and ever ready to bestow His blessings wherever they were prized, yet it was true of Christ that "He spared the poor and needy and saved the souls of the needy." And in a temporal point of view, one of the most striking effects of Christ's religion is, that it has so benefited, and tends still more to benefit, the poor. Slavery and tyranny are among its most detested things. Regard for man as man is one of its highest principles. It detects the spark of Divinity in every human soul, grievously overlaid with the scum and filth of the world; and it seeks to cleanse and brighten it, till it shine forth in clear and heavenly lustre. It is a most Christian thought that the gems in the kingdom of God are not to be found merely where respectability and culture disguise the true spiritual condition of humanity, but even among those who outwardly are lost and disreputable. Not the least honourable of the reproachful terms applied to Jesus was—"the Friend of publicans and sinners."

We are not to think of David, however, as being satisfied if he merely secured justice to the poor and succeeded in lightening their yoke. His ulterior aim was to fill his kingdom with active, useful, honourable citizens. This is plain from the beautiful language of some of the Psalms. Both for old and young, he had a beautiful ideal. "The righteous shall flourish as the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. xcii. 12-14). And so for the young his desire was—"That our sons may be as plants, grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace." Moral beauty, and especially the beauty of active and useful lives, was the great object of his desire. Can anything be better or more enlightened as a royal policy than that which we thus see to have been David's—in the first place, a policy of universal justice; in the second place, of special regard for those who on the one hand are most liable to oppression and on the other are most in need of help and encouragement; and in the third place, a policy whose aim is to promote excellence of character, and to foster in the young those graces and virtues which wear longest, which preserve the freshness and enjoyment of life to the end, and which crown their possessors, even in old age, with the respect and the affection of all?

The remaining notices of David's administration in the passage before us are simply to the effect that the government consisted of various departments, and that each department had an officer at its head.

1. There was the military department, at the head of which was Joab, or rather he was over "the host"—the great muster of the people for military purposes. A more select body, "the Cherethites and the Pelethites," seems to have

formed a bodyguard for the king, or a band of household troops, and was under a separate commander. The troops forming "the host" were divided into twelve courses of twenty-four thousand each, regularly officered, and for one month of the year the officers of one of the courses, and probably the people, or some of them, attended on the king at Jerusalem (1 Chron. xxvii. 1). Of the most distinguished of his soldiers who excelled in feats of personal valour, David seems to have formed a legion of honour, conspicuous among whom were the thirty honourable, and the three who excelled in honour (2 Sam. xxiii. 28). It is certain that whatever extra power could be given by careful organisation to the fighting force of the country, the army of Israel under David possessed it in the fullest degree.

2. There was the civil department, at the head of which were Jehoshaphat the recorder and Seraiah the scribe or secretary. While these were in attendance on David at Jerusalem, they did not supersede the ordinary home rule of the tribes of Israel. Each tribe had still its prince or ruler, and continued, under a general superintendence from the king, to conduct its local affairs (1 Chron. xxvii. 16-22). The supreme council of the nation continued to assemble on occasions of great national importance (1 Chron. xxviii. 1), and though its influence could not have been so great as it was before the institution of royalty, it continued an integral element of the constitution, and in the time of Rehoboam, through its influence and organisation (1 Kings xii. 3, 16), the kingdom of the ten tribes was set up, almost without a struggle (1 Chron. xxiii. 4). This home-rule system, besides interesting the people greatly in the prosperity of the country, was a great check against the abuse of the royal authority; and it is a proof that the confidence of Rehoboam in the stability of his government, confirmed perhaps by a superstitious view of that promise to David, must have been an absolute infatuation, the product of utter inexperience on his part, and of the most foolish counsel ever tendered by professional advisers.

3. Ecclesiastical administration. The capture of Jerusalem and its erection into the capital of the kingdom made a great change in ecclesiastical arrangements. For some time before it would have been hard to tell where the ecclesiastical capital was to be found. Shiloh had been stripped of its glory when Ichabod received his name, and the Philistine armies destroyed the place. Nob had shared a similar fate at the hands of Saul. The old tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness was at Gibeon (1 Chron. xxi. 29), and remained there even after the removal of the ark to Zion (1 Kings iii. 4). At Hebron, too, there must have been a shrine while David reigned there. But from the time when David brought up the ark to Jerusalem, that city became the greatest centre of the national worship. There the services enjoined by the law of Moses were celebrated; it became the scene of the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

We are told that the heads of the ecclesiastical department were Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar. These represented the elder and the younger branches of the priesthood. Zadok was the lineal descendant of Eleazar, Aaron's son (1 Chron. vi. 12), and was therefore the constitutional successor to the high-priesthood. Ahimelech the son of Abiathar represented the family of Eli, who seems to have been raised to

the high-priesthood out of order, perhaps in consequence of the illness or incompetence of the legitimate high-priest. It is of some interest to note the fact that under David two men were at the head of the priesthood, much as it was in the days of our Lord, when Annas and Caiaphas are each called the high-priest. The ordinary priests were divided into four-and-twenty courses, and each course served in its turn for a limited period, an arrangement which still prevailed in the days of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. A systematic arrangement of the Levites was likewise made; some were allocated to the service of the Temple, some were porters, some were singers, and some were officers and judges. Of the six thousand who filled the last-named office, "chief fathers" as they were called, nearly a half were allocated among the tribes east of the Jordan, as being far from the centre, and more in need of oversight. It is probable that this large body of Levites were not limited to strictly judicial duties, but that they performed important functions in other respects, perhaps as teachers, physicians, and registrars. It is not said that Samuel's schools of the prophets received any special attention, but the deep interest that David must have taken in Samuel's work, and his early acquaintance with its effects, leave little room to doubt that these institutions were carefully fostered, and owed to David some share of the vitality which they continued to exhibit in the days of Elijah and Elisha. It is very probable that the prophets Gad and Nathan were connected with these institutions.

It is scarcely possible to say how far these careful ecclesiastical arrangements were instrumental in fostering the spirit of genuine piety. But there is too much reason to fear that even in David's time that element was very deficient. The bursts of religious enthusiasm that occasionally rolled over the country were no sure indications of piety in a people easily roused to temporary gushes of feeling, but deficient in stability. There often breathes in David's psalms a sense of loneliness, a feeling of his being a stranger on the earth, that seems to show that he wanted congenial company, that the atmosphere was not of the godly quality he must have wished. The bloody Joab was his chief general, and at a subsequent period the godless Ahithophel was his chief counsellor. It is even probable that the intense piety of David brought him many secret enemies. The world has no favour for men, be they kings or priests, that repudiate all compromise in religion, and insist on God being regarded with supreme and absolute honour. Where religion interferes with their natural inclinations and lays them under inviolable obligations to have regard to the will of God, they rebel in their hearts against it, and they hate those who consistently uphold its claims. The nation of Israel appears to have been pervaded by an undercurrent of dislike to the eminent holiness of David, which, though kept in check by his distinguished services and successes, at last burst out with terrific violence in the rebellion of Absalom. That villainous movement would not have had the vast support it received, especially in Jerusalem, if even the people of Judah had been saturated with the spirit of genuine piety. We cannot think much of the piety of a people that rose up against the sweet singer of Israel and the great benefactor of the nation, and that seemed to anticipate the cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas."

The systematic administration of his kingdom

by King David was the fruit of a remarkable faculty of orderly arrangement that belonged to most of the great men of Israel. We see it in Abraham, in his prompt and successful marshalling of his servants to pursue and attack the kings of the East when they carried off Lot; we see it in Joseph, first collecting and then distributing the stores of food in Egypt; in Moses, conducting that marvellous host in order and safety through the wilderness; and, in later times, in Ezra and Nehemiah, reducing the chaos which they found at Jerusalem to a state of order and prosperity which seemed to verify the vision of the dry bones. We see it in the Son of David, in the orderly way in which all His arrangements were made: the sending forth of the twelve Apostles and the seventy disciples, the arranging of the multitude when He fed the five thousand, and the careful gathering up of the fragments "that nothing be lost." In the spiritual kingdom, a corresponding order is demanded, and times of peace and rest in the Church are times when this development is specially to be studied. Spiritual order, spiritual harmony: God in His own place, and self, with all its powers and interests, as well as our brethren, our neighbours, and the world, all in theirs—this is the great requisite in the individual heart. The development of this holy order in the *individual* soul; the development of *family* graces, the due Christian ordering of homes; the development of *public* graces—patriotism, freedom, godliness, in the State, and in the Church of the spirit that seeks the instruction of the ignorant, the recovery of the erring, the comforting of the wretched, and the advancement everywhere of the cause of Christ—in a word, the increase of spiritual wealth—these very specially are objects to which in all times, but especially in quiet times, all hearts and energies should be turned. What can be more honourable, what can be more blessed, than to help in advancing these? More life, more grace, more prayer, more progress, more missionary ardour, more self-denying love, more spiritual beauty—what higher objects can the Christian minister aim at? And how better can the Christian king or the Christian statesman fulfil and honour his office than by using his influence, so far as he legitimately may, in furthering the virtues and habits characteristic of men that fear God while they honour the king?

CHAPTER XII.

DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH.

2 SAMUEL ix.

THE busy life which King David was now leading did not prevent memory from occasionally running back to his early days and bringing before him the friends of his youth. Among these remembrances of the past, his friendship and his covenant with Jonathan were sure to hold a conspicuous place. On one of these occasions the thought occurred to him that possibly some descendant of Jonathan might still be living. He had been so completely severed from his friend during the last years of his life, and the unfortunate attempt on the part of Ishbosheth had made personal intercourse so much more difficult, that he seems not to have been aware of the exact state of Jonathan's family. It is evident that the survival of any descendant of his friend was not

publicly known, and probably the friends of the youth who was discovered had thought it best to keep his existence quiet, being of those who would give David no credit for higher principles than were current between rival dynasties. Even Michal, Jonathan's sister, does not seem to have known that a son of his survived. It became necessary, therefore, to make a public inquiry of his officers and attendants. "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" It was not essential that he should be a child of Jonathan's; any descendant of Saul's would have been taken for Jonathan's sake.

It is a proof that the bloody wars in which he had been engaged had not destroyed the tenderness of his heart, that the very chapter which follows the account of his battles opens with a yearning of affection—a longing for an outlet to feelings of kindness. It is instructive, too, to find the proof of love to his neighbour succeeding the remarkable evidence of supreme regard to the honour of God recently given in the proposal to build a temple. This period of David's life was its golden era, and it is difficult to understand how the man that was so remarkable at this time for his regard for God and his interest in his neighbour should soon afterwards have been betrayed into a course of conduct that showed him most grievously forgetful of both.

This proceeding of David's in making inquiry for a fit object of beneficence may afford us a lesson as to the true course of enlightened kindness. Doubtless David had numberless persons applying for a share of his bounty; yet he makes inquiry for a new channel in which it may flow. The most clamorous persons are seldom the most deserving, and if a bountiful man simply recognises, however generously, even the best of the cases that press themselves on his notice, he will not be satisfied with the result; he will feel that his bounty has rather been frittered away on miscellaneous undertakings, than that it has achieved any solid and satisfying result. It is easy for a rich man to fling a pittance to some wretched-looking creature that whines out a tale of horror in his ear; but this may be done only to relieve his own feelings, and harm instead of good may be the result. Enlightened benevolence aims at something higher than the mere relief of passing distress. Benevolent men ought not to lie at the mercy either of the poor who ask their charity, or of the philanthropic Christians who appeal for support to their schemes. Pains must be taken to find out the deserving, to find out those who have the strongest claim. Even the open-handed, whose purse is always at hand, and who are ready for every good work, may be neglecting some case or class of cases which have far stronger claims on them than those which are so assiduously pressed on their notice.

And hence we may see that it is right and fitting, especially in those to whom Providence has given much, to cast over in their minds, from time to time, the state of their obligations, and think whether among old friends, or poor relations, or faithful but needy servants of God, there may not be some who have a claim on their bounty. There are other debts besides money debts it becomes you to look after. In youth, perhaps, you received much kindness from friends and relatives which at the time you could not repay; but now the tables are turned; you are prosperous, they or their families are needy. And these cases are apt to slip out of mind. It is not always hard-heart-

edness that makes the prosperous forget the less fortunate; it is often utter thoughtlessness. It is the neglect of that rule which has such a powerful though silent effect when it is carried out—Put yourself in their place. Imagine how you would feel, strained and worried to sleeplessness through narrow means, and seeing old friends rolling in wealth, who might, with little or no inconvenience, lighten the burden that is crushing you so painfully. It is a strange thing that this counsel should be more needed by the rich than by the poor. Thoughtlessness regarding his neighbours is not a poor man's vice. The empty house is remembered, even though it costs a sacrifice to send it a little of his own scanty supplies. Few men are so hardened as not to feel the obligation to show kindness when that obligation is brought before them. What we urge is, that no one should lie at the mercy of others for bringing his obligations before him. Let him think for himself; and especially let him cast his eye round his own horizon, and consider whether there be not some representatives of old friends or old relations to whom kindness ought to be shown.

To return to the narrative. The history of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, had been a sad one. When Israel was defeated by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, and Saul and Jonathan were slain, he was but an infant; and his nurse, terror-stricken at the news of the disaster, in her haste to escape had let him fall, and caused an injury which made him lame for life. What the manner of his upbringing was, we are not told. When David found him, he was living with Machir, the son of Ammiel, of Lo-debar, on the other side of the Jordan, in the same region where his uncle Ishbosheth had tried to set up his kingdom. Mephibosheth became known to David through Ziba, a servant of Saul's, a man of more substance than principle, as his conduct showed at a later period of his life. Ziba, we are told, had fifteen sons and twenty servants. He seems to have contrived to make himself comfortable notwithstanding the wreck of his master's fortunes, more comfortable than Mephibosheth, who was living in another man's house.

There seems to have been a surmise among David's people that this Ziba could tell something of Jonathan's family; but evidently he was not very ready to do so; for it was only to David himself that when sent for he gave the information, and that after David had emphatically stated his motive—not to do harm, but to show kindness for Jonathan's sake. The existence of Mephibosheth being thus made known, he is sent for and brought into David's presence. And we cannot but be sorry for him when we mark his abject bearing in the presence of the king. When he was come unto David, "he fell on his face and did reverence." And when David explained his intentions, "he bowed himself and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look on such a dead dog as I am?" Naturally of a timid nature, and weakened in nerve by the accident of his infancy, he must have grown up under great disadvantages. His lameness excluded him from sharing in any youthful game or manly exercise, and therefore threw him into the company of the women who, like him, tarried at home. What he had heard of David had not come through a friendly channel, had come through the partisans of Saul, and was not likely to be very favourable. He was too young to remember the generous conduct of David in reference to his father and grandfather; and those who

were about him probably did not care to say much about it.

Accustomed to think that his wisest course was to conceal from David his very existence, and looking on him with the dread with which the family of former kings regarded the reigning monarch, he must have come into his presence with a strange mixture of feeling. He had a profound sense of the greatness which David had achieved and the honour implied in his countenance and fellowship. But there was no need for his humbling himself so low. There was no need for his calling himself a dog, a dead dog,—the most humiliating image it was possible to find. We should have thought him more worthy of his father if, recognising the high position which David had attained by the grace of God, he had gracefully thanked him for the regard shown to his father's memory, and shown more of the self-respect which was due to Jonathan's son. In his subsequent conduct, in the days of David's calamity, Mephibosheth gave evidence of the same disinterested spirit which had shone so beautifully in Jonathan, but his noble qualities were like a light twinkling among ruins or a jewel glistening in a wreck.

This shattered condition both of mind and body, however, commended him all the more to the friendly regard of David. Had he shown himself a high-minded, ambitious youth, David might have been embarrassed how to act towards him. Finding him modest and respectful, he had no difficulty in the case. The kindness which he showed him was twofold. In the first place, he restored to him all the land that had belonged to his grandfather; and in the second place, he made him an inmate of his own house, with a place at his table, the same as if he had been one of his own sons. And that he might not be embarrassed with having the land to care for, he committed the charge of it to Ziba, who was to bring to Mephibosheth the produce or its value.

Every arrangement was thus made that could conduce to his comfort. His being a cripple did not deprive him of the honour of a place at the royal table, little though he could contribute to the lustre of the palace. For David bestowed his favours not on the principle of trying to reflect lustre on himself or his house, but on the principle of doing good to those who had a claim on his consideration. The lameness and consequent awkwardness, that would have made many a king ashamed of such an inmate of his palace only recommended him the more to David. Regard for outward appearances was swallowed up by a higher regard—regard for what was right and true.

It might be thought by some that such an incident as this was hardly worthy of a place in the sacred record; but the truth is, that David seldom showed more of the true spirit of God than he did on this occasion. The feeling that led him to seek out any stray member of the house in order to show kindness to him was the counterpart of that feeling that has led God from the very beginning to seek the children of men, and that led Jesus to seek and to save that which was lost. For that is truly the attitude in which God has ever placed Himself towards our fallen race. The sight to be seen in this world has not been that of men seeking after God, but that of God seeking after men. All day long He has been stretching forth His hands, and inviting the children of men to taste and see that He is gracious. If we ask for the principle that

unifies all parts of the Bible, it is this gracious attitude of God towards those who have forfeited His favour. The Bible presents to us the sight of God's Spirit striving with men, persevering in the thankless work long after He has been resisted, and ceasing only when all hope of success through further pleading is gone.

There were times when this process was prosecuted with more than common ardour; and at last there came a time when the Divine pleadings reached a climax, and God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake to the fathers by the prophets, spake to them at last by His own Son. And what was the life of Jesus Christ but a constant appeal to men, in God's name, to accept the kindness which God was eager to show them? Was not His invitation to all that laboured and were heavy laden, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"? Did he not represent the Father as a householder, making a marriage feast for his son, sending forth his servants to bid the guests to the wedding, and when the natural guests refused, bidding them go to the highways and the hedges, and fetch the lame and the blind and any outcast they could find, because he longed to see guests of some kind enjoying the good things he had provided? The great crime of the ancient Jews was rejecting Him who had come in the name of the Lord to bless them. Their crowning condemnation was, not that they had failed to keep the Ten Commandments, though that was true; not that they had spent their lives in pleasing themselves instead of pleasing God, though that also was true; but that they had rejected God's unspeakable gift, and requited the Eternal Son, when He came from heaven to bless them, with the cursed death of the cross. But even after they had committed that act of unprecedented wickedness, God's face would not be wholly turned away from them. The very attitude in which Jesus died, with His hands outstretched on the tree, would still represent the attitude of the Divine heart towards the very murderers of His Son. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men toward Me." "Unto you first, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, hath sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Here, my friends, is the most glorious feature of the Christian religion. Happy those of you who have apprehended this attitude of your most gracious Father, who have believed in His love, and who have accepted His grace! For not only has God received you back into His family, and given you a name and a place in His temple better than that of sons and daughters, but He has restored to you your lost inheritance. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." Nay, more, He has not only restored to you your lost inheritance, but He has conferred on you an inheritance more glorious than that of which sin deprived you. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last day."

But if the grace of God in thus stretching out His hands to sinful men and offering them all the blessings of salvation is very wonderful, it makes the case of those all the more terrible, al' the more

hopeless, who treat His invitations with indifference, and turn their backs on an inheritance the glory of which they do not see. How men should be so infatuated as to do this it were hard to understand, if we had not ample evidence of it in the godless tendencies of our natural hearts. Still more mysterious is it to understand how God should fail to carry His point in the case of those to whom He stretches out His hands. But of all considerations there is none more fitted to astonish and alarm the careless than that they are capable of refusing all the appeals of Divine love, and rejecting all the bounty of Divine grace. If this be persevered in, what a rude awakening you will have in the world to come, when in all the bitterness of remorse you will think on the glories that were once within your reach, but with which you trifled when you had the chance! How foolish would Mephibosheth have been if he had disbelieved in David's kindness and rejected his offer! But David was sincere, and Mephibosheth believed in his sincerity. May we not, must we not, believe that God is sincere? If a purpose of kindness could arise in a human heart, how much more in the Divine heart, how much more in the heart of Him the very essence of whose nature is conveyed to us in the words of the beloved disciple—"God is love"!

There is yet another application to be made of this passage in David's history. We have seen how it exemplifies the duty incumbent on us all to consider whether kindness is not due from us to the friends or the relatives of those who have been helpful to ourselves. This remark is not applicable merely to temporal obligations, but also, and indeed emphatically, to spiritual. We should consider ourselves in debt to those who have conferred spiritual benefits upon us. Should a descendant of Luther or Calvin, of Latimer or Cranmer or Knox, appear among us in need of kindness, what true Protestant would not feel that for what he owed to the fathers it was his duty to show kindness to the children? But farther back even than this was a race of men to whom the Christian world lies under still deeper obligations. It was the race of David himself, to which had belonged "Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel with them that called on His name," and, in after-times, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel; Peter, and James, and John, and Paul; and, outshining them all, like the sun of heaven, Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour of men. With what models of lofty piety has that race furnished every succeeding generation! From the study of their holy lives, their soaring faith, their burning zeal, what blessing has been derived in the past, and what an impulse will yet go forth to the very end of time! No wonder though the Apostle had great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart when he thought of the faithless state of the people, "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God"! Yet none are more in need of your friendly remembrance at this day than the descendants of these men. It becomes you to ask, "Is there yet any that is left of their house to whom we may show kindness for Jesus' sake?" For God has not finally cast them off, and Jesus has not ceased to care for those who were His brethren according to the flesh. If there were no other motive to induce us to seek the good of the Jews, this consideration should surely prevail. Ill did the world requite its obligation during the long ages when all manner of contumely and injustice

was heaped upon the Hebrew race, as if Jesus had never prayed, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Their treatment by the Gentiles has been so harsh that, even when better feelings prevail, they are slow, like Mephibosheth, —to believe that we mean them well. They may have done much to repel our kindness, and they may appear to be hopelessly encrusted with unbelief in Him whom we present as the Saviour. But charity never faileth; and in reference to them as to other objects of philanthropic effort, the exhortation holds good, "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

Such kindness to those who are in need is not only a duty of religion, but tends greatly to commend it. Neglect of those who have claims on us, while objects more directly religious are eagerly prosecuted, is not pleasing to God, whether the neglect take place in our lives or in the destination of our substance at death. "Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."

CHAPTER XIII.

DAVID AND HANUN.

2 SAMUEL X.

POWERFUL though David had proved himself in every direction in the art of war, his heart was inclined to peace. A king who had been victorious over so many foes had no occasion to be afraid of a people like the Ammonites. It could not have been from fear therefore that, when Nahash the king of the Ammonites died, David resolved to send a friendly message to his son. Not the least doubt can be thrown on the statement of the history that what moved him to do this was a grateful remembrance of the kindness which he had at one time received from the late king. The position which he had gained as a warrior would naturally have made Hanun more afraid of David than David could be of Hanun. The king of Israel could not have failed to know this, and it might naturally occur to him that it would be a kindly act to the young king of Ammon to send him a message that showed that he might thoroughly rely on his friendly intentions. The message to Hanun was another emanation of a kindly heart. If there was anything of policy in it, it was the policy of one who felt that so many things are continually occurring to set nations against one another as to make it most desirable to improve every opportunity of drawing them closer together.

It is a happy thing for any country when its rulers and men of influence are ever on the watch for opportunities to strengthen the spirit of friendship. It is a happy thing in the Church when the leaders of different sections are more disposed to measures that conciliate and heal than to measures that alienate and divide. In family life, and wherever men of different views and different tempers meet, this peace-loving spirit is of great price. Men that like fighting, and that are ever disposed to taunt, to irritate, to divide, are the nuisances of society. Men that deal in the soft answer, in the message of kindness, and in the

prayer of love, deserve the respect and gratitude of all.

It is a remarkable thing that, of all the nations that were settled in the neighbourhood of the Israelites, the only one that seemed desirous to live on friendly terms with them was that of Tyre. Even those who were related to them by blood,—Edomites, Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites,—were never cordial, and often at open hostility. Though their rights had been carefully respected by the Israelites on their march from Sinai to Palestine, no feeling of cordial friendship was established with any of them. None of them were impressed even so much as Balaam had been, when in language so beautiful he blessed the people whom God had blessed. None of them threw in their lot with Israel, in recognition of their exalted spiritual privileges, as Hobab and his people had done near Mount Sinai. Individuals, like Ruth the Moabitess, had learned to recognise the claims of Israel's God and the privileges of the covenant, but no entire nation had ever shown even an inclination to such a course. These neighbouring nations continued therefore to be fitting symbols of that world-power which has so generally been found in antagonism to the people of God. Israel while they continued faithful to God were like the lily among thorns; and Israel's king, like Him whom he typified, was called to rule in the midst of his enemies. The friendship of the surrounding world cannot be the ordinary lot of the faithful servant, otherwise the Apostle would not have struck such a loud note of warning. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, would be the friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Between the Ammonites and the Israelites collisions had occurred on two former occasions, on both of which the Ammonites appear to have been the aggressors. The former of these was in the days of Jephthah. The defeat of the Ammonites at that time was very thorough, and probably unexpected, and, like other defeats of the same kind, it no doubt left feelings of bitter hatred rankling in the breasts of the defeated party. The second was the collision at Jabesh-gilead at the beginning of the reign of Saul. The king of the Ammonites showed great ferocity and cruelty on that occasion. When the men of Jabesh, brought to bay, begged terms of peace, the bitter answer was returned that it would be granted only on condition that every man's right eye should be put out. It was then that Saul showed such courage and promptitude. In the briefest space he was at Jabesh-gilead in defence of his people, and by his successful tactics inflicted on the Ammonites a terrible defeat, killing a great multitude and scattering the remainder, so that not any two of them were left together. Men do not like to have a prize plucked from their hands when they are on the eve of enjoying it. After such a defeat, Nahash could not have very friendly feelings to Saul. And when Saul proclaimed David his enemy, Nahash would naturally incline to David's side. There is no record of the occasion on which he showed kindness to him, but in all likelihood it was at the time when he was in the wilderness, hiding from Saul. If, when David was near the head of the Dead Sea, and therefore not very far from the land of the Ammonites, or from places where they had influence, Nahash sent him any supplies for his men, the gift would be very opportune, and there could be no reason why David should not accept of it. Anyhow, the act

of kindness, whatever it was, made a strong impression on his heart. It was long, long ago when it happened, but love has a long memory, and the remembrance of it was still pleasant to David. And now the king of Israel purposes to repay to the son the debt he had incurred to the father. Up to this point it is a pretty picture; and it is a great disappointment when we find the transaction miscarry, and a negotiation which began in all the warmth and sincerity of friendship terminate in the wild work of war.

The fault of this miscarriage, however, was glaringly on the other side. Hanun was a young king, and it would only have been in accordance with the frank and unsuspecting spirit of youth had he received David's communication with cordial pleasure, and returned to it an answer in the same spirit in which it was sent. But his counsellors were of another mind. They persuaded their master that the pretext of comforting him on the death of his father was a hollow one, and that David desired nothing but to spy out the city and the country, with a view to bring them under his dominion. It is hard to suppose that they really believed this. It was they, not David, that wished a pretext for going to war. And having got something that by evil ingenuity might be perverted to this purpose, they determined to treat it so that it should be impossible for David to avoid the conflict. Hanun appears to have been a weak prince, and to have yielded to their counsels. Our difficulty is to understand how sane men could have acted in such a way. The determination to provoke war, and the insolence of their way of doing it, appear so like the freaks of a madman, that we cannot comprehend how reasonable men should in cold blood have even dreamt of such proceedings. Perhaps at this early period they had an understanding with those Syrians that afterwards came to their aid, and thought that on the strength of this they could afford to be insolent. The combined force which they could bring into the field would be such as to make even David tremble.

It is hardly necessary to say a word to bring out the outrageous character of their conduct. First, there was the repulse of David's kindness. It was not even declined with civility; it was repelled with scorn. It is always a serious thing to reject overtures of kindness. Even the friendly salutations of dumb animals are entitled to a friendly return, and the man that returns the caresses of his dog with a kick and a curse is a greater brute than the animal that he treats so unworthily. Kindness is too rare a gem to be trampled under foot. Even though it should be mistaken kindness, though the form it takes should prove an embarrassment rather than a help, a good man will appreciate the motive that prompted it, and will be careful not to hurt the feelings of those who, though they have blundered, meant him well. None are more liable to make mistakes than young children in their little efforts to please; meaning to be kind, they sometimes only give trouble. The parent that gives way to irritation, and meets this with a volley of scolding, deals cruelly with the best and tenderest part of the child's nature. There are few things more deserving to be attended to through life than the habit not only of appreciating little kindnesses, but showing that you appreciate them. How much more sweetly might the current run in social life if this were universally attended to!

But Hanun not only repelled David's kindness, but charged him with meanness, and virtually

flung in his face a challenge to war. To represent his apparent kindness as a mean cover of a hostile purpose was an act which Hanun might think little of, but which was fitted to wound David to the quick. Unscrupulous natures have a great advantage over others in the charges they may bring. In a street collision a man in dirty clothing is much more powerful for mischief than one in clean raiment. Rough, unscrupulous men are restrained by no delicacy from bringing atrocious charges against those to whom these charges are supremely odious. They have little sense of the sin of them, and they toss them about without scruple. Such poisoned arrows inflict great pain, not because the charges are just, but because it is horrible to refined natures even to hear them. There are two things that make some men very sensitive—the refinement of grace, and the refinement of the spirit of courtesy. The refinement of grace makes all sin odious, and makes a charge of gross sin very serious. The refinement of courtesy creates great regard to the feelings of others, and a strong desire not to wound them unnecessarily. In circles where real courtesy prevails, accusations against others are commonly couched in very gentle language. Rough natures ridicule this spirit, and pride themselves on their honesty in calling a spade a spade. Evidently Hanun belonged to the rough, unscrupulous school. Either he did not know how it would make David writhe to be accused of the alleged meanness, or, if he did know, he enjoyed the spectacle. It gratified his insolent nature to see the pious king of Israel posing before all the people of Ammon as a sneak and a liar, and to hear the laugh of scorn and hatred resounding on every side.

To these offences Hanun added yet another—scornful treatment of David's ambassadors. In the eyes of all civilised nations the persons of ambassadors were held sacred, and any affront or injury to them was counted an odious crime. Very often men of eminent position, venerable age, and unblemished character were chosen for this function, and it is quite likely that David's ambassadors to Hanun were of this class. When therefore these men were treated with contumely—half their beards, which were in a manner sacred, shorn away, their garments mutilated, and their persons exposed—no grosser insult could have been inflicted. When the king and his princes were the authors of this treatment, it must have been greatly enjoyed by the mass of the people, whose coarse glee over the dishonoured ambassadors of the great King David one can easily imagine. It is a painful moment when true worth and nobility lie at the mercy of insolence and coarseness, and have to bear their bitter revilings. Such things may happen in public controversy in a country where the utmost liberty of speech is allowed, and when men of ruffian mould find contumely and insult their handiest weapons. In times of religious persecution the most frightful charges have been hurled at the heads of godly men and women, whose real crime is to have striven to the utmost to obey God. Oh, how much need there is of patience to bear insult as well as injury! And insult will sometimes rouse the temper that injury does not ruffle. Oh for the spirit of Christ, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again!

The Ammonites did not wait for a formal declaration of war by David. Nor did they flatter themselves, when they came to their senses, that against one who had gained such renown as a warrior they could stand alone. Their insult to

King David turned out a costly affair. To get assistance they had to give gold. The parallel passage in Chronicles gives a thousand talents of silver as the cost of the first bargain with the Syrians. These Syrian mercenaries came from various districts—Beth-rehob, Zoba, Beth-maacah, and Tob. Some of these had already been subdued by David; in other cases there was apparently no previous collision. But all of them no doubt smarted under the defeats which David had inflicted either on them or on their neighbours, and when a large subsidy was allotted to them to begin with, in addition to whatever booty might fall to their share if David should be subdued, it is no great wonder that an immense addition was made to the forces of the Ammonites. It became in fact a very formidable opposition; all the more that they were very abundantly supplied with chariots and horsemen, of which arm David had scarcely any. He met them first by sending out Joab and "all the host" of the mighty men. The whole resources of his army were forwarded. And when Joab came to the spot, he found that he had a double enemy to face. The Ammonite army came out from the city to encounter him, while the Syrian army were encamped in the country, ready to place him between two fires when the battle began. To guard against this, Joab divided his force into two. The Syrian host was the more formidable body; therefore Joab went in person against it, at the head of a select body of troops chosen from the general army. The command of the remainder was given to his brother Abishai, who was left to deal with the Ammonites. If either section found its opponent too much for it, aid was to be given by the other. No fault can be found either with the arrangements made by Joab for the encounter or the spirit in which he entered on the fight. "Be of good courage," he said to his men, "and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth to Him good." It was just such an exhortation as David himself might have given. Some were trusting in chariots and some in horses, but they were remembering the name of the Lord their God. The first movement was made by Joab and his part of the army against the Syrians; it was completely successful; the Syrians fled before him, chariots and horsemen and all. When the Ammonite army saw the fate of the Syrians they did not even hazard a conflict, but wheeled about and made for the city. Thus ended their first proud effort to sustain and complete the humiliation of King David. The hired troops on which they had leaned so much turned out utterly untrustworthy; and the wretched Ammonites found themselves *minus* their thousand talents, without victory, and without honour.

But their allies the Syrians were not disposed to yield without another conflict. Determined to do his utmost, Hadarezer, king of the Syrians of Zobah, sent across the Euphrates, and prevailed on their neighbours there to join them in the effort to crush the power of David. That a very large number of these Mesopotamian Syrians responded to the invitation of Hadarezer is apparent from the number of the slain (ver. 18). The matter assumed so serious an aspect that David himself was now constrained to take the field, at the head of "all Israel." The Syrian troops were commanded by Shobach, who appears to have been a distinguished general. It must have been a death-struggle between the Syrian power and the power of David. But again the victory was with the Is-

raelites, and among the slain were the men of seven hundred chariots, and forty thousand horsemen (1 Chron. xix. 18, "footmen"), along with Shobach, captain of the Syrian host. It must have been a most decisive victory, for after it took place all the states that had been tributary to Hadarezer transferred their allegiance to David. The Syrian power was completely broken; all help was withdrawn from the Ammonites, who were now left to bear the brunt of their quarrel alone. Single-handed, they had to look for the onset of the army which had so remarkably prevailed against all the power of Syria, and to answer to King David for the outrage they had perpetrated on his ambassadors. Very different must their feelings have been now from the time when they began to negotiate with Syria, and when, doubtless, they looked forward so confidently to the coming defeat and humiliation of King David.

It requires but a very little consideration to see that the wars which are so briefly recorded in this chapter must have been most serious and perilous undertakings. The record of them is so short, so unimpassioned, so simple, that many readers are disposed to think very little of them. But when we pause to think what it was for the king of Israel to meet, on foreign soil, confederates so numerous, so powerful, and so familiar with warfare, we cannot but see that these were tremendous wars. They were fitted to try the faith as well as the courage of David and his people to the very utmost. In seeking dates for those psalms that picture a multitude of foes closing on the writer, and that record the exercises of his heart, from the insinuations of fear at the beginning to the triumph of trust and peace at the end, we commonly think only of two events in David's life,—the persecution of Saul and the insurrection of Absalom. But the Psalmist himself could probably have enumerated a dozen occasions when his danger and his need were as great as they were then. He must have passed through the same experience on these occasions as on the other two; and the language of the Psalms may often have as direct reference to the former as to the latter. We may understand, too, how the destruction of enemies became so prominent a petition in his prayers. What can a general desire and pray for, when he sees a hostile army, like a great engine of destruction, ready to dash against all that he holds dear, but that the engine may be shivered, deprived of all power of doing mischief—in other words, that the army may be destroyed? The imprecations in the Book of Psalms against his enemies must be viewed in this light. The military habit of the Psalmist's mind made him think only of the destruction of those who, in opposing him, opposed the cause of God. It ought not to be imputed as a crime to David that he did not rise high above a soldier's feelings; that he did not view things from the point of view of Christianity; that he was not a thousand years in advance of his age. The one outlet from the frightful danger which these Syrian hordes brought to him and his people was that they should be destroyed. Our blessed Lord gave men another view when He said, "The Son of man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He familiarised us with other modes of conquest. When He appeared to Saul on the way to Damascus, and turned the persecutor into the chief of apostles, He showed that there are other ways than that of destruction for delivering His Church from its enemies. "I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to

light, and from the power of Satan unto God." This commission to Saul gives us reason for praying, with reference to the most clever and destructive of the enemies of His Church, that by His Spirit He would meet them too, and turn them into other men. And not until this line of petition has been exhausted can we fall back in prayer on David's method. Only when their repentance and conversion have become hopeless are we entitled to pray God to destroy the grievous wolves that work such havoc in His flock.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAVID AND URIAH.

2 SAMUEL xi.

How ardently would most, if not all readers, of the life of David have wished that it had ended before this chapter! Its golden era has passed away, and what remains is little else than a chequered tale of crime and punishment. On former occasions, under the influence of strong and long-continued temptations, we have seen his faith give way and a spirit of dissimulation appear; but these were like spots on the sun, not greatly obscuring his general radiance. What we now encounter is not like a spot, but a horrid eclipse; it is not like a mere swelling of the face, but a bloated tumour, that distorts the countenance, and drains the body of its life blood. To human wisdom it would have seemed far better had David's life ended now, so that no cause might have been given for the everlasting current of jeer and joke with which his fall has supplied the infidel. Often, when a great and good man is cut off in the midst of his days and of his usefulness, we are disposed to question the wisdom of the dispensation; but when we find ourselves disposed to wonder whether this might not have been better in the case of David, we may surely acquiesce in the ways of God.

If the composition of the Bible had been in human hands it would never have contained such a chapter as this. There is something quite remarkable in the fearless way in which it unveils the guilt of David; it is set forth in its nakedness, without the slightest attempt either to palliate or to excuse it; and the only statement in the whole record designed to characterise it is the quiet but terrible words with which the chapter ends—"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." In the fearless march of providence we see many a proof of the courage of God. It is God alone that could have the fortitude to place in the Holy Book this foul story of sin and shame. He only could deliberately encounter the scorn which it has drawn down from every generation of ungodly men, the only wise God, who sees the end from the beginning, who can rise high above all the fears and objections of short-sighted men, and who can quiet every feeling of uneasiness on the part of His children with the sublime words, "Be still, and know that I am God."

The truth is, that though David's reputation would have been brighter had he died at this point of his career, the moral of his life, so to speak, would have been less complete. There was evidently a sensual element in his nature, as there is in so many men of warm, emotional temperament; and he does not appear to have been alive to the danger involved in it. It led him the more readily

to avail himself of the toleration of polygamy, and to increase from time to time the number of his wives. Thus provision was made for the gratification of a disorderly lust, which, if he had lived like Abraham or Isaac, would have been kept back from all lawless excesses. And when evil desire has large scope for its exercise, instead of being satisfied it becomes more greedy and more lawless. Now, this painful chapter of David's history is designed to show us what the final effect of this was in his case—what came ultimately of this habit of pampering the lust of the flesh. And verily, if any have ever been inclined to envy David's liberty, and think it hard that such a law of restraint binds them while he was permitted to do as he pleased, let them study in the latter part of his history the effects of this unhallowed indulgence; let them see his home robbed of its peace and joy, his heart lacerated by the misconduct of his children, his throne seized by his son, while he has to fly from his own Jerusalem; let them see him obliged to take the field against Absalom, and hear the air rent by his cries of anguish when Absalom is slain; let them think how even his deathbed was disturbed by the noise of revolt, and how legacies of blood had to be bequeathed to his successor almost with his dying breath,—and surely it will be seen that the license which bore such wretched fruits is not to be envied, and that, after all, the way even of royal transgressors is hard.

But a fall so violent as that of David does not occur all at once. It is generally preceded by a period of spiritual declension, and in all likelihood there was such an experience on his part. Nor is it very difficult to find the cause. For many years back David had enjoyed a most remarkable run of prosperity. His army had been victorious in every encounter: his power was recognised by many neighbouring states; immense riches flowed from every quarter to his capital; it seemed as if nothing could go wrong with him. When everything prospers to a man's hand, it is a short step to the conclusion that he can do nothing wrong. How many great men in the world have been spoiled by success, and by unlimited, or even very great power! In how many hearts has the fallacy obtained a footing, that ordinary laws were not made for them, and that they did not need to regard them! David was no exception; he came to think of his will as the great directing force within his kingdom, the earthly consideration that should regulate all.

Then there was the absence of that very powerful stimulus, the pressure of distress around him, which had driven him formerly so close to God. His enemies had been defeated in every quarter, with the single exception of the Ammonites, a foe that could give him no anxiety; and he ceased to have a vivid sense of his reliance on God as his Shield. The pressure of trouble and anxiety that had made his prayers so earnest was now removed, and probably he had become somewhat remiss and formal in prayer. We little know how much influence our surroundings have on our spiritual life till some great change takes place in them; and then, perhaps, we come to see that the atmosphere of trial and difficulty which oppressed us so greatly was really the occasion to us of our highest strength and our greatest blessings.

And further, there was the fact that David was idle, at least without active occupation. Though it was the time for kings to go forth to battle, and though his presence with his army at Rabbah

would have been a great help and encouragement to his soldiers, he was not there. He seems to have thought it not worth his while. Now that the Syrians had been defeated, there could be no difficulty with the Ammonites. At evening-tide he arose from off his bed and walked on the roof of his house. He was in that idle, listless mood in which one is most readily attracted by temptation, and in which the lust of the flesh has its greatest power. And, as it has been remarked, "oft the sight of means to do ill makes ill deeds done." If any scruples arose in his conscience they were not regarded. To brush aside objections to anything on which he had set his heart was a process to which, in his great undertakings, he had been well accustomed; unhappily, he applies this rule when it is not applicable, and with the whole force of his nature rushes into temptation.

Never was there a case which showed more emphatically the dreadful chain of guilt to which a first act, apparently insignificant, may give rise. His first sin was allowing himself to be arrested to sinful intents by the beauty of Bathsheba. Had he, like Job, made a covenant with his eyes; had he resolved that when the idea of sin sought entrance into the imagination it should be sternly refused admission; had he, in a word, nipped the temptation in the bud, he would have been saved a world of agony and sin. But instead of repelling the idea he cherishes it. He makes inquiry concerning the woman. He brings her to his house. He uses his royal position and influence to break down the objections which she would have raised. He forgets what is due to the faithful soldier, who, employed in his service, is unable to guard the purity of his home. He forgets the solemn testimony of the law, which denounces death to both parties as the penalty of the sin. This is the first act of the tragedy.

Then follow his vain endeavours to conceal his crime, frustrated by the high self-control of Uriah. Yes, though David gets him intoxicated he cannot make a fool of him. Strange that this Hittite, this member of one of the seven nations of Canaan, whose inheritance was not a blessing but a curse, shows himself a paragon in that self-command, the utter absence of which, in the favoured king of Israel, has plunged him so deeply in the mire. Thus ends the second act of the tragedy.

But the next is far the most awful. Uriah must be got rid of, not, however, openly, but by a cunning stratagem that shall make it seem as if his death were the result of the ordinary fortune of war. And to compass this David must take Joab into his confidence. To Joab, therefore, he writes a letter, indicating what is to be done to get rid of Uriah. Could David have descended to a lower depth? It was bad enough to compass the death of Uriah; it was mean enough to make him the bearer of the letter that gave directions for his death; but surely the climax of meanness and guilt was the writing of that letter. Do you remember, David, how shocked you were when Joab slew Abner? Do you remember your consternation at the thought that you might be held to approve of the murder? Do you remember how often you have wished that Joab were not so rough a man, that he had more gentleness, more piety, more concern for bloodshedding? And here are you making this Joab your confidant in sin, and your partner in murder, justifying all the wild work his sword has ever done, and causing him to believe that, in spite of all his holy pretensions, David is just such a man as himself.

Surely it was a horrible sin—aggravated, too, in many ways. It was committed by the head of the nation, who was bound not only to discountenance sin in every form, but especially to protect the families and preserve the rights of the brave men who were exposing their lives in his service. And that head of the nation had been signally favoured by God, and had been exalted in room of one whose selfishness and godlessness had caused him to be deposed from his dignity. Then there was the profession made by David of zeal for God's service and His law, his great enthusiasm in bringing up the ark to Jerusalem, his desire to build a temple, the character he had gained as a writer of sacred songs, and indeed as the great champion of religion in the nation. Further, there was the mature age at which he had now arrived, a period of life at which sobriety in the indulgence of the appetites is so justly and reasonably expected. And finally, there were the excellent character and the faithful services of Uriah, entitling him to the high rewards of his sovereign, rather than the cruel fate which David measured out to him—his home rifled and his life taken away.

How then, it may be asked, can the conduct of David be accounted for? The answer is simple enough—on the ground of original sin. Like the rest of us, he was born with proclivities to evil—to irregular desires craving unlawful indulgence. When divine grace takes possession of the heart it does not annihilate sinful tendencies, but overcomes them. It brings considerations to bear on the understanding, the conscience, and the heart, that incline and enable one to resist the solicitations of evil, and to yield one's self to the law of God. It turns this into a habit of the life. It gives one a sense of great peace and happiness in resisting the motions of sin, and doing the will of God. It makes it the deliberate purpose and desire of one's heart to be holy; it inspires one with the prayer, "Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments."

But, meanwhile, the cravings of the old nature are not wholly destroyed. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh." It is as if two armies were in collision. The Christian who naturally has a tendency to sensuality may feel the craving for sinful gratification even when the general bent of his nature is in favour of full compliance with the will of God. In some natures, especially strong natures, both the old man and the new possess unusual vehemence; the rebellious energisings of the old are held in check by the still more resolute vigour of the new; but if it so happen that the opposition of the new man to the old is relaxed or abated, then the outbreak of corruption will probably be on a fearful scale. Thus it was in David's nature. The sensual craving, the law of sin in his members, was strong; but the law of grace, inclining him to give himself up to the will of God, was stronger, and usually kept him right. There was an extraordinary activity and energy of character about him; he never did things slowly, tremblingly, timidly; the wellsprings of life were full, and gushed out in copious currents; in whatever direction they might flow, they were sure to flow with power. But at this time the energy of the new nature was suffering a sad abatement; the considerations that should have led him to conform to God's law had lost much of their usual power. Fellowship with the Fountain of life was interrupted; the old nature found itself free from

its habitual restraint, and its stream came out with the vehemence of a liberated torrent. It would be quite unfair to judge David on this occasion as if he had been one of those feeble creatures who, as they seldom rise to the heights of excellence, seldom sink to the depths of daring sin.

We make these remarks simply to account for a fact, and by no means to excuse a crime. Men are liable to ask, when they read of such sins done by good men, Were they really good men? Can that be genuine goodness which leaves a man liable to do such deeds of wickedness? If so, wherein are your so-called good men better than other men? We reply, They are better than other men in this,—and David was better than other men in this,—that the deepest and most deliberate desire of their hearts is to do as God requires, and to be holy as God is holy. This is their habitual aim and desire; and in this they are in the main successful. If this be not one's habitual aim, and if in this he do not habitually succeed, he can have no real claim to be counted a good man. Such is the doctrine of the Apostle in the seventh chapter of the Romans. Any one who reads that chapter in connection with the narrative of David's fall can have little doubt that it is the experience of the new man that the Apostle is describing. The habitual attitude of the heart is given in the striking words, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." I see how good God's law is; how excellent is the stringent restraint it lays on all that is loose and irregular, how beautiful the life which is cast in its mould. But for all that, I feel in me the motions of desire for unlawful gratifications, I feel a craving for the pleasures of sin. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." But how does the Apostle treat this feeling? Does he say, "I am a human creature, and, having these desires, I may and I must gratify them"? Far from it! He deploras the fact, and he cries for deliverance. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And his only hope of deliverance is in Him whom he calls his Saviour. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." In the case of David, the law of sin in his members prevailed for the time over the new law, the law of his mind, and it plunged him into a state which might well have led him too to say, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

And now we begin to understand why this supremely horrible transaction should be given in the Bible, and given at such length. It bears the character of a beacon, warning the mariner against some of the most deceitful and perilous rocks that are to be found in all the sea of life. First of all, it shows the danger of interrupting, however briefly, the duty of watching and praying, lest you enter into temptation. It is at your peril to discontinue earnest daily communion with God, especially when the evils are removed that first drove you to seek His aid. An hour's sleep may leave Samson at the mercy of Delilah, and when he awakes his strength is gone. Further, it affords a sad proof of the danger of dallying with sin even in thought. Admit sin within the precincts of the imagination, and there is the utmost danger of its ultimately mastering the soul. The outposts of the spiritual garrison should be so placed as to protect even the thoughts, and the moment the enemy is discovered there the alarm should be given and the fight begun. It is a

serious moment when the young man admits a polluted thought to his heart, and pursues it even in reverie. The door is opened to a dangerous brood. And everything that excites sensual feeling, be it songs, jests, pictures, books of a lascivious character, all tends to enslave and pollute the soul, till at length it is saturated with impurity, and cannot escape the wretched thralldom. And further, this narrative shows us what moral havoc and ruin may be wrought by the toleration and gratification of a single sinful desire. You may contend vigorously against ninety-and-nine forms of sin, but if you yield to the hundredth the consequences will be deadly. You may fling away a whole box of matches, but if you retain one it is quite sufficient to set fire to your house. A single soldier finding his way into a garrison may open the gates to the whole besieging army. One sin leads on to another and another, especially if the first be a sin which it is desirable to conceal. Falsehood and cunning, and even treachery, are employed to promote concealment; unprincipled accomplices are called in; the failure of one contrivance leads to other contrivances more sinful and more desperate. If there is a being on earth more to be pitied than another it is the man who has got into this labyrinth. What a contrast his perplexed feverish agitation to the calm peace of the straightforward Christian! "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely; but he that perverteth his way shall be known."

Never let any one read this chapter of 2 Samuel without paying the profoundest regard to its closing words—"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." In that "but" lies a whole world of meaning.

CHAPTER XV.

DAVID AND NATHAN.

2 SAMUEL xii. 1-12; 26-31.

It is often the method of the writers of Scripture, when the stream of public history has been broken by a private or personal incident, to complete at once the incident, and then go back to the principal history, resuming it at the point at which it was interrupted. In this way it sometimes happens (as we have already seen) that earlier events are recorded at a later part of the narrative than the natural order would imply. In the course of the narrative of David's war with Ammon, the incident of his sin with Bathsheba presents itself. In accordance with the method referred to, that incident is recorded straight on to its very close, including the birth of Bathsheba's second son, which must have occurred at least two years later. That being concluded, the history of the war with Ammon is resumed at the point at which it was broken off. We are not to suppose, as many have done, that the events recorded in the concluding verses of this chapter (vv. 26-31) happened later than those recorded immediately before. This would imply that the siege of Rabbah lasted for two or three years—a supposition hardly to be entertained; for Joab was besieging it when David first saw Bathsheba, and there is no reason to suppose that a people like the Ammonites would be able to hold the mere outworks of the city for two or three whole years against such an army as David's and such a commander as Joab. It seems far more likely that Joab's first success against Rabbah was gained soon after the death of Uriah,

and that his message to David to come and take the citadel in person was sent not long after the message that announced Uriah's death.

In that case the order of events would be as follows: After the death of Uriah, Joab prepares for an assault on Rabbah. Meanwhile, at Jerusalem, Bathsheba goes through the form of mourning for her husband, and when the usual days of mourning are over David hastily sends for her and makes her his wife. Next comes a message from Joab that he has succeeded in taking the city of waters, and that only the citadel remains to be taken, for which purpose he urges David to come himself with additional forces, and thereby gain the honour of conquering the place. It rather surprises one to find Joab declining an honour for himself, as it also surprises us to find David going to reap what another had sowed. David, however, goes with "all the people," and is successful, and after disposing of the Ammonites he returns to Jerusalem. Soon after Bathsheba's child is born; then Nathan goes to David and gives him the message that lays him in the dust. This is not only the most natural order for the events, but it agrees best with the spirit of the narrative. The cruelties practised by David on the Ammonites send a thrill of horror through us as we read them. No doubt they deserved a severe chastisement; the original offence was an outrage on every right feeling, an outrage on the law of nations, a gratuitous and contemptuous insult; and in bringing these vast Syrian armies into the field they had subjected even the victorious Israelites to grievous suffering and loss, in toil, in money, and in lives.

Attempts have been made to explain away the severities inflicted on the Ammonites, but it is impossible to explain away a plain historical narrative. It was the manner of victorious warriors in those countries to steel their hearts against all compassion toward captive foes, and David, kind-hearted though he was, did the same. And if it be said that surely his religion, if it were religion of the right kind, ought to have made him more compassionate, we reply that at this period his religion was in a state of collapse. When his religion was in a healthy and active state, it showed itself in the first place by his regard for the honour of God, for whose ark he provided a resting-place, and in whose honour he proposed to build a temple. Love to God was accompanied by love to man, exhibited in his efforts to show kindness to the house of Saul for the sake of Jonathan, and to Hanun for the sake of Nahash. But now the picture is reversed; he falls into a cold state of heart toward God, and in connection with that declension we mark a more than usually severe punishment inflicted on his enemies. Just as the leaves first become yellow and finally drop from the tree in autumn, when the juices that fed them begin to fail, so the kindly actions that had marked the better periods of his life first fail, then turn to deeds of cruelty when that Holy Spirit, who is the fountain of all godness, being resisted and grieved by him, withholds His living power.

In the whole transaction at Rabbah David shows poorly. It is not like him to be roused to an enterprise by an appeal to his love of fame; he might have left Joab to complete the conquest and enjoy the honour which his sword had substantially won. It is not like him to go through the ceremony of being crowned with the crown of the king of Ammon, as if it were a great thing to have so precious a diadem on his head. Above all, it is not like him to show so terrible a spirit in disposing

of his prisoners of war. But all this is quite likely to have happened if he had not yet come to repentance for his sin. When a man's conscience is ill at ease, his temper is commonly irritable. Unhappy in his inmost soul, he is in the temper that most easily becomes savage when provoked. No one can imagine that David's conscience was at rest. He must have had that restless feeling which every good man experiences after doing a wrong act, before coming to a clear apprehension of it; he must have been eager to escape from himself, and Joab's request to him to come to Rabbah and end the war must have been very opportune. In the excitement of war he would escape for a time the pursuit of his conscience; but he would be restless and irritable, and disposed to drive out of his way, in the most unceremonious manner, whoever or whatever should cross his path.

We now return with him to Jerusalem. He had added another to his long list of illustrious victories, and he had carried to the capital another vast store of spoil. The public attention would be thoroughly occupied with these brilliant events; and a king entering his capital at the head of his victorious troops, and followed by waggons laden with public treasure, need not fear a harsh construction on his private actions. The fate of Uriah might excite little notice; the affair of Bathsheba would soon blow over. The brilliant victory that had terminated the war seemed at the same time to have extricated the king from a personal scandal. David might flatter himself that all would now be peace and quiet, and that the waters of oblivion would gather over that ugly business of Uriah.

"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David."

Slowly, sadly, silently the prophet bends his steps to the palace. Anxiously and painfully he prepares himself for the most distressing task a prophet of the Lord ever had to go through. He has to convey God's reproof to the king; he has to reprove one from whom, doubtless, he has received many an impulse towards all that is high and holy. Very happily he clothes his message in the Eastern garb of parable. He puts his parable in such life-like form that the king has no suspicion of its real character. The rich robber that spared his own flocks and herds to feed the traveller, and stole the poor man's ewe lamb, is a real flesh-and-blood criminal to him. And the deed is so dastardly, its heartlessness is so atrocious, that it is not enough to enforce against such a wretch the ordinary law of fourfold restitution; in the exercise of his high prerogative the king pronounces a sentence of death upon the ruffian, and confirms it with the solemnity of an oath—"The man that hath done this thing shall surely die." The flash of indignation is yet in his eye, the flush of resentment is still on his brow, when the prophet with calm voice and piercing eye utters the solemn words, "Thou art the man!" Thou, great king of Israel, art the robber, the ruffian, condemned by thine own voice to the death of the worst malefactor! "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little I would moreover have given thee such and such things. Wherefore hast

thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

It is not difficult to fancy the look of the king as the prophet delivered his message—how at first when he said, "Thou art the man," he would gaze at him eagerly and wistfully, like one at a loss to divine his meaning; and then, as the prophet proceeded to apply his parable, how, conscience-stricken, his expression would change to one of horror and agony; how the deeds of the last twelve months would glare in all their infamous baseness upon him, and outraged Justice, with a hundred glittering swords, would seem all impatient to devour him.

It is no mere imagination that, in a moment, the mind may be so quickened as to embrace the actions of a long period; and that with equal suddenness the moral aspect of them may be completely changed. There are moments when the powers of the mind as well as those of the body are so stimulated as to become capable of exertions undreamt of before. The dumb prince, in ancient history, who all his life had never spoken a word, but found the power of speech when he saw a sword raised to cut down his father, showed how danger could stimulate the organs of the body. The sudden change in David's feeling now, like the sudden change in Saul's on the way to Damascus, showed what electric rapidity may be communicated to the operations of the soul. It showed too what unseen and irresistible agencies of conviction and condemnation the great Judge can bring into play when it is His will to do so. As the steam hammer may be so adjusted as either to break a nutshell without injuring the kernel, or crush a block of quartz to powder, so the Spirit of God can range, in His effects on the conscience, between the mildest feeling of uneasiness and the bitterest agony of remorse. "When He is come," said our blessed Lord, "He shall reprove the world of sin." How helpless men are under His operation! How utterly was David prostrated! How were the multitudes brought down on the day of Pentecost! Is there any petition we more need to press than that the Spirit be poured out to convince of sin, whether as it regards ourselves or the world? Is it not true that the great want of the Church is the want of a sense of sin, so that confession and humiliation are become rare, and our very theology is emasculated, because, where there is little sense of sin, there can be little appreciation of redemption? And is not a sense of sin that which would bring a careless world to itself, and make it deal earnestly with God's gracious offers? How striking is the effect ascribed by the prophet Zechariah to that pouring of the spirit of grace and supplication upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when "they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Would that our whole hearts went out in those invocations of the Spirit which we often sing, but alas! so very tamely—

"Come, Holy Spirit, come,
Let Thy bright beams arise;
Dispel the darkness from our minds,
And open all our eyes.

"Convince us of our sin,
Lead us to Jesus' blood,
And kindle in our breast the flame
Of never-dying love."

We cannot pass from this aspect of David's case without marking the terrible power of self-deception. Nothing blinds men so much to the real character of a sin as the fact that it is their own. Let it be presented to them in the light of another man's sin, and they are shocked. It is easy for one's self-love to weave a veil of fair embroidery, and cast it over those deeds about which one is somewhat uncomfortable. It is easy to devise for ourselves this excuse and that, and lay stress on one excuse and another that may lessen the appearance of criminality. But nothing is more to be deprecated, nothing more to be deplored, than success in that very process. Happy for you if a Nathan is sent to you in time to tear to rags your elaborate embroidery, and lay bare the essential vileness of your deed! Happy for you if your conscience is made to assert its authority, and cry to you with its awful voice, "Thou art the man!" For if you live and die in your fool's paradise, excusing every sin, and saying peace, peace, when there is no peace, there is nothing for you but the rude awakening of the day of judgment, when the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies!

After Nathan had exposed the sin of David he proceeded to declare his sentence. It was not a sentence of death, in the ordinary sense of the term, but it was a sentence of death in a sense even more difficult to bear. It consisted of three things—first, the sword should never depart from his house; second, out of his own house evil should be raised against him, and a dishonoured harem should show the nature and extent of the humiliation that would come upon him; and thirdly, a public exposure should thus be made of his sin, so that he would stand in the pillory of Divine rebuke, and in the shame which it entailed, before all Israel, and before the sun. When David confessed his sin, Nathan told him that the Lord had graciously forgiven it, but at the same time a special chastisement was to mark how concerned God was for the fact that by his sin he had caused the enemy to blaspheme—the child born of Bathsheba was to die.

Reserving this last part of the sentence and David's bearing in connection with it for future consideration, let us give attention to the first portion of his retribution. "The sword shall never depart from thy house." Here we find a great principle in the moral government of God,—correspondence between an offence and its retribution. Of this many instances occur in the Old Testament. Jacob deceived his father; he was deceived by his own sons. Lot made a worldly choice; in the world's ruin he was overwhelmed. So David having slain Uriah with the sword, the sword was never to depart from him. He had robbed Uriah of his wife; his neighbours would in like manner rob and dishonour him. He had disturbed the purity of the family relation; his own house was to become a den of pollution. He had mingled deceit and treachery with his actions; deceit and treachery would be practised towards him. What a sad and ominous prospect! Men naturally look for peace in old age; the evening of life is expected to be calm. But for him there was to be no calm; and his trial was to fall on the tenderest part of his nature. He had a strong affection for his children; in that very feeling he was to be wounded, and that, too, all his life long. Oh let not any suppose that because God's children are saved by His mercy from eternal punishment, it is a light thing for them to despise the commandments of the Lord! "Thine own wickedness

shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that thy fear is not in Me, saith the Lord of hosts."

Pre-eminent in its bitterness was that part of David's retribution which made his own house the source from which his bitterest trials and humiliations should arise. For the most part, it is in extreme cases only that parents have to encounter this trial. It is only in the wickedest households, and in households for the most part where the passions are roused to madness by drink, that the hand of the child is raised against his father to wound and dishonour him. It was a terrible humiliation to the king of Israel to have to bear this doom, and especially to that king of Israel who in many ways bore so close a resemblance to the promised Seed, who was indeed to be the progenitor of that Seed, so that when Messiah came He should be called "the Son of David." Alas! the glory of this distinction was to be sadly tarnished. "Son of David" was to be a very equivocal title, according to the character of the individual who should bear it. In one case it would denote the very climax of honour; in another, the depth of humiliation. Yes, that household of David's would reek with foul lusts and unnatural crimes. From the bosom of that home where, under other circumstances, it would have been so natural to look for model children, pure, affectionate, and dutiful, there would come forth monsters of lust and monsters of ambition, whose deeds of infamy would hardly find a parallel in the annals of the nation! In the breasts of some of these royal children the devil would find a seat where he might plan and execute the most unnatural crimes. And that city of Jerusalem, which he had rescued from the Jebusites, consecrated as God's dwelling-place, and built and adorned with the spoils which the king had taken in many a well-fought field, would turn against him in his old age, and force him to fly wherever a refuge could be found as homeless, and nearly as destitute, as in the days of his youth when he fled from Saul!

And lastly, his retribution was to be public. He had done his part secretly, but God would do His part openly. There was not a man or woman in all Israel but would see these judgments coming on a king who had outraged his royal position and his royal prerogatives. How could he ever go in and out happily among them again? How could he be sure, when he met any of them, that they were not thinking of his crime, and condemning him in their hearts? How could he meet the hardly suppressed scowl of every Hittite, that would recall his treatment of their faithful kinsman? What a burden would he carry ever after. He that used to wear such a frank and honest and kindly look, that was so affable to all that sought his counsel, and so tender-hearted to all that were in trouble! And what outlet could he find out of all this misery? There was but one he could think of. If only God would forgive him; if He, whose mercy was in the heavens, would but receive him again of His infinite condescension into His fellowship, and vouchsafe to him that grace which was not the fruit of man's deserving but, as its very name implied, of God's unbounded goodness, then might his soul return again to its quiet rest, though life could never be to him what it was before. And this, as we shall presently see, is what he set himself very earnestly to seek, and

what of God's mercy he was permitted to find. O sinner, if thou hast strayed like a lost sheep, and plunged into the very depths of sin, know that all is not lost with thee! There is one way yet open to peace, if not to joy. Amid the ten thousand times ten thousand voices that condemn thee, there is one voice of love that comes from heaven and says, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord."

CHAPTER XVI.

PENITENCE AND CHASTISEMENT.

2 SAMUEL xii. 13-25.

WHEN Nathan ended his message, plainly and strongly though he had spoken, David indicated no irritation, made no complaint against the prophet, but simply and humbly confessed—"I have sinned." It is so common for men to be offended when a servant of God remonstrates with them, and to impute their interference to an unworthy motive, and to the desire of some one to hurt and humiliate them, that it is refreshing to find a great king receiving the rebuke of the Lord's servant in a spirit of profound humility and frank confession. Very different was the experience of John the Baptist when he remonstrated with Herod. Very different was the experience of the famous Chrysostom when he rebuked the emperor and empress for conduct unworthy of Christians. Very different has been the experience of many a faithful minister in a humbler sphere, when, constrained by a sense of duty, he has gone to some man of influence in his flock, and spoken seriously to him of sins which bring a reproach on the name of Christ. Often it has cost the faithful man days and nights of pain; girding himself for the duty has been like preparing for martyrdom; and it has been really martyrdom when he has had to bear the long malignant enmity of the man whom he rebuked. However vile the conduct of David may have been, it is one thing in his favour that he receives his rebuke with perfect humility and submission; he makes no attempt to palliate his conduct either before God or man; but sums up his whole feeling in these expressive words, "I have sinned against the Lord."

To this frank acknowledgment Nathan replied that the Lord had put away his sin, so that he would not undergo the punishment of death. It was his own judgment that the miscreant who had stolen the ewe lamb should die, and as that proved to be himself, it indicated the punishment that was due to him. That punishment, however, the Lord, in the exercise of His clemency, had been pleased to remit. But a palpable proof of His displeasure was to be given in another way—the child of Bathsheba was to die. It was to become, as it were, the scapegoat for its father. In those times father and child were counted so much one that the offence of the one was often visited on both. When Achan stole the spoil at Jericho, not only he himself, but his whole family, shared his sentence of death. In this case of David the father was to escape, but the child was to die. It may seem hard, and barely just. But death to the child, though in form a punishment, might prove to be great gain. It might mean transference to a higher and brighter state of existence. It might mean escape from a life full of sorrows and perils to the world where there is no more

pain, nor sorrow, nor death, because the former things are passed away.

We cannot pass from the consideration of David's great penitence for his sin without dwelling a little more on some of its features. It is in the fifty-first Psalm that the working of his soul is best unfolded to us. No doubt it has been strongly urged by certain modern critics that that psalm is not David's at all; that it belongs to some other period, as the last verse but one indicates, when the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins;—most likely the period of the Captivity. But even if we should have to say of the last two verses that they must have been added at another time, we cannot but hold the psalm to be the outpouring of David's soul, and not the expression of the penitence of the nation at large. If ever psalm was the expression of the feelings of an individual it is this one. And if ever psalm was appropriate to King David it is this one. For the one thing which is uppermost in the soul of the writer is his personal relation to God. The one thing that he values, and for which all other things are counted but dung, is friendly intercourse with God. This sin no doubt has had many other atrocious effects, but the terrible thing is that it has broken the link that bound him to God, it has cut off all the blessed things that come by that channel, it has made him an outcast from Him whose lovingkindness is better than life. Without God's favour life is but misery. He can do no good to man; he can do no service to God. It is a rare thing even for good men to have such a profound sense of the blessedness of God's favour. David was one of those who had it in the profoundest degree; and as the fifty-first Psalm is full of it, as it forms the very soul of its pleadings, we cannot doubt that it was a psalm of David.

The humiliation of the Psalmist before God is very profound, very thorough. His case is one for simple mercy; he has not the shadow of a plea in self-defence. His sin is in every aspect atrocious. It is the product of one so vile that he may be said to have been shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. The aspect of it as sin against God is so overwhelming that it absorbs the other aspect—the sin against man. Not but that he has sinned against man too, but it is the sin against God that is so awful, so overwhelming.

Yet, if his sin abounds, the Psalmist feels that God's grace abounds much more. He has the highest sense of the excellence and the multitude of God's lovingkindnesses. Man can never make himself so odious as to be beyond the Divine compassion. He can never become so guilty as to be beyond the Divine forgiveness. "Blot out my transgressions," sobs David, knowing that it can be done. "Purge me with hyssop," he cries, "and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me."

But this is not all; it is far from all. He pleads most plaintively for the restoration of God's friendship. "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,"—for that would be hell; "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit,"—for that is heaven. And, with the renewed sense of God's love and grace, there would come a renewed power to serve God and be useful to men. "Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee. O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." Deprive me not for ever

of Thy friendship, for then life would be but darkness and anguish; depose me not for ever from Thy ministry, continue to me yet the honour and the privilege of converting sinners unto Thee. Of the sacrifices of the law it was needless to think, as if they were adequate to purge away so overwhelming a sin. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else I would give it: Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

With all his consciousness of sin, David has yet a profound faith in God's mercy, and he is forgiven. But as we have seen, the Divine displeasure against him is to be openly manifested in another form, because, in addition to his personal sin, he has given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

This is an aggravation of guilt which only God's children can commit. And it is an aggravation of a most distressing kind, enough surely to warn off every Christian from vile self-indulgence. The blasphemy to which David had given occasion was that which denies the reality of God's work in the souls of His people. It denies that they are better than others. They only make more pretence, but that pretence is hollow, if not hypocritical. There is no such thing as a special work of the Holy Ghost in them, and therefore there is no reason why any one should seek to be converted, or why he should implore the special grace of the Spirit of God. Alas! how true it is that when any one who occupies a conspicuous place in the Church of God breaks down, such sneers are sure to be discharged on every side! What a keen eye the world has for the inconsistencies of Christians! With what remorseless severity does it come down on them when they fall into these inconsistencies! Sins that would hardly be thought of if committed by others,—what a serious aspect they assume when committed by them! Had it been Nebuchadnezzar, for example, that treated Uriah as David did, who would have thought of it a second time? What else could you expect of Nebuchadnezzar? Let a Christian society or any other Christian body be guilty of a scandal, how do the worldly newspapers fasten on it like treasure-trove, and exult over their humbled victim, like Red Indians dancing their war dances and flourishing their tomahawks over some miserable prisoner. The scorn is very bitter, and sometimes it is very unjust; yet perhaps it has on the whole a wholesome effect, just because it stimulates vigilance and carefulness on the part of the Church. But the worst of the case is, that on the part of unbelievers it stimulates that blasphemy which is alike dishonouring to God and pernicious to man. Virtually this blasphemy denies the whole work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. It denies the reality of any supernatural agency of the Spirit in one more than in all. And denying the work of the Spirit, it makes men careless about the Spirit; it neutralises the solemn words of Christ, "Ye must be born again." It throws back the kingdom of God, and it turns back many a pilgrim who had been thinking seriously of beginning the journey to the heavenly city, because he is now uncertain whether such a city exists at all.

Hardly has Nathan left the king's house when the child begins to sicken, and the sickness becomes very great. We should have expected that David would be concerned and distressed, but hardly to the degree which his distress attained. In the intensity of his anxiety and grief there is something

remarkable. A new-born infant could scarcely have taken that mysterious hold on a father's heart which a little time is commonly required to develop, but which, once it is there, makes the loss even of a little child a grievous blow, and leaves the heart sick and sore for many a day. But there is something in an infant's agony which unmans the strongest heart, especially when it comes in convulsive fits that no skill can allay. And should one, in addition, be tortured with the conviction that the child was suffering on one's own account, one's distress might well be overpowering. And this was David's feeling. His sin was ever before him. As he saw that suffering infant he must have felt as if the stripes that should have fallen on him were tearing the poor babe's tender frame, and crushing him with undeserved suffering. Even in ordinary cases, it is a mysterious thing to see an infant in mortal agony. It is solemnising to think that the one member of the family who has committed no actual sin should be the first to reap the deadly wages of sin. It leads us to think of mankind as one tree of many branches; and when the wintry frost begins to prevail it is the youngest and tenderest branchlets that first droop and die. Oh! how careful should those in mature years be, and especially parents, lest by their sins they bring down a retribution which shall fall first on their children, and perhaps the youngest and most innocent of all! Yet how often do we see the children suffering for the sins of their parents, and suffering in a way which, in this life at least, admits of no right remedy! In that "bitter cry of outcast London," which fell some years ago on the ears of the country, by far the most distressing note was the cry of infants abandoned by drunken parents before they could well walk, or living with them in hovels where blows and curses came in place of food and clothing and kindness—children brought up without aught of the sunshine of love, every tender feeling nipped and shrivelled in the very bud by the frost of bitter, brutal cruelty. And if in ordinary families children are not made to suffer so palpably for their parents' sins, yet suffer they do in many ways sufficiently serious. Wherever there is a bad example, wherever there is a laxity of principle, wherever God is dishonoured, the sin reacts upon the children. Their moral texture is relaxed; they learn to trifle with sin, and, trifling with sin, to disbelieve in the retribution for sin. And where conscience has not been altogether destroyed in the parent, and remorse for sin begins to prevail, and retribution to come, it is not what he has to suffer in his own person that he feels most deeply, but what has to be borne and suffered by his children. Does any one ask why God has constituted society so that the innocent are thus implicated in the sin of the guilty? The answer is, that this arises not from God's constitution, but from man's perversion of it. Why, we may ask, do men subvert God's moral order? Why do they break down His fences and embankments, and, contrary to the Divine plan, let ruinous streams pour their destructive waters into their homes and enclosures? If the human race had preserved from the beginning the constitution which God gave them, obeyed His law both individually and as a social body, such things would not have been. But reckless man, in his eagerness to have his own way, disregards the Divine arrangement, and plunges himself and his family into the depths of woe.

There is something even beyond this, however, that arrests our notice in the behaviour of David.

Though Nathan had said that the child would die, he set himself most earnestly, by prayer and fasting, to get God to spare him. Was this not a strange proceeding? It could be justified only on the supposition that the Divine judgment was modified by an unexpressed condition that, if David should humble himself in true repentance, it would not have to be inflicted. Anyhow, we see him throwing his whole soul into these exercises: engaging in them so earnestly that he took no regular food, and in place of the royal bed he was content to lie upon the earth. His earnestness in this was well fitted to show the difference between a religious service gone through with becoming reverence, because it is the proper thing to do, and the service of one who has a definite end in view, who seeks a definite blessing, and who wrestles with God to obtain it. But David had no valid ground for expecting that, even if he should repent, God would avert the judgment from the child; indeed, the reason assigned for it showed the contrary—because he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

And so, after a very weary and dismal week, the child died. But instead of abandoning himself to a tumult of distress when this event took place, he altogether changed his demeanour. His spirit became calm, "he arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and he came into the house of the Lord and worshipped; then he came to his own house, and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat." It seemed to his servants a strange proceeding. The answer of David showed that there was a rational purpose in it. So long as he thought it possible that the child's life might be spared, he not only continued to pray to that effect, but he did everything to prevent his attention from being turned to anything else, he did everything to concentrate his soul on that one object, and to let it appear to God how thoroughly it occupied his mind. The death of the child showed that it was not God's will to grant his petition, notwithstanding his deep repentance and earnest prayer and fasting. All suspense was now at an end, and therefore, all reason for continuing to fast and pray. For David to abandon himself to the wailings of aggravated grief at this moment would have been highly wrong. It would have been to quarrel with the will of God. It would have been to challenge God's right to view the child as one with its father, and treat it accordingly.

And there was yet another reason. If his heart still yearned on the child, the re-union was not impossible, though it could not take place in this life. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me." The glimpse of the future expressed in these words is touching and beautiful. The relation between David and that little child is not ended. Though the mortal remains shall soon crumble, father and child are not yet done with one another. But their meeting is not to be in this world. Meet again they certainly shall, but "I shall go to him, and he shall not return to me."

And this glimpse of the future relation of parent and child, separated here by the hand of death, has ever proved most comforting to bereaved Christian hearts. Very touching and very comforting it is to light on this bright view of the future at so early a period of Old Testament history. Words cannot express the desolation of heart which such bereavements cause. When

Rachel is weeping for her children she cannot be comforted if she thinks they are not. But a new light breaks on her desolate heart when she is assured that she may go to them, though they shall not return to her. Blessed, truly, are the dead who die in the Lord, and, however painful the stroke that removed them, blessed are their surviving friends. Ye shall go to them, though they shall not return to you. How you are to recognise them, how you are to commune with them, in what place they shall be, in what condition of consciousness, you cannot tell; but "you shall go to them;" the separation shall be but temporary, and who can conceive the joy of re-union, re-union never to be broken by separation for evermore?

One other fact we must notice ere passing from the record of David's confession and chastisement,—the moral courage which he showed in delivering the fifty-first Psalm to the chief musician, and thus helping to keep alive in his own generation and for all time coming in the memory of his trespass. Most men would have thought how the ugly transaction might most effectually be buried, and would have tried to put their best face on it before their people. Not so David. He was willing that his people and all posterity should see him the atrocious transgressor he was—let them think of him as they pleased. He saw that this everlasting exposure of his vileness was essential towards extracting from the miserable transaction such salutary lessons as it might be capable of yielding. With a wonderful effort of magnanimity, he resolved to place himself in the pillory of public shame, to expose his memory to all the foul treatment which the scoffers and libertines of every after-age might think fit to heap on it. It is unjust to David, when unbelievers rail against him for his sin in the matter of Uriah, to overlook the fact that the first public record of the transaction came from his own pen, and was delivered to the chief musician, for public use. Infidels may scoff, but this narrative will be a standing proof that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. The view given to God's servants of the weakness and deceitfulness of their hearts; the warning against dallying with the first movements of sin; the sight of the misery which follows in its wake; the encouragement which the convicted sinner has to humble himself before God; the impulse given to penitential feeling; the hope of mercy awakened in the breasts of the despairing; the softer, humbler, holier walk when pardon has been got and peace restored,—such lessons as these, afforded in every age by this narrative, will render it to thoughtful hearts a constant ground for magnifying God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ABSALOM AND AMNON.

2 SAMUEL xiii. 1-37.

A LIVING sorrow, says the proverb, is worse than a dead. The dead sorrow had been very grievous to David; what the living sorrow, of which this chapter tells us, must have been, we cannot conceive. It is his own disorderly lusts, reappearing in his sons, that are the source of this new tragedy. It is often useful for parents to ask whether they would like to see their children doing what

they allow in themselves; and in many cases the answer is an emphatic "No." David is now doomed to see his children following his own evil example, only with added circumstances of atrocity. Adultery and murder had been introduced by him into the palace; when he is done with them they remain to be handled by his sons.

It is a very repulsive picture of sensuality that this chapter presents. One would suppose that Amnon and Absalom had been accustomed to the wild orgies of pagan idolatry. Nathan had rebuked David because he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. He had afforded them a pretext for denying the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, and for affirming that so-called holy men were just like the rest of mankind. This in God's eyes was a grievous offence. Amnon and Absalom are now guilty of the same offence in another form, because they afford a pretext for ungodly men to say that the families of holy men are no better—perhaps that they are worse—than other families. But as David himself in the matter of Uriah is an exception to the ordinary lives of godly men, so his home is an exception to the ordinary tone and spirit of religious households. Happily we are met with a very different ideal when we look behind the scenes into the better class of Christian homes, whether high or low. It is a beautiful picture of the Christian home, according to the Christian ideal, we find, for example, in Milton's *Comus*—pure brothers, admiring a dear sister's purity, and jealous lest, alone in the world, she should fall in the way of any of those bloated monsters that would drag an angel into their filthy sty. Commend us to those homes where brothers and sisters, sharing many a game, and with still greater intimacy pouring into each other's ears their inner thoughts and feelings, never utter a jest, or word, or allusion with the slightest taint of indelicacy, and love and honour each other with all the higher affection that none of them has ever been near the haunts of pollution. It is easy to ridicule innocence, to scoff at young men who "flee youthful lusts;" yet who will say that the youth who is steeped in fashionable sensuality is worthy to be the brother and companion of pure-minded maidens, or that his breath will not contaminate the atmosphere of their home? What easy victories Belial gains over many! How easily he persuades them that vice is manly, that impurity is grand, that the pig's sty is a delightful place to lie down in! How easily he induces them to lay snares for female chastity, and put the devil's mask on woman's soul! But "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, while he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

In Scripture some men have very short biographies; Amnon is one of these. And, like Cain, all that is recorded of him has the mark of infamy. We can easily understand that it was a great disaster to him to be a king's son. To have his position in life determined and all his wants supplied without an effort on his part; to be surrounded by such plenty that the wholesome necessity of denying himself was unknown, and whatever he fancied was at once obtained; to be so accustomed to indulge his legitimate feelings that when illegitimate desires rose up it seemed but natural that they too should be gratified; thus to be led on in the evil ways of sensual pleasure till his appetite became at once bloated and irrepressible; to be

surrounded by parasites and flatterers, that would make a point of never crossing him nor uttering a disagreeable word, but constantly encouraging his tastes,—all this was extremely dangerous. And when his father had set him the example, it was hardly possible he would avoid the snare. There is every reason to believe that before he is presented to us in this chapter he was already steeped in sensuality. It was his misfortune to have a friend, Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, "a very subtil man," who at heart must have been as great a profligate as himself. For if Jonadab had been anything but a profligate, Amnon would never have confided to him his odious desire with reference to his half-sister, and Jonadab would never have given him the advice that he did. What a blessing to Amnon, at this stage of the tragedy, would have been the faithful advice of an honest friend—one who would have had the courage to declare the infamy of his proposal, and who would have so placed it in the light of truth that it would have shocked and horrified even Amnon himself! In reality, the friend was more guilty than the culprit. The one was blinded by passion; the other was self-possessed and cool. The cool man encourages the heated; the sober man urges on the intoxicated. O ye sons of wealth and profligacy, it is sad enough that you are often so tempted by the lusts that rise up in your own bosoms, but it is worse to be exposed to the friendship of wretches who never study your real good, but encourage you to indulge the vilest of your appetites, and smooth for you the way to hell!

The plan which Jonadab proposes for Amnon to obtain the object of his desire is founded on a stratagem which he is to practise on his father. He is to pretend sickness, and under this pretext to get matters arranged by his father as he would like. To practise deceit on a father was a thing not unknown even among the founders of the nation; Jacob and Jacob's sons had resorted to it alike. But it had been handed down with the mark of disgrace attached to it by God Himself. In spite of this it was counted both by Jonadab and Amnon a suitable weapon for their purpose. And so, as every one knows, it is counted not only a suitable, but a smart and laughable, device, in stage plays without number, and by the class of persons whose morality is reflected by the popular stage. Who so suitable a person to be made a fool of as "the governor"? Who so little to be pitied when he becomes the dupe of his children's cunning? "Honour thy father and thy mother," was once proclaimed in thunder from Sinai, and not only men's hearts trembled, but the very earth shook at the voice. But these were old times and old-fashioned people. Treat your father and mother as useful and convenient tools, inasmuch as they have control of the purse, of which you are often in want. But as they are not likely to approve of the objects for which you would spend their money; as they are sure, on the other hand, to disapprove of them strongly, exercise your ingenuity in hoodwinking them as to your doings, and if your stratagem succeed, enjoy your chuckle at the blindness and simplicity of the poor old fools! If this be the course that commends itself to any son or daughter, it indicates a heart so perverted that it would be most difficult to bring it to any sense of sin. All we would say is. See what kind of comrades you have in this policy of deceiving parents. See this royal blackguard, Amnon, and his villainous adviser Jonadab, resorting to the very same method for hoodwinking

King David; see them making use of this piece of machinery to compass an act of the grossest villainy that ever was heard of; and say whether you hold the device to be commended by their example, and whether you feel honoured in treading a course that has been marked before you by such footprints.

If anything more was needed to show the accomplished villainy of Amnon, it is his treatment of Tamar after he has violently compassed her ruin. It is the story so often repeated even at this day,—the ruined victim flung aside in dishonour, and left unpitied to her shame. There is no trace of any compunction on the part of Amnon at the moral murder he has committed, at the life he has ruined; no pity for the once blithe and happy maiden whom he has doomed to humiliation and woe. She has served his purpose, king's daughter though she is; let her crawl into the earth like a poor worm to live or to die, in want or in misery; it is nothing to him. The only thing about her that he cares for is, that she may never again trouble him with her existence, or disturb the easy flow of his life. We think of those men of the olden time as utter barbarians who confined their foes in dismal dungeons, making their lives a continual torture, and denying them the slightest solace to the miseries of captivity. But what shall we say of those, high-born and wealthy men, it may be, who doom their cast-off victims to an existence of wretchedness and degradation which has no gleam of enjoyment, compared with which the silence and loneliness of a prison would be a luxury? Can the selfishness of sin exhibit itself anywhere or anyhow more terribly? What kind of heart can be left to the seducer, so hardened as to smother the faintest touch of pity for the woman he has made wretched for ever; so savage as to drive from him with the roughest execrations the poor confiding creature without whom he used to vow, in the days of her unsuspecting innocence, that he knew not how to live!

In a single word, our attention is now turned to the father of both Amnon and Tamar. "When King David heard of all these things, he was very wroth." Little wonder? But was this all? Was no punishment found for Amnon? Was he allowed to remain in the palace, the oldest son of the king, with nothing to mark his father's displeasure, nothing to neutralise his influence with the other royal children, nothing to prevent the repetition of his wickedness? Tamar, of course, was a woman. Was it for this reason that nothing was done to punish her destroyer? It does not appear that his position was in any way changed. We cannot but be indignant at the inactivity of David. Yet when we think of the past, we need not be surprised. David was too much implicated in the same sins to be able to inflict suitable punishment for them. It is those whose hands are clean that can rebuke the offender. Let others try to administer reproof—their own hearts condemn them, and they shrink from the task. Even the king of Israel must wink at the offences of his son.

But if David winked, Absalom did nothing of the kind. Such treatment of his full sister, if the king chose to let it alone, could not be let alone by the proud, indignant brother. He nursed his wrath, and watched for his opportunity. Nothing short of the death of Amnon would suffice him. And that death must be compassed not in open fight but by assassination. At last, after two full years, his opportunity came. A sheepshearing at Baal-hazor gave occasion for a feast, to which the

king and all his sons should be asked. His father excused himself on the ground of the expense. Absalom was most unwilling to receive the excuse, reckoning probably that the king's presence would more completely ward off any suspicion of his purpose, and utterly heedless of the anguish his father would have felt when he found that, while asked professedly to a feast, it was really to the murder of his eldest son. David, however, refuses firmly, but he gives Absalom his blessing. Whether this was meant in the sense in which Isaac blessed Jacob, or whether it was merely an ordinary occasion of commending Absalom to the grace of God, it was a touching act, and it might have arrested the arm that was preparing to deal such a fatal blow to Amnon. On the contrary, Absalom only availed himself of his father's expression of kindly feeling to beg that he would allow Amnon to be present. And he succeeded so well that permission was given, not to Amnon only, but to all the king's sons. To Absalom's farm at Baal-hazor accordingly they went, and we may be sure that nothing would be spared to make the banquet worthy of a royal family. And now, while the wine is flowing freely, and the buzz of jovial talk fills the apartment, and all power of action on the part of Amnon is arrested by the stupefying influence of wine, the signal is given for his murder. See how closely Absalom treads in the footsteps of his father when he summons intoxicating drink to his aid, as David did to Uriah, when trying to make a screen of him for his own guilt. Yes, from the beginning, drink, or some other stupefying agent, has been the ready ally of the worst criminals, either preparing the victim for the slaughter or maddening the murderer for the deed. But wherever it has been present it has only made the tragedy more awful and the aspect of the crime more hideous. Give a wide berth, ye servants of God, to an agent with which the devil has ever placed himself in such close and deadly alliance!

It is not easy to paint the blackness of the crime of Absalom. We have nothing to say for Amnon, who seems to have been a man singularly vile; but there is something very appalling in his being murdered by the order of his brother, something very cold-blooded in Absalom's appeal to the assassins not to flinch from their task, something very revolting in the flagrant violation of the laws of hospitality, and something not less daring in the deed being done in the midst of the feast, and in the presence of the guests. When Shakespeare would paint the murder of a royal guest, the deed is done in the dead of night, with no living eye to witness it, with no living arm at hand capable of arresting the murderous weapon. But here is a murderer of his guest who does not scruple to have the deed done in broad daylight in presence of all his guests, in presence of all the brothers of his victim, while the walls resound to the voice of mirth, and each face is radiant with festive excitement. Out from some place of concealment rush the assassins with their deadly weapons; next moment the life-blood of Amnon spurts on the table, and his lifeless body falls heavily to the ground. Before the excitement and horror of the assembled guests have subsided Absalom has made his escape, and before any step can be taken to pursue him he is beyond reach in Geshur in Syria.

Meanwhile an exaggerated report of the tragedy reaches King David's ears,—Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. Evil, at the bottom of his heart, must have been David's opinion of him when he believed the story,

even in this exaggerated form. "The king arose and rent his clothes, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood round with their clothes rent." Nor was it till Jonadab, his cousin, assured him that only Amnon could be dead, that the terrible impression of a wholesale massacre was removed from his mind. But who can fancy what the circumstances must have been, when it became a relief to David to know that Absalom had murdered but one of his brothers? Jonadab evidently thought that David did not need to be much surprised, inasmuch as this murder was a foregone conclusion with Absalom; it had been determined on ever since the day when Amnon forced Tamar. Here is a new light on the character of Jonadab. He knew that Absalom had determined that Amnon should die. It was no surprise to him to hear that this purpose was carried out with effect. Why did he not warn Amnon? Could it be that he had been bribed over to the side of Absalom? He knew the real state of the case before the king's sons arrived. For when they did appear he appealed to David whether his statement, previously given, was not correct.

And now the first part of the retribution denounced by Nathan begins to be fulfilled, and fulfilled very fearfully.—"the sword shall never depart from thy house." Ancient history abounds in frightful stories, stories of murder, incest, and revenge, the materials, real or fabulous, from which were formed the tragedies of the great Greek dramatists. But nothing in their dramas is more tragic than the crime of Amnon, the incest of Tamar, and the revenge of Absalom. What David's feelings must have been we can hardly conceive. What must he have felt as he thought of the death of Amnon, slain by his brother's command, in his brother's house, at his brother's table, and hurried to God's judgment while his brain was reeling with intoxication! What a pang must have been shot by the recollection how David had once tried, for his own base ends, to intoxicate Uriah as Absalom had intoxicated Amnon! It does not appear that David's grief over Amnon was of the passionate kind that he showed afterwards when Absalom was slain; but, though quieter, it must have been very bitter. How could he but be filled with anguish when he thought of his son, hurried, while drunk, by his brother's act, into the presence of God, to answer for the worse than murder of his sister, and for all the crimes and sins of an ill-spent life! What hope could he entertain for the welfare of his soul? What balm could he find for such a wound?

And it was not Amnon only he had to think of. These three of his children, Amnon, Tamar, Absalom, in one sense or another, were now total wrecks. From these three branches of his family tree no fruit could ever come. Nor could the dead now bury its dead. Neither the remembrance nor the effect of the past could ever be wiped out. It baffles us to think how David was able to carry such grief. "David mourned for his son every day." It was only the lapse of time that could blunt the edge of his distress.

But surely there must have been terrible faults in David's upbringing of his family before such results as these could come. Undoubtedly there were. First of all, there was the number of his wives. This could not fail to be a source of much jealousy and discord among them and their children, especially when he himself was absent, as he must often have been, for long periods at a time. Then there was his own example, so un-

guarded, so unhallowed, at a point where the utmost care and vigilance had need to be shown. Thirdly, there seems to have been an excessive tenderness of feeling towards his children, and towards some of them in particular. He could not bear to disappoint; his feelings got the better of his judgment; when the child insisted the father weakly gave way. He wanted the firmness and the faithfulness of Abraham, of whom God had said, "I know him that he will *command* his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." Perhaps, too, busy and often much pressed as he was with affairs of state, occupied with foreign wars, with internal improvements, and the daily administration of justice, he looked on his house as a place of simple relaxation and enjoyment, and forgot that there, too, he had a solemn charge and most important duty. Thus it was that David failed in his domestic management. It is easy to spy out his defects, and easy to condemn him. But let each of you who have a family to bring up look to himself. You have not all David's difficulties, but you may have some of them. The precept and the promise is, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It is not difficult to know the way he should go—the difficulty lies in the words, "Train up." To train up is not to force, nor is it merely to lay down the law, or to enforce the law. It is to get the whole nature of the child to move freely in the direction wished. To do this needs on the part of the parent a combination of firmness and love, of patience and decision, of consistent example and sympathetic encouragement. But it needs also, on the part of God, and therefore to be asked in earnest, believing prayer, that wondrous power which touches the springs of the heart, and draws it to Him and to His ways. Only by this combination of parental faithfulness and Divine grace can we look for the blessed result, "When he is old he will not depart from it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ABSALOM BANISHED AND BROUGHT BACK.

2 SAMUEL xiii. 38, 39; xiv.

GESHUR, to which Absalom fled after the murder of Amnon, accompanied in all likelihood by the men who had slain him, was a small kingdom in Syria, lying between Mount Hermon and Damascus. Maacah, Absalom's mother, was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, so that Absalom was there among his own relations. There is no reason to believe that Talmai and his people had renounced the idolatrous worship that prevailed in Syria. For David to ally himself in marriage with an idolatrous people was not in accordance with the law. In law, Absalom must have been a Hebrew, circumcised the eighth day; but in spirit he would probably have no little sympathy with his mother's religion. His utter alienation in heart from his father; the unconcern with which he sought to drive from the throne the man who had been so solemnly called to it by God; the vow which he pretended to have taken, when away in Syria, that if he were invited back to Jerusalem he would "serve the Lord," all point to a man infected in no small degree with the

spirit, if not addicted to the practice, of idolatry. And the tenor of his life, so full of cold-blooded wickedness, exemplified well the influence of idolatry, which bred neither fear of God nor love of man.

We have seen that Amnon had not that profound hold on David's heart which Absalom had; and therefore it is little wonder that when time had subdued the keen sensation of horror, the king "was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead." There was no great blank left in his heart, no irrepressible craving of the soul for the return of the departed. But it was otherwise in the case of Absalom,—“the king's heart was towards him.” David was in a painful dilemma, placed between two opposite impulses, the judicial and the paternal; the judicial calling for the punishment of Absalom, the paternal craving his restoration. Absalom in the most flagrant way had broken a law older even than the Sinai legislation, for it had been given to Noah after the flood—“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” But the deep affection of David for Absalom not only caused him to shrink from executing that law, but made him most desirous to have him near him again, pardoned, penitent as he no doubt hoped, and enjoying all the rights and privileges of the king's son. The first part of the chapter now before us records the manner in which David, in great weakness, sacrificed the judicial to the paternal, sacrificed his judgment to his feelings, and the welfare of the kingdom for the gratification of his affection. For it was too evident that Absalom was not a fit man to succeed David on the throne. If Saul was unfit to rule over God's people, and as God's vicegerent, much more was Absalom. Not only was he not the right kind of man, but, as his actions had showed, he was the very opposite. By his own wicked deed he was now an outlaw and an exile; he was out of sight and likely to pass out of mind; and it was most undesirable that any step should be taken to bring him back among the people, and give him every chance of the succession. Yet in spite of all this the king in his secret heart desired to get Absalom back. And Joab, not studying the welfare of the kingdom, but having regard only to the strong wishes of the king and of the heir-apparent, devised a scheme for fulfilling their desire.

That collision of the paternal and the judicial, which David removed by sacrificing the judicial, brings to our mind a discord of the same kind on a much greater scale, which received a solution of a very different kind. The sin of man created the same difficulty in the government of God. The judicial spirit, demanding man's punishment, came into collision with the paternal, desiring his happiness. How were they to be reconciled? This is the great question on which the priests of the world, when unacquainted with Divine revelation, have perplexed themselves since the world began. When we study the world's religions, we see very clearly that it has never been held satisfactory to solve the problem as David solved his difficulty, by simply sacrificing the judicial. The human conscience refuses to accept of such a settlement. It demands that some satisfaction shall be made to that law of which the Divine Judge is the administrator. It cannot bear to see God abandoning His judgment-seat in order that He may show indiscriminate mercy. Fantastic and foolish in the last degree, grim and repulsive too, in many cases, have been the devices by which it has been sought

to supply the necessary satisfaction. The awful sacrifices of Moloch, the mutilations of Juggernaut, the penances of popery, are most repulsive solutions, while they all testify to the intuitive conviction of mankind that something in the form of atonement is indispensable. But if these solutions repel us, not less unsatisfactory is the opposite view, now so current, that nothing in the shape of sin-offering is necessary, that no consideration needs to be taken of the judicial, that the infinite clemency of God is adequate to deal with the case, and that a true belief in His most loving fatherhood is all that is required for the forgiveness and acceptance of His erring children. In reality this is no solution at all; it is just David's method of sacrificing the judicial; it satisfies no healthy conscience, it brings solid peace to no troubled soul. The true and only solution, by which due regard is shown both to the judicial and the paternal, is that which is so fully unfolded and enforced in the Epistles of St. Paul. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses. . . For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

Returning to the narrative, we have next to examine the stratagem of Joab, designed to commit the king unwittingly to the recall of Absalom. The idea of the method may quite possibly have been derived from Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb. The design was to get the king to give judgment in an imaginary case, and thus commit him to a similar judgment in the case of Absalom. But there was a world-wide difference between the purpose of the parable of Nathan and that of the wise woman of Tekoah. Nathan's parable was designed to rouse the king's conscience as against his feelings; the woman of Tekoah's, as prompted by Joab, to rouse his feelings as against his conscience. Joab found a fitting tool for his purpose in a wise woman of Tekoah, a small town in the south of Judah. She was evidently an accommodating and unscrupulous person; but there is no reason to compare her to the woman of Endor, whose services Saul had resorted to. She seems to have been a woman of dramatic faculty, clever at personating another, and at acting a part. Her skill in this way becoming known to Joab, he arranged with her to go to the king with a fictitious story, and induce him now to bring back Absalom. Her story bore that she was a widow who had been left with two sons, one of whom in a quarrel killed his brother in the field. All the family were risen against her to constrain her to give up the murderer to death, but if she did so her remaining coal would be quenched, and neither name nor remainder left to her husband on the face of the earth. On hearing the case, the king seems to have been impressed in the woman's favour, and promised to give an order accordingly. Further conversation obtained clearer assurances from him that he would protect her from the avenger of blood. Then, dropping so far her disguise, she ventured to remonstrate with the king, inasmuch as he had not dealt with his own son as he was prepared to deal with hers. “Wherefore then hast thou devised such a thing against the people of God? for in speaking this word, the king is as one that is guilty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished one. For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God take away life, but deviseth

means that he that is banished be not an outcast from Him." We cannot but be struck, though not favourably, with the pious tone which the woman here assumed to David. She represents that the continued banishment of Absalom is against the people of God,—it is not for the nation's interest that the heir-apparent should be for ever banished. It is against the example of God, who, in administering His providence, does not launch His arrows at once against the destroyer of life, but rather shows him mercy, and allows him to return to his former condition. Clemency is a divine-like attribute. The king who can disentangle difficulties, and give such prominence to mercy, is like an angel of God. It is a divine-like work he undertakes when he recalls his banished. She can pray, when he is about to undertake such a business, "The Lord thy God be with thee" (R. V.). She knew that any difficulties the king might have in recalling his son would arise from his fears that he would be acting against God's will. The clever woman fills his eye with considerations on one side—the mercy and forbearance of God, the paths of human life, the duty of not making things worse than they necessarily are. She knew he would be startled when she named Absalom. She knew that though he had given judgment on the general principle as involved in the imaginary case she had put before him, he might demur to the application of that principle to the case of Absalom. Her instructions from Joab were to get the king to sanction Absalom's return. The king has a surmise that the hand of Joab is in the whole transaction, and the woman acknowledges that it is so. After the interview with the woman, David sends for Joab, and gives him leave to fetch back Absalom. Joab goes to Geshur and brings Absalom to Jerusalem.

But David's treatment of Absalom when he returns does not bear out the character for unerring wisdom which the woman had given him. The king refuses to see his son, and for two years Absalom lives in his own house, without enjoying any of the privileges of the king's son. By this means David took away all the grace of the transaction, and irritated Absalom. He was afraid to exercise his royal prerogative in pardoning him out-and-out. His conscience told him it ought not to be done. To restore at once one who had sinned so flagrantly to all his dignity and power was against the grain. Though therefore he had given his consent to Absalom returning to Jerusalem, for all practical purposes he might as well have been at Geshur. And Absalom was not the man to bear this quietly. How would his proud spirit like to hear of royal festivals at which all were present but he? How would he like to hear of distinguished visitors to the king from the surrounding countries, and he alone excluded from their society? His spirit would be chafed like that of a wild beast in its cage. Now it was, we cannot doubt, that he felt a new estrangement from his father, and conceived the project of seizing upon his throne. Now too it probably was that he began to gather around him the party that ultimately gave him his short-lived triumph. There would be sympathy for him in some quarters as an ill-used man; while there would rally to him all who were discontented with David's government, whether on personal or on public grounds. The enemies of his godliness, emboldened by his conduct towards Uriah, finding there what Daniel's enemies in a future age tried in vain to find in his conduct, would begin to think seri-

ously of the possibility of a change. Probably Joab began to apprehend the coming danger when he refused once and again to speak to Absalom. It seemed to be the impression both of David and of Joab that there would be danger to the state in his complete restoration.

Two years of this state of things had passed, and the patience of Absalom was exhausted. He sent for Joab to negotiate for a change of arrangements. But Joab would not see him. A second time he sent, and a second time Joab declined. Joab was really in a great difficulty. He seems to have seen that he had made a mistake in bringing Absalom to Jerusalem, but it was a mistake out of which he could not extricate himself. He was unwilling to go back, and he was afraid to go forward. He had not courage to undo the mistake he had made in inviting Absalom to return by banishing him again. If he should meet Absalom, he knew he would be unable to meet the arguments by which he would press him to complete what he had begun when he invited him back. Therefore he studiously avoided him. But Absalom was not to be outdone in this way. He fell on a rude stratagem for bringing Joab to his presence. Their fields being adjacent to each other, Absalom sent his servants to set Joab's barley on fire. The irritation of such an unprovoked injury overcame Joab's unwillingness to meet Absalom; he went to him in a rage and demanded why this had been done. The matter of the barley would be easy to arrange; but now that he had met Joab he showed him that there were just two modes of treatment open to David,—either really to pardon, or really to punish him. This probably was just what Joab felt. There was no good, but much harm in the half-and-half policy which the king was pursuing. If Absalom was pardoned, let him be on friendly terms with the king. If he was not pardoned, let him be put to death for the crime he had committed.

Joab was unable to refute Absalom's reasoning. And when he went to the king he would press that view on him likewise. And now, after two years of a half-and-half measure, the king sees no alternative but to yield. "When he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself to his face on the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom." This was the token of reconciliation and friendship. But it would not be with a clear conscience or an easy mind that David saw the murderer of his brother in full possession of the honours of the king's son.

In all this conduct of King David we can trace only the infatuation of one left to the guidance of his own mind. It is blunder after blunder. Like many good but mistaken men, he erred both in inflicting punishments and in bestowing favours. Much that ought to be punished such persons pass over; what they do select for punishment is probably something trivial; and when they punish it is in a way so injudicious as to defeat its ends. And some, like David, keep oscillating between punishment and favour so as at once to destroy the effect of the one and the grace of the other. His example may well show all of you who have to do with such things the need of great carefulness in this important matter. Penalties, to be effectual, should be for marked offences, but when incurred should be firmly maintained. Only when the purpose of the punishment is attained ought reconciliation to take place, and when that comes it should be full-hearted and complete, restoring the offender to the full benefit of his place and

privilege, both in the home and in the hearts of his parents.

So David lets Absalom loose, as it were, on the people of Jerusalem. He is a young man of fine appearance and fascinating manners. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of the foot even to the crown of the head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head (for it was at every year's end that he polled it; because his hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it) the weight of the hair of his head was two hundred shekels after the king's weight." No doubt this had something to do with David's great liking for him. He could not but look on him with pride, and think with pleasure how much he was admired by others. The affection which owed so much to a cause of this sort was not likely to be of the highest or purest quality. What then are we to say of David's fondness for Absalom? Was it wrong for a father to be attached to his child? Was it wrong for him to love even a wicked child? No one can for a moment think so who remembers that "God commended His love towards us, in that *while we were yet sinners* Christ died for us." There is a sense in which loving emotions may warrantably be more powerfully excited in the breast of a godly parent toward an erring child than toward a wise and good one. The very thought that a child is in the thralldom of sin creates a feeling of almost infinite pathos with reference to his condition. The loving desire for his good and his happiness becomes more intense from the very sense of the disorder and misery in which he lies. The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the object of a more profound emotion than the ninety-and-nine that are safe within it. In this sense a parent cannot love his child, even his sinful and erring child, too well. The love that seeks another's highest good can never be too intense, for it is the very counterpart and image of God's love for sinful men.

But, as far as we can gather, David's love for Absalom was not exclusively of this kind. It was a fondness that led him to wink at his faults even when they became flagrant, and that desired to see him occupying a place of honour and responsibility for which he certainly was far from qualified. This was more than the love of benevolence. The love of benevolence has, in the Christian bosom, an unlimited sphere. It may be given to the most unworthy. But the love of complacency, of delight in any one, of desire for his company, desire for close relations with him, confidence in him, as one to whom our own interests and the interests of others may be safely entrusted, is a quite different feeling. This kind of love must ever be regulated by the degree of true excellence, of genuine worth, possessed by the person loved. The fault in David's love to Absalom was not that he was too benevolent, not that he wished his son too well. It was that he had too much complacency or delight in him, delight resting on very superficial ground, and that he was too willing to have him entrusted with the most vital interests of the nation. This fondness for Absalom was a sort of infatuation, to which David never could have yielded if he had remembered the hundred and first Psalm, and if he had thought of the kind of men whom alone when he wrote that Psalm he determined to promote to influence in the kingdom.

And on this we found a general lesson of no small importance. Young persons, let us say em-

phatically young women, and perhaps Christian young women, are apt to be captivated by superficial qualities, qualities like those of Absalom, and in some cases are not only ready but eager to marry those who possess them. In their blindness they are willing to commit not only their own interests but the interests of their children, if they should have any, to men who are not Christians, perhaps barely moral, and who are therefore not worthy of their trust. Here it is that affection should be watched and restrained. Christians should never allow their affections to be engaged by any whom, on Christian grounds, they do not thoroughly esteem. All honour to those who, at great sacrifice, have honoured this rule! All honour to Christian parents who bring up their children to feel that, if they are Christians themselves, they can marry only in the Lord! Alas for those who deem accidental and superficial qualities sufficient grounds for a union which involves the deepest interests of souls for time and for eternity! In David's ill-founded complacency in Absalom, and the woeful disasters which flowed from it, let them see a beacon to warn them against any union which has not mutual esteem for its foundation, and does not recognise those higher interests in reference to which the memorable words were spoken by our Lord, "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

CHAPTER XIX.

ABSALOM'S REVOLT.

2 SAMUEL XV. 1-12.

WHEN Absalom obtained from his father the position he had so eagerly desired at Jerusalem, he did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. The terms on which he was now with the king evidently gave him a command of money to a very ample degree. By this means he was able to set up an equipage such as had not previously been seen at Jerusalem. "He prepared him a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him." To multiply horses to himself was one of the things forbidden by the law of Moses to the king that should be chosen (Deut. xvii. 16), mainly, we suppose, because it was a prominent feature of the royal state of the kings of Egypt, and because it would have indicated a tendency to place the glory of the kingdom in magnificent surroundings rather than in the protection and blessing of the heavenly King. The style of David's living appears to have been quiet and unpretending, notwithstanding the vast treasures he had amassed; for the love of pomp or display was none of his failings. Anything in the shape of elaborate arrangement that he devised seems to have been in connection with the public service of God—for instance, his choir of singers and players (1 Chron. xxiii. 5); his own personal tastes appear to have been simple and inexpensive. And this style undoubtedly befitted a royalty which rested on a basis so peculiar as that of the nation of Israel, when the king, though he used that title, was only the viceroy of the true King of the nation, and where it was the will of God that a different spirit should prevail from that prevalent among the surrounding nations. A modest establishment was evidently suited to one who recognised his true position as a subordinate lieutenant, not an absolute ruler.

But Absalom's tastes were widely different, and he was not the man to be restrained from gratifying them by any considerations of that sort. The moment he had the power, though he was not even king, he set up his imposing equipage, and became the observed of all observers in Jerusalem. And no doubt there were many of the people who sympathised with him, and regarded it as right and proper that, now that Israel was so renowned and prosperous a kingdom, its court should shine forth in corresponding splendour. The plain equipage of David would seem to them paltry and unimposing, in no way fitted to gratify the pride or elevate the dignity of the kingdom. Absalom's, on the other hand, would seem to supply all that David's wanted. The prancing steeds, with their gay caparisons, the troop of outrunners in glittering uniform, the handsome face and figure of the prince, would create a sensation wherever he went; There, men would say emphatically, is the proper state and bearing of a king; had we such a monarch as that, surrounding nations would everywhere acknowledge our superiority, and feel that we were entitled to the first place among the kingdoms of the East.

But Absalom was far too shrewd a man to base his popularity merely on outward show. For the daring game which he was about to play it was necessary to have much firmer support than that. He understood the remarkable power of personal interest and sympathy in winning the hearts of men, and drawing them to one's side. He rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate, where in eastern cities judgment was usually administered, but where, for some unknown reason, little seems to have been done by the king or the king's servants at that time. To all who came to the gate he addressed himself with winsome affability, and to those who had "a suit that should come to the king for judgment" (R. V.) he was especially encouraging. Well did he know that when a man has a lawsuit it usually engrosses his whole attention, and that he is very impatient of delays and hindrances in the way of his case. Very adroitly did he take advantage of this feeling,—sympathising with the litigant, agreeing with him of course that he had right on his side, but much concerned that there was no one appointed of the king to attend to his business, and devoutly and fervently wishing that he were made judge in the land, that every one that had any suit or cause might come to him, and he would do him justice. And with regard to others, when they came to do him homage he seemed unwilling to recognise this token of superiority, but, as if they were just brothers, he put forth his hand, took hold of them, and kissed them. If it were not for what we know now of the hollowness of it, this would be a pretty picture—an ear so ready to listen to the tale of wrong, a heart so full of sympathy, an active temperament that in the early hours of the morning sent him forth to meet the people and exchange kindly greetings with them; a form and figure that graced the finest procession; a manner that could be alike dignified when dignity was becoming and humility itself when it was right to be humble. But alas for the hollow-heartedness of the picture! It is like the fabled apples of Sodom, outside all fair and attractive, but dust within.

But hollow though it was, the policy succeeded—he became exceedingly popular; he secured the affections of the people. It is a remarkable expression that is used to denote this result—"He

stole the hearts of the men of Israel." It was not an honest transaction. It was swindling in high life. He was appropriating valuable property on false pretences. To constitute a man a thief or a swindler it is not necessary that he forge a rich man's name, or that he put his hand into the pocket of his neighbour. To gain a heart by hypocritical means, to secure the confidence of another by lying promises, is equally low and wicked; nay, in God's sight is a greater crime. It may be that man's law has difficulty in reaching it, and in many cases cannot reach it at all. But it cannot be supposed that those who are guilty of it will in the end escape God's righteous judgment. And if the punishments of the future life are fitted to indicate the due character of the sins for which they are sent, we can think of nothing more appropriate than that those who have stolen hearts in this way, high in this world's rank though they have often been, should be made to rank with the thieves and thimble-riggers and other knaves who are the *habitués* of our prisons, and are scorned universally as the meanest of mankind. With all his fine face and figure and manner, his chariot and horses, his outrunners and other attendants, Absalom after all was but a black-hearted thief.

All this crooked and cunning policy of his Absalom carried on with unwearied vigour till his plot was ripe. There is reason to apprehend an error of some kind in the text when it is said (ver. 7) that it was "at the end of forty years" that Absalom struck the final blow. The reading of some manuscripts is more likely to be correct,—“at the end of four years,” that is, four years after he was allowed to assume the position of prince. During that space of time much might be quietly done by one who had such an advantage of manner, and was so resolutely devoted to his work. For he seems to have laboured at his task without interruption all that time. The dissembling which he had to practise, to impress the people with the idea of his kindly interest in them, must have required a very considerable strain. But he was sustained in it by the belief that in the end he would succeed, and success was worth an infinity of labour. What a power of persistence is often shown by the children of this world, and how much wiser are they in their generation than the children of light as to the means that will achieve their ends! With what wonderful application and perseverance do many men labour to build up a business, to accumulate a fortune, to gain a distinction! I have heard of a young man who, being informed that an advertisement had appeared in a newspaper to the effect that if his family would apply to some one they would hear of something to their advantage, set himself to discover that advertisement, went over the advertisements for several years, column by column, first of one paper, then of another and another, till he became so absorbed in the task that he lost first his reason and then his life. Thank God, there are instances not a few of very noble application and perseverance in the spiritual field; but is it not true that the mass even of good men are sadly remiss in the efforts they make for spiritual ends? Does not the energy of the racer who ran for the corruptible crown often put to shame the languor of those who seek for an incorruptible? And does not the manifold secular activity of which we see so much in the world around us sound a loud summons in the ears of all who are at ease in Zion—"Now it is high time to awake out of sleep"?

The copestone which Absalom put on his plot when all was ripe for execution was of a piece with the whole undertaking. It was an act of religious hypocrisy amounting to profanity. It shows how well he must have succeeded in deceiving his father when he could venture on such a finishing stroke. Hypocrite though he was himself, he well knew the depth and sincerity of his father's religion. He knew too that nothing could gratify him more than to find in his son the evidence of a similar state of heart. It is difficult to comprehend the villainy that could frame such a statement as this:—"I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow, while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall indeed bring me again to Jerusalem, then I will serve" (marg. R. V., worship) "the Lord." We have already remarked that it is not very clear from this whether up to this time Absalom had been a worshipper of the God of Israel. The purport of his pretended vow (that is, what he wished his father to believe) must have been either that, renouncing the idolatry of Geshur, he would now become a worshipper of Israel's God, or (what seems more likely) that in token of his purpose for the future he would present a special offering to the God of Israel. This vow he now wished to redeem by making his offerings to the Lord, and for this purpose he desired to go to Hebron. But why go to Hebron? Might he not have redeemed it at Jerusalem? It was the custom, however, when a vow was taken, to specify the place where it was to be fulfilled, and in this instance Hebron was alleged to be the place. But what are we to think of the effrontery and wickedness of this pretence? To drag sacred things into a scheme of villainy, to pretend to have a desire to do honour to God simply for the purpose of carrying out deception and gaining a worldly end, is a frightful prostitution of all that ought to be held most sacred. It seems to indicate one who had no belief in God or in anything holy, to whom truth and falsehood, right and wrong, honour and shame, were all essentially alike, although, when it suited him, he might pretend to have a profound regard to the honour of God and a cordial purpose to render that honour. We are reminded of Charles II. taking the Covenant to please the Scots, and get their help towards obtaining the crown. But indeed the same great sin is involved in every act of religious hypocrisy, in every instance in which pretended reverence is paid to God in order to secure a selfish end.

The place was cunningly selected. It enjoyed a sanctity which had been gathering round it for centuries; whereas Jerusalem, as the capital of the nation, was but of yesterday. Hebron was the place where David himself had begun his reign, and while it was far enough from Jerusalem to allow Absalom to work unobserved by David, it was near enough to allow him to carry out the schemes which had been set on foot there. So little suspicion had the old king of what was brewing that, when Absalom asked leave to go to Hebron, he dismissed him with a blessing—"Go in peace."

What Joab was thinking of all this we have no means of knowing. That a man who looked after his own interests so well as Joab did, should have stuck to David when his fortunes appeared to be desperate, is somewhat surprising. But the truth seems to be that Absalom never felt very cordial

towards Joab after his refusal to meet him on his return from Geshur. It does not appear that Joab was much impressed by regard to God's will in the matter of the succession; his being engaged afterwards in the insurrection in favour of Adonijah when Solomon was divinely marked out for the succession shows that he was not. His adherence to David on this occasion was probably the result of necessity rather than choice. But what are we to say of his want of vigilance in allowing Absalom's conspiracy to advance as it did either without suspecting its existence, or at least without making provision for defending the king's cause? Either he was very blind or he was very careless. As for the king himself, we have seen what cause he had, after his great trespass, for courting solitude and avoiding contact with the people. That he should be ignorant of all that was going on need not surprise us. And moreover, from allusions in some of the Psalms (xxxviii., xxxix., xli.) to a loathsome and all but fatal illness of David's, and to treachery practised on him when ill, some have supposed that this was the time chosen by Absalom for consummating his plot. When Absalom said to the men applying for justice, whom he met at the gate of the city, "There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee," his words implied that there was something hindering the king from being there in person, and for some reason he had not appointed a deputy. A protracted illness, unfitting David for his personal duties and for superintending the machinery of government, might have furnished Absalom with the pretext for his lamentation over this want. It gives us a harder impression of his villainy and hardness of heart if he chose a time when his father was enfeebled by disease to inflict a crushing blow on his government and a crowning humiliation on himself.

Three other steps were taken by Absalom before bringing the revolt to a crisis. First, he sent spies or secret emissaries to all the tribes, calling them, on hearing the sound of a trumpet, to acknowledge him as king at Hebron. Evidently he had all the talent for administration that was so conspicuous in his nation and in his house,—if only it had been put to a better use. Secondly, he took with him to Hebron a band of two hundred men, of whom it is said "they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything"—so admirably was the secret kept. Thirdly, Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, having reason to believe that Ahithophel was on his side, and knowing that his counsel would be valuable to him in the present emergency. And every arrangement seemed to succeed admirably. The tide ran strongly in his favour—"the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom." Everything seemed to fall out precisely as he wished: it looked as if the revolt would not only succeed, but that it would succeed without serious opposition. Absalom must have been full of expectation that in a few days or weeks he would be reigning unopposed at Jerusalem.

This extraordinary success is difficult to understand. For what could have made David so unpopular? In his earliest years he had been singularly popular; his victories brought him unbounded *éclat*; and when Ishbosheth died it was the remembrance of these early services that disposed the people to call him to the throne. Since that time he had increased his services in an eminent degree. He had freed his country from

all the surrounding tribes that were constantly attacking it; he had conquered those distant but powerful enemies the Syrians; and he had brought to the country a great accumulation of wealth. Add to this that he was fond of music and a poet, and had written many of the very finest of their sacred songs. Why should not such a king be popular? The answer to this question will embrace a variety of reasons. In the first place, a generation was growing up who had not been alive at the time of his early services, and on whom therefore they would make a very slender impression. For service done to the public is very soon forgotten unless it be constantly repeated in other forms, unless, in fact, there be a perpetual round of it. So it is found by many a minister of the gospel. Though he may have built up his congregation from the very beginning, ministered among them with unceasing assiduity, and taken the lead in many important and permanent undertakings, yet in a few years after he goes away all is forgotten, and his very name comes to be unknown to many. In the second place, David was turning old, and old men are prone to adhere to their old ways; his government had become old-fashioned, and he showed no longer the life and vigour of former days. A new, fresh lively administration was eagerly desired by the younger spirits of the nation. Further, there can be no doubt that David's fervent piety was disliked by many, and his puritan methods of governing the kingdom. The spirit of the world is sure to be found in every community, and it is always offended by the government of holy men. Finally, his fall in the matter of Uriah had greatly impaired the respect and affection even of the better part of the community. If to all this there was added a period of feeble health, during which many departments of government were neglected, we shall have, beyond doubt, the principal grounds of the king's unpopularity. The ardent lovers of godliness were no doubt a minority, and thus even David, who had done so much for Israel, was ready to be sacrificed in the time of old age.

But had he not something better to fall back on? Was he not promised the protection and the aid of the Most High? Might he not cast himself on Him who had been his refuge and his strength in every time of need, and of whom he had sung so serenely that He is near to them that call on Him in sincerity and in truth? Undoubtedly he might, and undoubtedly he did. And the final result of Absalom's rebellion, the wonderful way in which its back was broken and David rescued and restored, showed that though cast down he was not forsaken. But now, we must remember, the second element of the chastisement of which Nathan testified, had come upon him. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house." That chastisement was now falling, and while it lasted the joy and comfort of God's gracious presence must have been interrupted. But all the same God was still with him, even though He was carrying him through the valley of the shadow of death. Like the Apostle Peter, he was brought to the very verge of destruction; but at the critical moment an unseen hand was stretched out to save him, and in after-years he was able to sing, "He brought me up also out of a fearful pit, and out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock and established my goings; and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

CHAPTER XX.

DAVID'S FLIGHT FROM JERUSALEM.

2 SAMUEL XV. 13.

THE trumpet which was to be the signal that Absalom reigned in Hebron had been sounded, the flow of people in response to it had begun, when "a messenger came to David saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." The narrative is so concise that we can hardly tell whether or not this was the first announcement to David of the real intentions of Absalom. But it is very certain that the king was utterly unprepared to meet the sudden revolt. The first news of it all but overwhelmed him. And little wonder. There came on him three calamities in one. First, there was the calamity that the great bulk of the people had revolted against him, and were now hastening to drive him from the throne, and very probably to put him to death. Second, there was the appalling discovery of the villainy, hypocrisy, and heartless cruelty of his favourite and popular son,—the most crushing thing that can be thought of to a tender heart. And third, there was the discovery that the hearts of the people were with Absalom; David had lost what he most prized and desired to possess; the intense affection he had for his people now met with no response; their love and confidence were given to a usurper. Fancy an old man, perhaps in infirm health, suddenly confronted with this threefold calamity; who can wonder for the time that he is paralysed, and bends before the storm?

Flight from Jerusalem seemed the only feasible course. Both policy and humanity seemed to dictate it. He considered himself unable to defend the city with any hope of success against an attack by such a force as Absalom could muster, and he was unwilling to expose the people to be snitten with the sword. Whether he was really as helpless as he thought we can hardly say. We should be disposed to think that his first duty was to stay where he was, and defend his capital. He was there as God's viceroy, and would not God be with him, defending the place where He had set His name, and the tabernacle in which He was pleased to dwell? It is not possible for us, ignorant as we are of the circumstances, to decide whether the flight from Jerusalem was the enlightened result of an overwhelming necessity, or the fruit of sudden panic, of a heart so paralysed that it could not gird itself for action. His servants had no other advice to offer. Any course that recommended itself to him they were ready to take. If this did not help to throw light on his difficulties, it must at least have soothed his heart. His friends were not all forsaking him. Amid the faithless a few were found faithful. Friends in such need were friends indeed. And the sight of their honest though perplexed countenances, and the sound of their friendly though trembling voices, would be most soothing to his feelings, and serve to rally the energy that had almost left him. When the world forsakes us, the few friends that remain are of priceless value.

On leaving Jerusalem David at once turned eastward, into the wilderness region between Jerusalem and Jericho, with the view, if possible, of crossing the Jordan, so as to have that river, with its deep valley, between him and the rebels. The first halt, or rather the rendezvous for his followers, though called in the A. V. "a place that was

far off," is more suitably rendered in the R. V. Bethmerhak, and the margin "the far house." Probably it was the last house on this side the brook Kidron. Here, outside the walls of the city, some hasty arrangements were made before the flight was begun in earnest.

First, we read that he was accompanied by all his household, with the exception of ten concubines who were left to keep the house. Fain would we have avoided contact at such a moment with that feature of his house from which so much mischief had come; but to the end of the day David never deviated in that respect from the barbarous policy of all Eastern kings. The mention of his household shows how embarrassed he must have been with so many helpless appendages, and how slow his flight. And his household were not the only women and children of the company; the "little ones" of the Gittites are mentioned in ver. 22; we may conceive how the unconcealed terror and excitement of these helpless beings must have distressed him, as their feeble powers of walking must have held back the fighting part of his attendants. When one thinks of this, one sees more clearly the excellence of the advice afterwards given by Ahithophel to pursue him without loss of time with twelve thousand men, to destroy his person at once; in that case, Absalom must have overtaken him long before he reached the Jordan, and found him quite unable to withstand his ardent troops.

Next, we find mention of the forces that remained faithful to the king in the crisis of his misfortunes. The Pelethites, the Cherethites, and the Gittites were the chief of these. The Pelethites and the Cherethites are supposed to have been the representatives of the band of followers that David commanded when hiding from Saul in the wilderness; the Gittites appear to have been a body of refugees from Gath, driven away by the tyranny of the Philistines, who had thrown themselves on the protection of David and had been well treated by him. The interview between David and Ittai was most creditable to the feelings of the fugitive king. Ittai was a stranger who had but lately come to Jerusalem, and as he was not attached to David personally, it would be safer for him to return to the city and offer to the reigning king the services which David could no longer reward. But the generous proposal of David was rejected with equal nobility on the part of Ittai. He had probably been received with kindness by David when he first came to Jerusalem, the king remembering well when he himself was in the like predicament, and thinking, like the African princess to Æneas, "*Haud ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco*"—"Having had experience of adversity myself, I know how to succour the miserable." Ittai's heart was won to David then; and he had made up his mind, like Ruth the Moabitess with reference to Naomi, that wherever David was, in life or in death, there also he should be. How affecting must it have been to David to receive such an assurance from a stranger! His own son, whom he had loaded with undeserved kindness, was conspiring against him, while this stranger, who owed him nothing in comparison, was risking everything in his cause. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Next in David's train presented themselves Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, carrying the ark of God. The presence of this sacred symbol would have invested the cause of David with a manifestly sacred character in the eyes of all good

men; its absence from Absalom would have equally suggested the absence of Israel's God. But David probably remembered how ill it had fared with Israel in the days of Eli and his sons, when the ark was carried into battle. Moreover, when the ark had been placed on Mount Zion, God had said, "This is My rest; here will I dwell;" and even in this extraordinary emergency, David would not disturb that arrangement. He said to Zadok, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He shall bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation: but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I; let Him do to me what seemeth good unto Him." These words show how much God was in David's mind in connection with the events of that humiliating day. They show, too, that he did not regard his case as desperate. But everything turned on the will of God. It might be that, in His great mercy, He would bring him back to Jerusalem. His former promises led him to think of this as a possible, perhaps probable, termination of the insurrection. But it might also be that the Lord had no more delight in him. The chastening with which He was now visiting him for his sin might involve the success of Absalom. In that case, all that David would say was that he was at God's disposal, and would offer no resistance to His holy will. If he was to be restored, he would be restored without the aid of the ark; if he was to be destroyed, the ark could not save him. Zadok and his Levites must carry it back into the city. The distance was a very short one, and they would be able to have everything placed in order before Absalom could be there.

Another thought occurred to David, who was now evidently recovering his calmness and power of making arrangements. Zadok was a seer, and able to use that method of obtaining light from God which in great emergencies God was pleased to give when the ruler of the nation required it. But the marginal reading of the R. V., "Seest thou?" instead of "Thou art a seer," makes it doubtful whether David referred to this mystic privilege, which Zadok does not appear to have used; the meaning may be simply, that as he was an observant man, he could be of use to David in the city, by noticing how things were going and sending him word. In this way he could be of more use to him in Jerusalem than in the field. Considering how he was embarrassed with the women and children, it was better for David not to be encumbered with another defenceless body like the Levites. The sons of the priests, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, would be of great service in bringing him information. Even if he succeeded in reaching the plains (or fords, *marg.* R. V.) of the wilderness, they could easily overtake him, and tell him what plan of operations it would be wisest for him to follow.

These hasty arrangements being made, and the company placed in some sort of order, the march towards the wilderness now began. The first thing was to cross the brook Kidron. From its bed, the road led up the slope of Mount Olivet. To the spectators the sight was one of overwhelming sadness. "All the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over; the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the wilderness." After all, there was a large number who sympathised with the king, and to whom it was most affecting to see one who was

now "old and grey-headed" driven from his throne and from his home by an unprincipled son, aided and abetted by a graceless generation who had no consideration for the countless benefits which David had conferred on the nation. It is when we find "all the country" expressing their sympathy that we cannot but doubt whether it was really necessary for David to fly. Perhaps "the country" here may be used in contrast to the city. Country people are less accessible to secret conspiracies, and besides are less disposed to change their allegiance. The event showed that in the more remote country districts David had still a numerous following. Time to gather these friends together was his great need. If he had been fallen on that night, weary and desolate and almost friendless, as was proposed by Ahithophel, there can be no rational doubt what the issue would have been.

And the king himself gave way to distress, like the people, though for different reasons. "David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot; and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up." The covered head and bare feet were tokens of humiliation. They were a humble confession on the king's part that the affliction which had befallen him was well deserved by him. The whole attitude and bearing of David is that of one "stricken, smitten, and afflicted." Lofty looks and a proud bearing had never been among his weaknesses; but on this occasion, he is so meek and lowly that the poorest person in his kingdom could not have assumed a more humble bearing. It is the feeling that had so wrung his heart in the fifty-first Psalm come back on him again. It is the feeling, Oh, what a sinner I have been! how forgetful of God I have often proved, and how unworthily I have acted toward man! No wonder that God rebukes me and visits me with these troubles! And not me only, but my people too. These are my children, for whom I should have provided a peaceful home, driven into the shelterless wilderness with me! These kind people who are compassionating me have been brought by me into this trouble, which peradventure will cost them their lives. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!"

It was at this time that some one brought word to David that Ahithophel the Gilonite was among the conspirators. He seems to have been greatly distressed at the news. For "the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired of the oracle of God" (xvi. 23). An ingenious writer has found a reason for this step. By comparing 2 Sam. xi. 3 with 2 Sam. xxiii. 34, in the former of which Bathsheba is called the daughter of Eliam, and in the later Eliam is called the son of Ahithophel, it would appear—if it be the same Eliam in both—that Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. From this it has been inferred that his forsaking of David at this time was due to his displeasure at David's treatment of Bathsheba and Uriah. The idea is ingenious, but after all it is hardly trustworthy. For if Ahithophel was a man of such singular shrewdness, he would not be likely to let his personal feelings determine his public conduct. There can be no reasonable doubt that, judging calmly from the kind of considerations by which a worldly mind like his would be

influenced, he came to the deliberate conclusion that Absalom was going to win. And when David heard of his defection, it must have given him a double pang; first, because he would lose so valuable a counsellor, and Absalom would gain what he would lose; and second, because Ahithophel's choice showed the side that, to his shrewd judgment, was going to triumph. David could but fall back on that higher Counsellor on whose aid and countenance he was still able to rely, and offer a short but expressive prayer, "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

It was but a few minutes after this that another distinguished counsellor, Hushai the Archite, came to him, with his clothes rent and dust on his head, signifying his sense of the public calamity, and his adherence to David. Him, too, as well as Ittai and the priests, David wished to send back. And the reason assigned showed that his mind was now calm and clear, and able to ponder the situation in all its bearings. Indeed, he concocts quite a little scheme with Hushai. First, he is to go to Absalom and pretend to be on his side. But his main business will be to oppose the counsel of Ahithophel, try to secure a little time to David, and thus give him a chance of escape. Moreover, he is to co-operate with the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and through their sons send word to David of everything he hears. Hushai obeys David, and as he returns to the city from the east, Absalom arrives from the south, before David is more than three or four miles away. But for the Mount of Olives intervening, Absalom might have seen the company that followed his father, creeping slowly along the wilderness, a company that could hardly be called an army, and that, humanly speaking, might have been scattered like a puff of smoke.

Thus Absalom gets possession of Jerusalem without a blow. He goes to his father's house, and takes possession of all that he finds there. He cannot but feel the joy of gratified ambition, the joy of the successful accomplishment of his elaborate and long-prosecuted scheme. Times are changed, he would naturally reflect, since I had to ask my father's leave for everything I did, since I could not even go to Hebron without begging him to allow me. Times are changed since I reared that monument in the vale for want of anything else to keep my name alive. Now that I am king, my name will live without a monument. The success of the revolution was so remarkable, that if Absalom had believed in God, he might have imagined, judging from the way in which everything had fallen out in his favour, that Providence was on his side. But, surely there must have been a hard constraint and pressure upon his feelings somewhere. Conscience could not be utterly inactive. Fresh efforts to silence it must have been needed from time to time. Amid all the excitement of success, a vague horror must have stolen in on his soul. A vision of outraged justice would haunt him. He might scare away the hideous spectre for a time, but he could not lay it in the grave. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

But if Absalom might well be haunted by a spectre because he had driven his father from his house, and God's anointed from his throne, there was a still more fearful reckoning standing against him, in that he had enticed such multitudes from their allegiance, and drawn them into the guilt of rebellion. There was not one of the many thou-

sands that were now shouting "God save the king!" who had not been induced through him to do a great sin, and bring himself under the special displeasure of God. A rough nature like Absalom's would make light of this result of his movement, as rough natures have done since the world began. But a very different judgment was passed by the great Teacher on the effects of leading others into sin. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of God." "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe in Me to stumble, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast in the depth of the sea." Yet how common a thing this has been in all ages of the world, and how common it is still! To put pressure on others to do wrong; to urge them to trifle with their consciences, or knowingly to violate them; to press them to give a vote against their convictions;—all such methods of disturbing conscience and drawing men into crooked ways, what sin they involve! And when a man of great influence employs it with hundreds and thousands of people in such ways, twisting consciences, disturbing self-respect, bringing down Divine displeasure, how forcibly we are reminded of the proverb, "One sinner destroyeth much good"!

Most earnestly should every one who has influence over others dread being guilty of debauching conscience, and discouraging obedience to its call. On the other hand, how blessed is it to use one's influence in the opposite direction. Think of the blessedness of a life spent in enlightening others as to truth and duty, and encouraging loyalty to their high but often difficult claims. What a contrast to the other! What a noble aim to try to make men's eyes single and their duty easy; to try to raise them above selfish and carnal motives, and inspire them with a sense of the nobility of walking uprightly, and working righteousness, and speaking the truth in their hearts! What a privilege to be able to induce our fellows to walk in some degree even as He walked "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth;" and who, in ways so high above our ways, was ever influencing the children of men "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God"!

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM JERUSALEM TO MAHANAIM.

2 SAMUEL xvi. 1-14; xvii. 15-22 and 24-26.

As David proceeds on his painful journey, there flows from his heart a gentle current of humble, contrite, gracious feeling. If recent events have thrown any doubt on the reality of his goodness, this fragrant narrative will restore the balance. Many a man would have been beside himself with rage at the treatment he had undergone. Many another man would have been restless with terror, looking behind him every other moment to see if the usurper's army was not hastening in pursuit of him. It is touching to see David, mild, self-possessed, thoroughly humble, and most considerate of others. Adversity is the element in which he shines; it is in prosperity he falls; in adversity he rises beautifully. After the humbling events in his life to which our attention has been lately called, it is a relief to witness the noble

bearing of the venerable saint amid the pelting of this most pitiless storm.

It was when David was a little past the summit of Mount Olivet, and soon after he had sent back Hushai, that Ziba came after him,—that servant of Saul that had told him of Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, and whom he had appointed to take charge of the property that had belonged to Saul, now made over to Mephibosheth. The young man himself was to be as one of the king's sons, and was to eat at the royal table. Ziba's account of him was, that when he heard of the insurrection he remained at Jerusalem, in the expectation that on that very day the kingdom of his father would be restored to him. It can hardly be imagined that Mephibosheth was so silly as to think or say anything of the kind. Either Ziba must have been slandering him now, or Mephibosheth must have slandered Ziba when David returned (see 2 Sam. xix. 24-30). With that remarkable impartiality which distinguishes the history, the facts and the statements of the parties are recorded as they occurred, but we are left to form our own judgment regarding them. All things considered, it is likely that Ziba was the slanderer and Mephibosheth the injured man. Mephibosheth was too feeble a man, both in mind and in body, to be forming bold schemes by which he might benefit from the insurrection. We prefer to believe that the son of Jonathan had so much of his father's nobility as to cling to David in the hour of his trial, and be desirous of throwing in his lot with him. If, however, Ziba was a slanderer and a liar, the strange thing about him is that he should have taken this opportunity to give effect to his villainy. It is strange that, with a soul full of treachery, he should have taken the trouble to come after David at all, and still more that he should have made a contribution to his scanty stores. We should have expected such a man to remain with Absalom, and look to him for the reward of unrighteousness. He brought with him for David's use a couple of asses saddled, and two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. We get a vivid idea of the extreme haste with which David and his company must have left Jerusalem and their destitution of the very necessaries of life as they fled, from this catalogue of Ziba's contributions. Not even were there beasts of burden "for the king's household"—even Bathsheba and Solomon may have been going on foot. David was evidently impressed by the gift, and his opinion of Mephibosheth was not so high as to prevent him from believing that he was capable of the course ascribed to him. Yet we cannot but think there was undue haste in his at once transferring to Ziba the whole of Mephibosheth's property. We can only say, in vindication of David, that his confidence even in those who had been most indebted to him had received so rude a shock in the conduct of Absalom, that he was ready to say in his haste, "All men are liars;" he was ready to suspect every man of deserting him, except those that gave palpable evidence that they were on his side. In this number it seemed at the moment that Ziba was, while Mephibosheth was not; and trusting to his first impression, and acting with the promptitude necessary in war, he made the transfer. It is true that afterwards he discovered his mistake; and some may think that when he did he did not make a sufficient rectification. He directed Ziba and Mephibosheth to divide the property between

them; but in explanation it has been suggested that this was equivalent to the old arrangement, by which Ziba was to cultivate the land, and Mephibosheth to receive the fruits; and if half the produce went to the proprietor, and the other half to the cultivator, the arrangement may have been a just and satisfactory one after all.

But if Ziba sinned in the way of smooth treachery, Shimei, the next person with whom David came in contact, sinned not less in the opposite fashion, by his outrageous insolence and invective. It is said of this man that he was of the family of the house of Saul, and that fact goes far to account for his atrocious behaviour. We get a glimpse of that inveterate jealousy of David which during the long period of his reign slept in the bosom of the family of Saul, and which seemed now, like a volcano, to burst out all the more fiercely for its long suppression. When the throne passed from the family of Saul, Shimei would of course experience a great social fall. To be no longer connected with the royal family would be a great mortification to one who was vain of such distinctions. Outwardly, he was obliged to bear his fall with resignation, but inwardly the spirit of disappointment and jealousy raged in his breast. When the opportunity of revenge against David came, the rage and venom of his spirit poured out in a filthy torrent. There is no mistaking the mean nature of the man to take such an opportunity of venting his malignity on David. To trample on the fallen, to press a man when his back is at the wall, to pierce with fresh wounds the body of a stricken warrior, is the mean resource of ungenerous cowardice. But it is too much the way of the world. "If there be any quarrels, any exceptions," says Bishop Hall, "against a man, let him look to have them laid in his dish when he fares the hardest. This practice have wicked men learned of their master, to take the utmost advantage of their afflictions."

If Shimei had contented himself with denouncing the policy of David, the forbearance of his victim would not have been so remarkable. But Shimei was guilty of every form of offensive and provoking assault. He threw stones, he called abusive names, he hurled wicked charges against David; he declared that God was fighting against him, and fighting justly against such a man of blood, such a man of Belial. And, as if this were not enough, he stung him in the most sensitive part of his nature, reproaching him with the fact that it was his son that now reigned instead of him, because the Lord had delivered the kingdom into his hand. But even all this accumulation of coarse and shameful abuse failed to ruffle David's equanimity. Abishai, Joab's brother, was enraged at the presumption of a fellow who had no right to take such an attitude, and whose insolence deserved a prompt and sharp castigation. But David never thirsted for the blood of foes. Even while the rocks were echoing Shimei's charges, David gave very remarkable evidence of the spirit of a chastened child of God. He showed the same forbearance that he had shown twice on former occasions in sparing the life of Saul. "Why," asked Abishai, "should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go, I pray thee, and take off his head." "So let him curse," was David's answer, "because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." It was but partially true that the Lord had told him to do so. The Lord had only permitted him to do it; He had only placed David in circumstances which allowed Shimei to pour out

his insolence. This use of the expression, "The Lord hath said unto him," may be a useful guide to its true meaning in some passages of Scripture where it has seemed at first as if God gave very strange directions. The pretext that Providence had afforded to Shimei was this, "Behold, my son, which came out of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more then may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." It is touching to remark how keenly David felt this dreadful trial as coming from his own son.

So the struck eagle stretched upon the plain,
No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart
That winged the shaft that quivered in his heart,
Keen were his pangs, but keener far to feel
He nursed the pinion which impelled the steel;
While the same plumage that had warmed his nest
Drank the last lifedrop of his bleeding breast."

But even the fact that it was his own son that was the author of all his present calamities would not have made David so meek under the outrage of Shimei if he had not felt that God was using such men as instruments to chastise him for his sins. For though God had never said to Shimei, "Curse David," He had let him become an instrument of chastisement and humiliation against him. It was the fact of his being such an instrument in God's hands that made the King so unwilling to interfere with him. David's reverence for God's appointment was like that which afterwards led our Lord to say, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink of it?" Unlike though David and Jesus were in the cause of their sufferings, yet there is a remarkable resemblance in their bearing under them. The meek resignation of David as he went out from the holy city had a strong resemblance to the meek resignation of Jesus as He was being led from the same city to Calvary. The gentle consideration of David for the welfare of his people as he toiled up Mount Olivet was parallel to the same feeling of Jesus expressed to the daughters of Jerusalem as He toiled up to Calvary. The forbearance of David to Shimei was like the spirit of the prayer—"Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." The overawing sense that God had ordained their sufferings was similar in both. David owed his sufferings solely to himself; Jesus owed His solely to the relation in which He had placed Himself to sinners as the Sin-bearer. It is beautiful to see David so meek and lowly under the sense of his sins—breathing the spirit of the prophet's words, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

There was another thought in David's mind that helped him to bear his sufferings with meek submission. It is this that is expressed in the words, "It may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." He felt that, as coming from the hand of God, all that he had suffered was just and righteous. He had done wickedly, and he deserved to be humbled and chastened by God, and by such instruments as God might appoint. But the particular words and acts of these instruments might be highly unjust to him: though Shimei was God's instrument for humiliating him, yet the curses of Shimei were alike unrighteous and outrageous; the charge that he had shed the blood of Saul's house, and seized Saul's kingdom

by violence, was outrageously false; but it was better to bear the wrong, and leave the rectifying of it in God's hands; for God detests unfair dealing, and when His servants receive it He will look to it and redress it in His own time and way. And this is a very important and valuable consideration for those servants of God who are exposed to abusive language and treatment from scurrilous opponents, or, what is too common in our day, scurrilous newspapers. If injustice is done them, let them, like David, trust to God to redress the wrong; God is a God of justice, and God will not see them treated unjustly. And hence that remarkable statement which forms a sort of appendix to the seven beatitudes—"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely for My name's sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you."

Ere we return to Jerusalem to witness the progress of events in Absalom's camp and cabinet, let us accompany David to his resting-place beyond the Jordan. Through the counsel of Hushai, afterwards to be considered, he had reached the plains of Jordan in safety; had accomplished the passage of the river, and traversed the path on the other side as far as Mahanaim, somewhere to the south of the Lake of Gennesareth, the place where Ishbosheth had held his court. It was a singular mercy that he was able to accomplish this journey, which in the condition of his followers must have occupied several days, without opposition in front or molestation in his rear. Tokens of the Lord's loving care were not wanting to encourage him on the way. It must have been a great relief to him to learn that Ahithophel's proposal of an immediate pursuit had been arrested through the counsel of Hushai. It was a further token for good, that the lives of the priests' sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, which had been endangered as they bore tidings for him, had been mercifully preserved. After learning the result of Hushai's counsel, they proceeded, incautiously perhaps, to reach David, and were observed and pursued. But a friendly woman concealed them in a well, as Rahab the harlot had hid the spies in the roof of her house; and though they ran a great risk, they contrived to reach David's camp in peace.

And when David reached Mahanaim, where he halted to await the course of events, Shobi, the son of Nahash, king of Ammon, and Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David and for the people that were with him to eat; for they said, "The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness." Some of those who thus befriended him were only requiting former favours. Shobi may be supposed to have been ashamed of his father's insulting conduct when David sent messengers to comfort him on his father's death. Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, was the friend who had cared for Mephibosheth, and was doubtless thankful for David's generosity to him. Of Barzillai we know nothing more than is told us here. But David could not have reckoned on the friendship of these men, nor on its taking so useful and practical a turn. The Lord's hand was manifest in the turning of the hearts of these people to him. How hard bestead he and his followers were is but

too apparent from the fact that these supplies were most welcome in their condition. And David must have derived no small measure of encouragement even from these trifling matters; they showed that God had not forgotten him, and they raised the expectation that further tokens of His love and care would not be withheld.

The district where David now was, "the other side of Jordan," lay far apart from Jerusalem and the more frequented places in the country, and, in all probability, it was but little affected by the arts of Absalom. The inhabitants lay under strong obligations to David; in former times they had suffered most from their neighbours, Moab, Ammon, and especially Syria; and now they enjoyed a very different lot, owing to the fact that those powerful nations had been brought under David's rule. It was a fertile district, abounding in all kinds of farm and garden produce, and therefore well adapted to support an army that had no regular means of supply. The people of this district seem to have been friendly to David's cause. The little force that had followed him from Jerusalem would now be largely recruited; and, even to the outward sense, he would be in a far better condition to receive the assault of Absalom than on the day when he left the city.

The third Psalm, according to the superscription—and in this case there seems no cause to dispute it—was composed "when David fled from Absalom his son." It is a psalm of wonderful serenity and perfect trust. It begins with a touching reference to the multitude of the insurgents, and the rapidity with which they increased. Everything confirms the statement that "the conspiracy was strong, and that the people increased continually with Absalom." We seem to understand better why David fled from Jerusalem; even there the great bulk of the people were with the usurper. We see, too, how godless and unbelieving the conspirators were—"Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God." God was cast out of their reckoning as of no consideration in the case; it was all moonshine, his pretended trust in Him. Material forces were the only real power; the idea of God's favour was only cant, or at best but "a devout imagination." But the foundation of his trust was too firm to be shaken either by the multitude of the insurgents or the bitterness of their sneers. "Thou, Lord, art a shield unto me"—ever protecting me, "my glory,"—ever honouring me, "and the lifter up of mine head,"—ever setting me on high because I have known Thy name. No doubt he had felt some tumult of soul when the insurrection began. But prayer brought him tranquillity. "I cried unto God with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill." How real the communion must have been that brought tranquillity to him amid such a sea of trouble! Even in the midst of his agitation he can lie down and sleep, and awake refreshed in mind and body. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that have set themselves against me round about." Faith already sees his enemies defeated and receiving the doom of ungodly men. "Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God; for Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly." And he closes as confidently and serenely as if victory had already come—"Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon Thy people."

If, in this solemn crisis of his history, David is a pattern to us of meek submission, not less is he

a pattern of perfect trust. He is strong in faith, giving glory to God, and feeling assured that what He has promised He is able also to perform. Deeply conscious of his own sin, he at the same time most cordially believes in the word and promise of God. He knows that, though chastened, he is not forsaken. He bows his head in meek acknowledgment of the righteousness of the chastisement; but he lays hold with unwavering trust on the mercy of God. This union of submission and trust is one of priceless value, and much to be sought by every good man. Under the deepest sense of sin and unworthiness, you may rejoice and you ought to rejoice, in the provision of grace. And while rejoicing most cordially in the provision of grace, you ought to be contrite and humble for your sin. You are grievously defective if you want either of these elements. If the sense of sin weighs on you with unbroken pressure, if it keeps you from believing in forgiving mercy, if it hinders you from looking to the cross, to Him who taketh away the sin of the world, there is a grievous defect. If your joy in forgiving mercy has no element of contrition, no chastened sense of unworthiness, there is no less grievous a defect in the opposite direction. Let us try at once to feel our unworthiness, and to rejoice in the mercy that freely pardons and accepts. Let us look to the rock whence we are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we are digged; feeling that we are great sinners, but that the Lord Jesus Christ is a great Saviour; and finding our joy in that faithful saying, ever worthy of all acceptation, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," even the chief.

CHAPTER XXII.

ABSALOM IN COUNCIL.

2 SAMUEL xvi. 15-23; xvii. 1-14, and ver. 23.

WE must now return to Jerusalem, and trace the course of events there on that memorable day when David left it, to flee toward the wilderness, just a few hours before Absalom entered it from Hebron.

When Absalom came to the city, there was no trace of an enemy to oppose him. His supporters in Jerusalem would no doubt go out to meet him, and conduct him to the palace with great demonstrations of delight. Eastern nations are so easily roused to enthusiasm that we can easily believe that, even for Absalom, there would be an overpowering demonstration of loyalty. Once within the palace, he would receive the adherence and congratulations of his friends.

Among these, Hushai the Archite presents himself, having returned to Jerusalem at David's request, and it is to Hushai's honour that Absalom was surprised to see him. He knew him to be too good a man, too congenial with David "his friend," to be likely to follow such a standard as his. There is much to be read between the lines here. Hushai was not only a counsellor, but a friend, of David's. They were probably of kindred feeling in religious matters, earnest in serving God. A man of this sort did not seem to be in his own place among the supporters of Absalom. It was a silent confession by Absalom that his supporters were a godless crew, among whom a man of godliness must be out of his element. The sight of Hushai impressed Absalom as the sight of an earnest Christian in a gambling saloon or on a

racecourse would impress the greater part of worldly men. For even the world has a certain faith in godliness,—to this extent, at least, that it ought to be consistent. You may stretch a point here and there in order to gain favour with worldly men; you may accommodate yourselves to their ways, go to this and to that place of amusement, adopt their tone of conversation, join with them in ridiculing the excesses of this or that godly man or woman; but you are not to expect that by such approaches you will rise in their esteem. On the contrary, you may expect that in their secret hearts they will despise you. A man that acts according to his convictions and in the spirit of what he professes they may very cordially hate, but they are constrained to respect. A man that does violence to the spirit of his religion, in his desire to be on friendly terms with the world and further his interests, and that does many things to please them, they may not hate so strongly, but they will not respect. There is a fitness of things to which the world is sometimes more alive than Christians themselves. Jehoshaphat is not in his own place making a league with Ahab, and going up with him against Ramoth-gilead; he lays himself open to the rebuke of the seer—"Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." There is no New Testament precept needing to be more pondered than this—"Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness? or what fellowship hath Christ with Belial? or what communion hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

But Hushai was not content with putting in a silent appearance for Absalom. When his consistency is challenged, he must repudiate the idea that he has any preference for David; he is a loyal man in this sense, that he attaches himself to the reigning monarch, and as Absalom has received overwhelming tokens in his favour from every quarter, Hushai is resolved to stand by him. But can we justify these professions of Hushai? It is plain enough he went on the principle of fighting Absalom with his own weapons, of paying him with his own coin; Absalom had dissembled so profoundly, he had made treachery, so to speak, so much the current coin of the kingdom, that Hushai determined to use it for his own purposes. Yet, even in these circumstances, the deliberate dissembling of Hushai grates against every tender conscience, and more especially his introduction of the name of Jehovah—"Nay, but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide." Was not this taking the name of the Lord his God in vain? The stratagem had been suggested by David; it was not condemned by the voice of the age; and we are not prepared to say that stratagem is always to be condemned; but surely, in our time, the claims of truth and fair dealing would stamp it as a disreputable device, not sanctified by the end for which it was resorted to, and not worthy the followers of Him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

Having established himself in the confidence of Absalom, Hushai gained a right to be consulted in the deliberations of the day. He enters the room where the new king's counsellors are met, but he finds it a godless assemblage. In planning the most awful wickedness, a cool deliberation prevails that shows how familiar the counsellors are with the ways of sin. "Give counsel among you," says the royal president, "what we shall

do." How different from David's way of opening the business—"Bring hither the ephod, and enquire of the Lord." In Absalom's council help of that kind is neither asked nor desired.

The first to propose a course is Ahithophel, and there is something so revolting in the first scheme which he proposed that we wonder much that such a man should ever have been a counsellor of David. His first piece of advice, that Absalom should publicly take possession of his father's concubines, was designed to put an end to any wavering among the people; it was, according to Eastern ideas, the grossest insult that could be offered to a king, and that king a father, and it would prove that the breach between David and Absalom was irreparable, that it was vain to hope for any reconciliation. They must all make up their minds to take a side, and as Absalom's cause was so popular, it was far the most likely they would side with him. Without hesitation Absalom complied with the advice. It is a proof how hard his heart had become, that he did not hesitate to mock his father by an act which was as disgusting as it was insulting. And what a picture we get of the position of women even in the court of King David! They were slaves in the worst sense of the term, with no right even to guard their virtue, or to protect their persons from the very worst of men; for the custom of the country, when it gave him the throne, gave him likewise the bodies and souls of the women of the harem to do with as he pleased!

The next piece of Ahithophel's counsel was a masterpiece alike of sagacity and of wickedness. He proposed to take a select body of twelve thousand out of the troops that had already flocked to Absalom's standard, and follow the fugitive king. That very night he would set out; and in a few hours they would overtake the king and his handful of defenders; they would destroy no life but the king's only; and thus, by an almost bloodless revolution, they would place Absalom peacefully on the throne. The advantages of the plan were obvious. It was prompt, it seemed certain of success, and it would avoid an unpopular slaughter. So strongly was Ahithophel impressed with the advantages that it seemed impossible that it could be opposed, far less rejected. One element only he left out of his reckoning—that "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord God is round about His people from henceforth even for ever." He forgot how many methods of protecting David God had already employed. From the lion and the bear He had delivered him in his youth, by giving strength to his arm and courage to his heart; from the uncircumcised Philistine He had delivered him by guiding the stone projected from his sling to the forehead of the giant; from Saul, at one time through Michal letting him down from a window; at another, through Jonathan taking his side; at a third, by an invasion of the Philistines calling Saul away; and now He was preparing to deliver him from Absalom by a still different method: by causing the shallow proposal of Hushai to find more favour than the sagacious counsel of Ahithophel.

It must have been a moment of great anxiety to Hushai when the man whose counsel was as the oracle of God sat down amid universal approval, after having propounded the very advice of which he was most afraid. But he shows great coolness and skill in recommending his own course, and in trying to make the worse appear the better reason. He opens with an implied compliment to Ahithophel—his counsel is not good at

this time. It may have been excellent on all other occasions, but the present is an exception. Then he dwells on the warlike character of David and his men, and on the exasperated state of mind in which they might be supposed to be; probably they were at that moment in some cave, where no idea of their numbers could be got, and from which they might make a sudden sally on Absalom's troops; and if, on occasion of an encounter between the two armies, some of Absalom's were to fall, people would take it as a defeat; a panic might seize the army, and his followers might disperse as quickly as they had assembled.

But the concluding stroke was the masterpiece. He knew that vanity was Absalom's besetting sin. The young man that had prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him, that had been accustomed to poll his head from year to year and weigh it with so much care, and whose praise was throughout all Israel for beauty, must be flattered by a picture of the whole host of Israel marshalled around him, and going forth in proud array, with him at its head. "Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground; and of him and of all men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river until there shall not be one small stone left there."

It is with counsel as with many other things: what pleases best is thought best; solid merit gives way to superficial plausibility. The counsel of Hushai pleased better than that of Ahithophel, and so it was preferred. Satan had outwitted himself. He had nursed in Absalom an overweening vanity, intending by its means to overturn the throne of David; and now that very vanity becomes the means of defeating the scheme, and laying the foundation of Absalom's ruin. The turning-point in Absalom's mind seems to have been the magnificent spectacle of the whole of Israel mustered for battle, and Absalom at their head. He was fascinated by the brilliant imagination. How easily may God, when He pleases, defeat the most able schemes of His enemies! He does not need to create weapons to oppose them; He has only to turn their own weapons against themselves. What an encouragement to faith even when the fortunes of the Church are at their lowest ebb! "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

The council is over; Hushai, unspeakably relieved, hastens to communicate with the priests, and through them send messengers to David; Absalom withdraws to delight himself with the thought of the great military muster that is to flock to his standard; while Ahithophel, in high dudgeon, retires to his house. The character of Ahithophel was a singular combination. To deep natural sagacity he united great spiritual blindness and lack of true manliness. He saw at once the

danger to the cause of Absalom in the plan that had been preferred to his own; but it was not that consideration, it was the gross affront to himself that preyed on him, and drove him to commit suicide. "When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass and arose and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father." In his own way he was as much the victim of vanity as Absalom. The one was vain of his person, the other of his wisdom. In each case it was the man's vanity that was the cause of his death. What a contrast Ahithophel was to David in his power of bearing disgrace!—David, though with bowed head, bearing up so bravely, and even restraining his followers from chastising some of those who were so vehemently affronting him; Ahithophel unable to endure life because for once another man's counsel had been preferred to his. Men of the richest gifts have often shown themselves babes in self-control. Ahithophel is the Judas of the New Testament, lays plans for the destruction of his master, and, like Judas, falls almost immediately, by his own hand. "What a mixture," says Bishop Hall, "do we find here of wisdom and madness! Ahithophel will needs hang himself, *there* is madness; he will yet set his house in order, *there* is wisdom. And could it be possible that he that was so wise as to set his house in order was so mad as to hang himself? that he should be so careful to order his house who had no care to order his unruly passions? that he should care for his house who cared not for his body or his soul? How vain is it for man to be wise if he is not wise in God. How preposterous are the cares of idle worldlings, that prefer all other things to themselves, and while they look at what they have in their coffers forget what they have in their breasts."

This council-chamber of Absalom is full of material for profitable reflection. The manner in which he was turned aside from the way of wisdom and safety is a remarkable illustration of our Lord's principle—"If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." We are accustomed to view this principle chiefly in its relation to moral and spiritual life; but it is applicable likewise even to worldly affairs. Absalom's eye was not single. Success, no doubt, was the chief object at which he aimed, but another object was the gratification of his vanity. This inferior object was allowed to come in and disturb his judgment. If Absalom had had a single eye, even in a worldly sense, he would have felt profoundly that the one thing to be considered was, how to get rid of David and establish himself firmly on the throne. But instead of studying this one thing with firm and immovable purpose, he allowed the vision of a great muster of troops commanded by himself to come in, and so to distract his judgment that he gave his decision for the latter course. No doubt he thought that his position was so secure that he could afford the few days' delay which this scheme involved. All the same, it was this disturbing element of personal vanity that gave a twist to his vision, and led him to the conclusion which lost him everything.

For even in worldly things, singleness of eye is a great help towards a sound conclusion. "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." And if this rule hold true in the worldly sphere, much more in the moral and spiritual. It is when you have the profoundest desire to do what is right

that you are in the best way to know what is wise. In the service of God you are grievously liable to be distracted by private feelings and interests of your own. It is when these private interests assert themselves that you are most liable to lose the clear line of duty and of wisdom. You wish to do God's will, but at the same time you are very unwilling to sacrifice this interest, or expose yourself to that trouble. Thus your own feeling becomes a screen that dims your vision, and prevents you from seeing the path of duty and wisdom alike. You have not a clear sight of the right path. You live in an atmosphere of perplexity; whereas men of more single purpose, and more regardless of their own interests, see clearly and act wisely. Was there anything more remarkable in the Apostle Paul than the clearness of his vision, the decisive yet admirable way in which he solved perplexing questions, and the high practical wisdom that guided him throughout? And is not this to be connected with his singleness of eye, his utter disregard of personal interests in his public life—his entire devotion to the will and to the service of his Master. From that memorable hour on the way to Damascus, when he put the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" onward to the day when he laid his head on the block in imperial Rome, the one interest of his heart, the one thought of his mind, was to do the will of Christ. Never was an eye more single, and never was a body more full of light.

But again, from that council-chamber of Absalom and its results we learn how all projects founded on godlessness and selfishness carry in their bosom the elements of dissolution. They have no true principle of coherence, no firm, binding element, to secure them against disturbing influences arising from further manifestations of selfishness on the part of those engaged in them. Men may be united by selfish interest in some undertaking up to a certain point, but, like a rocket in the air, selfishness is liable to burst up in a thousand different directions, and then the bond of union is destroyed. The only bond of union that can resist distracting tendencies is an immovable regard to the will of God, and, in subordination thereto, to the welfare of men. In our fallen world it is seldom—rather, it is never—that any great enterprise is undertaken and carried forward on grounds where selfishness has no place whatever. But we may say this very confidently, that the more an undertaking is based on regard to God's will and the good of men, the more stability and true prosperity will it enjoy; whereas every element of selfishness or self-seeking that may be introduced into it is an element of weakness, and tends to its dissolution. The remark is true of Churches and religious societies, of religious movements and political movements too.

Men that are not overawed, as it were, by a supreme regard to the will of God; men to whom the consideration of that will is not strong enough at once to smite down every selfish feeling that may arise in their minds, will always be liable to desire some object of their own rather than the good of the whole. They will begin to complain if they are not sufficiently considered and honoured. They will allow jealousies and suspicions towards those who have most influence to arise in their hearts. They will get into caves to aid their discontent with those like-minded. All this tends to weakness and dissolution. Selfishness is the serpent that comes crawling into many a hopeful garden, and brings with it division and desolation. In private life,

it should be watched and thwarted as the grievous foe of all that is good and right. The same course should be taken with regard to it in all the associations of Christians. And it is Christian men only that are capable of uniting on grounds so high and pure as to give some hope that this evil spirit will not succeed in disuniting them—that is to say, men who feel and act on the obligations under which the Lord Jesus Christ has placed them; men that feel that their own redemption, and every blessing they have or hope to have, come through the wonderful self-denial of the Son of God, and that if they have the faintest right to His holy name they must not shrink from the like self-denial. It is a happy thing to be able to adopt as our rule—“None of us liveth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord’s.” The more this rule prevails in Churches and Christian societies, the more will there be of union and stability too; but with its neglect, all kinds of evil and trouble will come in, and very probably, disruption and dissolution in the end.

CHAPTER XXIII.

2 SAMUEL xviii. 1-18.

ABSALOM’S DEFEAT AND DEATH.

WHATEVER fears of defeat and destruction might occasionally flit across David’s soul between his fight from Jerusalem and the battle in the wood of Ephraim, it is plain both from his actions and from his songs that his habitual frame was one of serenity and trust. The number of psalms ascribed to this period of his life may be in excess of the truth; but that his heart was in near communion with God all the time we cannot doubt. Situated as his present refuge was not far from Peniel, where Jacob had wrestled with the angel, we may believe that there were wrestlings again in the neighbourhood not unworthy to be classed with that from which Peniel derived its memorable name.

In the present emergency the answer to prayer consisted, first, in the breathing-time secured by the success of Hushai’s counsel; second, in the countenance and support of the friends raised up to David near Mahanaim and last, not least, in the spirit of wisdom and harmony with which all the arrangements were made for the inevitable encounter. Every step was taken with prudence, while every movement of his opponents seems to have been a blunder. It was wise in David, as we have already seen, to cross the Jordan and retire into Gilead; it was wise in him to make Mahanaim his headquarters; it was wise to divide his army into three parts, for a reason that will presently be seen; and it was wise to have a wood in the neighbourhood of the battlefield, though it could not have been foreseen how this was to bear on the individual on whose behalf the insurrection had taken place.

By this time the followers of David had grown to the dimensions of an army. We are furnished with no means of knowing its actual number. Josephus puts it at four thousand, but, judging from some casual expressions (“David set captains of hundreds and *captains of thousands* over them,” ver. 1; “Now thou art worth *ten thousand* of us,” ver. 3; “The people came by

thousands,” ver. 4), we should infer that David’s force amounted to a good many thousands. The division of the army into three parts, however, reminding us, as it does, of Gideon’s division of his little force into three, would seem to imply that David’s force was far inferior in number to Absalom’s. The insurrectionary army must have been very large, and stretching over a great breadth of country, would have presented far too wide a line to be effectually dealt with by a single body of troops, comparatively small. Gideon had divided his handful into three that he might make a simultaneous impression on three different parts of the Midianite host, and thus contribute the better to the defeat of the whole. So David divided his army into three, that, meeting Absalom’s at three different points, he might prevent a concentration of the enemy that would have swallowed up his whole force. David had the advantage of choosing his ground, and his military instinct and long experience would doubtless enable him to do this with great effect. His three generals were able and valuable leaders. The aged king was prepared to take part in the battle, believing that his presence would be helpful to his men; but the people would not allow him to run the risk. Aged and somewhat infirm as he seems to have been, wearied with his flight, and weakened with the anxieties of so distressing an occasion, the excitement of the battle might have proved too much for him, even if he had escaped the enemy’s sword. Besides, everything depended on him; if his place were discovered by the enemy, their hottest assault would be directed to it; and if he should fall, there would be left no cause to fight for. “It is better,” they said to him, “that thou succour us out of the city.” What kind of succour could he render there? Only the succour that Moses and his two attendants rendered to Israel in the fight with Amalek in the wilderness, when Moses held up his hands, and Aaron and Hur propped them up. He might pray for them; he could do no more.

By this time Absalom had probably obtained the great object of his ambition; he had mustered Israel from Dan to Beersheba, and found himself at the head of an array very magnificent in appearance, but, like most Oriental gatherings of the kind, somewhat unwieldy and unworkable. This great conglomeration was now in the immediate neighbourhood of Mahanaim, and must have seemed as if by sheer weight of material it would crush any force that could be brought against it. We read that the battle took place “in the wood of Ephraim.” This could not be a wood in the tribe of Ephraim, for that was on the other side of Jordan, but a wood in Gilead, that for some reason unknown to us had been called by that name. The whole region is still richly wooded, and among its prominent trees is one called the prickly oak. A *dense* wood would obviously be unsuitable for battle, but a wooded district, with clumps here and there, especially on the hill-sides, and occasional trees and brushwood scattered over the plains, would present many advantages to a smaller force opposing the onset of a larger. In the American war of 1755 some of the best troops of England were nearly annihilated in a wood near Pittsburg in Pennsylvania, the Indians levelling their rifles unseen from behind the trees, and discharging them with yells that were even more terrible than their weapons. We may fancy the three battalions of David making a vigorous onslaught on Absalom’s troops as they advanced into the wooded

country, and when they began to retreat through the woods, and got entangled in brushwood, or jammed together by thickset trees, discharging arrows at them, or falling on them with the sword, with most disastrous effect. "There was a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle there was scattered over the face of all the country, and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." Many of David's men were probably natives of the country, and in their many encounters with the neighbouring nations had become familiar with the warfare of "the bush." Here was one benefit of the choice of Mahanaim by David as his rallying-ground. The people that joined him from that quarter knew the ground, and knew how to adapt it to fighting purposes; the most of Absalom's forces had been accustomed to the bare wadies and limestone rocks of Western Palestine, and, when caught in the thickets, could neither use their weapons nor save themselves by flight.

Very touching if not very business-like, had been David's instructions to his generals about Absalom: "The king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom." It is interesting to observe that David fully expects to win. There is no hint of any alternative, as if Absalom would not fall into their hands. David knows that he is going to conquer, as well as he knew it when he went against the giant. The confidence which is breathed in the third Psalm is apparent here. Faith saw his enemies already defeated. "Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone; Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon Thy people." In a pitched battle, God could not give success to a godless crew, whose whole enterprise was undertaken to drive God's anointed one from his throne. Temporary and partial successes they might have, but final success it was morally impossible for God to accord. It was not the spirit of his own troops, nor the undisciplined condition of the opposing host, that inspired this confidence, but the knowledge that there was a God in Israel, who would not suffer His anointed to perish, nor the impious usurper to triumph over him.

We cannot tell whether Absalom was visited with any misgivings as to the result before the battle began. Very probably he was not. Having no faith in God, he would make no account whatever of what David regarded as the Divine palladium of his cause. But if he entered on the battle confident of success, his anguish is not to be conceived when he saw his troops yield to panic, and, in wild disorder, try to dash through the wood. Dreadful miseries must have overwhelmed him. He does not appear to have made any attempt to rally his troops. Riding on a mule, in his haste to escape, he probably plunged into some thick part of the wood, where his head came in contact with a mass of prickly oak; struggling to make a way through it, he only entangled his hair more hopelessly in the thicket; then, raising himself in the saddle to attack it with his hands, his mule went from under him, and left him hanging between heaven and earth, maddened by pain, enraged at the absurdity of his plight, and storming against his attendants, none of whom was near him in his time of need. Nor was this the worst

of it. Absalom was probably among the foremost of the fugitives, and we can hardly suppose but that many of his own people fled that way after him. Could it be that all of them were so eager to escape that not one of them would stop to help their king? What a contrast the condition of Absalom when fortune turned against him to that of his father! Dark though David's trials had been, and seemingly desperate his position, he had not been left alone in its sudden horrors; the devotion of strangers, as well as the fidelity of a few attached friends, had cheered him, and had the worst disaster befallen him, had his troops been routed and his cause ruined, there were warm and bold hearts that would not have deserted him in his extremity, that would have formed a wall around him, and with their lives defended his grey hairs. But when the hour of calamity came to Absalom it found him alone. Even Saul had his armour-bearer at his side when he fled over Gilboa; but neither armour-bearer nor friend attended Absalom as he fled from the battle of the wood of Ephraim. It would have been well for him if he had really gained a few of the many hearts he stole. Much though moralists tell us of the heartlessness of the world in the hour of adversity, we should not have expected to light on so extreme a case of it. We can hardly withhold a tear at the sight of the unhappy youth, an hour ago with thousands eager to obey him, and a throne before him, apparently secure from danger; now hanging helpless between earth and heaven, with no companion but an evil conscience, and no prospect but the judgment of an offended God.

A recent writer, in his "History of the English People" (Green), when narrating the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, powerfully describes the way of Providence in suffering a career of unexampled wickedness and ambition to go on from one degree of prosperity to another, till the moment of doom arrives, when all is shattered by a single blow. There was long delay, but "the hour of reckoning at length arrived. Slowly the hand had crawled along the dial-plate, slowly as if the event would never come; and wrong was heaped on wrong, and oppression cried, and it seemed as if no ear had heard its voice, till the measure of the wickedness was at length fulfilled. The finger touched the hour; and as the strokes of the great hammer rang out above the nation, in an instant the whole fabric of iniquity was shivered to ruins."

This hour had now come to Absalom. He had often been reproved, but had hardened his heart, and was now to be destroyed, and that without remedy. In the person of Joab, God found a fitting instrument for carrying His purpose into effect. The character of Joab is something of a riddle. We cannot say that he was altogether a bad man, or altogether without the fear of God. Though David bitterly complained of him in some things, he must have valued him on the whole, for during the whole of his reign Joab had been his principal general. That he wanted all tenderness of heart seems very plain. That he was subject to vehement and uncontrollable impulses, in the heat of which fearful deeds of blood were done by him, but done in what seemed to him the interest of the public, is also clear. There is no evidence that he was habitually savage or grossly selfish. When David charged him and the other generals to deal tenderly with the young man Absalom, it is quite possible that he was minded to do so. But in the excitement of the battle, that uncontrollable impulse seized him which urged

him to the slaughter of Amasa and Abner. The chance of executing judgment on the arch-rebel who had caused all this misery, and been guilty of crimes never before heard of in Israel, and thus ending for ever an insurrection that might have dragged its slow length along for harassing years to come, was too much for him. "How could you see Absalom hanging in an oak and not put an end to his mischievous life?" he asks the man that tells him he had seen him in that plight. And he has no patience with the man's elaborate apology. Seizing three darts, he rushes to the place, and thrusts them through Absalom's heart. And his ten armour-bearers finish the business with their swords. We need not suppose that he was altogether indifferent to the feelings of David; but he may have been seized by an overwhelming conviction that Absalom's death was the only effectual way of ending this most guilty and pernicious insurrection, and so preserving the country from ruin. Absalom living, whether banished or imprisoned, would be a constant and fearful danger. Absalom dead, great though the king's distress for the time might be, would be the very salvation of the country. Under the influence of this conviction he thrust the three darts through his heart, and he allowed his attendants to hew that comely body to pieces, till the fair form that all had admired so much became a mere mass of hacked and bleeding flesh. But whatever may have been the process by which Joab found himself constrained to disregard the king's order respecting Absalom, it is plain that to his dying day David never forgave him.

The mode of Absalom's death, and also the mode of his burial, were very significant. It had probably never happened to any warrior, or to any prince, to die from a similar cause. And but for the vanity that made him think so much of his bodily appearance, and especially of his hair, death would never have come to him in such a form. Vanity of one's personal appearance is indeed a weakness rather than a crime. It would be somewhat hard to punish it directly, but it is just the right way of treating it, to make it punish itself. And so it was in the case of Absalom. His bitterest enemy could have desired nothing more ludicrously tragical than to see those beautiful locks fastening him as with a chain of gold to the arm of the scaffold, and leaving him dangling there like the most abject malefactor. And what of the beautiful face and handsome figure that often, doubtless, led his admirers to pronounce him every inch a king? So slashed and mutilated under the swords of Joab's ten men, that no one could have told that it was Absalom that lay there. This was God's judgment on the young man's vanity.

The mode of his burial is particularly specified. "They took Absalom and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him; and all Israel fled every one to his tent." The purpose of this seems to have been to show that Absalom was deemed worthy of the punishment of the rebellious son, as appointed by Moses; and a more significant expression of opinion could not have been given. The punishment for the son who remained incorrigibly rebellious was to be taken beyond the walls of the city, and stoned to death. It is said by Jewish writers that this punishment was never actually inflicted, but the mode of Absalom's burial was fitted to show that he at least was counted as deserving of it. The ignominious treatment of that graceful body, which he adorned and set off with such care, did

not cease even after it was gashed by the weapons of the young men; no place was found for it in the venerable cave of Machpelah; it was not even laid in the family sepulchre at Jerusalem, but cast ignominiously into a pit in the wood; it was bruised and pounded by stones, and left to rot there, like the memory of its possessor, and entail eternal infamy on the place. What a lesson to all who disown the authority of parents! What a warning to all who cast away the cords of self-restraint! It is said by Jewish writers that every by-passer was accustomed to throw a stone on the heap that covered the remains of Absalom, and as he threw it to say, "Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom; and cursed for ever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents!"

And here it may be well to say a word to children. You all see the lesson that is taught, by the doom of Absalom, and you all feel that in that doom, terrible though it was, he just reaped what he had sowed. You see the seed of his offence, disobedience to parents, bringing forth the most hideous fruit, and receiving in God's providence a most frightful punishment. You see it without excuse and without palliation; for David had been a kind father, and had treated Absalom better than he deserved. Mark, then, that this is the final fruit of that spirit of disobedience to parents which often begins with very little offences. These little offences are big enough to show that you prefer your own will to the will of your parents. If you had a just and true respect for their authority, you would guard against little transgressions—you would make conscience of obeying in all things great and small. Then remember that every evil habit must have a beginning, and very often it is a small beginning. By imperceptible stages it may grow and grow, till it becomes a hideous vice, like this rebellion of Absalom. Nip it in the bud; if you don't, who can tell whether it may not grow to something terrible, and at last brand you with the brand of Absalom?

If this be the lesson to children from the doom of Absalom, the lesson to parents is not less manifest from the case of David. The early battle between the child's will and the parent's is often very difficult and trying; but God is on the parent's side, and will give him the victory if he seeks it aright. It certainly needs great vigilance, wisdom, patience, firmness, and affection. If you are careless and unwatchful, the child's will will speedily assert itself. If you are foolish, and carry discipline too far, if you thwart the child at every point, instead of insisting on one thing, or perhaps a few things, at a time, you will weary him and weary yourself without success. If you are fitful, insisting at one time and taking no heed at another, you will convey the impression of a very elastic law, not entitled to much respect. If you lose your temper, and speak unadvisedly, instead of mildly and lovingly, you will most effectually set the child's temper up against the very thing you wish him to do. If you forget that you are not independent agents, but have got the care of your beloved child from God, and ought to bring him up as in God's stead, and in the most humble and careful dependence on God's grace, you may look for blunder upon blunder in sad succession, with results in the end that will greatly disappoint you. How close every Christian needs to lie to God in the exercise of this sacred trust! And how much, when conscious of weakness and fearing the consequences,

ought he to prize the promise—"My grace is sufficient for thee!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID'S GRIEF FOR ABSALOM.

2 SAMUEL xviii. 19-33; xix. 1-4.

"NEXT to the calamity of losing a battle," a great general used to say, "is that of gaining a victory." The battle in the wood of Ephraim left twenty thousand of King David's subjects dead or dying on the field. It is remarkable how little is made of this dismal fact. Men's lives count for little in time of war, and death, even with its worst horrors, is just the common fate of warriors. Yet surely David and his friends could not think lightly of a calamity that cut down more of the sons of Israel than any battle since the fatal day of Mount Gilboa. Nor could they form a light estimate of the guilt of the man whose inordinate vanity and ambition had cost the nation such a fearful loss.

But all thoughts of this kind were for the moment brushed aside by the crowning fact that Absalom himself was dead. And this fact, as well as the tidings of the victory, must at once be carried to David. Mahanaim, where David was, was probably but a little distance from the field of battle. A friend offered to Joab to carry the news—Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the priest. He had formerly been engaged in the same way, for he was one of those that had brought word to David of the result of Absalom's council, and of other things that were going on in Jerusalem. But Joab did not wish that Ahimaaz should be the bearer of the news. He would not deprive him of the character of king's messenger, but he would employ him as such another time. Meanwhile the matter was entrusted to another man, called in the Authorised Version Cushite, but in the Revised Version the Cushite. Whoever this may have been, he was a simple official, not like Ahimaaz, a personal friend of David. And this seems to have been Joab's reason for employing him. It is evident that physically he was not better adapted to the task than Ahimaaz, for when the latter at last got leave to go he overran the Cushite. But Joab appears to have felt that it would be better that David should receive his first news from a mere official than from a personal friend. The personal friend would be likely to enter into details that the other would not give. It is clear that Joab was ill at ease in reference to his own share in the death of Absalom. He would fain keep that back from David, at least for a time; it would be enough for him at the first to know that the battle had been gained, and that Absalom was dead.

But Ahimaaz was persistent, and after the Cushite had been despatched he carried his point, and was allowed to go. Very graphic is the description of the running of the two men and of their arrival at Mahanaim. The king had taken his place at the gate of the city, and stationed a watchman on the wall above to look out eagerly lest any one should come bringing news of the battle. In those primitive times there was no more rapid way of despatching important news than by a swift well-trained runner on foot. In the clear atmosphere of the East first one man, then another was seen running alone. By-and-bye, the watchman surmised that the foremost of the two

was Ahimaaz; and when the king heard it, remembering his former message, he concluded that such a man must be the bearer of good tidings. As soon as he came within hearing of the king, he shouted out, "All is well." Coming close, he fell on his face and blessed God for delivering the rebels into David's hands. Before thanking him or thanking God, the king showed what was uppermost in his heart by asking, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And here the moral courage of Ahimaaz failed him, and he gave an evasive answer: "When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." When he heard this the king bade him stand aside, till he should hear what the other messenger had to say. And the official messenger was more frank than the personal friend. For when the king repeated the question about Absalom, the answer was, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." The answer was couched in skilful words. It suggested the enormity of Absalom's guilt, and of the danger to the king and the state which he had plotted, and the magnitude of the deliverance, seeing that he was now beyond the power of doing further evil.

But such soothing expressions were lost upon the king. The worst fears of his heart were realised—Absalom was dead. Gone from earth for ever, beyond reach of the yearnings of his heart; gone to answer for crimes that were revolting in the sight of God and man. "The king was much moved; and he 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!"

He had been a man of war, a man of the sword; he had been familiar with death, and had seen it once and again in his own family; but the tidings of Absalom's death fell upon him with all the force of a first bereavement. Not more piercing is the wail of the young widow when suddenly the corpse of her beloved is borne into the house, not more overwhelming is her sensation, as if the solid earth were giving way beneath her, than the emotion that now prostrated King David.

Grief for the dead is always sacred; and however unworthy we may regard the object of it, we cannot but respect it in King David. Viewed simply as an expression of his unquenched affection for his son, and separated from its bearing on the interests of the kingdom, and from the air of repining it seemed to carry against the dispensation of God, it showed a marvellously tender and forgiving heart. In the midst of an odious and disgusting rebellion, and with the one object of seeking out his father and putting him to death, the heartless youth had been arrested and had met his deserved fate. Yet so far from showing satisfaction that the arm that had been raised to crush him was laid low in death, David could express no feelings but those of love and longing. Was it not a very wonderful love, coming very near to the feeling of Him who prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," like that "love Divine, all love excelling," that follows the sinner through all his wanderings, and clings to him amid all his rebellions; the love of Him that not merely wished in a moment of excitement that He could die for His guilty children, but did die for them, and in dying bore their guilt and took it away, and of which the brief

but matchless record is that "having once loved His own that were with Him in the world, He loved them even unto the end?"

The elements of David's intense agony, when he heard of Absalom's death, were mainly three. In the first place, there was the loss of his son, of whom he could say that, with all his faults, he loved him still. A dear object had been plucked from his heart, and left it sick, vacant, desolate. A face he had often gazed on with delight lay cold in death. He had not been a good son, he had been very wicked; but affection has always its visions of a better future, and is ready to forgive unto seventy times seven. And then death is so dreadful when it fastens on the young. It seems so cruel to fell to the ground a bright young form; to extinguish by one blow his every joy, every hope, every dream; to reduce him to nothingness, so far as this life is concerned. An infinite pathos, in a father's experience, surrounds a young man's death. The regret, the longing, the conflict with the inevitable, seem to drain him of all energy, and leave him helpless in his sorrow.

Secondly, there was the terrible fact that Absalom had died in rebellion, without expressing one word of regret, without one request for forgiveness, without one act or word that it would be pleasant to recall in time to come, as a foil to the bitterness caused by his unnatural rebellion. Oh, if he had had but an hour to think of his position, to realise the lesson of his defeat, to ask his father's forgiveness, to curse the infatuation of the last few years! How would one such word have softened the sting of his rebellion in his father's breast! What a change it would have given to the aspect of his evil life! But not even the faint vestige of such a thing was even shown; the unmitigated glare of that evil life must haunt his father evermore!

Thirdly, there was the fact that in this rebellious condition he had passed to the judgment of God. What hope could there be for such a man, living and dying as he had done? Where could he be now? Was not "the great pit in the wood," into which his unhonoured carcass had been flung, a type of another pit, the receptacle of his soul? What agony to the Christian heart is like that of thinking of the misery of dear ones who have died impenitent and unpardoned?

To these and similar elements of grief David appears to have abandoned himself without a struggle. But was this right? Ought he not to have made some acknowledgment of the Divine hand in his trial, as he did when Bathsheba's child died? Ought he not to have acted as he did on another occasion, when he said, "I was dumb with silence, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it"? We have seen that in domestic matters he was not accustomed to place himself so thoroughly under the control of the Divine will as in the more public business of his life; and now we see that, when his parental feelings are crushed, he is left without the steady influence of submission to the will of God. And in the agony of his private grief he forgets the public welfare of the nation. Noble and generous though the wish be, "Would God I had died for thee," it was on public grounds out of the question. Let us imagine for one moment the wish realised. David has fallen and Absalom survives. What sort of kingdom would it have been? What would have been the fate of the gallant men who had defended David? What would have been the condition of God's servants throughout the kingdom?

What would have been the influence of so godless a monarch upon the interests of truth and the cause of God? It was a rash and unadvised utterance of affection. But for the rough faithfulness of Joab, the consequences would have been disastrous. "The victory that day was turned into mourning, for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son." Every one was discouraged. The man for whom they had risked their lives had not a word of thanks to any of them, and could think of no one but that vile son of his, who was now dead. In the evening Joab came to him, and in his blunt way swore to him that if he was not more affable to the people they would not remain a night longer in his service. Roused by the reproaches and threatenings of his general, the king did now present himself among them. The people responded and came before him, and the effort he made to show himself agreeable kept them to their allegiance, and led on to the steps for his restoration that soon took place.

But it must have been an effort to abstract his attention from Absalom, and fix it on the brighter results of the battle. And not only that night, in the silence of his chamber, but for many a night, and perhaps many a day, during the rest of his life, the thought of that battle and its crowning catastrophe must have haunted David like an ugly dream. We seem to see him in some still hour of reverie recalling early days;—happy scenes rise around him; lovely children gambol at his side; he hears again the merry laugh of little Tamar, and smiles as he recalls some childish saying of Absalom; he is beginning, as of old, to forecast the future and shape out for them careers of honour and happiness; when, horror of horrors! the spell breaks; the bright vision gives way to dismal realities—Tamar's dishonour, Amnon's murder, Absalom's insurrection, and, last not least, Absalom's death, glare in the field of memory! Who will venture to say that David did not smart for his sins? Who that reflects would be willing to take the cup of sinful indulgence from his hands, sweet though it was in his mouth, when he sees it so bitter in the belly?

Two remarks may appropriately conclude this chapter, one with reference to grief from bereavements in general, the other with reference to the grief that may arise to Christians in connection with the spiritual condition of departed children.

1. With reference to grief from bereavements in general, it is to be observed that they will prove either a blessing or an evil according to the use to which they are turned. All grief in itself is a weakening thing—weakening both to the body and the mind, and it were a great error to suppose that it *must* do good in the end. There are some who seem to think that to resign themselves to overwhelming grief is a token of regard to the memory of the departed, and they take no pains to counteract the depressing influence. It is a painful thing to say, yet it is true, that a long-continued manifestation of overwhelming grief, instead of exciting sympathy, is more apt to cause annoyance. Not only does it depress the mourner himself, and unfit him for his duties to the living, but it depresses those that come in contact with him, and makes them think of him with a measure of impatience. And this suggests another remark. It is not right to obtrude our grief overmuch on others, especially if we are in a public position. Let us take example in this respect from our blessed Lord. Was any sorrow like unto His sorrow?

Yet how little did He obtrude it even on the notice of His disciples! It was towards the end of His ministry before He even began to tell them of the dark scenes through which He was to pass; and even when He did tell them how He was to be betrayed and crucified, it was not to court their sympathy, but to prepare them for their part of the trial. And when the overwhelming agony of Gethsemane drew on, it was only three of the twelve that were permitted to be with Him. All such considerations show that it is a more Christian thing to conceal our griefs than to make others uncomfortable by obtruding them upon their notice. David was on the very eve of losing the affections of those who had risked everything for him, by abandoning himself to anguish for his private loss, and letting his distress for the dead interfere with his duty to the living.

And how many things are there to a Christian mind fitted to abate the first sharpness even of a great bereavement. Is it not the doing of a Father, infinitely kind? Is it not the doing of Him "who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all"? You say you can see no light through it,—it is dark, all dark, fearfully dark. Then you ought to fall back on the inscrutability of God. Hear Him saying, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Resign yourself patiently to His hands, till He make the needed revelation, and rest assured that when it is made it will be worthy of God. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Meanwhile, be impressed with the vanity of this life, and the infinite need of a higher portion. "Set your affection on things above, and not on the things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your Life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

2. The other remark that falls to be made here concerns the grief that may arise to Christians in connection with the spiritual condition of departed children.

When the parent is either in doubt as to the happiness of a beloved one, or has cause to apprehend that the portion of that child is with the unbelievers, the pang which he experiences is one of the most acute which the human heart can know. Now here is a species of suffering which, if not peculiar to believers, falls on them far the most heavily, and is, in many cases, a haunting spectre of misery. The question naturally arises, Is it not strange that their very beliefs, as Christians, subject them to such acute sufferings? If one were a careless, unbelieving man, and one's child died without evidence of grace, one would probably think nothing of it, because the things that are unseen and eternal are never in one's thoughts. But just because one believes the testimony of God on this great subject, one becomes liable to a peculiar agony. Is this not strange indeed?

Yes, there is a mystery in it which we cannot wholly solve. But we must remember that it is in thorough accordance with a great law of Providence, the operation of which, in other matters, we cannot overlook. That law is, that the cultivation and refinement of any organ or faculty, while it greatly increases your capacity of enjoyment, increases at the same time your capacity, and it may be your occasions, of suffering. Let us take, for example, the habit of cleanliness. Where this habit prevails, there is much more enjoyment in

life; but let a person of great cleanliness be surrounded by filth, his suffering is infinitely greater. Or take the cultivation of taste, and let us say of musical taste. It adds to life an immense capacity of enjoyment, but also a great capacity and often much occasion of suffering, because bad music or tasteless music, such as one may often have to endure, creates a misery unknown to the man of no musical culture. To a man of classical taste, bad writing or bad speaking, such as is met with every day, is likewise a source of irritation and suffering. If we advance to a moral and spiritual region, we may see that the cultivation of one's ordinary affections, apart from religion, while on the whole it increases enjoyment, does also increase sorrow. If I lived and felt as a Stoic, I should enjoy family life much less than if I were tender-hearted and affectionate; but when I suffered a family bereavement I should suffer much less. These are simply illustrations of the great law of Providence that culture, while it increases happiness, increases suffering too.—It is a higher application of the same law, that gracious culture, the culture of our spiritual affections under the power of the Spirit of God, in increasing our enjoyment does also increase our capacity of suffering. In reference to that great problem of natural religion, Why should a God of infinite benevolence have created creatures capable of suffering? one answer that has often been given is, that if they had not been capable of suffering they might not have been capable of enjoyment. But in pursuing these inquiries we get into an obscure region, in reference to which it is surely our duty patiently to wait for that increase of light which is promised to us in the second stage of our existence.

Yet still it remains to be asked, What comfort can there possibly be for Christian parents in such a case as David's? What possible consideration can ever reconcile them to the thought that their beloved ones have gone to the world of woe? Are not their children parts of themselves, and how is it possible for them to be completely saved if those who are so identified with them are lost? How can they ever be happy in a future life if eternally separated from those who were their nearest and dearest on earth? On such matters it has pleased God to allow a great cloud to rest which our eyes cannot pierce. We cannot solve this problem. We cannot reconcile perfect personal happiness, even in heaven, with the knowledge that beloved ones are lost. But God must have some way, worthy of Himself, of solving the problem. And we must just wait for His time of revelation. "God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain." The Judge of all the earth must act justly. And the song which will express the deepest feelings of the redeemed, when from the sea of glass, mingled with fire, they look back on the ways of Providence toward them, will be this: "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty: *just and true are all Thy ways*, Thou King of saints. Who would not fear Thee and glorify Thy name, for Thou only art holy?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RESTORATION.

2 SAMUEL xix. 5-30.

To rouse one's self from the prostration of grief, and grapple anew with the cares of life, is hard

indeed. Among the poorer classes of society, it is hardly possible to let grief have its swing; amid suppressed and struggling emotions the poor man must return to his daily toil. The warrior, too, in the heat of conflict has hardly time to drop a tear over the tomb of his comrade or his brother. But where leisure is possible, the bereaved heart does crave a time of silence and solitude; and it seems reasonable, in order that its fever may subside a little, before the burden of daily work is resumed. It was somewhat hard upon David, then, that his grief could not get a single evening to flow undisturbed. A rough voice called him to rouse himself, and speak comfortably to his people, otherwise they would disband before morning, and all that he had gained would be lost to him again. In the main, Joab was no doubt right; but in his manner there was a sad lack of consideration for the feelings of the king. He might have remembered that, though he had gained a battle, David had lost a son, and that, too, under circumstances peculiarly heart-breaking. Faithful in the main and shrewd as Joab was, he was no doubt a useful officer; but his harshness and want of feeling went far to neutralise the benefit of his services. It ought surely to be one of the benefits of civilisation and culture that, where painful duties have to be done, they should be done with much consideration and tenderness. For the real business of life is not so much to get right things done in any way, as to diffuse a right spirit among men, and get them to do things well. Men of enlightened goodness will always aim at purifying the springs of conduct, at increasing virtue, and deepening faith and holiness. The call to the royal bridegroom in the forty-fifth Psalm is to "gird his sword on his thigh, and ride forth prosperously, *because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness.*" To increase these three things is to increase the true wealth of nations and advance the true prosperity of kingdoms. In his eagerness to get a certain thing done, Joab showed little or no regard for those higher interests to which outward acts should ever be subordinate.

But David felt the call of duty—"He arose and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent." And very touching it must have been to look on the sad, pale, wasted face of the king, and mark his humble, chastened bearing, and yet to receive from him words of winning kindness that showed him still caring for them and loving them, as a shepherd among his sheep; in no wise exasperated by the insurrection, not breathing forth threatenings and slaughter on those who had taken part against him; but concerned as ever for the welfare of the whole kingdom, and praying for Jerusalem, for his brethren and companions' sakes, "Peace be within thee."

It was now open to him to follow either of two courses: either to march to Jerusalem at the head of his victorious army, take military possession of the capital, and deal with the remains of the insurrection in the stern fashion common among kings; or to wait till he should be invited back to the throne from which he had been driven, and then magnanimously proclaim an amnesty to all the rebels. We are not surprised that he preferred the latter alternative. It is more agreeable to any man to be offered what is justly due to him by those who have deprived him of it than to have to claim it as his right. It was far more like him to return in peace than in that vengeful spirit that

must have hecatombs of rebels slain to satisfy it. The people knew that David was in no bloodthirsty mood. And it was natural for him to expect that an advance would be made to him, after the frightful wrong which he had suffered from the people. He was therefore in no haste to leave his quarters at Mahanaim.

The movement that he looked for did take place, but it did not originate with those who might have been expected to take the lead. It was among the ten tribes of Israel that the proposal to bring him back was first discussed, and his own tribe, the tribe of Judah, held back after the rest were astir. He was much chagrined at this backwardness on the part of Judah. It was hard that his own tribe should be the last to stir, that those who might have been expected to head the movement should lag behind. But in this David was only experiencing the same thing as the Son of David a thousand years after, when the people of Nazareth, His own city, not only refused to listen to Him, but were about to hurl Him over the edge of a precipice. So important, however, did he see it to be for the general welfare that Judah should share the movement, that he sent Zadok and Abiathar the priests to stir them up to their duty. He would not have taken this step but for his jealousy for the honour of Judah; it was the fact that the movement was now going on in some places and not in all that induced him to interfere. He dreaded disunion in any case, especially a disunion between Judah and Israel. For the jealousy between these two sections of the people that afterwards broke the kingdom into two under Jeroboam was now beginning to show itself, and indeed led soon after to the revolt of Sheba.

Another step was taken by David, of very doubtful expediency, in order to secure the more cordial support of the rebels. He superseded Joab, and gave the command of his army to Amasa, who had been general of the rebels. In more ways than one this was a strong measure. To supersede Joab was to make for himself a very powerful enemy, to rouse a man whose passions, when thoroughly excited, were capable of any crime. But on the other hand, David could not but be highly offended with Joab for his conduct to Absalom, and he must have looked on him as a very unsuitable coadjutor to himself in that policy of clemency that he had determined to pursue. This was significantly brought out by the appointment of Amasa in room of Joab. Both were David's nephews, and both were of the tribe of Judah; but Amasa had been at the head of the insurgents, and therefore in close alliance with the insurgents of Judah. Most probably the reason why the men of Judah hung back was that they were afraid lest, if David were restored to Jerusalem, he would make an example of them; for it was at Hebron, in the tribe of Judah, that Absalom had been first proclaimed, and the people of Jerusalem who had favoured him were mostly of that tribe. But when it became known that the leader of the rebel forces was not only not to be punished, but actually promoted to the highest office in the king's service, all fears of that sort were completely scattered. It was an act of wonderful clemency. It was such a contrast to the usual treatment of rebels! But this king was not like other kings; he gave gifts even to the rebellious. There was no limit to his generosity. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Accordingly a new sense of the goodness and generosity of their ill-treated but noble king took possession of the people. "He

bowed the heart of the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man, so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants." From the extreme of backwardness they started to the extreme of forwardness; the last to speak for David, they were the first to act for him; and such was their vehemence in his cause that the evil of national disunion which David dreaded from their indifference actually sprang from their over-impetuous zeal.

Thus at length David bade farewell to Mahanaim, and began his journey to Jerusalem. His route in returning was the reverse of that followed in his flight. First he descends the eastern bank of the Jordan as far as opposite Gilgal; then he strikes up through the wilderness the steep ascent to Jerusalem. At Gilgal several events of interest took place.

The first of these was the meeting with the representatives of Judah, who came to conduct the king over Jordan, and to offer him their congratulations and loyal assurances. This step was taken by the men of Judah alone, and without consultation or co-operation with the other tribes. A ferry-boat to convey the king's household over the river, and whatever else might be required to make the passage comfortable, these men of Judah provided. Some have blamed the king for accepting these attentions from Judah, instead of inviting the attendance of all the tribes. But surely, as the king had to pass the Jordan, and found the means of transit provided for him, he was right to accept what was offered. Nevertheless, this act of Judah and its acceptance by David gave serious offence, as we shall presently see, to the other tribes.

Neither Judah nor Israel comes out well in this little incident. We get an instructive glimpse of the hot-headedness of the tribes, and the childishness of their quarrels. It is members of the same nation a thousand years afterwards that on the very eve of the Crucifixion we see disputing among themselves which of them should be the greatest. Men never appear in a dignified attitude when they are contending that on some occasion or other they have been treated with too little consideration. And yet how many of the quarrels of the world, both public and private, have arisen from this, that some one did not receive the attention which he deserved! Pride lies at the bottom of it all. And quarrels of this kind will sometimes, nay often, be found even among men calling themselves the followers of Christ. If the blessed Lord Himself had acted on this principle, what a different life He would have led! If He had taken offence at every want of etiquette, at every want of the honour due to the Son of God, when would our redemption ever have been accomplished? Was His mother treated with due consideration when forced into the stable, because there was no room for her in the inn? Was Jesus Himself treated with due honour when the people of Nazareth took Him to the brow of the lill, or when the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head? What if He had resented the denial of Peter, the treachery of Judas, and the forsaking of Him by all the apostles? How admirable was the humility that made Himself of no reputation, so that when He was reviled He reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously! Yet how utterly opposite is the bearing of many, who are ever ready to take of-

fence if anything is omitted to which they have a claim—standing upon their rights, claiming precedence over this one and the other, maintaining that it would never do to allow themselves to be trampled on, thinking it spirited to contend for their honours! It is because this tendency is so deeply seated in human nature that you need to be so watchful against it. It breaks out at the most unseasonable times. Could any time have been more unsuitable for it on the part of the men of Israel and Judah than when the king was giving them such a memorable example of humility, pardoning every one, great and small, that had offended him, even though their offence was as deadly as could be conceived? Or could any time have been more unsuitable for it on the part of the disciples of our Lord than when He was about to surrender His very life, and submit to the most shameful form of death that could be devised? Why do men not see that the servant is not above his lord, nor the disciple above his master? "Is not the heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?" Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

The next incident at Gilgal was the cringing entreaty of Shimei, the Benjamite, to be pardoned the insult which he had offered the king when he left Jerusalem. The conduct of Shimei had been such an outrage on all decency that we wonder how he could have dared to present himself at all before David, even though, as a sort of screen, he was accompanied by a thousand Benjamites. His prostration of himself on the ground before David, his confession of his sin and abject deprecation of the king's anger, are not fitted to raise him in our estimation; they were the fruits of a base nature that can insult the fallen, but lick the dust off the feet of men in power. It was not till David had made it known that his policy was to be one of clemency that Shimei took this course; and even then he must have a thousand Benjamites at his back before he could trust himself to his mercy. Abishai, Joab's brother, would have had him slain; but his proposal was rejected by David with warmth and even indignation. He knew that his restoration was an accomplished fact, and he would not spoil a policy of forgiveness by shedding the blood of this wicked man. Not content with passing his word to Shimei, "he swore unto him." But he afterwards found that he had carried clemency too far, and in his dying charge to Solomon he had to warn him against this dangerous enemy, and instruct him to bring down his hoar head with blood. But this needs not to make us undervalue the singular quality of heart which led David to show such forbearance to one utterly unworthy. It was a strange thing in the annals of Eastern kingdoms, where all rebellion was usually punished with the most fearful severity. It brings to mind the gentle clemency of the great Son of David in His dealings, a thousand years after, with another Benjamite as he was travelling, on that very route on the way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against His disciples. Was there ever such clemency as that which met the persecutor with the words, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? Only in this case the clemency accomplished its object; in Shimei's case it did not. In the one case the persecutor became the chief of Apostles; in the other he acted more like the evil spirit in the parable, whose last end was worse than the first.

The next incident in the king's return was his meeting with Mephibosheth. He came down to

meet the king, "and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed unto the day when he came again in peace." Naturally, the king's first question was an inquiry why he had not left Jerusalem with him. And Mephibosheth's reply was simply, that he had wished to do so, but, owing to his lameness, had not been able. And, moreover, Ziba had slandered him to the king when he said that Mephibosheth hoped to receive back the kingdom of his grandfather. The words of this poor man had all the appearance of an honest narrative. The ass which he intended to saddle for his own use was probably one of those which Ziba took away to present to David, so that Mephibosheth was left helpless in Jerusalem. If the narrative commends itself by its transparent truthfulness, it shows also how utterly improbable was the story of Ziba, that he had expectations of being made king. For he seems to have been as feeble in mind as he was frail in body, and he undoubtedly carried his compliments to David to a ridiculous pitch when he said, "All my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king." Was that a fit way to speak of his father Jonathan?

We cannot greatly admire one who would depreciate his family to such a degree because he desired to obtain David's favour. And for some reason David was somewhat sharp to him. No man is perfect, and we cannot but wonder that the king who was so gentle to Shimei should have been so sharp to Mephibosheth. "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land." David appears to have been irritated at discovering his mistake in believing Ziba, and hastily transferring Mephibosheth's property to him. Nothing is more common than such irritation, when men discover that through false information they have made a blunder, and gone into some arrangement that must be undone. But why did not the king restore all his property to Mephibosheth? Why say that he and Ziba were to divide it? Some have supposed (as we remarked before) that this meant simply that the old arrangement was to be continued—Ziba to till the ground, and Mephibosheth to receive as his share half the produce. But in that case Mephibosheth would not have added, "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." Our verdict would have been the very opposite.—Let Mephibosheth take all. But David was in a difficulty. The temper of the Benjamites was very irritable; they had never been very cordial to David, and Ziba was an important man among them. There he was, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants, a man not to be hastily set aside. For once the king appeared to prefer the rule of expediency to that of justice. To make some amends for his wrong to Mephibosheth, and at the same time not to turn Ziba into a foe, he resorted to this rough-and-ready method of dividing the land between them. But surely it was an unworthy arrangement. Mephibosheth had been loyal, and should never have lost his land. He had been slandered by Ziba, and therefore deserved some solace for his wrong. David restores but half his land, and has no soothing word for the wrong he has done him. Strange that when so keenly sensible of the wrong done to himself when he lost his kingdom unrighteously, he should not have seen the wrong he had done to Mephibosheth. And strange that when his whole kingdom had been restored to

himself, he should have given back but half to Jonathan's son.

The incident connected with the meeting with Barzillai we reserve for separate consideration.

Amid the greatest possible diversity of circumstance, we are constantly finding parallels in the life of David to that of Him who was his Son according to the flesh. Our Lord can hardly be said to have ever been driven from His kingdom. The hosannahs of to-day were indeed very speedily exchanged into the "Away with Him! away with Him! Crucify Him! crucify Him!" of to-morrow. But what we may remark of our Lord is rather that He has been kept out of His kingdom than driven from it. He who came to redeem the world, and of whom the Father said, "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion," has never been suffered to exercise His sovereignty, at least in a conspicuous manner and on a universal scale. Here is a truth that ought to be a constant source of humiliation and sorrow to every Christian. Are you to be content that the rightful Sovereign should be kept in the background, and the great ruling forces of the world should be selfishness, and mammon, and pleasure, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life? Why speak ye not of bringing the King back to His house? You say you can do so little. But every subject of King David might have said the same. The question is, not whether you are doing much or little, but whether you are doing what you can. Is the exaltation of Jesus Christ to the supreme rule of the world an object dear to you? Is it matter of humiliation and concern to you that He does not occupy that place? Do you humbly try to give it to Him in your own heart and life? Do you try to give it to Him in the Church, in the State, in the world? The supremacy of Jesus Christ must be the great rallying cry of the members of the Christian Church, whatever their denomination. It is a point on which surely all ought to be agreed, and agreement there might bring about agreement in other things. Let us give our minds and hearts to realise in our spheres that glorious plan of which we read in the first chapter of Ephesians: "That, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, God might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DAVID AND BARZILLAI.

2 SAMUEL xix. 31-40.

It is very refreshing to fall in with a man like Barzillai in a record which is so full of wickedness, and without many features of a redeeming character. He is a sample of humanity at its best—one of those men who diffuse radiance and happiness wherever their influence extends. Long before St. Peter wrote his epistle, he had been taught by the one Master to "put away all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil-speakings;" and he had adopted St. Paul's rule for rich men, "that they do good, that

they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate." We cannot well conceive a greater contrast than that between Barzillai and another rich farmer with whom David came in contact at an earlier period of his life—Nabal of Carmel: the one niggardly, beggarly, and bitter, not able even to acknowledge an obligation, far less to devise anything liberal, adding insult to injury when David modestly stated his claim, humiliating him before his messengers, and meeting his request with a flat refusal of everything great or small; the other hastening from his home when he heard of David's distress, carrying with him whatever he could give for the use of the king and his followers, continuing to send supplies while he was at Mahanaim, and now returning to meet him on his way to Jerusalem, conduct him over Jordan, and show his loyalty and goodwill in every available way. While we grieve that there are still so many Nabals, let us bless God that there are Barzillais too.

Of Barzillai's previous history we know nothing. We do not even know where Rogelim, his place of abode, was, except that it was among the mountains of Gilead. The facts stated regarding him are few, but suggestive.

1. He was "a very great man." The expression seems to imply that he was both rich and influential. Dwelling among the hills of Gilead, his only occupation, and main way of becoming rich, must have been as a farmer. The two and a half tribes that settled on the east of the Jordan, while they had a smaller share of national and spiritual privileges, were probably better provided in a temporal sense. That part of the country was richer in pasturage, and therefore better adapted for cattle. It is probable, too, that the allotments were much larger. The kingdoms of Sihon and Og, especially the latter, were of wide extent. If the two and half tribes had been able thoroughly to subdue the original inhabitants, they would have had possessions of great extent and value. Barzillai's ancestors had probably received a valuable and extensive allotment, and had been strong enough and courageous enough to keep it for themselves. Consequently, when their flocks and herds multiplied, they were not restrained within narrow dimensions, but could spread over the mountains round about. But however his riches may have been acquired, Barzillai was evidently a man of very large means. He was rich apparently both in flocks and servants, a kind of chief or sheikh, not only with a large establishment of his own, but enjoying the respect, and in some degree able to command the services, of many of the humble people around him.

2. His generosity was equal to his wealth. The catalogue of the articles which he and another friend of David's brought him in his extremity (2 Sam. xvii. 28, 29) is instructive from its minuteness and its length. Like all men liberal in heart, he devised liberal things. He did not ask to see a subscription list, or inquire what other people were giving. He did not consider what was the smallest amount that he could give without appearing to be shabby. His only thought seems to have been, what there was he had to give that could be of use to the king. It is this large in-born generosity manifested to David that gives one the assurance that he was a kind, generous helper wherever there was a case deserving and needing his aid. We class him with the patriarch of Uz, with whom no doubt he could have said, "When the eye saw me, then it blessed me, and

when the ear heard me, it bare witness unto me; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I made the widow's heart to leap for joy."

3. His loyalty was not less thorough than his generosity. When he heard of the king's troubles, he seems never to have hesitated one instant as to throwing in his lot with him. It mattered not that the king was in great trouble, and apparently in a desperate case. Neighbours, or even members of his own family, might have whispered to him that it would be better not to commit himself, seeing the rebellion was so strong. He was living in a sequestered part of the country; there was no call on him to declare himself at that particular moment; and if Absalom got the upper hand, he would be sure to punish severely those who had been active on his father's side. But none of these things moved him. Barzillai was no sunshine courtier, willing to enjoy the good things of the court in days of prosperity, but ready in darker days to run off and leave his friends in the midst of danger. He was one of those true men that are ready to risk their all in the cause of loyalty when persuaded that it is the cause of truth and right. We cannot but ask, What could have given him a feeling so strong? We are not expressly told that he was a man deeply moved by the fear of God, but we have every reason to believe it. If so, the consideration that would move him most forcibly in favour of David must have been that he was God's anointed. God had called him to the throne, and had never declared, as in the case of Saul, that he had forfeited it; the attempt to drive him from it was of the devil, and therefore to be resisted to the last farthing of his property, and if he had been a younger man, to the last drop of his blood. Risk? Can you frighten a man like this by telling him of the risk he runs by supporting David in the hour of adversity? Why, he is ready not only to risk all, but to lose all, if necessary, in a cause which appears so obviously to be Divine, all the more because he sees so well what a blessing David has been to the country. Why, he has actually made the kingdom. Not only has he expelled all its internal foes, but he has cowed those troublesome neighbours that were constantly pouncing upon the tribes, and especially the tribes situated in Gilead and Bashan. Moreover, he has given unity and stability to all the internal arrangements of the kingdom. See what a grand capital he has made for it at Jerusalem. Look how he has planted the ark on the strongest citadel of the country, safe from every invading foe. Consider how he has perfected the arrangements for the service of the Levites, what a delightful service of song he has instituted, and what beautiful songs he has composed for the use of the sanctuary. Doubtless it was considerations of this kind that roused Barzillai to such a pitch of loyalty. And is not a country happy that has such citizens, men who place their personal interest far below the public weal, and are ready to make any sacrifice, of person or of property, when the highest interests of their country are concerned? We do not plead for the kind of loyalty that clings to a monarch simply because he is king, apart from all considerations, personal and public, bearing on his worthiness or unworthiness of the office. We plead rather for the spirit that makes duty to country stand first, and personal or family interest a long way below. We deprecate the spirit that sneers at the very idea of putting one's self to loss or trouble of any kind for the sake of public in-

terests. We long for a generation of men and women that, like many in this country in former days, are willing to give "all for the Church and a little less for the State." And surely in these days, when no deadly risk is incurred, the demand is not so very severe. Let Christian men lay it on their consciences to pay regard to the claims under which they lie to serve their country. Whether it be in the way of serving on some public board, or fighting against some national vice, or advancing some great public interest, let it be considered even by busy men that their country, and I must add, their Church, have true claims upon them. Even heathens and unbelievers have said, "It is sweet and glorious to die for one's country." It is a poor state of things when in a Christian community men are so sunk in indolence and selfishness that they will not stir a finger on its behalf.

4. Barzillai was evidently a man of attractive personal qualities. The king was so attracted by him, that he wished him to come with him to Jerusalem, and promised to sustain him at court. The heart of King David was not too old to form new attachments. And towards Barzillai he was evidently drawn. We can hardly suppose but that there were deeper qualities to attract the king than even his loyalty and generosity. It looks as if David perceived a spiritual congeniality that would make Barzillai, not only a pleasant inmate, but a profitable friend. For indeed in many ways Barzillai and David seem to have been like one another. God had given them both a warm, sunny nature. He had prospered them in the world. He had given them a deep regard for Himself and delight in His fellowship. David must have found in Barzillai a friend whose views on the deepest subjects were similar to his own. At Jerusalem the men who were of his mind were by no means too many. To have Barzillai beside him, refreshing him with his experiences of God's ways and joining with him in songs of praise and thanksgiving, would be delightful. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" But however pleasant the prospect may have been to David, it was not one destined to be realised.

5. For Barzillai was not dazzled even by the highest offers of the king, because he felt that the proposal was unsuitable for his years. He was already eighty and every day was adding to his burden, and bringing him sensibly nearer the grave. Even though he might be enjoying a hale old age he could not be sure that he would not break down suddenly, and thus become an utter burden to the king. David had made the offer as a compliment to Barzillai, although it might also be a favour to himself, and as a compliment the aged Gileadite was entitled to view it. And viewing it in that light, he respectfully declined it. He was a home-loving man, his habits had been formed for a quiet domestic sphere, and it was too late to change them. His faculties were losing their sharpness; his taste had become dulled, his ear blunted, so that both savoury dishes and elaborate music would be comparatively thrown away on him. The substance of his answer was, I am an old man, and it would be unsuitable in me to begin a courtier's life. In a word, he understood what was suitable for old age. Many a man and woman too, perhaps, even of Barzillai's years, would have jumped at King David's offer, and rejoiced to share the dazzling honours of a court, and would have affected youthful feelings

and habits in order to enjoy the exhilaration and the excitement of a courtier's life. In Barzillai's choice, we see the predominance of a sanctified common sense, alive to the proprieties of things, and able to see how the enjoyment most suitable to an advanced period of life might best be had. It was not by aping youth or grasping pleasures for which the relish had gone. Some may think this a painful view of old age. Is it so that as years multiply the taste for youthful enjoyments passes away, and one must resign one's self to the thought that life itself is near its end? Undoubtedly it is. But even a heathen could show that this is by no means an evil. The purpose of Cicero's beautiful treatise on old age, written when he was sixty-two, but regarded as spoken by Cato at the age of eighty-four, was to show that the objections commonly brought against old age were not really valid. These objections were—that old age unfits men for active business, that it renders the body feeble, that it deprives them of the enjoyment of almost all pleasures, and that it heralds the approach of death. Let it be granted, is the substance of Cicero's argument; nevertheless, old age brings enjoyments of a new order that compensate for those which it withdraws. If we have wisdom to adapt ourselves to our position, and to lay ourselves out for those compensatory pleasures, we shall find old age not a burden, but a joy. Now, if even a heathen could argue in that way, how much more a Christian! If he cannot personally be so lively as before, he may enjoy the young life of his children and grandchildren or other young friends, and delight to see them enjoying what he cannot now engage in. If active pleasures are not to be had, there are passive enjoyments—the conversation of friends, reading, meditation, and the like—of which all the more should be made. If one world is gliding from him, another is moving towards him. As the outward man perisheth, let the inward man be renewed day by day.

There are few more jarring scenes in English history than the last days of Queen Elizabeth. As life was passing away, a historian of England says, "she clung to it with a fierce tenacity. She hunted, she danced, she jested with her young favourites, she coquetted, and frolicked, and scolded at sixty-seven as she had done at thirty." "The Queen," wrote a courtier, "a few months before her death was never so gallant these many years, nor so set upon jollity." She persisted, in spite of opposition, in her gorgeous progresses from country house to country house. She clung to business as of old, and rated in her usual fashion one "who minded not to giving up some matter of account." And then a strange melancholy settled on her. Her mind gave way, and food and rest became alike distasteful. Clever woman, yet very foolish in not discerning how vain it was to attempt to carry the brisk habits of youth into old age, and most profoundly foolish in not having taken pains to provide for old age the enjoyments appropriate to itself! How differently it has fared with those who have been wise in time and made the best provision for old age! "I have waited for Thy salvation, O my God," says the dying Jacob, relieved and happy to think that the object for which he had waited had come at last. "I am now ready to be offered," says St. Paul, "and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

the righteous Judge, will give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." Which is the better portion—his whose old age is spent in bitter lamentation over the departed joys and brightness of his youth? or he whose sun goes down with the sweetness and serenity of an autumn sunset, but only to rise in a brighter world, and shine forth in the glory of immortal youth?

6. Holding such views of old age, it was quite natural and suitable for Barzillai to ask for his son Chimham what he respectfully declined for himself. For his declination was not a rude rejection of an honour deemed essentially false and vain. Barzillai did not tell the king that he had lived to see the folly and the sin of those pleasures which in the days of youth and inexperience men are so greedy to enjoy. That would have been an affront to David, especially as he was now getting to be an old man himself. He recognised that a livelier mode of life than befitted the old was suitable for the young. The advantages of residence at the court of David were not to be thought little of by one beginning life, especially where the head of the court was such a man as David, himself so affectionate and attractive, and so deeply imbued with the fear and love of God. The narrative is so short that not a word is added as to how it fared with Chimham when he came to Jerusalem. Only one thing is known of him: it is said that, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, when Johanan conducted to Egypt a remnant of Jews that he had saved from the murderous hand of Ishmael, "they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go into Egypt." We infer that David bestowed on Chimham some part of his paternal inheritance at Bethlehem. The vast riches which he had amassed would enable him to make ample provision for his sons; but we might naturally have expected that the whole of the paternal inheritance would have remained in the family. For some reason unknown to us, Chimham seems to have got a part of it. We cannot but believe that David would desire to have a good man there, and it is much in favour of Chimham that he should have got a settlement at Bethlehem. And there is another circumstance that tells in his favour: during the five centuries that elapsed between David's time and the Captivity the name of Chimham remained in connection with that property, and even so late as the time of Jeremiah it was called "Chimham's habitation." Men do not thus keep alive dishonoured names, and the fact that Chimham's was thus preserved would seem to indicate that he was one of those of whom it is said, "The memory of the just is blessed."

Plans for life were speedily formed in those countries; and as Rebekah wished no delay in accompanying Abraham's servant to be the wife of Isaac, nor Ruth in going forth with Naomi to the land of Judah, so Chimham at once went with the king. The interview between David and Barzillai was ended in the way that in those countries was the most expressive sign of regard and affection: "David kissed Barzillai," but "Chimham went on with him."

The meeting with Barzillai and the finding of a new son in Chimham must have been looked back on by David with highly pleasant feelings. In every sense of the term, he had lost a son in Absalom; he seems now to find one in Chimham. We dare not say that the one was compensation for the other. Such a blank as the death of Absalom left

in the heart of David could never be filled up from any earthly source whatever. Blanks of that nature can be filled only when God gives a larger measure of His own presence and His own love. But besides feeling very keenly the blank of Absalom's death, David must have felt distressed at the loss as it seemed, of power, to secure the affections of the younger generation of his people, many of whom, there is every reason to believe, had followed Absalom. The ready way in which Chimham accepted of the proposal in regard to him would therefore be a pleasant incident in his experience; and the remembrance of his father's fast attachment and most useful friendship would ever be in David's memory like an oasis in the desert.

We return for a moment to the great lesson of this passage. Aged men, it is a lesson for you. Titus was instructed to exhort the aged men of Crete to be "sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience." It is a grievous thing to see grey hairs dishonoured. It is a humiliating sight when Noah excites either the shame or the derision of his sons. But "the hoary head is a crown of glory if it is found in the way of uprightness." And the crown is described in the six particulars of the exhortation to Titus. It is a crown of six jewels. Jewel the first is "sobriety," meaning here self-command, self-control, ability to stand erect before temptation, and calmness under provocation and trial. Jewel the second is "gravity," not sternness, nor sullenness, nor censoriousness, but the bearing of one who knows that "life is real, life is earnest," in opposition to the frivolous tone of those who act as if there were no life to come. Jewel the third is "temperance," especially in respect of bodily indulgence, keeping under the body, never letting it be master, but in all respects a servant. Jewel the fourth, "soundness in faith," holding the true doctrine of eternal life, and looking forward with hope and expectation to the inheritance of the future. Jewel the fifth, "soundness in charity," the charity of the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, itself a coruscation of the brightest gem in the Christian cabinet. Jewel the sixth, "soundness in patience," that grace so needful, but so often neglected, that grace that gives an air of serenity to one's character, that allies it to heaven, that gives it sublimity, that bears the unbearable, and hopes and rejoices on the very edge of despair. Onward, then, ye aged men, in this glorious path! By God's grace, gather round your head these incorruptible jewels, which shine with the lustre of God's holiness, and which are the priceless gems of heaven. Happy are ye, if indeed you have these jewels for your crown; and happy is your Church where the aged men are crowned with glory like the four-and-twenty elders before the throne!

But what of those who dishonour God, and their own grey hairs, and the Church of Christ by stormy tempers, profane tongues, drunken orgies, and disorderly lives? "O my soul, come not thou into their secret! To their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE INSURRECTION OF SHEBA.

2 SAMUEL xix. 41-43; xx.

DAVID was now virtually restored to his kingdom; but he had not even left Gilgal when fresh

troubles began. The jealousy between Judah and Israel broke out in spite of him. The cause of complaint was on the part of the ten tribes; they were offended at not having been waited for to take part in escorting the king to Jerusalem. First, the men of Israel, in harsh language, accused the men of Judah of having stolen the king away, because they had transported him over the Jordan. To this the men of Judah replied that the king was of their kin; therefore they had taken the lead, but they had received no special reward or honour in consequence. The men of Israel, however, had an argument in reply to this: they were ten tribes, and therefore had so much more right to the king; and Judah had treated them with contempt in not consulting or co-operating with them in bringing him back. It is added that the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

It is in a poor and paltry light that both sides appear in this inglorious dispute. There was no solid grievance whatever, nothing that might not have been easily settled if the soft answer that turneth away wrath had been resorted to instead of fierce and exasperating words. Alas! that miserable tendency of our nature to take offence when we think we have been overlooked,—what mischief and misery has it bred in the world! The men of Israel were foolish to take offence; but the men of Judah were neither magnanimous nor forbearing in dealing with their unreasonable humour. The noble spirit of clemency that David had shown awakened but little permanent response. The men of Judah, who were foremost in Absalom's rebellion, were like the man in the parable that had been forgiven ten thousand talents, but had not the generosity to forgive the trifling offence committed against them, as they thought, by their brethren of Israel. So they seized their fellow-servant by the throat and demanded that he should pay them the uttermost farthing. Judah played false to his national character; for he was not "he whom his brethren should praise."

What was the result? Any one acquainted with human nature might have foretold it with tolerable certainty. Given on one side a proneness to take offence, a readiness to think that one has been overlooked, and on the other a want of forbearance, a readiness to retaliate,—it is easy to see that the result will be a serious breach. It is just what we witness so often in children. One is apt to be dissatisfied, and complains of ill-treatment; another has no forbearance, and retorts angrily: the result is a quarrel, with this difference, that while the quarrels of children pass quickly away, the quarrels of nations or of factions last miserably long.

Much inflammable material being thus provided, a casual spark speedily set it on fire. Sheba, an artful Benjamite, raised the standard of revolt against David, and the excited ten tribes, smarting with the fierce words of the men of Judah, flocked to his standard. Most miserable proceeding! The quarrel had begun about a mere point of etiquette, and now they cast off God's anointed king, and that, too, after the most signal token of God's anger had fallen on Absalom and his rebellious crew. There are many wretched enough slaveries in this world, but the slavery of pride is perhaps the most mischievous and humiliating of all.

And here it cannot be amiss to call attention to the very great neglect of the rules and spirit of

Christianity that is apt, even at the present day, to show itself among professing Christians in connection with their disputes. This is so very apparent that one is apt to think that the settlement of quarrels is the very last matter to which Christ's followers learn to apply the example and instructions of their Master. When men begin in earnest to follow Christ, they usually pay considerable attention to certain of His precepts; they turn away from scandalous sins, they observe prayer, they show some interest in Christian objects, and they abandon some of the more frivolous ways of the world. But alas! when they fall into differences, they are prone in dealing with them to leave all Christ's precepts behind them. See in what an unlovely and unloving spirit the controversies of Christians have usually been conducted; how much of bitterness and personal animosity they show, how little forbearance and generosity; how readily they seem to abandon themselves to the impulses of their own hearts. Controversy rouses temper, and temper creates a tempest through which you cannot see clearly. And how many are the quarrels in Churches or congregations that are carried on with all the heat and bitterness of unsanctified men! How much offence is taken at trifling neglects or mistakes! Who remembers, even in its spirit, the precept in the Sermon on the Mount, "If any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"? Who remembers the beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God"? Who bears in mind the Apostle's horror at the unseemly spectacle of saints carrying their quarrels to heathen tribunals, instead of settling them as Christians quietly among themselves? Who weighs the earnest counsel, "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"? Who prizes our gracious Lord's most blessed legacy, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you"? Do not all such texts show that it is incumbent on Christians to be most careful and watchful, when any difference arises, to guard against carnal feeling of every kind, and strive to the very utmost to manifest the spirit of Christ? Yet is it not at such times that they are most apt to leave all their Christianity behind them, and engage in unseemly wrangles with one another? Does not the devil very often get it all his own way, whoever may be in the right, and whoever in the wrong? And is not frequent occasion given thereby to the enemy to blaspheme, and, in the very circumstances that should bring out in clear and strong light the true spirit of Christianity, is there not often, in place of that, an exhibition of rudeness and bitterness that makes the world ask, What better are Christians than other men?

But let us return to King David and his people. The author of the insurrection was "a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba." He is called "the son of Bichri, a Benjamite." Benjamin had a son whose name was Becher, and the adjective formed from that would be Bichrite; some have thought that Bichri denotes not his father, but his family. Saul appears to have been of the same family (see *Speaker's Commentary in loco*). It is thus quite possible that Sheba was a relation of Saul, and that he had always cherished a grudge against David for taking the throne which he had filled. Here, we may remark in passing, would have been a real temptation to Mephiboseth to join an insurrection, for if this had succeeded he would have been the man who would naturally have become

king. But there is no reason to believe that Mephibosheth favoured Sheba, and therefore no reason to doubt the truth of the account he gave of himself to David. The war-cry of Sheba was an artful one—"We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse." It was a scornful and exaggerated mockery of the claim that Judah had asserted as being of the same tribe with the king, whereas the other tribes stood in no such relation to him. "Very well," was virtually the cry of Sheba—"if we have no part in David, neither any inheritance in the son of Jesse, let us get home as fast as possible, and leave his friends, the tribe of Judah, to make of him what they can." It was not so much a setting up of a new rebellion as a scornful repudiation of all interest in the existing king. Instead of going with David from Gilgal to Jerusalem, they went up every man to his tent or to his home. It is not said that they intended actively to oppose David, and from this part of the narrative we should suppose that all that they intended was to make a public protest against the unworthy treatment which they held that they had received. It must have greatly disturbed the pleasure of David's return to Jerusalem that this unseemly secession occurred by the way. A chill must have fallen upon his heart just as it was beginning to recover its elasticity. And much anxiety must have haunted him as to the issue—whether or not the movement would go on to another insurrection like Absalom's; or whether, having discharged their dissatisfied feeling, the people of Israel would return sullenly to their allegiance.

Nor could the feelings of King David be much soothed when he re-entered his home. The greater part of his family had been with him in his exile, and when he returned his house was occupied by the ten women whom he had left to keep it, and with whom Absalom had behaved dishonourably. And here was another trouble resulting from the rebellion that could not be adjusted in a satisfactory way. The only way of disposing of them was to put them in ward, to shut them up in confinement, to wear out the rest of their lives in a dreary, joyless widowhood. All joy and brightness was thus taken out of their lives, and personal freedom was denied them. They were doomed, for no fault of theirs, to the weary lot of captives, cursing the day, probably, when their beauty had brought them to the palace, and wishing that they could exchange lots with the humblest of their sisters that breathed the air of freedom. Strange that, with all his spiritual instincts, David could not see that a system which led to such miserable results must lie under the curse of God!

As events proceeded, it appeared that active mischief was likely to arise from Sheba's movement. He was accompanied by a body of followers, and the king was afraid lest he should get into some fenced city, and escape the correction which his wickedness deserved. He accordingly sent Amasa to assemble the men of Judah, and return within three days. This was Amasa's first commission after his being appointed general of the troops. Whether he found the people unwilling to go out again immediately to war, or whether they were unwilling to accept him as their general, we are not told, but certainly he tarried longer than the time appointed. Thereupon the king, who was evidently alarmed at the serious dimensions which the insurrection of Sheba was assuming, sent for Abishai, Joab's brother, and

ordered him to take what troops were ready and start immediately to punish Sheba. Abishai took "Joab's men, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men." With these he went out from Jerusalem to pursue after Sheba. How Joab conducted himself on this occasion is a strange but characteristic chapter of his history. It does not appear that he had any dealings with David, or that David had any dealings with him. He simply went out with his brother, and, being a man of the strongest will and greatest daring, he seems to have resolved on some fit occasion to resume his command in spite of all the king's arrangements.

They had not gone farther from Jerusalem than the Pool of Gibeon when they were overtaken by Amasa, followed doubtless by his troops. When Joab and Amasa met, Joab, actuated by jealousy towards him as having superseded him in the command of the army, treacherously slew him, leaving his dead body on the ground, and, along with Abishai, prepared to give pursuit after Sheba. An officer of Joab's was stationed beside Amasa's dead body, to call on the soldiers, when they saw that their chief was dead, to follow Joab as the friend of David. But the sight of the dead body of Amasa only made them stand still—horrified, most probably, at the crime of Joab, and unwilling to place themselves under one who had been guilty of such a crime. The body of Amasa was accordingly removed from the highway into the field, and his soldiers were then ready enough to follow Joab. Joab was now in undisturbed command of the whole force, having set aside all David's arrangements as completely as if they had never been made. Little did David thus gain by superseding Joab and appointing Amasa in his room. The son of Zeruiah proved himself again too strong for him. The hideous crime by which he got rid of his rival was nothing to him. How he could reconcile all this with his duty to his king we are unable to see. No doubt he trusted to the principle that "success succeeds," and believed firmly that if he were able entirely to suppress Sheba's insurrection and return to Jerusalem with the news that every trace of the movement was obliterated, David would say nothing of the past, and silently restore the general who, with all his faults did so well in the field.

Sheba was quite unable to offer opposition to the force that was thus led against him. He retreated northwards from station to station, passing in succession through the different tribes, until he came to the extreme northern border of the land. There, in a town called Abel-beth-Maacchah, he took refuge, till Joab and his forces, accompanied by the Berites, a people of whom we know nothing, having overtaken him at Abel, besieged the town. Works were raised for the purpose of capturing Abel, and an assault was made on the wall for the purpose of throwing it down. Then a woman, gifted with the wisdom for which the place was proverbial, came to Joab to remonstrate against the siege. The ground of her remonstrance was that the people of Abel had done nothing on account of which their city should be destroyed. Joab, she said, was trying to destroy "a city and a mother in Israel," and thereby to swallow up the inheritance of the Lord. In what sense was Joab seeking to destroy a *mother* in Israel? The word seems to be used to denote a mother-city or district capital, on which other places were depending. What you are trying to destroy is not a mere city of Israel, but a city

which has its family of dependent villages, all of which must share in the ruin if we are destroyed. But Joab assured the woman that he had no such desire. All that he wished was to get at Sheba, who had taken refuge within the city. If that be all, said the woman, I will engage to throw his head to thee over the wall. It was the interest of the people of the city to get rid of the man who was bringing them into so serious a danger. It was not difficult for them to get Sheba decapitated, and to throw his head over the wall to Joab. By this means the conspiracy was ended. As in Absalom's case, the death of the leader was the ruin of the cause. No further stand was made by any one. Indeed, it is probable that the great body of Sheba's followers had fallen away from him in the course of his northern flight, and that only a handful were with him in Abel. So "Joab blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned unto Jerusalem, to the king."

Thus, once again, the land had rest from war. At the close of the chapter we have a list of the chief officers of the kingdom, similar to that given in ch. viii. at the close of David's foreign wars. It would appear that, peace being again restored, wounds were taken by the king to improve and perfect the arrangements for the administration of the kingdom. The changes on the former list are not very numerous. Joab was again at the head of the army; Benaiah, as before, commanded the Cherethites and the Pelethites; Jehoshaphat was still recorder; Sheva (same as Seraiah) was scribe; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests. In two cases there was a change. A new office had been instituted—"Adoram was over the tribute;" the subjugation of so many foreign states which had to pay a yearly tribute to David called for this change. In the earlier list it is said that the king's sons were chief rulers. No mention is made of king's sons now; the chief ruler is Ira the Jairite. On the whole, there was little change; at the close of this war the kingdom was administered in the same manner and almost by the same men as before.

There is nothing to indicate that the kingdom was weakened in its external relations by the two insurrections that had taken place against David. It is to be observed that both of them were of very short duration. Between Absalom's proclamation of himself at Hebron and his death in the wood of Ephraim there must have been a very short interval, not more than a fortnight. The insurrection of Sheba was probably all over in a week. Foreign powers could scarcely have heard of the beginning of the revolts before they heard of the close of them. There would be nothing therefore to give them any encouragement to rebel against David, and they do not appear to have made any such attempt. But in another and higher sense these revolts left painful consequences behind them. The chastening to which David was exposed in connection with them was very humbling. His glory as king was seriously impaired. It was humiliating that he should have had to fly from before his own son. It was hardly less humiliating that he was seen to lie so much at the mercy of Joab. He is unable to depose Joab, and when he tries to do so, Joab not only kills his successor, but takes possession by his own authority of the vacant place. And David can say nothing. In this relation of David to Joab we have a sample of the trials of kings. Nominally supreme, they are often the servants of their ministers and officers. Certainly

David was not always his own master. Joab was really above him; frustrated, doubtless, some excellent plans; did great service by his rough patriotism and ready valour, but injured the good name of David and the reputation of his government by his daring crimes. The retrospect of this period of his reign could have given little satisfaction to the king, since he had to trace it, with all its calamities and sorrows, to his own evil conduct. And yet what David suffered, and what the nation suffered, was not, strictly speaking, the punishment of his sin. God had forgiven him his sin. David had sung, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered." What he now suffered was not the visitation of God's wrath, but a fatherly chastening, designed to deepen his contrition and quicken his vigilance. And surely we may say, If the fatherly chastening was so severe, what would the Divine retribution have been? If these things were done in the green tree, what would have been done in the dry? If David, even though forgiven, could not but shudder at all the terrible results of that course of sin which began with his allowing himself to lust after Bathsheba, what must be the feeling of many a lost soul, in the world of woe, recalling its first step in open rebellion against God, and thinking of all the woes, innumerable and unutterable, that have sprung therefrom? Oh, sin, how terrible a curse thou bringest! What serpents spring up from the dragon's teeth! And how awful the fate of those who awake all too late to a sense of what thou art! Grant, O God, of Thine infinite mercy, that we all may be wise in time; that we may ponder the solemn truth, that "the wages of sin is death"; and that, without a day's delay, we may flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, and find peace in believing on Him who came to take sin away by the sacrifice of Himself!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FAMINE.

2 SAMUEL XXI. 1-14.

WE now enter on the concluding part of the reign of David. Some of the matters in which he was most occupied during this period are recorded only in Chronicles. Among these, the chief was his preparations for the building of the temple, which great work was to be undertaken by his son. In the concluding part of Samuel the principal things recorded are two national judgments, a famine and a pestilence, that occurred in David's reign, the one springing from a transaction in the days of Saul, the other from one in the days of David. Then we have two very remarkable lyrical pieces, one a general song of thanksgiving, forming a retrospect of his whole career; the other a prophetic vision of the great Ruler that was to spring from him, and the effects of His reign. In addition to these, there is also a notice of certain wars of David's, not previously recorded, and a fuller statement respecting his great men than we have elsewhere. The whole of this section has more the appearance of a collection of pieces than a chronological narrative. It is by no means certain that they are all recorded in the order of their occurrence. The most characteristic of the pieces are the two songs or psalms—the one looking back, the other looking forward; the one commemorating the goodness and mercy that had followed him

all the days of his life, the other picturing goodness still greater and mercy more abundant, yet to be vouchsafed under David's Son.

The conjunction "then" at the beginning of the chapter is replaced in the Revised Version by "and." It does not denote that what is recorded here took place immediately after what goes before. On the contrary, the note of time is found in the general expression, "in the days of David," that is, some time in David's reign. On obvious grounds, most recent commentators are disposed to place this occurrence comparatively early. It is likely to have happened while the crime of Saul was yet fresh in the public recollection. By the close of David's reign a new generation had come to maturity, and the transactions of Saul's reign must have been comparatively forgotten. It is clear from David's excepting Mephibosheth, that the transaction occurred after he had been discovered and cared for. Possibly the narrative of the discovery of Mephibosheth may also be out of chronological order, and that event may have occurred earlier than is commonly thought. It will remove some of the difficulties of this difficult chapter if we are entitled to place the occurrence at a time not very far remote from the death of Saul.

It was altogether a singular occurrence, this famine in the land of Israel. The calamity was remarkable, the cause was remarkable, the cure most remarkable of all. The whole narrative is painful and perplexing; it places David in a strange light,—it seems to place even God Himself in a strange light; and the only way in which we can explain it, in consistency with a righteous government, is by laying great stress on a principle accepted without hesitation in those Eastern countries, which made the father and his children "one concern," and held the children liable for the misdeeds of the father.

1. As to the calamity. It was a famine that continued three successive years, causing necessarily an increase of misery year after year. There is a presumption that it occurred in the earlier part of David's reign, because, if it had been after the great enlargement of the kingdom which followed his foreign wars, the resources of some parts of it would probably have availed to supply the deficiency. At first it does not appear that the king held that there was any special significance in the famine,—that it came as a reproof for any particular sin. But when the famine extended to a third year, he was persuaded that it must have a special cause. Did he not in this just act as we all are disposed to do? A little trial we deem to be nothing; it does not seem to have any significance or to be connected with any lesson. It is only when the little trial swells into a large one, or the brief trouble into a long-continued affliction, that we begin to inquire why it was sent. If small trials were more regarded, heavy trials would be less needed. The horse that springs forward at the slightest touch of the whip or prick of the spur needs no heavy lash; it is only when the lighter stimulus fails that the heavier has to be applied. Man's tendency, even under God's chastenings, has ever been to ignore the source of them,—when God "poured upon him the fury of His anger and the strength of battle, and it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart" (Isa. xlii. 25). Trials would neither be so long nor so severe if more regard were had to them in an earlier stage; if they were accepted more as God's message—

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways."

2. The cause of the calamity was made known when David inquired of the Lord—"It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."

The history of the crime for which this famine was sent can be gathered only from incidental notices. It appears from the narrative before us that Saul "consumed the Gibeonites, and devised against them that they should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel." The Gibeonites, as is well known, were a Canaanite people, who, through a cunning stratagem, obtained leave from Joshua to dwell in their old settlements, and being protected by a solemn national oath, were not disturbed even when it was found out that they had been practising a fraud. They possessed cities, situated principally in the tribe of Benjamin; the chief of them, Gibeon, "was a great city, one of the royal cities, greater than Ai." In the time of Saul they were a quiet, inoffensive people; yet he seems to have fallen on them with a determination to sweep them from all the coasts of Israel. Death or banishment was the only alternative he offered. His desire to exterminate them evidently failed, otherwise David would have found none of them to consult: but the savage attack which he made on them affords an incidental proof that it was no feeling of humanity that led him to spare the Amalekites when he was ordered to destroy them.

We are not told of any offence that the Gibeonites had committed; and perhaps covetousness lay at the root of Saul's policy. There is reason to believe that when he saw his popularity declining and David's advancing, he had recourse to unscrupulous methods of increasing his own. Addressing his servants, before the slaughter of Abimelech and the priests, he asked, "Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give you fields and vineyards, that all of you have conspired against me?" Evidently he had rewarded his favourites, especially those of his own tribe, with fields and vineyards. But how had he got these to bestow? Very probably by dispossessing the Gibeonites. Their cities, as we have seen, were in the tribe of Benjamin. But to prevent jealousy, others, both of Judah and of Israel, would get a share of the spoil. For he is said to have sought to slay the Gibeonites "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah." If this was the way in which the slaughter of the Gibeonites was compassed, it was fair that the nation should suffer for it. If the nation profited by the unholy transaction, and was thus induced to wink at the violation of the national faith and the massacre of an inoffensive people, it shared in Saul's guilt, and became liable to chastisement. Even David himself was not free from blame. When he came to the throne he should have seen justice done to this injured people. But probably he was afraid. He felt his own authority not very secure, and probably he shrank from raising up enemies in those whom justice would have required him to dispossess. Prince and people therefore were both at fault, and both were suffering for the wrongdoing of the nation. Perhaps Solomon had this case in view when he wrote: "Rob not the poor because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them."

But whatever may have been Saul's motive, it is certain that by his attempt to massacre and

banish the Gibeonites a great national sin was committed, and that for this sin the nation had never humbled itself, and never made reparation.

3. What, then, was now to be done? The king left it to the Gibeonites themselves to prescribe the satisfaction which they claimed for this wrong. This was in accordance with the spirit of the law that gave a murdered man's nearest of kin a right to exact justice of the murderer. In their answer the Gibeonites disclaimed all desire for compensation in money; and very probably this was a surprise to the people. To surrender lands might have been much harder than to give up lives. What the Gibeonites asked had a grim look of justice; it showed a burning desire to bring home the punishment as near as possible to the offender: "The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose." Seven was a perfect number, and therefore the victims should be seven. Their punishment was, to be hanged or crucified, but in inflicting this punishment the Jews were more merciful than the Romans; the criminals were first put to death, then their dead bodies were exposed to open shame. They were to be hanged "unto the Lord," as a satisfaction to expiate His just displeasure. They were to be hanged "in Gibeah of Saul," to bring home the offence visibly to him, so that the expiation should be at the same place as the crime. And when mention is made of Saul, the Gibeonites add, "Whom the Lord did choose." For Jehovah was intimately connected with Saul's call to the throne; He was in some sense publicly identified with him; and unless something were done to disconnect Him with this crime, the reproach of it would, in measure, rest upon Him.

Such was the demand of the Gibeonites; and David deemed it right to comply with it, stipulating only that the descendants of Jonathan should not be surrendered. The sons or descendants of Saul that were given up for this execution were the two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, and along with them five sons of Michal, or, as it is in the margin, of Merab, the elder daughter of Saul, whom she bare (R. V.—not "brought up," A. V.) to Adriel the Meholathite. These seven men were put to death accordingly, and their bodies exposed in the hill near Gibeah.

The transaction has a very hard look to us, though it had nothing of the kind to the people of those days. Why should these unfortunate men be punished so terribly for the sin of their father? How was it possible for David, in cold blood, to give them up to an ignominious death? How could he steel his heart against the supplications of their friends? With regard to this latter aspect of the case, it is ridiculous to cast reproach on David. As we have remarked again and again, if he had acted like other Eastern kings, he would have consigned every son of Saul to destruction when he came to the throne, and left not one remaining, for no other offence than being the children of their father. On the score of clemency to Saul's family the character of David is abundantly vindicated.

The question of justice remains. Is it not a law of nature, it may be asked, and a law of the Bible too, that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, but that the soul that sinneth it shall die? It is undoubtedly the rule both of nature and the Bible that the son is not to be substituted for the

father when the father is there to bear the penalty. But it is neither the rule of the one nor of the other that the son is never to suffer *with* the father for the sins which the father has committed. On the contrary, it is what we see taking place, in many forms, every day. It is an arrangement of Providence that almost baffles the philanthropist, who sees that children often inherit from their parents a physical frame disposing them to their parents' vices, and who sees, moreover, that, when brought up by vicious parents, children are deprived of their natural rights, and are initiated into a life of vice. But the law that identified children and parents in Old Testament times was carried out to consequences which would not be tolerated now. Not only were children often punished because of their physical connection with their fathers, but they were regarded as judicially one with them, and so liable to share in their punishment. The Old Testament (as Canon Mozley has so powerfully shown*) was in some respects an imperfect economy; the rights of the individual were not so clearly acknowledged as they are under the New; the family was a sort of moral unit, and the father was the responsible agent for the whole. When Achan sinned, his whole household shared his punishment. The solidarity of the family was such that all were involved in the sin of the father. However strange it may seem to us it did not appear at all strange in David's time that this rule should be applied in the case of Saul. On the contrary, it would probably be thought that it showed considerable moderation of feeling not to demand the death of the whole living posterity of Saul, but to limit the demand to the number of seven. Doubtless the Gibeonites had suffered to an enormous extent. Thousands upon thousands of them had probably been slain. People might be sorry for the seven young men that had to die, but that there was anything essentially unjust or even harsh in the transaction is a view of the case that would occur to no one. Justice is often hard; executions are always grim; but here was a nation that had already experienced three years of famine for the sin of Saul, and that would experience yet far more if no public expiation should take place; and seven men were not very many to die for a nation.

The grimness of the mode of punishment was softened by an incident of great moral beauty, which cannot but touch the heart of every man of sensibility. Rizpah, the concubine of Saul, and mother of two of the victims, combining the tenderness of a mother and the courage of a hero, took her position beside the gibbet; and, undeterred by the sight of the rotting bodies and the stench of the air, she suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night. The poor woman must have looked for a very different destiny when she became the concubine of Saul. No doubt she expected to share in the glory of his royal state. But her lord perished in battle, and the splendour of royalty passed for ever from him and his house. Then came the famine; its cause was declared from heaven, its cure was announced by the Gibeonites. Her two sons were among the slain. Probably they were but lads, not yet beyond the age which rouses a mother's sensibilities to the full. (This consideration likewise points to an early date.) We cannot attempt to picture her feelings. The last consolation that remained for her was to

* Lectures on the Old Testament. Lecture V.: "Visitation of Sins of Fathers on Children."

guard their remains from the vulture and the tiger. Unburied corpses were counted to be disgraced, and this, in some degree, because they were liable to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. Rizpah could not prevent the exposure, but she could try to prevent the wild animals from devouring them. The courage and self-denial needed for this work were great, for the risk of violence from wild beasts was very serious. All honour to this woman and her noble heart! David appears to have been deeply impressed by her heroism. When he heard of it he went and collected the bones of Jonathan and his sons, which had been buried under a tree at Jabesh-gilead, and likewise the bones of the men that had been hanged; and he buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish, Saul's father. And after that God was entreated for the land.

We offer a concluding remark, founded on the tone of this narrative. It is marked, as every one must perceive, by a subdued, solemn tone. Whatever may be the opinion of our time as to the need of apologising for it, it is evident that no apology was deemed necessary for the transaction at the time this record was written. The feeling of all parties evidently was, that it was indispensable that things should take the course they did. No one expressed wonder when the famine was accounted for by the crime of Saul. No one objected when the question of expiation was referred to the Gibeonites. The house of Saul made no protest when seven of his sons were demanded for death. The men themselves, when they knew what was coming, seem to have been restrained from attempting to save themselves by flight. It seemed as if God were speaking, and the part of man was simply to obey. When unbelievers object to passages in the Bible like this, or like the sacrifice of Isaac, or the death of Achan, they are accustomed to say that they exemplify the worst passions of the human heart consecrated under the name of religion. We affirm that in this chapter there is no sign of any outburst of passion whatever; everything is done with gravity, with composure and solemnity. And, what is more, the graceful piety of Rizpah is recorded, with simplicity, indeed, but in a tone that indicates appreciation of her tender motherly soul. Savages thirsting for blood are not in the habit of appreciating such touching marks of affection. And further, we are made to feel that it was a pleasure to David to pay that mark of respect for Rizpah's feelings in having the men buried. He did not desire to lacerate the feelings of the unhappy mother; he was glad to soothe them as far as he could. To him, as to his Lord, judgment was a strange work, but he delighted in mercy. And he was glad to be able to mingle a slight streak of mercy with the dark colours of a picture of God's judgment on sin.

To all right minds it is painful to punish, and when punishment has to be inflicted it is felt that it ought to be done with great solemnity and gravity, and with an entire absence of passion and excitement. In a sinful world God too must inflict punishment. And the future punishment of the wicked is the darkest thing in all the scheme of God's government. But it must take place, and when it does take place it will be done deliberately, solemnly, sadly. There will be no exasperation, no excitement. There will be no disregard of the feelings of the unhappy victims of the Divine retribution. What they are able to bear will be well considered. What condition they shall be

placed in when the punishment comes, will be calmly weighed. But may we not see what a distressing thing it will be (if we may use such an expression with reference to God) to consign His creatures to punishment? How different His feelings when He welcomes them to eternal glory! How different the feelings of His angels when that change takes place by which punishment ceases to hang over men, and glory takes its place! "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Is it not blessed to think that this is the feeling of God, and of all Godlike spirits? Will you not all believe this,—believe in the mercy of God, and accept the provision of His grace? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but should have eternal life."

CHAPTER XXIX.

LAST BATTLES AND THE MIGHTY MEN.

2 SAMUEL xxi. 15-22; xxiii. 8-39.

IN entering on the consideration of these two portions of the history of David, we must first observe that the events recorded do not appear to belong to the concluding portion of his reign. It is impossible for us to assign a precise date to them, or at least to most of them, but the displays of physical activity and courage which they record would lead us to ascribe them to a much earlier period. Originally, they seem to have formed parts of a record of David's wars, and to have been transferred to the book of Samuel and Chronicles in order to give a measure of completeness to the narrative. The narrative in Chronicles is substantially the same as that in Samuel, but the text is purer. From notes of time in Chronicles it is seen that some at least of the encounters took place after the war with the children of Ammon.

Why have these passages been inserted in the history of the reign of David? Apparently for two chief purposes. In the first place, to give us some idea of the dangers to which he was exposed in his military life, dangers manifold and sometimes overwhelming, and all but fatal; and thus enable us to see how wonderful were the deliverances he experienced, and prepare us for entering into the song of thanksgiving which forms the twenty-second chapter, and of which these deliverances form the burden. In the second place, to enable us to understand the human instrumentality by which he achieved so brilliant a success, the kind of men by whom he was helped, the kind of spirit by which they were animated, and their intense personal devotion to David himself. The former purpose is that which is chiefly in view in the end of the twenty-first chapter, the latter in the twenty-third. The exploits themselves occur in encounters with the Philistines, and may therefore be referred partly to the time after the slaughter of Goliath, when he first distinguished himself in warfare, and the daughters of Israel began to sing, "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands;" partly to the time in his early reign when he was engaged driving them out of Israel, and putting a bridle on them to restrain their inroads; and partly to a still later period. It is to be observed that nothing more is sought than to give a sample of David's military adventures, and for this purpose his wars with the Philistines alone are examined. If the like method had been

taken with all his other campaigns,—against Edom, Moab and Ammon; against the Syrians of Rehob, and Maacah, and Damascus, and the Syrians beyond the river,—we might borrow the language of the Evangelist, and say that the world itself would not have been able to contain the books that should be written.

Four exploits are recorded in the closing verses of the twenty-first chapter, all with "sons of the giant," or, as it is in the margin, of Rapha. The first was with a man who is called Ishbi-benob, but there is reason to suspect that the text is corrupt here, and in Chronicles this incident is not mentioned. The language applied to David, "David and his servants went down," would lead us to believe that the incident happened at an early period, when the Philistines were very powerful in Israel, and it was a mark of great courage to "go down" to their plains, and attack them in their own country. To do this implied a long journey, over steep and rough roads, and it is no wonder if between the journey and the fighting David "waxed faint." Then it was that the son of the giant, whose spear or spearhead weighed three hundred shekels of brass, or about eight pounds, fell upon him "with a new sword, and thought to have slain him." There is no noun in the original for sword; all that is said is, that the giant fell on David with something new, and our translators have made it a sword. The Revised Version in the margin gives "new armour." The point is evidently this, that the newness of the thing made it more formidable. This could hardly be said of a common sword, which would be really more formidable after it had ceased to be quite new, since, by having used it, the owner would know it better and wield it more perfectly. It seems better to take the marginal reading "new armour," that is, new defensive armour, against which the weary David would direct his blows in vain. Evidently he was in the utmost peril of his life, but was rescued by his nephew Abishai, who killed the giant. The risk to which he was exposed was such that his people vowed they would not let him go out with them to battle any more, lest the light of Israel should be quenched.

During the rest of that campaign the vow seems to have been respected, for the other three giants were not slain by David personally, but by others. As to other campaigns, David usually took his old place as leader of the army, until the battle against Absalom, when his people prevailed on him to remain in the city.

Three of the four duels recorded here took place at Gob,—a place not now known, but most probably in the neighbourhood of Gath. In fact, all the encounters probably took place near that city. One of the giants slain is said in Samuel, by a manifest error, to have been Goliath the Gittite; but the error is corrected in Chronicles, where he is called the brother of Goliath. The very same expression is used of his spear as in the case of Goliath: "the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." Of the fourth giant it is said that he defied Israel, as Goliath had done. Of the whole four it is said that "they were born to the giant in Gath." This does not necessarily imply that they were all sons of the same father, "the giant" being used generically to denote the race rather than the individual.

But the tenor of the narrative and many of its expressions carry us back to the early days of David. There seems to have been a nest at Gath of men of gigantic stature, brothers or near rela-

tions of Goliath. Against these he was sent, perhaps in one of the expeditions when Saul secretly desired that he should fall by the hand of the Philistines. If it was in this way that he came to encounter the first of the four, Saul had calculated well, and was very nearly carrying his point. But though man proposes, God disposes. The example of David in his encounter with Goliath, even at this early period, had inspired several young men of the Hebrews, and even when David was interdicted from going himself into battle, others were raised up to take his place. Every one of the giants found a match either in David or among his men. It was indeed highly perilous work; but David was encompassed by a Divine Protector, and being destined for high service in the kingdom of God, he was "immortal till his work was done."

We have said that these were but samples of David's trials, and that they were probably repeated again and again in the course of the many wars in which he was engaged. One can see that the danger was often very imminent, making him feel that his only possible deliverance must come from God. Such dangers, therefore, were wonderfully fitted to exercise and discipline the spirit of trust. Not once or twice, but hundreds of times, in his early experience he would find himself constrained to cry to the Lord. And protected as he was, delivered as he was, the conviction would become stronger and stronger that God cared for him and would deliver him to the end. We see from all this how unnecessary it is to ascribe all the psalms where David is pressed by enemies either to the time of Saul or to the time of Absalom. There were hundreds of other times in his life when he had the same experience, when he was reduced to similar straits, and his appeal lay to the God of his life.

And this was in truth the healthiest period of his spiritual life. It was amid these perilous but bracing experiences that his soul prospered most. The north wind of danger and difficulty braced him to spiritual self-denial and endurance; the south wind of prosperity and luxurious enjoyment was what nearly destroyed him. Let us not become impatient when anxieties multiply around us, and we are beset by troubles, and labours, and difficulties. Do not be tempted to contrast your miserable lot with that of others, who have health while you are sick, riches while you are poor, honour while you are despised, ease and enjoyment while you have care and sorrow. By all these things God desires to draw you to Himself, to discipline your soul, to lead you away from the broken cisterns that can hold no water to the fountain of living waters. Guard earnestly against the unbelief that at such times would make your hands hang down and your heart despond; rally your sinking spirit. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" Remember the promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you;" and one day you shall have cause to look back on this as the most useful, the most profitable, the most healthful, period of your spiritual life.

We pass to the twenty-third chapter, which tells us of David's mighty men. The narrative, at some points, is not very clear; but we gather from it that David had an order of thirty men distinguished for their valour; that besides these there were three of super-eminent merit, and another three, who were also eminent, but who did not attain to the distinction of the first three. Of the

first three, the first was Jashobeam the Hachmonite (see 1 Chron. xi. 11), the second Eleazar, and the third Shamnah. Of the second three, who were not quite equal to the first, only two are mentioned, Abishai and Benaiah; thereafter we have the names of the thirty. It is remarkable that Joab's name does not occur in the list, but as he was captain of the host, he probably held a higher position than any. Certainly Joab was not wanting in valour, and must have held the highest rank in a legion of honour.

Of the three mighties of the first rank, and the two of the second, characteristic exploits of remarkable courage and success are recorded. The first of the first rank, whom the Chroniclers call Jashobeam, lifted up his spear against three hundred slain at one time. (In Samuel the number is eight hundred.) The exploit was worthy to be ranked with the famous achievement of Jonathan and his armour-bearer at the pass of Michmash. The second, Eleazar, defied the Philistines when they were gathered to battle, and when the men of Israel had gone away he smote the Philistines till his hand was weary. The third, Shamnah, kept the Philistines at bay on a piece of ground covered with lentils, after the people had fled, and slew the Philistines, gaining a great victory.

Next we have a description of the exploit of three of the mighty men when the Philistines were in possession of Bethlehem, and David in a hold near the cave of Adullam (see 2 Sam. v. 15-21). The occasion of their exploit was an interesting one. Contemplating the situation, and grieved to think that his native town should be in the enemy's hands, David gave expression to a wish—"Oh that someone would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem which is before the gate!" It was probably meant for little more than the expression of an earnest wish that the enemy were dislodged from their position—that there were no obstruction between him and the well, that access to it were as free as in the days of his youth. But the three mighty men took him at his word, and breaking through the host of the Philistines, brought the water to David. It was a singular proof of his great personal influence; he was so loved and honoured that to gratify his wish these three men took their lives in their hands to obtain the water. Water got at such a cost was sacred in his eyes: it was a thing too holy for man to turn to his use, so he poured it out before the Lord.

Next we have a statement bearing on two of the second three. Abishai, David's nephew, who was one of them, lifted up his spear against three hundred and slew them. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, slew two lion-like men of Moab (the two sons of Ariel of Moab, R. V.); also, in time of snow, he slew a lion in a pit; and finally he slew an Egyptian, a powerful man, attacking him when he had only a staff in his hand, wrenching his spear from him, and killing him with his own spear. The third of this trio has not been mentioned; some conjecture that he was Amasa ("chief of the captains"—"the thirty," R. V., 1 Chron. xii. 18), and that his name was not recorded because he deserted David to side with Absalom. Among the other thirty, we cannot but be struck with two names—Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, and apparently the father of Bathsheba; and Uriah the Hittite. The sin of David was all the greater if it involved the dishonour of men who had served him so bravely as to be enrolled in his legion of honour.

With regard to the kind of exploits ascribed to some of these men, a remark is necessary. There is an appearance of exaggeration in statements that ascribe to a single warrior the routing and killing of hundreds through his single sword and spear. In the eyes of some such statements give the narrative an unreliable look, as if the object of the writer had been more to give *éclat* to the warriors than to record the simple truth. But this impression arises from our tendency to ascribe the conditions of modern warfare to the warfare of these times. In Eastern history, cases of a single warrior putting a large number to flight and even killing them are not uncommon. For though the strength of the whole number was far more than a match for his, the strength of each individual was far inferior; and if the mass of them were scarcely armed, and the few who had arms were far inferior to him, the result would be that after some had fallen the rest would take to flight; and the destruction of life in a retreat was always enormous. The incident recorded of Eleazar is very graphic and truth-like. "He smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto his sword." A Highland sergeant at Waterloo had done such execution with his basket-handled sword, and so much blood had coagulated round his hand, that it had to be released by a blacksmith, so firmly were they glued together. The style of Eastern warfare was highly favourable to deeds of great courage being done by individuals, and in the terrific panic which followed their first successes prodigious slaughter often ensued. Under present conditions of fighting such things cannot be done.

The glimpse which these little notices give us of King David and his knights is extremely interesting. The story of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table bears a resemblance to it. We see the remarkable personal influence of David, drawing to himself so many men of spirit and energy, firing them by his own example, securing their warm personal attachment, and engaging them in enterprises equal to his own. How far they shared his devotional spirit we have no means of judging. If the historian reflects the general sentiment in recording their victories when he says, once and again, "The Lord wrought a great victory that day" (xxiii. 10, 12), we should say that trust in God must have been the general sentiment. "If it had not been the Lord that was on our side, . . . they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us." It is no wonder that David soon gained a great military renown. Such a king, surrounded by such a class of lieutenants, might well spread alarm among all his enemies. One who, besides having such a body of helpers, could claim the assistance of the Lord of hosts, and could enter battle with the shout, "Let God arise; and let His enemies be scattered; and let them also that hate Him flee before Him," might well look for universal victory. Trustworthy generals, we are told, double the value of the troops; and the soldiers that were led by such leaders, trusting in the Lord of hosts, could hardly fail of triumph.

And thus, too, we may see how David came to be thoroughly under the influence of the military spirit, and of some of the less favourable features of that spirit. Accustomed to such scenes of bloodshed, he would come to think lightly of the lives of his enemies. A hostile army he would be prone to regard as a kind of infernal machine, an instrument of evil only, and therefore to be de-

stroyed. Hence the complacency he expresses in the destruction of his enemies. Hence the judgment he calls down on those who thwarted and opposed him. If, in the songs of David, this feeling sometimes disappears, and the expressed desire of his heart is that the nations may be glad and sing for joy, that the people may praise God, that all the people may praise Him, this seems to be in the later period of his life, when all his enemies had been subdued, and he had rest on every side. Even in earnest and spiritually-minded men, religion is often coloured by their worldly calling; and in no case more so, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, than in those who follow the profession of arms.

But in all this military career and influence of David, may we not trace a type of character which was realised in a far higher sphere, and to far grander purpose, in the career of Jesus, David's Son? David on an earthly level is Jesus on a higher. Every noble quality of David, his courage, his activity, his affection, his obedience and trust toward God, his devotion to the welfare of others, reappears purer and higher in Jesus. If David is surrounded by his thirty mighty and his two threes, so is Jesus by His twelve apostles, His seventy disciples, and pre-eminently the three apostles who went with Him into the innermost scenes. If David's men are roused by his example to deeds of daring like his own, so the apostles and disciples go into the world to teach, to fight, to heal, and to bless, as Christ had done before them. Looking back from the present moment to David's time, what young man of spirit but feels that it would have been a great joy to belong to his company, much better than to be among those who were always carping and criticising, and laughing at the men who shared his danger and sacrifices? And does any one think that, when another cycle of ages has gone past, he will have occasion to congratulate himself that while he lived on earth he had nothing to do with Christ and earnest Christians, that he bore no part in any Christian battle, that he kept well away from Christ and His staff, that he preferred the service and pleasure of the world? Surely no. Shall any of us, then, deliberately do to-day what we know we shall repent to-morrow? Is it not certain that Jesus Christ is an unrivalled Commander, pure and noble above all His fellows, that His life was the most glorious ever led on earth, and that His service is by far the most honourable? We do not dwell at this moment on the great fact that only in His faith and fellowship can any of us escape the wrath to come, or gain the favour of God. We ask you to say in what company you can spend your lives to most profit, under whose influence you may receive the highest impulses, and be made to do the best service for God and man? It must have been interesting in David's time to see his people "willing in the day of his power," to see young men flocking to his standard in the beauties of holiness, like dewdrops from the womb of the morning. And still more glorious is the sight when young men, even the highest born and the highest gifted, having had grace to see who and what Jesus Christ is, find no manner of life worthy to be compared in essential dignity and usefulness with His service, and, in spite of the world, give themselves to Him. Oh that we could see many such rallying to His standard, contrasting, as St. Paul did, the two services, and counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

2 SAMUEL xxii.

SOME of David's actions are very characteristic of himself; there are other actions quite out of harmony with his character. This psalm of thanksgiving belongs to the former order. It is quite like David, at the conclusion of his military enterprises, to cast his eye gratefully over the whole, and acknowledge the goodness and mercy that had followed him all along. Unlike many, he was as careful to thank God for mercies past and present as to entreat Him for mercies to come. The whole book of Psalms resounds with halleluiahs, especially the closing part. In the song before us we have something like a grand halleluiah, in which thanks are given for all the deliverances and mercies of the past, and unbounded confidence expressed in God's mercy and goodness for the time to come.

The date of this song is not to be determined by the place which it occupies in the history. We have already seen that the last few chapters of Samuel consist of supplementary narratives, not introduced at their regular places, but needful to give completeness to the history. It is likely that this psalm was written considerably before the end of David's reign. Two considerations make it all but certain that its date is earlier than Absalom's rebellion. In the first place, the mention of the name of Saul in the first verse—"in the day when God delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies and out of the hand of Saul"—would seem to imply that the deliverance from Saul was somewhat recent, certainly not so remote as it would have been at the end of David's reign. And secondly, while the affirmation of David's sincerity and honesty in serving God might doubtless have been made at any period of his life, yet some of his expressions would not have been likely to be used after his deplorable fall. It is not likely that after that, he would have spoken, for example, of the cleanness of his hands, stained as they had been by wickedness that could hardly have been surpassed. On the whole, it seems most likely that the psalm was written about the time referred to in 2 Sam. vii. 1—"when the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about." This was the time when it was in his heart to build the temple, and we know from that and other circumstances that he was then in a state of overflowing thankfulness.

Besides the introduction, the song consists of three leading parts not very definitely separated from each other, but sufficiently marked to form a convenient division, as follows:—

I. Introduction: the leading thought of the song, an adoring acknowledgment of what God had been and was to David (vv. 2-4).

II. A narrative of the Divine interpositions on his behalf, embracing his dangers, his prayers, and the Divine deliverances in reply (vv. 5-19).

III. The grounds of his protection and success (vv. 20-30).

IV. References to particular acts of God's goodness in various parts of his life, interspersed with reflections on the Divine character, from all which the assurance is drawn that that goodness would be continued to him and his successors, and would secure through coming ages the welfare and extension of the kingdom. And here we observe what

is so common in the Psalms: a gradual rising above the idea of a mere earthly kingdom; the type passes into the antitype; the kingdom of David melts, as in a dissolving view, into the kingdom of the Messiah; thus a more elevated tone is given to the song, and the assurance is conveyed to every believer that as God protected David and his kingdom so shall He protect and glorify the kingdom of His Son for ever.

I. In the burst of adoring gratitude with which the psalm opens as its leading thought, we mark David's recognition of Jehovah as the source of all the protection, deliverance, and success he had ever enjoyed, along with a special assertion of closest relationship to Him, in the frequent use of the word "my," and a very ardent acknowledgment of the claim to his gratitude thus arising—"God, who is worthy to be praised."

The feeling that recognised God as the Author of all his deliverances was intensely strong, for every expression that can denote it is heaped together: "My rock, my portion, my deliverer; the God of my rock, my shield; the horn of my salvation, my high tower, my refuge, my Saviour." He takes no credit to himself; he gives no glory to his captains; the glory is all the Lord's. He sees God so supremely the Author of his deliverance that the human instruments that helped him are for the moment quite out of view. He who, in the depths of his penitence, sees but one supremely injured Being, and says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," at the height of his prosperity sees but one gracious Being, and adores Him, who only is his rock and his salvation. In an age when all the stress is apt to be laid on the human instruments, and God left out of view, this habit of mind is instructive and refreshing. It was a touching incident in English history when, after the battle of Agincourt, Henry V. of England directed the hundred and fifteenth Psalm to be sung; prostrating himself on the ground, and causing his whole army to do the same, when the words were sounded out, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name give glory."

The emphatic use of the pronoun "my" by the Psalmist is very instructive. It is so easy to speak in general terms of what God is, and what God does; but it is quite another thing to be able to appropriate Him as ours, and rejoice in that relation. Luther said of the twenty-third Psalm that the word "my" in the first verse was the very hinge of the whole. There is a whole world of difference between the two expressions, "The Lord is a Shepherd" and "The Lord is my Shepherd." The use of the "my" indicates a personal transaction, a covenant relation into which the parties have solemnly entered. No man is entitled to use this expression who has merely a reverential feeling towards God, and respect for His will. You must have come to God as a sinner, owning and feeling your unworthiness, and casting yourself on His grace. You must have transacted with God in the spirit of His exhortation. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

One other point has to be noticed in this introduction—when David comes to express his dependence on God, he very specially sets Him before his mind as "worthy to be praised." He calls to mind the gracious character of God,—not an austere God, reaping where He has not sown, and

gathering where He has not strowed, but "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." "This doctrine," says Luther, "is in tribulation the most ennobling and truly golden. One cannot imagine what assistance such praise of God is in pressing danger. For as soon as you begin to praise God the sense of the evil will also begin to abate, the comfort of your heart will grow; and then God will be called on with confidence. There are some who cry to the Lord and are not heard. Why is this? Because they do not praise the Lord when they cry to Him, but go to Him with reluctance; they have not represented to themselves how sweet the Lord is, but have looked only to their own bitterness. But no one gets deliverance from evil by looking simply upon his evil and becoming alarmed at it; he can get deliverance only by rising above his evil, hanging it on God, and having respect to His goodness. Oh, hard counsel, doubtless, and a rare thing truly, in the midst of trouble to conceive of God as sweet, and worthy to be praised; and when He has removed Himself from us and is incomprehensible, even then to regard Him more intensely than we regard our misfortune that keeps us from Him! Only let one try it, and make the endeavour to praise God, though in little heart for it; he will soon experience an enlightenment."

II. We pass on to the part of the song where the Psalmist describes his trials and God's deliverances in his times of danger (vv. 5-20).

The description is eminently poetical. First, there is a vivid picture of his troubles. "The waves of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me; the snares of death prevented me" ("The cords of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid; the cords of sheol were round about me; the snares of death came upon me," R. V.). It is no overcharged picture. With Saul's javelins flying at his head in the palace, or his best troops scouring the wilderness in search of him; with Syrian hosts bearing down on him like the waves of the sea, and a confederacy of nations conspiring to swallow him up, he might well speak of the waves of death and the cords of Hades. He evidently desires to describe the extremest peril and distress that can be conceived, a situation where the help of man is vain indeed. Then, after a brief account of his calling upon God, comes a most animated description of God coming to his help. The description is ideal, but it gives a vivid view how the Divine energy is roused when any of God's children are in distress. It is in heaven as in an earthly home when an alarm is given that one of the little children is in danger, has wandered away into a thicket where he has lost his way: every servant is summoned, every passer-by is called to the rescue, the whole neighbourhood is roused to the most strenuous efforts; so when the cry reached heaven that David was in trouble, the earthquake and the lightning and all the other messengers of heaven were sent out to his aid; nay, these were not enough; God Himself flew, riding on a cherub, yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind. Faith saw God bestirring Himself for his deliverance, as if every agency of nature had been set in motion on his behalf.

And this being done, his deliverance was conspicuous and complete. He saw God's hand stretched out with remarkable distinctness. There could be no more doubt that it was God that

rescued him from Saul than that it was He that snatched Israel from Pharaoh when literally "the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils." There could be no more doubt that it was God who protected David when men rose to swallow him up than that it was He who drew Moses from the Nile—"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." No miracles had been wrought on David's behalf; unlike Moses and Joshua before him, and unlike Elijah and Elisha after him, he had not had the laws of nature suspended for his protection; yet he could see the hand of God stretched out for him as clearly as if a miracle had been wrought at every turn. Does this not show that ordinary Christians, if they are but careful to watch, and humble enough to watch in a chastened spirit, may find in their history, however quietly it may have glided by, many a token of the interest and care of their Father in heaven? And what a blessed thing to have accumulated through life a store of such providences—to have Ebenezers reared along the whole line of one's history! What courage after looking over such a past might one feel in looking forward to the future!

III. The next section of the song sets forth the grounds on which the Divine protection was thus enjoyed by David. Substantially these grounds were the uprightness and faithfulness with which he had served God. The expressions are strong, and at first sight they have a flavour of self-righteousness. "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me, and I put not away His statutes from me. I was also perfect with Him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity." But it is impossible to read this Psalm without feeling that it is not pervaded by the spirit of the self-righteous man. It is pervaded by a profound sense of dependence on God, and of obligation to His mercy and love. Now that is the very opposite of the self-righteous spirit. We may surely find another way of accounting for such expressions used by David here. We may surely believe that all that was meant by him was to express the unswerving sincerity and earnestness with which he had endeavoured to serve God, with which he had resisted every temptation to conscious unfaithfulness, with which he had resisted every allurements to idolatry on the one hand or to the neglect of the welfare of God's nation on the other. What he here celebrates is, not any personal righteousness that might enable him as an individual to claim the favour and reward of God, but the ground on which he, as the public champion of God's cause before the world, enjoyed God's countenance and obtained His protection. There would be no self-righteousness in an inferior officer of the navy or the army who had been sent on some expedition saying, "I obeyed your instructions in every particular; I never deviated from the course you prescribed." There would have been no self-righteousness in such a man as Luther saying, "I constantly maintained the principles of the Bible; I never once abandoned Protestant ground." Such affirmations would never be held to imply a claim of personal sinlessness during the whole course of their lives. Substantially all that is asserted is, that in their public capacity they proved

faithful to the cause entrusted to them; they never consciously betrayed their public charge. Now it is this precisely that David affirms of himself. Unlike Saul, who abandoned the law of the kingdom, David uniformly endeavoured to carry it into effect. The success which followed he does not claim as any credit to himself, but as due to his having followed the instructions of his heavenly Lord. It is the very opposite of a self-righteous spirit. He would have us understand that if ever he had abandoned the guidance of God, if ever he had relied on his own wisdom and followed the counsels of his own heart, everything would have gone wrong with him; the fact that he had been successful was due altogether to the Divine wisdom that guided and the Divine strength that upheld him.

Even with this explanation, some of the expressions may seem too strong. How could he speak of the cleanness of his hands, and of his not having wickedly departed from his God? Granting that the song was written before his sin in the case of Uriah, yet remembering how he had lied at Nob and equivocated at Gath, might he not have used less sweeping words? But it is not the way of burning, enthusiastic minds to be for ever weighing their words, and guarding against misunderstandings. Enthusiasm sweeps along in a rapid current. And David correctly describes the prevailing features of his public endeavours. His public life was unquestionably marked by a sincere and commonly successful endeavour to follow the will of God. In contrast with Saul and Ishbosheth, side by side with Absalom or Sheba, his career was purity itself, and bore out the rule of the Divine government, "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, and with the upright man Thou wilt show Thyself upright. With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure, and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury." If God is to prosper us, there must be an inner harmony between us and Him. If the habit of our life be opposed to God, the result can only be collision and rebuke. David was conscious of the inner harmony, and therefore he was able to rely on being supported and blessed.

IV. In the wide survey of his life and of his providential mercies, the eye of the Psalmist is particularly fixed on some of his deliverances, in the remembrance of which he specially praises God. One of the earliest appears to be recalled in the words, "By my God have I leaped over a wall,"—the wall, it may be supposed, of Gibeah, down which Michal let him when Saul sent to take him in his house. Still further back, perhaps, in his life is the allusion in another expression—"Thy gentleness hath made me great." He seems to go back to his shepherd life, and in the gentleness with which he dealt with the feeble lamb that might have perished in rougher hands to find an emblem of God's method with himself. If God had not dealt gently with him, he never would have become what he was. The Divine gentleness had made paths easy that rougher treatment would have made intolerable. And who of us that looks back but must own our obligations to the gentleness of God, the tender, forbearing, nay loving, treatment He has bestowed on us, even in the midst of provocations that would have justified far harsher treatment?

But what? Can David praise God's gentleness and in the next words utter such terrible words against his foes? How can he extol God's gentleness to him and immediately dwell on his tre-

mendous severity to them? "I have consumed them and wounded them that they could not arise; yea, they are fallen under my feet. . . . Then did I beat them as sinners as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad." It is the military spirit which we have so often observed, looking on his enemies in one light only, as identified with everything evil and enemies of all that was good. To show mercy to them would be like showing mercy to destructive wild beasts, raging bears, venomous serpents, and rapacious vultures. Mercy to them would be cruelty to all God's servants; it would be ruin to God's cause. No! for them the only fit doom was destruction, and that destruction he had dealt to them with no sparing hand.

But while we perceive his spirit, and harmonise it with his general character, we cannot but regard it as the spirit of one who was imperfectly enlightened. We tremble when we think what fearful wickedness persecutors and inquisitors have committed, under the idea that the same course was to be followed against those whom they deemed enemies of the cause of God. We rejoice in the Christian spirit that teaches us to regard even public enemies as our brothers, for whom individually kindly and brotherly feelings are to be cherished. And we remember the new aspect in which our relations to such have been placed by our Lord: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."

In the closing verses of the Psalm, the views of the Psalmist seem to sweep beyond the limits of an earthly kingdom. His eye seems to embrace the wide-spreading dominion of Messiah; at all events, he dwells on those features of his own kingdom that were typical of the all-embracing kingdom of the Gospel: "Thou hast made me the head of the nations; a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me; the strangers shall submit themselves unto me." The forty-ninth verse is quoted by St. Paul (Rom. xv. 9) as a proof that in the purpose of God the salvation of Christ was designed for Gentiles as well as Jews. "It is beyond doubt," says Luther, "that the wars and victories of David prefigured the passion and resurrection of Christ." At the same time, he admits that it is very doubtful how far the Psalm applies to Christ, and how far to David, and he declines to press the type to particulars. But we may surely apply the concluding words to David's Son: "He showeth loving-kindness to his anointed, to David and to his seed for evermore."

It is interesting to mark the military aspect of the kingdom gliding into the missionary. Other psalms bring out more clearly this missionary element, exhibit David rejoicing in the widening limits of his kingdom, in the wider diffusion of the knowledge of the true God, and in the greater happiness and prosperity accruing to men. And yet, perhaps, his views on the subject were comparatively dim; he may have been disposed to identify the conquests of the sword and the conquests of the truth instead of regarding the one as but typical of the other. The visions and revelations of his later years seem to have thrown new light on this glorious subject, and though not immediately, yet ultimately, to have convinced him that truth, righteousness, and meekness were to be the conquering weapons of Messiah's reign.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID.

2 SAMUEL xxiii. 1-7. (See Revised Version and margin.)

OF these "the last words of David," we need not understand that they were the last words he ever spoke, but his last song or psalm, his latest vision, and therefore the subject that was most in his mind in the last period of his life. The Psalm recorded in the preceding chapter was an earlier song, and its main drift was of the past. Of this latest Psalm the main drift is of the future. The colours of this vision are brighter than those of any other. Aged though the seer was, there is a glory in this his latest vision unsurpassed in any that went before. The setting sun spreads a lustre around as he sinks under the horizon unequalled by any he diffused even when he rode in the height of the heavens.

The song falls into four parts. First, there is an elaborate introduction, descriptive of the singer and the inspiration which gave birth to his song; secondly, the main subject of the prophecy, a Ruler among men, of wonderful brightness and glory; thirdly, a reference to the Psalmist's own house and the covenant God had made with him; and finally, in the way of contrast to the preceding, a prediction of the doom of the ungodly.

I. In the introduction, we cannot but be struck with the formality and solemnity of the affirmation respecting the singer and the inspiration under which he sang.

"David, the son of Jesse, saith,
And the man who was raised on high saith,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel:
The Spirit of the Lord spake by me,
And His word was upon my tongue;
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spake to me" (R. V.).

The first four clauses represent David as the speaker; the second four represent God's Spirit as inspiring his words. The introduction to Balaam's prophecies is the only passage where we find a similar structure, nor is this the only point of resemblance between the two songs.

"Balaam, the son of Beor, saith,
And the man whose eye was closed saith;
He saith which heareth the words of God,
And knoweth the knowledge of the Most High;
Which seeth the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, and having his eyes open,"
(Num. xxiv. 15, 16, R. V.).

In both prophecies, the word translated "saith" is peculiar. While occurring between two and three hundred times in the formula "Thus saith the Lord," it is used by a human speaker only in these two places and in Prov. xxx. 1. Both Balaam and David begin by giving their own name and that of their father, thereby indicating their native insignificance, and disclaiming any right to speak on subjects so lofty through any wisdom or insight of their own. Immediately after, they claim to speak the words of God. All the grounds on which David should be listened to fall under this head. Was he not "raised up on high"? Was he not the anointed of the God of Jacob? Was he not the sweet Psalmist of Israel? Having been raised up on high, David had established the kingdom of Israel on a firm and lasting basis, he had destroyed all its enemies, and he had estab-

lished a comely order and prosperity throughout all its borders; as the sweet singer of Israel, or, as it has been otherwise rendered, "the lovely one in Israel's songs of praise"—that is, the man who had been specially gifted to compose songs of praise in honour of Israel's God—it was fitting that he should be made the organ of this very remarkable and glorious communication. It is interesting to observe how David must have been attracted by Balaam's vision. The dark wall of the Moabite mountains was a familiar object to him, and must often have recalled the strange but unworthy prophet who spoke of the Star that was to shine so gloriously, and the Sceptre that was to have such a wonderful rule. Often during his life we may believe that David devoutly desired to know something more of that mysterious Star and Sceptre; and now that desire is fulfilled; the Star is as the light of the morning star; the Sceptre is that of a blessed ruler, "one that ruleth over men righteously, that ruleth in the fear of God."

The second part of the introduction stamps the prophecy with a fourfold mark of inspiration. 1. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me." For "the prophecy came not of old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2. "His word was in my tongue." For in high visions like this, of which no wisdom of man can create even a shadow, it is not enough that the Spirit should merely guide the writer; this is one of the utterances where verbal inspiration must have been enjoyed. 3. "The God of Israel said," He who entered into covenant with Israel, and promised him great and peculiar mercies. 4. "The Rock of Israel spake to me," the faithful One, whose words are stable as a rock, and who provides for Israel a foundation-stone, elect and precious, immovable as the everlasting hills.

So remarkable an introduction must be followed by no ordinary prophecy. If the prophecy should bear on nothing more remarkable than some earthly successor of David, all this preliminary glorification would be singularly out of place. It would be like a great procession of heralds and flourishing of trumpets in an earthly kingdom to announce some event of the most ordinary kind, the repeal of a tax or the appointment of an officer.

II. We come then to the great subject of the prophecy—a Ruler over men. The rendering of the Authorised Version is somewhat lame and obscure, "He that ruleth over men must be just," there being nothing whatever in the original corresponding to "must be." The Revised Version is at once more literal and more expressive:—

"One that ruleth over men righteously,
Ruling in the fear of God,
He shall be as the light of the morning."

It is a vision of a remarkable Ruler, not a Ruler over the kingdom of Israel merely, but a Ruler "over men." The Ruler seen is One whose government knows no earthly limits, but prevails wherever there are men. Solomon could not be the ruler seen, for, wide though his empire was, he was king of Israel only, not king of men. It was but a speck of the habitable globe, but a morsel of that part of it that was inhabited even then, over which Solomon reigned. If the term "One that ruleth over men" could have been appropriated by any monarch, it would have been Ahasuerus, with his hundred and twenty-seven provinces, or Alexander the Great, or some other uni-

versal monarch, that would have had the right to claim it. But every such application is out of the question. The "Ruler over men" of this vision must have been identified by David with Him "in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed."

It is worthy of very special remark that the first characteristic of this Ruler is "righteousness." There is no grander or more majestic word in the language of men. Not even love or mercy can be preferred to righteousness. And this is no casual expression, happening in David's vision, for it is common to the whole class of prophecies that predict the Messiah. "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment." "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord . . . shall rest on Him, . . . and righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins." There is no lack in the New Testament of passages to magnify the love and mercy of the Lord Jesus, yet it is made very plain that righteousness was the foundation of all His work. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," were the words with which He removed the objections of John to His baptism, and they were words that described the business of His whole life: to fulfil all righteousness for His people and in His people—for them, to satisfy the demands of the righteous law and bear the righteous penalty of transgression; in them to infuse His own righteous spirit and mould them into the likeness of His righteous example, to sum up the whole law of righteousness in the law of love, and by His grace instil that law into their hearts. Such essentially was the work of Christ. No man can say of the religious life that Christ expounded that it was a life of loose, feverish emotion or sentimental spirituality that left the Decalogue far out of view. Nothing could have been further from the mind of Him that said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Nothing could have been more unlike the spirit of Him who was not content with maintaining the letter of the Decalogue, but with His "again, I say unto you," drove its precepts so much further as into the very joints and marrow of men's souls.

It is the grand characteristic of Christ's salvation in theory that it is through righteousness; it is not less its effect in practice to promote righteousness. To any who would dream, under colour of free grace, of breaking down the law of righteousness, the words of "the Holy One and the Just" stand out as an eternal rebuke, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

And as Christ's work was founded on righteousness, so it was constantly done "in the fear of God,"—with the highest possible regard for His will, and reverence for His law. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" is the first word we hear from Christ's lips; and among the last is, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." No motto could have been more appropriate for His whole life than this: "I delight to do Thy will, O My God."

Having shown the character of the Ruler, the vision next pictures the effects of His rule:—

"He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth,
A morning without clouds,
When the tender grass springeth out of the earth
Through clear shining after rain."

But why introduce the future "shall be" in the translation when it is not in the original? May we not conceive the Psalmist reading off a vision—a scene unfolding itself in all its beauty before his mind's eye? A beautiful influence seems to come over the earth as the Divine Ruler makes His appearance, like the rising of the sun on a cloudless morning, like the appearance of the grass when the sun shines out clearly after rain. No imagery could be more delightful, or more fitly applied to Christ. The image of the morning sun presents Christ in His gladdening influences, bringing pardon to the guilty, health to the diseased, hope to the despairing; He is indeed like the morning sun, lighting up the sky with splendour and the earth with beauty, giving brightness to the languid eye, and colour to the faded cheek, and health and hope to the sorrowing heart. The chief idea under the other emblem, the grass shining clearly after rain, is that of renewed beauty and growth. The heavy rain batters the grass, as heavy trials batter the soul, but when the morning sun shines out clearly, the grass recovers, it sparkles with a fresher lustre, and grows with intenser activity. So when Christ shines on the heart after trial, a new beauty and a new growth and prosperity come to it. When this Sun of righteousness shines forth thus, in the case of individuals the understanding becomes more clear, the conscience more vigorous, the will more firm, the habits more holy, the temper more serene, the affections more pure, the desires more heavenly. In communities, conversions are multiplied, and souls advanced steadily in holy beauties; intelligence spreads, love triumphs over selfishness, and the spirit of Christ modifies the spirit of strife and the spirit of mammon. It is with the happiest skill that Solomon, appropriating part of his father's imagery, draws the picture of the bride, with the radiance of the bridegroom falling on her: "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

III. Next comes David's allusion to his own house. In our translation, and in the text of the Revised Version, this comes in to indicate a sad contrast between the bright vision just described and the Psalmist's own family. It indicates that his house or family did not correspond to the picture of the prophecy, and would not realize the emblems of the rising sun and the growing grass; but as God had made with himself an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, that satisfied him; it was all his salvation and all his desire, although his house was not to grow.

But in the margin of the Revised Version we have another translation, which reverses all this:—

"For is not my house so with God?
For He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,
Ordered in all things and sure:
For all my salvation and all my desire,
Will He not make it to grow?"

Corresponding as this does with the translation of many scholars (*e. g.*, Boothroyd, Hengstenberg, Fairbairn), it must be regarded as admissible on the strength of outward evidence. And if so, certainly it is very strongly recommended by internal evidence. For what reason could David have for introducing his family at all after the glorious vision if only to say that they were excluded from it? And can it be thought that David, whose nature was so intensely sympathetic, would be so pleased because he was personally provided for, though not his family? And still further, why

should he go on in the next verses (6, 7) to describe the doom of the ungodly by way of contrast to what precedes if the doom of ungodly persons is the matter already introduced in the fifth verse? The passage becomes highly involved and unnatural in the light of the older translation.

The key to the passage will be found, if we mistake not, in the expression "my house." We are liable to think of this as the domestic circle, whereas it ought to be thought of as the reigning dynasty. What is denoted by the house of Hapsburg, the house of Hanover, the house of Savoy, is quite different from the personal family of any of the kings. So when David speaks of his house, he means his dynasty. In this sense his "house" had been made the subject of the most gracious promise. "Moreover, the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. . . . And thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee. . . . Then David said, . . . What is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far? . . . Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." The king felt profoundly on that occasion that his house was even more prominently the subject of Divine promise than himself. What roused his gratitude to its utmost height was the gracious provision for his house. Surely the covenant referred to in the passage now before us, "ordered in all things and sure," was this very covenant announced to him by the prophet Nathan, the covenant that made this provision for his house. It is impossible to think of him recalling this covenant and yet saying, "Verily my house is not so with God" (R.V.).

But take the marginal reading—"Is not my house so with God?" Is not my dynasty embraced in the scope of this promise? Hath He not made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure? And will He not make this promise, which is all my salvation and all my desire, to grow, to fructify? It is infinitely more natural to represent David on this joyous occasion congratulating himself on the promise of long continuance and prosperity made to his dynasty, than dwelling on the unhappy condition of the members of his family circle.

And the facts of the future correspond to this explanation. Was not the government of David's house or dynasty in the main righteous, at least for many a reign, conducted in the fear of God, and followed by great prosperity and blessing? David himself, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah—what other nation had ever so many Christlike kings? What a contrast was presented to this in the main by the apostate kingdom of the ten tribes, idolatrous, God-dishonouring, throughout! And as to the growth or continued vitality of his house, its "clear shining after rain," had not God promised that He would bless it, and that it would continue for ever before Him? He knew that, spiritually dormant at times, his house would survive, till a living root came from the stem of Jesse, till the Prince of life should be born from it, and once that plant of renown was raised up, there was no fear but the house would be preserved for ever. From this point it would start on a new career of glory: nay, this was the very Ruler of whom he had been prophesying, at once David's Son and David's Lord: this was the root and the offspring of David, the bright and the morning star. Conducted to this stage in the future experience of his house, he needed no further assurance, he cherished no further desire. The

covenant that rested on Him and that promised Him was ordered in all things and sure. The glorious prospect exhausted his every wish. "This is all my salvation and all my desire."

IV. The last part of the prophecy, in the way of contrast to the leading vision, is a prediction of the doom of the ungodly. The revised translation is much the clearer:—

"But the ungodly shall be all of them as thorns to be thrust away,
For they cannot be taken with the hand,
But the man that toucheth them
Must be armed with iron and the staff and spear,
And they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place."

While some would fain think of Christ's sceptre as one of mercy only, the uniform representation of the Bible is different. In this, as in most predictions of Christ's kingly office, there is an instructive combination of mercy and judgment. In the bosom of one of Isaiah's sweetest predictions, he introduces the Messiah as anointed by the Spirit of God to proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God." In a subsequent vision, Messiah appears marching triumphantly "with dyed garments from Bozrah, after treading the people in His anger and trampling them in His fury." Malachi proclaimed Him "the Sun of righteousness, with healing under His wings," while His day was to burn as an oven and consume the proud and the wicked like stubble. John the Baptist saw Him "with His fan in His hand, throughly purging His floor, gathering the wheat into His garner, while the chaff should be burnt with unquenchable fire." In His own words, "the Son of man shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And in the Apocalypse, when the King of kings and the Lord of lords is to be married to His bride, He appears "clothed with a garment dipped in blood, and out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that He should smite the nations, and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Nor could it be otherwise. The union of mercy and judgment is the inevitable result of the righteousness which is the foundation of His government. Sin is the abominable thing which He hates. To separate men from sin is the grand purpose of His government. For this end, He draws His people into union with Himself, thereby for ever removing their guilt, and providing for the ultimate removal of all sin from their hearts and the complete assimilation of their natures to His holy nature. Blessed are they who enter into this relation; but alas for those who, for all that He has done, prefer their sins to Him! "The ungodly shall be all of them as thorns to be thrust away."

Oh, let us not be satisfied with admiring beautiful images of Christ! Let us not deem it enough to think with pleasure of Him as the light of the morning, a morning without clouds, brightening the earth, and making it sparkle with the lustre of the sunshine on the grass after rain! Let us not satisfy ourselves with knowing that Jesus Christ came to earth on a beneficent mission, and with thinking that surely we shall one day share in the blessed effects of His work! Nothing of that kind can avail us if we are not personally united to Christ. We must come as sinners individually to Him, cast ourselves on His free, unmerited grace, and deliberately accept His righteousness as our clothing. Then, but only then, shall we be able to

sing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NUMBERING OF ISRAEL.

2 SAMUEL xxiv.

THOUGH David's life was now drawing to its close, neither his sins nor his chastisements were yet exhausted. One of his chief offences was committed when he was old and gray-headed. There can be little doubt that what is recorded in this chapter took place toward the close of his life; the word "again" at the beginning indicates that it was later in time than the event which gave rise to the last expression of God's displeasure to the nation. Surely there can be little ground for the doctrine of perfectionism, otherwise David, whose religion was so earnest and so deep, would have been nearer it now than this chapter shows that he was.

The offence consisted in taking a census of the people. At first it is difficult to see what there was in this that was so sinful; yet highly sinful it was in the judgment of God, in the judgment of Joab, and at last in the judgment of David too; it will be necessary, therefore, to examine the subject very carefully if we would understand clearly what constituted the great sin of David.

The origin of the proceeding was remarkable. It may be said to have had a double, or rather a triple, origin: God, David, and Satan, or, as some propose to render in place of Satan, "an enemy."

In Samuel we read that "the Lord's anger was again kindled against Israel." The nation required a chastisement. It needed a smart stroke of the rod to make it pause and think how it was offending God. We do not require to know very specially what it was that displeased God in a nation that had been so ready to side with Absalom and drive God's anointed from the throne. They were far from steadfast in their allegiance to God, easily drawn from the path of duty; and all that it is important for us to know is simply that at this particular time they were farther astray than usual, and more in need of chastisement. The cup of sin had filled up so far that God behoved to interpose.

For this end "the Lord moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." The action of God in the matter, like His action in sinful matters generally, was, that He permitted it to take place. He allowed David's sinful feeling to come as a factor into His scheme with a view to the chastising of the people. We have seen many times in this history how God is represented as doing things and saying things which He does not do nor say directly, but which He takes up into His plan, with a view to the working out of some great end in the future. But in Chronicles it is said that Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel. According to some commentators, the Hebrew word is not to be translated "Satan," because it has no article, but "an adversary," as in parallel passages: "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite" (1 Kings xi. 14); "God stirred

up another adversary to Israel, Razon, the son of Eliadib" (1 Kings xi. 23). Perhaps it was some one in the garb of a friend, but with the spirit of an enemy, that moved David in this matter. If we suppose Satan to have been the active mover, then Bishop Hall's words will indicate the relation between the three parties: "Both God and Satan had then a hand in the work—God by permission, Satan by suggestion; God as a Judge, Satan as an enemy; God as in a just punishment for sin, Satan as in an act of sin; God in a wise ordination of it for good, Satan in a malicious intent of confusion. Thus at once God moved and Satan moved, neither is it any excuse to Satan or to David that God moved, neither is it any blemish to God that Satan moved. The ruler's sin is a punishment to a wicked people; if God were not angry with a people, He would not give up their governors to evils that provoke His vengeance; justly are we charged to make prayers and supplications as for all men, so especially for rulers."

But what constituted David's great offence in numbering the people? Every civilised State is now accustomed to number its people periodically, and for many good purposes it is a most useful step. Josephus represents that David omitted to levy the atonement money which was to be raised, according to Exod. xxx. 12, etc., from all who were numbered, but surely, if this had been his offence, it would have been easy for Joab, when he remonstrated, to remind him of it, instead of trying to dissuade him from the scheme altogether. The more common view of the transaction has been that it was objectionable, not in itself, but in the spirit by which it was dictated. That spirit seems to have been a self-glorifying spirit. It seems to have been like the spirit which led Hezekiah to show his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. Perhaps it was designed to show, that in the number of his forces David was quite a match for the great empires on the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates. If their fighting men could be counted by the hundred thousand or the thousand thousand, so could his. In the fighting resources of his kingdom, he was able to hold his head as high as any of them. Surely such a spirit was the very opposite of what was becoming in such a king as David. Was this not measuring the strength of a spiritual power with the measure of a carnal? Did it not leave God most sinfully out of reckoning? Nay, did it not substitute a carnal for a spiritual defence? Was it not in the very teeth of the Psalm, "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety; neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine"?

That David's project was very deeply seated in his heart is evident from the fact that he was unmoved by the remonstrance of Joab. In ordinary circumstances it must have startled him to find that even he was strongly opposed to his project. It is indeed strange that Joab should have had scruples where David had none. We have been accustomed to find Joab so seldom in the right that it is hard to believe that he was in the right now. But perhaps we do Joab injustice. He was a man that could be profoundly stirred when his own interests were at stake, or his passions roused, and that seemed equally regardless of God and man in what he did on such occasions. But otherwise

Joab commonly acted with prudence and moderation. He consulted for the good of the nation. He was not habitually reckless or habitually cruel, and he seems to have had a certain amount of regard to the will of God and the theocratic constitution of the kingdom, for he was loyal to David from the very beginning, up to the contest between Solomon and Adonijah. It is evident that Joab felt strongly that in the step which he proposed to take David would be acting a part unworthy of himself and of the constitution of the kingdom, and by displeasing God would expose himself to evils far beyond any advantage he might hope to gain by ascertaining the number of the people.

For once—and this time, unhappily—David was too strong for the son of Zeruiah. The enumerators of the people were despatched, no doubt with great regularity, to take the census. The boundaries named were not beyond the territory as divided by Joshua among the Israelites, save that Tyre and Zidon were included; not that they had been annexed by David, but probably because there was an understanding that in all his military arrangements they were to be associated with him. Nine months and twenty days were occupied in the business. At the end of it, it was ascertained that the fighting men of Israel were eight hundred thousand, and those of Judah five hundred thousand; or, if we take the figures in Chronicles, eleven hundred thousand of Israel and four hundred and seventy thousand of Judah. The discrepancy is not easily accounted for; but probably in Chronicles in the number for Israel certain bodies of troops were included which were not included in Samuel, and *vice versa* in the case of Judah.

Just as in the case of his sin in the matter of Uriah, David was long of coming to a sense of it. How his view came to change we are not told, but when the change did occur, it seems, as in the other case, to have come with extraordinary force. "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that which I have done; and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." Once alive to his sin, his humiliation is very profound. His confession is frank, hearty, complete. He shows no proud desire to remain on good terms with himself, seeks nothing to break his fall or to make his humiliation less before Joab and before the people. He says, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord;" and his plea is one with which he is familiar from of old—"For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." He is never greater than when acknowledging his sin.

Next comes the chastisement. The moment for sending it is very seasonable. It did not come while his conscience was yet slumbering, but after he had come to feel his sin. His confessions and relentings were proofs that he was now fit for chastisement; the chastisement, as in the other case, was solemnly announced by a prophet; and, as in the other case too, it fell on one of the tenderest spots of his heart. Then the first blow fell on his infant child; now it falls upon his sheep. His affections were divided between his children; and his people, and in both cases the blow must have been very severe. It was, as far as we can judge, after a night of very profound humiliation that the prophet Gad was sent to him. Gad had first come to him when he was hiding from Saul.

and had therefore been his friend all his kingly life. Sad that so old and so good a friend should be the bearer to the aged king of a bitter message! Seven years of famine (in 1 Chron. xxi. 12, three years), three months of unsuccessful war, or three days of pestilence,—the choice lies between these three. All of them were well fitted to rebuke that pride in human resources which had been the occasion of his sin. Well might he say, "I am in a great strait." Oh the bitterness of the harvest when you sow to the flesh! Between these three horrors even God's anointed king has to choose. What a delusion it is that God will not be very careful in the case of the wicked to inflict the due retribution of sin! "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

David chose the three days of pestilence. It was the shortest, no doubt, but what recommended it, especially above the three months of unsuccessful war, was that it would come more directly from the hand of God. "Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man." What a frightful time it must have been! Seventy thousand died of the plague. From Dan to Beersheba nothing would be heard but a bitter cry, like that of the Egyptians when the angel slew the first-born. What days and nights of agony these must have been to David! How slowly would they drag on! What cries in the morning, "Would God it were evening!" and in the evening, "Would God it were morning!"

The pestilence, wherever it originated, seems to have advanced from every side like a besieging army, till it was ready to close upon Jerusalem. The destroying angel hovered over Mount Moriah, and, like Abraham on the same spot a thousand years before, was brandishing his sword for the work of destruction. It was a spot that had already been memorable for one display of Divine forbearance, and now it became the scene of another. Like the hand of Abraham when ready to plunge the knife into the bosom of his son, the hand of the angel was stayed when about to fall on Jerusalem. For Abraham a ram had been provided to offer in the room of Isaac; and now David is commanded to offer a burnt-offering in acknowledgment of his guilt and of his need of expiation. Thus the Lord stayed His rough wind in the day of His east wind. In sparing Jerusalem, on the very eve of destruction, He caused His mercy to rejoice over judgment.

No one but must admire the spirit of David when the angel appeared on Mount Moriah. Owning frankly his own great sin, and especially his sin as a shepherd, he bared his own bosom to the sword, and entreated God to let the punishment fall on him and on his father's house. Why should the sheep suffer for the sin of the shepherd? The plea was more beautiful than correct. The sheep had been certainly not less guilty than the shepherd, though in a different way. We have seen how the anger of the Lord had been kindled against Israel when David was induced to go and number the people. And as both had been guilty, so both had been punished. The sheep had been punished in their own bodies, the shepherd in the tenderest feelings of his heart. It is a rare sight to find a man prepared to take on himself more than his own share of the blame. It was not so in paradise, when the man threw the blame on the woman and the woman on the serpent. We see that, with all his faults, David had another spirit from that of the vulgar world. After all, there is

much of the Divine nature in this poor, blundering, sinning child of clay.

On the day when the angel appeared over Jerusalem, Gad was sent back to David with a more auspicious message. He is required to build an altar to the Lord on the spot where the angel stood. This was the fitting counterpart to Abraham's act when, in place of Isaac, he offered the ram which Jehovah-jireh had provided for the sacrifice. The circumstances connected with the rearing of the altar and the offering of the burnt-offering were very peculiar, and seem to have borne a deep typical meaning. The place where the angel's arm was arrested was by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. It was there that David was commanded to rear his altar and offer his burnt-offering. When Araunah saw the king approaching, he bowed before him and respectfully asked the purpose of his visit. It was to buy the threshing-floor and build an altar, that the plague might be stayed. But if the threshing-floor was needed for that purpose, Araunah would give it freely; and offer it as a free gift he did, with royal munificence, along with the oxen for a burnt-offering and their implements also as wood for the sacrifice. David, acknowledging his goodness, would not be outdone in generosity, and insisted on making payment. The floor was bought, the altar was built, the sacrifice was offered, and the plague was stayed. As we read in Chronicles, fire from heaven attested God's acceptance of the offering. "And David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel." That is to say, the threshing-floor was appointed to be the site of the temple which Solomon was to build; and the spot where David had hastily reared his altar was to be the place where, for hundreds of years, day after day, morning and evening, the blood of the burnt-offering was to flow, and the fumes of incense to ascend before God.

No doubt it was to save time in so pressing an emergency that Araunah gave for sacrifice the oxen with which he was working, and the implements connected with his labour. But in the purpose of God, a great truth lay under these symbolical arrangements. The oxen that had been labouring for man were sacrificed for man; both their life and their death were given for man, just as afterwards the Lord Jesus Christ, after living and labouring for the good of many, at last gave His life a ransom. The wood of the altar on which they suffered was, part of it at all events, borne on their own necks, "the threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen," just as Isaac had borne the wood and as Jesus was to bear the cross on which, respectively, they were stretched. The sacrifice was a sacrifice of blood, for only blood could remove the guilt that had to be pardoned. The analogy is clear enough. Isaac had escaped; the ram suffered in his room. Jerusalem escaped now; the oxen were sacrificed in its room. Sinners of mankind were to escape; the Lamb of God was to die, the just for the unjust, to bring them to God.

There were other circumstances, however, not without significance, connected with the purchase of the temple site. The man to whom the ground had belonged, and whose oxen had been slain as the burnt-offering, was a Jebusite; and from the way in which he designated David's Lord, "the Lord thy God," it is not certain whether he was even a proselyte. Some think that he had formerly been king of Jerusalem, or rather of the stronghold of Zion, but that when Zion was taken he had

been permitted to retire to Mount Moriah, which was separated from Zion only by a deep ravine. Josephus calls him a great friend of David's. He could not have shown a more friendly spirit or a more princely liberality. The striking way in which the heart of this Jebusite was moved to cooperate with King David in preparing for the temple was fitted to remind David of the missionary character which the temple was to sustain. "My house shall be called an house of prayer for all nations." In the words of the sixty-eighth Psalm, "Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee." As Araunah's oxen had been accepted, so the time would come when "the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar." What a wonderful thing is sanctified affliction! While its root lies in the very corruption of our nature, its fruit consists of the best blessings of Heaven. The root of David's affliction was carnal pride; but under God's sanctifying grace, it was followed by the erection of a temple associated with heavenly blessing, not to one nation only, but to all. When affliction, duly sanctified, is thus capable of bringing such blessings, it makes the fact all the more lamentable that affliction is so often unsanctified. It is vain to imagine that everything of the nature of affliction is sure to turn to good. It can turn to good on one condition only—when your heart is humbled under the rod, and in the same humble, chastened spirit as David you say, and feel as well as say, "I have sinned."

One other lesson we gather from this chapter of David's history. When he declined to accept the generous offer of Araunah, it was on the ground that he would not serve the Lord with that which cost him nothing. The thought needs only to be put in words to commend itself to every conscience. God's service is neither a form nor a sham; it is a great reality. If we desire to show our honour for Him, it must be in a way suited to the occasion. The poorest mechanic that would offer a gift to his sovereign tries to make it the product of his best labour, the fruit of his highest skill. To pluck a weed from the roadside and present it to one's sovereign would be no better than an insult. Yet how often is God served with that which costs men nothing! Men that will lavish hundreds and thousands to gratify their own fancy,—what miserable dribbles they often give to the cause of God! The smallest of coins is good enough for His treasury. And as for other forms of serving God, what a tendency there is in our time to make everything easy and pleasant,—to forget the very meaning of self-denial! It is high time that that word of David were brought forth and put before every conscience, and made to rebuke ever so many professed worshippers of God, whose rule of worship is to serve God with what does cost them nothing. The very heathen reprove you. Little though there has been to stimulate their love, their sacrifices are often most costly—far from sacrifices that have cost them nothing. Oh, let us who call ourselves Christians beware lest we be found the meanest, patrician, shabbiest of worshippers! Let souls that have been blessed as Christians have devise liberal things. Let your question and the answer be: "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of sal-

vation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of His people."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TWO BOOKS OF SAMUEL.

HAVING now surveyed the events of the history of Israel, one by one, during the whole of that memorable period which is embraced in the books of Samuel, it will be profitable, before we close, to cast a glance over the way by which we have travelled, and endeavour to gather up the leading lessons and impressions of the whole.

Let us bear in mind all along that the great object of these books, as of the other historical books of Scripture, is peculiar: it is not to trace the history of a nation, in the ordinary sense, but to trace the course of Divine revelation, to illustrate God's manner of dealing with the nation whom He chose that He might instruct and train them in His ways, that He might train them to that righteousness which alone exalteth a people, and that He might lay a foundation for the work of Christ in future times, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The history delineated is not that of the kingdom of Israel, but that of the kingdom of God.

The history falls into four divisions, like the acts of a drama. I. It opens with Eli as high-priest, when the state of the nation is far from satisfactory, and God's holy purpose regarding it appears a failure. II. With Samuel as the Lord's prophet, we see a remarkable revival of the spirit of God's nation. III. With Saul a king, the fair promise under Samuel is darkened, and an evil spirit is again ascendant. IV. But with David, the conditions are again reversed; God's purpose regarding the people is greatly advanced, but in the later part of his reign the sky again becomes overcast, through his infirmities and the people's perversity, and the great forces of good and evil are left still contending, though not in the same proportion as before.

I. The opening scene, under the high-priesthood of Eli, is sad and painful. It is the sanctuary itself, the priestly establishment at Shiloh that which ought to be the very centre and heart of the spiritual life of the nation, that is photographed for us; and it is a deplorable picture. The soul of religion has died out; little but the carcase is left. Formality and superstition are the chief forces at work, and a wretched business they make of it. Men still attend to religious service, for conscience and the force of habit have a wonderful tenacity; but what is the use? Religion does not even help morality. The acting priests are unblushing profligates, defiling the very precincts of God's house with abominable wickedness. And what better could you expect of the people when their very spiritual guides set them such an example? "Men abhor the offering of the Lord." No wonder! It irritates them in the last degree to have to give their wealth ostensibly for religion, but really to feed the lusts of scoundrels. People feel that instead of getting help from religious services for anything good, it strains all that is best in them to endure contact with such things. How can belief in a living God prevail when the very priests show themselves practical atheists? The very idea of a personal God is blotted out of the people's mind, and superstition takes its place.

Men come to think that certain words, or things, or places have in some way a power to do them good. The object of religion is not to please God, but to get the mysterious good out of the words, or things, or places that have it in them. When they are going to war, they do not think how they may get the living God to be on their side, but they take hold of the dead ark, believing that there is some spell in it to frighten their enemies. Israelites who believe such things are no better than their pagan neighbours. The whole purpose of God to make them an enlightened, orderly, sanctified people seems grievously frustrated.

Even good men become comparatively useless under such a system. The very high-priest is a kind of nonentity. If Eli had asserted God's claims with any vigour, Hophni and Phinehas would not have dared to live as they did. It is a mournful state of things when good men get reconciled to the evil that prevails, or content themselves with very feebly protesting against it. No doubt Eli most sincerely bewailed it. But the very atmosphere was drowsy, inviting to rest and quiet. There was no stir, no movement anywhere. Where all death lived, life died.

And yet, as in the days of Elijah, God had His faithful ones in the land. There were still men and women that believed in a living God, and in their closets prayed to their Father that seeth in secret. And God has wonderful ways of reviving His cause when it seems extinct. When all flesh had corrupted their way, there was yet one man left who was righteous and godly; and through Noah God peopled the world. When the new generation had become idolatrous, He chose one man, Abraham, and by him alone He built up a holy Church, and a consecrated nation. And now, when all Israel seems to be hopelessly corrupt, God finds in an obscure cottage a humble woman, through whose seed it is His purpose that His Church be revived, and the nation saved. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. Be thankful for every man and woman, however insignificant, in whose heart there is a living faith in a living God. No one can tell what use God may not make of the poorest saint. For God's power is unlimited. One man, one woman, one child, may be His instrument for arresting the decline of ages, and introducing a new era of spiritual revival and holy triumph.

II. For it was no less a change than this that was effected through Samuel, Hannah's child. From his infancy Samuel was a consecrated person. Brought up as a child to reverence the sanctuary and all its worship, he learned betimes the true meaning of it all; and the reverence that he had been taught to give to His outward service, he learned to associate with the person of the living God. And Samuel had the courage of his convictions, and told the people of their sins, and of God's claims. It was his function to revive belief in the spiritual God, and in His relation to the people of Israel; and to summon the nation to honour and serve Him. What Samuel did in this way, he did mainly through his high personal character and intense convictions. In office he was neither priest nor king, though he had much of the influence of both. No doubt he judged Israel; but that function came to him not by formal appointment, but rather as the fruit of his high character and commanding influence. The whole position of Samuel and the influence which he wielded were due not to temporal but spiritual authority. He manifestly walked with God;

he was conspicuous for his fellowship with Jehovah, Israel's Lord; and his life, and his character, and his words, all combined to exalt Him whose servant he evidently was.

And that was the work to which Samuel was appointed. It was to revive the faith of an unbelieving people in the reality of God's existence in the first place, and in the second in the reality of His covenant relation to Israel. It was to rivet on their minds the truth that the supreme and only God was the God of their nation, and to get them to have regard to Him and to honour Him as such. He was to impress on them the great principle of national prosperity, to teach them that the one unfailing source of blessing was the active favour of God. It was their sin and their misery alike that they not only did not take the right means to secure God's favour, but, on the contrary, provoked Him to anger by their sins.

Now there were two things about God that Samuel was most earnest in pressing. The one was His holiness, the other His spirituality. The righteous Lord loved righteousness. No amount of ritual service could compensate the want of moral obedience. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." If they would enjoy His favour, they must search out their sins, and humble themselves for them before this holy God. The other earnest lesson was God's spirituality. Not only was all idolatry and image-worship most obnoxious to Him, but no service was acceptable which did not come from the heart. Hence the great value of prayer. It was Samuel's privilege to show the people what prayer could do. He showed them prayer, when it arose from a humble, penitent spirit, moving the Hand that moved the universe. He endeavoured to inspire them with heartfelt regard to God as their King, and with supreme honour for Him in all the transactions both of public and private life. That was the groove in which he tried to move the nation, for in that course alone he was persuaded that their true interest lay. To a large extent, Samuel was successful in this endeavour. His spirit was very different from the languid timidity of Eli. He spoke with a voice that evoked an echo. He raised the nation to a higher moral and spiritual platform, and brought them nearer to their heavenly King. Seldom has such proof been given of the almost unbounded moral power attainable by one man, if he but be of single eye and immovable will.

But, as we have said, Samuel was neither priest nor king; his conquests were the conquests of character alone. The people clamoured for a king, certainly from inferior motives, and Samuel yielded to their clamour. It would have been a splendid thing for the nation to have got an ideal king, a king adapted for such a kingdom, as deeply impressed as Samuel was with his obligation to honour God, and ruling over them with the same regard for the law and covenant of Israel. But such was not to be their first king. Some correction was due to them for having been impatient of God's arrangements, and so eager to have their own wishes complied with. Saul was to be as much an instrument of humiliation as a source of blessing.

III. And this brings us to the third act of the drama. Saul the son of Kish begins well, but he turns aside soon. He has ability, he has activity, he has abundant opportunity to make the necessary external arrangements for the welfare of the nation; but he has no heart for the primary condition

of blessing. At first he feels constrained to honour God; he accepts from Samuel the law of the kingdom and tries to govern accordingly. He could not well have done otherwise. He could not decently have accepted the office of king at the hands of Samuel without promising and without trying to have regard to the mode of ruling which the king-maker so earnestly pressed on him. But Saul's efforts to honour God shared the fate of all similar efforts when the force that impels to them is pressure from without, not heartiness within. Like a rower pulling against wind and tide, he soon tired. And when he tired of trying to rule as God would have him, and fell back on his own way of it, he seemed all the more wilful for the very fact that he had tried at first to repress his own will. Externally he was active and for a time successful, but internally he went from bad to worse. Under Saul, the process of training Israel to fear and honour God made no progress whatever. The whole force of the governing power was in the opposite direction. One thing is to be said in favour of Saul—he was no idolater. He did not encourage any outward departure from the worship of God. Neither Baal nor Ashtaroth, Moloch nor Chemosh, received any countenance at his hands. The Second Commandment was at least outwardly observed.

But for all that, Saul was the active, inveterate, and bitter persecutor of what we may call God's interest in the kingdom. There was no real sympathy between him and Samuel; but as Samuel did not cross his path, he left him comparatively alone. It was very different in the case of David. In Saul's relation to David we see the old antagonism—the antagonism of nature and grace, of the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, of those born after the flesh and those born after the Spirit. Here is the most painful feature of Saul's administration. Knowing, as he did, that David enjoyed God's favour in a very special degree, he ought to have respected him the more. In reality he hated him the more. Jealousy is a blind and stupid passion. It mattered nothing to Saul that David was a man after God's own heart, except that it made him more fierce against him. How could a theocratic kingdom prosper when the head of it raged against God's anointed one, and strained every nerve to destroy him? The whole policy of Saul was a fatal blunder. Under him, the nation, instead of being trained to serve God better, and realise the end of their selection more faithfully, were carried in the opposite direction. And Saul lived to see into what confusion and misery he had dragged them by his wilful and godless rule. No man ever led himself into a more humiliating maze, and no man ever died in circumstances that proclaimed more clearly that his life had been both a failure and a crime.

IV. The fourth act of the drama is a great contrast to the third. It opens at Hebron, that place of venerable memories, where a young king, inheriting Abraham's faith, sets himself, heart and soul, to make the nation of Israel what God would have it to be. Trained in the school of adversity, his feet had sometimes slipped; but on the whole he had profited by his teacher; he had learned a great lesson of trust, and knowing something of the treachery of his own heart, he had committed himself to God, and his whole desire and ambition was to be God's servant. For a long time he is occupied in getting rid of enemies, and securing the tranquillity of the kingdom. When that object is gained, he sets himself to the great business of

his life. He places the symbol of God's presence and covenant in the securest spot in the kingdom, and where it is at once most central and most conspicuous. He proposes, after his wars are over, and when he has not only become a great king, but amassed great treasure, to employ this treasure in building a stately temple for God's worship, although he is not allowed to carry out that purpose. He remodels the economy of priests and Levites, making arrangements for the more orderly and effective celebration of all the service in the capital and throughout the kingdom for which they were designed. He places the whole administration of the kingdom under distinct departments, putting at the head of each the officer that is best fitted for the effective discharge of its duties. In all these arrangements, and in other arrangements more directly adapted to the end, he sought to promote throughout his kingdom the spirit that fears and honours God. And more especially did he labour for this in that most interesting field for which he was so well adapted—the writing of songs fitted for God's public service, and accompanied by the instruments of music in which he so greatly delighted. Need we say how his whole soul was thrown into this service? Need we say how wonderfully he succeeded in it, not only in the songs which he wrote personally, but in the school of like-minded men which he originated, whose songs were worthy to rank with his own? The whole collection, for well-nigh three thousand years, has been by far the best aid to devotion the Church of God has ever known, and the best means of promoting that fellowship with God of which his own life and experience furnished the finest sample. No words can tell the effect of this step in guiding the nation to a due reverence for God, and stimulating them to the faithful discharge of the high ends for which they had been chosen.

Beautiful and most promising was the state of the nation at one period of his life. Unbounded prosperity had flowed into the country. Every enemy had been subdued. There was no division in the kingdom, and no one likely to cause any. The king was greatly honoured by his people, and highly popular. The arrangements which he had made, both for the civil and spiritual administration of the kingdom, were working beautifully, and producing their natural fruits. All things seemed to be advancing the great purpose of God in connection with Israel. Let this state of things but last, and surely the consummation will be reached. The promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will be fulfilled, and the promised Seed will come very speedily to diffuse His blessing over all the families of the earth.

But into this fair paradise the serpent contrived to creep, and the consequence was another fall. Never did the cause of God seem so strong as it was in Israel under David, and never did it seem more secure from harm. David was an absolute king, without an opponent, without a rival; his whole soul was on the side of the good cause; his influence was paramount; whence could danger come? Alas, it could come and it did come from David himself. His sin in the matter of Uriah was fraught with the most fatal consequences. It brought down the displeasure of God; it lowered the king in the eyes of his subjects; it caused the enemy to blaspheme; it made rebellion less difficult; it made the success of rebellion possible. It threw back the cause of God, we cannot tell for how long. Disaster followed disaster in the

latter part of David's reign; and though he bequeathed to his son a splendid and a peaceful empire, the seeds of division had been sown in it; the germ of disruption was at work; and when the disruption came, in the days of David's grandson, no fewer than ten tribes broke away from their allegiance, and of the new kingdom which they founded idolatry was the established religion, and the worship of calves was set up by royal warrant from Bethel even to Dan.

It is sad indeed to dwell on the reverse which befel the cause of God in the latter part of the reign of David. But this event has been matched, over and over again, in the chequered history of religious movements. The story of Sisyphus has often been realised, rolling his stone up the hill, but finding it, near the top, slip from his hands and go thundering to the bottom. Or rather, to take a more Biblical similitude, the burden of the watchman of Dumah has time after time come true: "The morning cometh, and also the night." Strange and trying is often the order of Providence. The conflict between good and evil seems to go on for ever, and just when the good appears to be on the eve of triumph something occurs to throw it back, and restore the balance. Was it not so after the Reformation? Did not the Catholic cause, by diplomacy and cruelty in too many cases, regain much of what Luther had taken from it? And have we not from time to time had revivals of the Church at home that have speedily been followed by counteracting forces that have thrown us back to where we were? What encouragement is there to labour for truth and righteousness when, even if we are apparently successful, we are sure to be overtaken by some counter-current that will sweep us back to our former position?

But let us not be too hasty or too summary in our inferences. When we examine carefully the history of David, we find that the evil that came in the end of his reign did not counteract all the good at the beginning. Who does not see that, after all, there was a clear balance of gain? The cause of God was stronger in Israel, its founda-

tion firmer, its defences surer, than it had ever been before. Why, even if nothing had remained but those immortal psalms that ever led the struggling Church to her refuge and her strength, the gain would have been remarkable. And so it will be found that the Romish reaction did not swallow up all the good of the Reformation, and that the free-thinking reaction of our day has not neutralized the evangelical revival of the nineteenth century. A decided gain remains, and for that gain let us ever be thankful.

And if the gain be less decided and less full than once it promised, and if Amalek gains upon Israel, and recovers part of the ground he had lost, let us mark well the lesson which God designs to teach us. In the first place, let us learn the lesson of vigilance. Let us watch against the decline of spiritual strength, and against the decline of that fellowship with God from which all spiritual strength is derived. Let those who are prominent in the Church watch their personal conduct, let them be intensely careful against those inconsistencies and indulgences by which, when they take place, such irreparable injury is done to the cause. And in the second place, let us learn the lesson of patient waiting and patient working. As the early Church had to wait for the promise of the Father, so let the Church wait in every age. As the early Church continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, so let each successive age ply with renewed earnestness its applications to the throne of grace. And let us be encouraged by the assurance that long though the tide has ebbed and flowed, and flowed and ebbed, it will not be so for ever. To them that look for Him, the great Captain shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation. "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever" (Isa. lix. 20, 21).

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

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 2011
 2012
 2013
 2014
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 2016
 2017
 2018
 2019
 2020
 2021
 2022
 2023
 2024
 2025

THE GREAT BOOK OF THE

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER I.

The Higher Criticism, 217

CHAPTER II.

The Books of Kings, 219

CHAPTER III.

The Historian of the Kings, 223

CHAPTER IV.

God in History, 225

CHAPTER V.

History with a Purpose, 227

CHAPTER VI.

Lessons of the History. 228

BOOK II.

DAVID AND SOLOMON.

CHAPTER VII.

David's Decrepitude, 229

CHAPTER VIII.

An Eastern Court and Home, 232

CHAPTER IX.

Adonijah's Rebellion, 234

CHAPTER X.

David's Death-Bed, 237

CHAPTER XI.

Avenging Justice, 240

CHAPTER XII.

The Boy-King's Wisdom, 243

CHAPTER XIII.

Solomon's Court and Kingdom, 247

CHAPTER XIV.

The Temple, 251

CHAPTER XV.

The Ideal Significance of the Temple, 256

CHAPTER XVI.

The Ark and the Cherubim, 257

CHAPTER XVII.

The Gradual Growth of the Levitic Ritual, 260

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Temple Worship, 261

CHAPTER XIX.

The Temple Sacrifices, 263

CHAPTER XX.

Solomon in All His Glory, 268

CHAPTER XXI.

Hollow Prosperity, 270

CHAPTER XXII.

The Old Age of Solomon, 273

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Wind and the Whirlwind, 275

BOOK III.

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM.

B. C. 937-889.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A New Reign. B.C. 937 279

CHAPTER XXV.

The Disruption, 281

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Jeroboam the Son of Nebat, who Made Israel to Sin." B. C. 937-915, 283

CHAPTER XXVII.

Jeroboam, and the Man of God, 286

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Doom of the House of Nebat, 287

CHAPTER XXIX.

Nadab; Baasha; Elah. B. C. 915-889, 289

CHAPTER XXX.

The Earlier Kings of Judah. B. C. 937-851, 289

CHAPTER XXXI.

Jehoshaphat. B. C. 876-851, 293

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Kings of Israel from Zimri to Ahab. B. C. 889-877, 295

BOOK IV.				PAGE
<i>AHAB AND ELIJAH.</i>				
B. C. 877-855.				
CHAPTER XXXIII.				PAGE
King Ahab and Queen Jezebel,	297	CHAPTER XLI.	How God Deals with Despondency,	316
CHAPTER XXXIV.		CHAPTER XLII.	The Theophany and its Significance,	317
Elijah,	300	CHAPTER XLIII.	The Call of Elisha,	321
CHAPTER XXXV.		CHAPTER XLIV.	Ahab and Benhadad,	322
Elijah at Sarepta,	303	CHAPTER XLV.	Ahab's Infatuation,	325
CHAPTER XXXVI.		CHAPTER XLVI.	Naboth's Vineyard,	327
Elijah and Ahab,	305	CHAPTER XLVII.	Alone against the World,	329
CHAPTER XXXVII.		CHAPTER XLVIII.	Conclusion,	333
Elijah on Mount Carmel,	306	APPENDIX.	Chronology of the First Book of Kings,	334
CHAPTER XXXVIII.				
The Rain,	310			
CHAPTER XXXIX.				
Elijah's Flight,	311			
CHAPTER XL.				
Elijah's Despair,	314			

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

BY F. W. FARRAR, D. D.

BOOK I.

INTRODUCTION.

"Ich bin überzeugt, dass die Bibel immer schöner wird, je mehr man sie versteht, d. h. je mehr man einsieht und anschaut, dass jedes Wort, das wir allgemein auffassen und in Besondern auf uns anwenden, nach gewissen Umständen, nach Zeit- und Orts-verhältnissen einen, eigenen, besondern, unmittelbar individuellen Bezug gehabt hat."—GOETHE.

"Es bleibt dabei, das beste Lesen der Bibel, dieses Göttlichen Buchs, ist *menschlich*. Ich nehme dies Wort im weitesten Umfang und in der andringendsten Bedeutung. Menschlich muss man die Bibel lesen: denn sie ist ein Buch durch Menschen für Menschen geschrieben; menschlich ist die Sprache, menschlich die äussern Hülfsmittel, mit denen sie geschrieben und aufbehalten ist. . . . Es darf also sicher geglaubt werden: je humaner (im besten Sinn des Worts) man das Wort Gottes liest, desto näher kommt man dem Zweck seines Urhebers, welcher Menschen zu seinem Bilde schuf . . . und für uns *menschlich* handelt."—HERDER.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

"God shows all things in the slow history of their ripening."—GEORGE ELIOT.

God has given us many Bibles. The book which we call the Bible consists of a series of books, and its name represents the Greek plural *τὰ Βιβλία*. It is not so much a book, as the extant fragments of a literature, which grew up during many centuries. Supreme as is the importance of this "Book of God," it was never meant to be the sole teacher of mankind. We mistake its purpose, we misapply its revelation, when we use it to exclude the other sources of religious knowledge. It is supremely profitable for our instruction, but, so far from being designed to absorb our exclusive attention, its work is to stimulate the eagerness with which, by its aid, we are able to learn from all other sources the will of God towards men.

God speaks to us in many voices. In the Bible He revealed Himself to all mankind by His messages to the individual souls of some of His servants. But those messages, whether uttered or consigned to writing, were but one method of enabling us to hold communion with Him. They were not even an *indispensable* method. Thousands of the saints of God lived the spiritual life in close communion with their Father in heaven in ages which possessed no written book; in ages before any such book existed; in ages during which, though it existed, it was practically inaccessible; in ages during which it had been designedly kept out of their hands by priests. This fact should quicken our sense of gratitude for the inestimable boon of a Book wherein he who runs may now read, and respecting the main teaching of which wayfaring men, and even fools, need not err. But it should at the same time save us from the error of treating the Bible as though it were in itself an amulet or a fetish, as the Moham-medan treats his Koran. The Bible was written in human language, by men for men. It was written mainly in Judæa, by Jews, for Jews. "Scripture," as the old theological rule said, "is the sense of Scripture,"* and the sense of Scrip-

ture can only be ascertained by the methods of study and the rules of criticism without which no ancient document or literature can be even approximately understood. In these respects the Bible cannot be arbitrarily or exceptionally treated. No *a priori* rules can be devised for its elucidation. It is what it is, not what we might have expected it to be. Language, at the best, is an imperfect and ever-varying instrument of thought. It is full of twilight and of gracious shadows. Vast numbers of its words were originally metaphorical. When the light of metaphor has faded from them they come to mean different things at different times, under different conditions, in different contexts, on different lips. Language can at the best be but an *asymptote* to thought; in other words, it resembles the mathematical line which approaches nearer and nearer to the circumference of a circle, but which, even when infinitely extended, can never actually touch it. The fact that the Bible contains a Divine revelation does not alter the fact that it represents a nation's literature. It is the library of the Jewish people, or rather all that remains to us of that library, and all that was most precious in it. Holy men of old were moved by the Spirit of God, but as this Divine inspiration did not make them personally sinless in their actions, or infallible in their judgments, so neither does it exempt their messages from the limitation which attaches to all human conditions. Criticism would have rendered an inestimable service to every thoughtful reader of the Scriptures if it had done nothing more than impress upon them that the component books are not one, but complex and multiform, separated from each other by centuries of time, and of very varying value and preciousness. They too, like the greatest apostles of God, have their treasure in earthen vessels; and we not only may, but must, by the aid of that reason which is "the candle of the Lord," estimate both the value of the treasure, and the age and character of the earthen vessel in which it is contained.

There are hundreds of texts in Scripture which may convey to some souls a very true and blessed meaning, but which do not in the original possess any such meaning as that which is now attached to them. The words of Hebrew prophets often seem perfectly clear, but in some cases they had another set of connotations in the mouths of those by whom they were originally spoken. It requires a learned and a literary training to discover by philology, by history, or by comparison, what alone they could have meant when they were first spoken. In many cases their exact significance is no longer to be ascertained with certainty. It must be more or less conjectural. There are passages of Scripture which have received scores of differing interpretations. There are entire books of Scripture about the general scope of which there have been diametrically opposite opinions. The spiritual intuition of the saint may in some instances be keener to read aright than the laborious researches of the scholar, because spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned. But in general it is true that the *ex cathedra* assertions of ignorant readers, though they are often pronounced with an assumption of infallibility, are not worth the breath which utters them. All

* "Scriptura est sensus Scripturæ."—St. Augustine. 217

artificial dogmas as to what Scripture *must* be, and *must* mean, are worse than idle; we have only to deal with what it *really is*, and what it *really says*. Even when opinions respecting it have been all but unanimously pronounced by the representatives of all the Churches, they have nevertheless been again and again shown to be absurdly erroneous. The slow light of scholarship, of criticism, of comparative religion, has proved that in many instances not only the interpretations of former ages, but the very *principles* of interpretation from which they were derived, had no basis whatever in fact. And the methods of interpretation—dogmatic, ecclesiastical, mystic, allegorical, literal—have changed from age to age.* The asserted heresy of yesterday has in scores of instances become the accepted commonplace of tomorrow. The duty of the Church in the present day is neither to make out that the Bible is what men have imagined that it was, nor to repeat the assertions of ancient writers as to what they declared it to be, but honestly and truthfully to discover the significance of the actual phenomena which it presents to the enlightened and cultivated intelligence.

If it were not so common a failing to ignore the lessons of the past, it might have been hoped that a certain modesty, of which the necessity is taught us by centuries of error, would have saved a multitude of writers from rushing into premature and denunciative rejection of results which they have not studied, and of which they are incapable to judge. St. Jerome complained that in his day there was no old woman so fatuous as not to assume the right to lay down the law about Scriptural interpretation. It is just the same in these days. Half-taught dogmatists—*αὐροσχέδιοι δογματισταί*, as they have been called—may sweepingly condemn the lifelong researches of men far superior to themselves, not only in learning, but in love of truth; they may attribute their conclusions to faithless infatuation, and even to moral obliquity. This has been done over and over again in our own lifetime; and yet such self-constituted and unauthorised defenders of their own prejudices and traditions—which they always identify with the Catholic faith—are impotent to prevent, impotent even greatly to retard, the spread of real knowledge. Many of the now-accepted certainties of science were repudiated a generation ago as absurd and blasphemous. As long as it was possible to put them down by persecution, the thumbscrew and the stake were freely used by priests and inquisitors for their suppression. *E pur si muove*. Theologians who mingled the gold of Revelation with the clay of their own opinions have been driven to correct their past errors. Untaught by experience, religious prejudice is ever heaping up fresh obstacles to oppose the progress of new truths. The obstacles will be swept away in the future as surely as they have been in the past. The eagle, it has been said, which soars through the air does not worry itself how to cross the rivers.

It is probable that no age since that of the Apostles has added so much to our knowledge of the true meaning and history of the Bible as has been added by our own. The mode of regarding Scripture has been almost revolutionised, and in consequence many books of Scripture previously misunderstood have acquired a reality and intensity

of interest and instructiveness which have rendered them trebly precious. A deeper and holier reverence for all eternal truth which the Bible contains has taken the place of a meaningless letter worship. The fatal and wooden Rabbinic dogma of verbal dictation—a dogma which either destroys intelligent faith altogether, or introduces into Christian conduct some of the worst delusions of false religion—is dead and buried in every capable and well-taught mind. Truths which had long been seen through the distorting mirage of false exegesis have now been set forth in their true aspect. We have been enabled, for the first time, to grasp the real character of events which, by being set in a wrong perspective, had been made so fantastic as to have no relation to ordinary lives. Figures which had become dim spectres moving through an unnatural atmosphere now stand out, full of grace, instructiveness and warning, in the clear light of day. The science of Bible criticism has solved scores of enigmas which were once fantastically obscure, and has brought out the original beauty of some passages, which, even in our Authorised Version, conveyed no intelligible meaning to earnest readers. The Revised Version alone has corrected hundreds of inaccuracies which in some instances defaced the beauty of the sacred page, and in many others misrepresented and mistranslated it. Intolerance has been robbed of favourite shibboleths, used as the basis of cruel beliefs, which souls unhardened by system could only repudiate with a "God forbid!" Familiar error has ever been dearer to most men than unfamiliar truths; but truth, however slow may seem to be the beat of her pinions, always wins her way at last.

"Thro' the heather an' howe gaed the creepin' thing,
But abune was the waft of an angel's wing."

Can there be any doubt that mankind has everything to gain and nothing to lose from the ascertainment of genuine truth? Are we so wholly devoid of even an elementary faith as to think that man can profit by consciously cherished illusions? Does it not show a nobler confidence in facts to correct traditional prejudices, than to rest blindly content with conventional assertions? If we do not believe that God is a God of truth, that all falsity is hateful to Him,—and religious falsity most hateful of all, because it adds the sin of hypocrisy to the love of lies,—we believe in *nothing*. If our religion is to consist in a rejection of knowledge, lest it should disturb the convictions of times of ignorance, the dicta of "the Fathers," or dogmas which arrogate to themselves the sham claim of Catholicity—if we are to give only to the Dark Ages the title of the Ages of Faith, then indeed

"The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble."

"There is and will be much discussion," says Goethe, "as to the advantage or disadvantage of the popular dissemination of the Bible. To me it is clear that it will be mischievous as it always has been if used dogmatically and capriciously; beneficial as it always has been if accepted didactically (for our instruction) and with feeling." There is abundance in the Bible for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;—we shall weaken its moral and spiritual force, and gain nothing in its place, if we turn it into an idol adorned with impossible claims which it never makes for itself, and if we support its golden

* For a decisive proof of these statements I refer to my Bampton Lectures on the *History of Interpretation* (Macmillan, 1890.)

image upon the brittle clay of an exegesis which is morally, critically, and historically false.

I do not see how there can be any loss in the positive results of what is called the Higher Criticism. Certainly its suggestions must never be hastily adopted. Nor is it likely that they will be. They have to fight their way through crowds of opposing prejudices. They are first held up to ridicule as absurd; then exposed to anathema as irreligious; at last they are accepted as obviously true. The very theologians who once denounced them silently ignore or readjust what they previously preached, and hasten, first to minimise the importance, then to extol the value of the new discoveries. It is quite right that they should be keenly scrutinised. All new sciences are liable to rush into extremes. Their first discoverers are misled into error by premature generalisations born of a genuine enthusiasm. They are tempted to build elaborate superstructures on inadequate foundations. But when they have established certain irrefragable principles, can the obvious deductions from those principles be other than a pure gain? Can we be the better for traditional delusions? Can mistakes and ignorance—can anything but the ascertained fact—be desirable for man, or acceptable to God?

No doubt it is with a sensation of pain that we are compelled to give up convictions which we once regarded as indubitable and sacred. That is a part of our human nature. We must say with all gentleness to the passionate devotees of each old erroneous *mummsimus*—

“Disce; sed ira cadat naso rugosaque sanna,
Cum veteres avias tibi de pulmone revello.”

Our blessed Lord, with His consummate tenderness, and Divine insight into the frailties of our nature made tolerant allowance for inveterate prejudices. “No man,” He said, “having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is good.” But the pain of disillusionment is blessed and healing when it is incurred in the cause of sincerity. There must always be more value in results earned by heroic labour than in conventions accepted without serious inquiry. Already there has been a silent revolution. Many of the old opinions about the Bible have been greatly modified. There is scarcely a single competent scholar who does not now admit that the Hexateuch is a composite structure; that much of the Levitical legislation, which was once called Mosaic, is in reality an aftergrowth which in its present form is not earlier than the days of the prophet Ezekiel; that the Book of Deuteronomy belongs, in its present form, whatever older elements it may contain, to the era of Hezekiah's or Josiah's reformation; that the Books of Zechariah and Isaiah are not homogeneous, but preserve the writings of more prophets than their titles imply; that only a small section of the Psalter was the work of David; that the Book of Ecclesiastes was not the work of King Solomon; that most of the Book of Daniel belongs to the era of Antiochus Epiphanes; and so forth. In what respect is the Bible less precious, less “inspired” in the only tenable sense of that very undefined word, in consequence of such discoveries? In what way do they touch the outermost fringe of our Christian faith? Is there anything in such results of modern criticism which militates against the most inferential expansion of a single clause in the Apostolic, the Nicene, or even the Athanasian Creed? Do they contravene one single syllable of the hundreds of

propositions to which our assent is demanded in the Thirty-nine Articles? I would gladly help to mitigate the needless anxiety felt by many religious minds. When the Higher Criticism is in question I would ask them to distinguish between established premises and the exorbitant system of inferences which a few writers have based upon them. They may rest assured that sweeping conclusions will not be hastily snatched up; that no conclusion will be regarded as proved until it has successfully run the gauntlet of many a jealous challenge. They need not fear for one moment that the Ark of their faith is in peril, and they will be guilty not only of unwisdom but of profanity if they rush forward to support it with rude and unauthorised hands. There never has been an age of deep thought and earnest inquiry which has not left its mark in the modification of some traditions or doctrines of theology. But the truths of essential Christianity are built upon a rock. They belong to things which cannot be shaken, and which remain. The intense labours of eminent scholars, English and German, thanklessly as they have been received, have not robbed us of so much as a fraction of a single precious element of revelation. On the contrary, they have cleared the Bible of many accretions by which its meaning was spoilt, and its doctrines wrested to perdition, and they have thus rendered it more profitable than before for every purpose for which it was designed, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

When we study the Bible it is surely one of our most primary duties to beware lest any idols of the caverns or of the forum tempt us “to offer to the God of truth the unclean sacrifice of a lie.”*

CHAPTER II.

THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

THE “Two Books of Kings,” as we call them, are only one book (Sepher Melakim), and were so regarded not only in the days of Origen (*ap. Euseb., H. E., vi. 25*) and of Jerome (*A. D. 420*), but by the Jews even down to Bomberg's Hebrew Bible of 1518. They are treated as one book in the Talmud and the Peshito. The Western Bibles followed the Alexandrian division into two books (called the third and fourth of Kings), and Jerome adopted this division in the Vulgate (*Regum, iii. et iv.*). But if this separation into two books was due to the LXX. translators, they should have made a less awkward and artificial division than the one which breaks off the first book in the middle of the brief reign of Ahaziah. Jerome's version of the Books of Samuel and Kings appeared first of his translations, and in his famous *Prologus Galcatus* he mentions these facts.

The History was intended to be a continuation of the Books of Samuel. Some critics, and among them Ewald, assign them to the same author, but closer examination of the Book of Kings renders this more than doubtful. The incessant use of the prefix “King,” the extreme frequency of the description “Man of God,” the references to the law, and above all the constant condemnation of high places, counterbalance the minor resemblance of style, and prove a difference of authorship.

What has the Higher Criticism, as represented

* Bacon.

in historic sequence by such writers as Vatke, de Wette, Reuss, Graf, Ewald, Kuenen, Bleek, Wellhausen, Stade, Kittel, Renan, Klostermann, Cheyne, Driver, Robertson Smith, and others, to tell us about the structure and historic credibility of the Books of Kings? Has it in any way shaken their value, while it has undoubtedly added to their intelligibility and interest?

1. It emphasises the fact that they are a compilation. In this there is nothing either new or startling, for the fact is plainly and repeatedly acknowledged in the page of the sacred narrative. The sources utilised are:—

(1) The Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings xi. 41).

(2) The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (referred to fifteen times).

(3) The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (referred to seventeen times).*

By comparing the authority referred to in 1 Kings xi. 41 with those quoted in 2 Chron. ix. 29, we see that "the Book of the Acts of Solomon" must have been to a large extent identical with the annals of that king's reign contained in "the Book (R. V., Histories) of Nathan the Prophet," the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and "the story (R. V., commentary) or visions of Iddo the Seer."† Similarly it appears that the Acts of Rehoboam, Abijam, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, were compiled, at any rate in part, from the histories of Shemaiah, Jehu the son of Hanani,‡ Isaiah the son of Amoz, Hozai (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18, R. V.), and other seers. In the narrative of a history of 450 years (from B. C. 1016 to 562) the writer was of course compelled to rely for his facts upon more ancient authorities. Whether he consulted the original documents in the archives of Jerusalem, or whether he utilised some outline of them which had previously been drawn up, cannot easily be determined. The work would have been impossible but for the existence of the officials known as recorders and historiographers (*Mazkirim, Sophcrim*), who first made their appearance in the court of David. But the original documents could hardly have survived the ravages of Shalmanezar in Samaria and of Nebuchadnezzar in Jerusalem, so that Movers is probably right in the conjecture that the author's extracts were made, not immediately, but from the epitome of an earlier compiler.§

2. Although no direct quotations are referred to other documents, it seems certain from the style, and from various minor touches, that the compiler also utilised detailed accounts of great prophets like Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah son of Imlah, which had been drawn up by literary students in the Schools of the Prophets. The stories of prophets and men of God who are left unnamed

* How closely these documents are transcribed is shown by the recurrence of "unto this day," though the phrase had long ceased to be true when the book appeared.

† It is inferred from 1 Kings viii. 12, 13, which have a poetic tinge, and to which the LXX. add "Behold they are written in the Book of the Song," that in this section the "Book of Jashar" has been utilised, and that the reading הַשִּׁיר has been confused with הַשִּׁיר (Driver, p. 182).

‡ 2 Chron. xx. 34. R. V., "The history of Jehu, the son of Hanani, which is inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel" (not "who is mentioned," A. V., which, however, gives in the margin the literal meaning "was made to ascend").

§ Movers, *Krit. Untersuch.*, p. 185 (Bonn, 1836). The use of older documents explains the phrase "till this day," and the passages which speak of the Temple as still standing (1 Kings viii. 8; ix. 21; xii. 19; 2 Kings x. 27; xiii. 23). Sometimes the traces of earlier and later date are curiously juxtaposed, as in 2 Kings xvii. 18, 21 and

were derived from oral traditions so old that the names had been forgotten before they had been committed to writing.*

3. The work of the compiler himself is easily traceable. It is seen in the constantly recurring formulæ, which come almost like the refrain of an epic poem, at the accession and close of every reign.

They run normally as follows. For the Kings of Judah:—

"And in the . . . year of . . . King of Israel reigned . . . over Judah." "And . . . years he reigned in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was . . . the daughter of . . . And . . . did that which was } right } in the sight of the Lord." } evil }

"And . . . slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father. And . . . his son reigned in his stead." In the formulæ for the Kings of Israel "slept with his fathers" is omitted when the king was murdered; and "was buried with his fathers" is omitted because there was no unbroken dynasty and no royal burial-place. The prominent and frequent mention of the queen-mother is due to the fact that as *Gebira* she held a far higher rank than the favourite wife.

4. To the compiler is also due the moral aspect given to the annals and other documents which he utilised. Something of this religious colouring he doubtless found in the prophetic histories which he consulted; and the unity of aim visible throughout the book is due to the fact that his standpoint is identical with theirs. Thus, in spite of its compilation from different sources, the book bears the impress of one hand and of one mind. Sometimes a passing touch in an earlier narrative shows the work of an editor after the Exile, as when in the story of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 20-26) we read, "And he had dominion over all the region on the other side of the river," i. e., west of the Euphrates, exactly as in Ezra iv. 10. Here the rendering of the A. V., "on this side of the river," is certainly inaccurate, and is surprisingly retained in the R. V. also.†

5. To this high moral purpose everything else is subordinated. Like all his Jewish contemporaries, the writer attaches small importance to accurate chronological data. He pays little attention to discrepancies, and does not care in every instance to harmonise his own authorities.‡ Some contradictions may be due to additions made in a later recension,§ and some may have arisen from the introduction of marginal glosses,|| or from corruptions of the text which (apart from a miraculous supervision such as was not exercised) might

* Difference of sources is marked by the different designations of the months, which are called sometimes by their numbers, as in the Priestly Codex (1 Kings xii. 32, 33), sometimes by the old Hebrew names Zif ("blossom," April, May, 1 Kings vi. 1), Ethanim ("fruit," Sept., Oct., 1 Kings viii. 2), and Bul ("rain," 1 Kings vi. 38).

† מִיּוֹדְנַיִם (compare עֲבָרֵי יַרְדֵּן). *Lit.*, "Beyond the river," i. e., from the Persian standpoint. It becomes a fixed geographical phrase. Traces of the editor's hand occur in 1 Kings xiii. 32 ("the cities of Samaria"); 2 Kings xiii. 23 ("as yet").

‡ Comp. 2 Kings viii. 25 with ix. 29.

§ See 2 Kings xv. 30 and 33, viii. 25 and ix. 29.

|| As, perhaps, the clause "In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah" in 1 Kings xvi. 23; and the much more serious "in the 480th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt," which are omitted by Origen (*comm. in Johannem*, ii. 20), and create many difficulties. The only narratives which critics have suggested as possible interpolations, from the occurrence of unusual grammatical forms, are 2 Kings viii. 1-6 and iv. 1-37 (in the story of Elisha); but these forms are perhaps northern provincialisms.

easily, and indeed would inevitably, occur in the constant transcription of numerical letters closely resembling each other. "The numbers as they have come down to us in the Book of Kings," says Canon Rawlinson, "are untrustworthy, being in part self-contradictory, in part opposed to other Scriptural notices, in part improbable, if not impossible."*

6. The date of the book as it stands was after B. C. 542, for the last event mentioned in it is the mercy extended by Evil-merodach, King of Babylon, to his unfortunate prisoner Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxv. 27) in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity. The language—later than that of Isaiah, and earlier than that of Ezra—confirms this conclusion. That the book appeared before B. C. 536 is clear from the fact that the compiler makes no allusion to Zerubbabel, Jeshua, or the first exiles who returned to Jerusalem after the decree of Cyrus. But it is generally agreed that the book was substantially complete before the Exile (about B. C. 600), though some exilic additions may have been made by a later editor.† "The writer was already removed by at least six hundred years from the days of Samuel, a space of time as long as that which separates us from the first Parliament of Edward I."

This date of the book—which cannot but have some bearing on its historic value—is admitted by all, since the peculiarities of the language from the beginning to the end are marked by the usages of later Hebrew.‡ The chronicler lived some two centuries later "in about the same chronological relation to David as Professor Freeman stands to William Rufus."§

7. Criticism cannot furnish us with the name of this great compiler.¶ Jewish tradition, as preserved in the Talmud,* assigned the Books of Kings to the prophet Jeremiah, and in the Jewish canon they are reckoned among "the earlier prophets." This would account for the strange silence about Jeremiah in the Second Book of Kings, whereas he is prominently mentioned in the Book of Chronicles, in the Apocrypha, and in Josephus. But unless we accept the late and worthless Jewish assertion that, after being carried to Egypt by Johanan, son of Kareah (Jer. xlii. 6, 7), Jeremiah escaped to Babylon,** he could not have been the author of the last section of the book (2 Kings xxv. 27-30).†† Yet it is precisely in the closing chapters of the second book (in and after chap. xvii.) that the resemblances to the style of Jeremiah are most marked.‡‡ That the writer was a contemporary of that prophet, was closely akin to him in his religious attitude, and was filled with the same melancholy feelings, is plain; but this, as recent critics have pointed out, is due to the fact

that both writers reflect the opinions and the phraseology which we find in the Book of Deuteronomy.

8. The critics who are so often charged with rash assumptions have been led to the conclusions which they adopt by intense and infinite labour, including the examination of various books of Scripture phrase by phrase, and even word by word. The sum total of their most important results as regards the Books of Kings is as follows:—

i. The books are composed of older materials, retouched, sometimes expanded, and set in a suitable framework, mostly by a single author who writes throughout in the same characteristic phraseology, and judges the actions and characters of the kings from the standpoint of later centuries. The annals which he consulted, and in part incorporated, were twofold—prophetic and political. The latter were probably drawn up for each reign by the official recorder (מְזַכֵּר), who held an important place in the courts of all the greatest kings (2 Sam. viii. 16, xx. 24; 1 Kings iv. 3; 2 Kings xviii. 18), and whose duty it was to write the "acts" or "words" of the "days" of his sovereign (דְּבַר הַיָּמִים).

ii. The compiler's work is partly of the nature of an epitome,* and partly consists of longer narratives, of which we can sometimes trace the Northern Israelitish origin by peculiarities of form and expression.

iii. The synchronisms which he gives between the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah are computed by himself, or by some redactor, and only in round numbers.

iv. The speeches, prayers, and prophecies introduced are perhaps based on tradition, but, since they reflect all the peculiarities of the compiler, must owe their ultimate form to him. This accounts for the fact that the earlier prophecies recorded in these books resemble the tone and style of Jeremiah, but do not resemble such ancient prophecies as those of Amos and Hosea.

v. The numbers which he adopts are sometimes so enormous as to be grossly improbable; and in these as in some of the dates, allowance must be made for possible errors of tradition and transcription.

vi. "Deuteronomy," says Professor Driver, "is the standard by which the compiler judges both men and actions; and the history from the beginning of Solomon's reign is presented, not in a purely 'objective' form (as *c. g.* in 2 Sam. ix.-xx.), but from the point of view of the Deuteronomical code.† . . . The principles which, in his

* *Speaker's Commentary*, ii. 475. Instances will be found in 1 Kings xiv. 21, xvi. 23, 29; 2 Kings iii. 1, xiii. 10, xv. 1, 30, 33, xiv. 23, xvi. xvii. 1, xviii. 2.

† Stade, p. 79; Kalisch, *Exodus*, p. 495.

‡ See Keil, pp. 9, 10.

§ R. F. Horton, *Inspiration*, p. 843.

¶ He was not the author of the Book of Samuel, for the standpoint and style are quite different. In the First and Second Books of Samuel the high places are never condemned, as they are incessantly in Kings (1 Kings iii. 2, xiii. 2, xiv. 23, xv. 14, xxii. 43, etc.).

** *Baba Bathra*, 15 a.

†† *Seder Olam Rabba*, 20.

‡‡ Even then he would have been ninety years old.

§§ There are, however, some differences between 2 Kings xxv. and Jer. lii. (see Keil, p. 12), though the manner is the same. Carpov, *Introd.*, i. 262-64 (Hävernicks, *Einleit.*, ii. 172). Jer. li. (verse 64) ends with "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah," excluding him from the authorship of chap. lii. (Driver, *Introd.*, p. 109). The last chapter of Jeremiah was perhaps added to his volume by a later editor.

* "The Old Testament does not furnish a history of Israel, though it supplies the materials from which such a history can be constructed. For example, the narrative of Kings gives but the merest outline of the events that preceded the fall of Samaria. To understand the inner history of the time we must fill up this outline with the aid of the prophets Amos and Hosea."—ROBERTSON SMITH'S *Preface* to translation of Wellhausen, p. vii.

† "In der Chronik," on the other hand, "ist es der Pentateuch, d. h. vor Allem der *Priester-codex*, nach dessen Muster die Geschichte des alten Israels dargestellt wird" (Wellhausen, *Prolegom.*, p. 309). It has been said that the Book of Kings reflects the political and prophetic view, and the Book of Chronicles the priestly view of Jewish history. It is about the Pentateuch, its date and composition, that the battle of the Higher Criticism chiefly rages. With that we are but indirectly concerned in considering the Book of Kings; but it is noticeable that the ablest and most competent defender of the more conservative criticism, Professor James Robertson, D.D., both in his contribution to *Book by Book* and in his *Early Religion of Israel*, makes large concessions. Thus he says, "It is particularly to be noticed that in the Book of

view, the history as a whole is to exemplify, are already expressed succinctly in the charge which he represents David as giving to his son Solomon (1 Kings ii. 3, 4); they are stated by him again in chap. iii. 14, and more distinctly in chap. ix. 1-9. Obedience to the Deuteronomic law is the qualification for an approving verdict; deviation from it is the source of ill success (1 Kings xi. 9-13, xiv. 7-11, xvi. 2; 2 Kings xvii. 7-18), and the sure prelude to condemnation. Every king of the Northern Kingdom is characterised as doing 'that which was evil in the eyes of Jehovah.' In the Southern Kingdom the exceptions are Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, Josiah—usually, however, with the limitation that 'the high places were not removed' as demanded by the Deuteronomic law.* The constantly recurring Deuteronomic phrases which most directly illustrate the point of view from which the history is regarded are, 'To keep the charge of Jehovah'; 'to walk in the ways of Jehovah'; 'to keep (or execute) His commandments, or statutes, and judgments'; 'to do that which is right in the eyes of Jehovah'; 'to provoke Jehovah to anger'; 'to cleave to Jehovah.'† If the reader will be at the pains of underlining in his text the phrases here cited" (and many others of which Professor Driver gives a list), "he will not only realise how numerous they are, but also perceive how they seldom occur indiscriminately in the narrative as such, but are generally aggregated in particular passages (mostly comments on the history, or speeches) which are thereby distinguished from their context, and shown to be presumably the work of a different hand."‡

vii. It must not be imagined that the late compilation of the book, or its subsequent recensions, or the dogmatic colouring which it may have insensibly derived from the religious systems and organisations of days subsequent to the Exile, have in the least affected the main historic veracity of the kingly annals. They may have influenced the omissions and the moral estimates, but the events themselves are in every case confirmed when we are able to compare them with any records and monuments of Phœnicia, Moab, Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. The discovery and deciphering of the Moabite stone, and of the painted vaults of Shishak at Karnak, and of the cuneiform inscriptions, confirm in every case the general truth, in some cases the minute details, of the sacred historian. In so passing an allusion as that in 2 Kings iii. 16, 17 the accuracy of the narrative is confirmed by the fact that (as Delitzsch has shown) the method of obtaining water is that which is to this day employed in the Wady el-Hasa at the southern end of the Dead Sea.‡

viii. The Book of Kings consists, according to

the Pentateuch itself the Mosaic origin is not claimed" (*Book by Book*, p. 5). "The anonymous character of all the historical writings of the Old Testament would lead us to conclude that the ancient Hebrews had not the idea of literary property which we attach to authorship" (p. 8). "It is long since the composite character of the Pentateuch was observed" (p. 9). "There may remain doubts as to when the various parts of the Pentateuch were actually written down; it may be admitted that the later writers wrote in the light of the events and circumstances of their own times" (p. 16).

* Driver, p. 180. Comp. Professor Robertson Smith: "The most notable feature in the extant redactions of the book is the strong interest shown in the Deuteronomic law of Moses, and especially in the centralisation of worship in the Temple on Zion, as pre-supposed in Deuteronomy and enforced by Josiah. This interest did not exist in ancient Israel, and is quite foreign to the older memories incorporated in the book."

† Driver, p. 102.

‡ Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 6th ed., p. 567.

Stade,* of, (a) 1 Kings i., ii., the close of a history of David, in continuation of 1 and 2 Samuel. The continuity of the Scriptures is marked in an interesting way by the word "and," with which so many of the books begin. The Jews, devout believers in the work of a Divine Providence, saw no discontinuities in the course of national events.†

(b) 1 Kings iii.—xi., a conglomerate of notices about Solomon, grouped round chaps. vi., vii., which narrate the building of the Temple. They are arranged by the præ-exilic compiler, but not without later touches from the Deuteronomic standpoint of a later editor (e. g., iii. 2, 3). Chap. viii. 14 ix. 9 also belong to the later editor.‡

(c) 1 Kings xi.—2 Kings xxiii. 29, an epitome of the entire regal period of Judah and Israel, after the three first reigns over the undivided kingdom, compiled mainly before the Exile.

(d) 2 Kings xxiii. 30—xxv. 30, a conclusion, added, in its present form, after the Exile.

Two positions are maintained (A) as regards the text, and (B) as regards the chronology.

A. As regards the text no one will maintain the old false assertion that it has come down to us in a perfect condition. There are in the history of the text three epochs: 1, The Præ-Talmudic; 2, The Talmudic-Masoretic up to the time when vowel-points were introduced; 3, The Masoretic traditions of a later period. The marginal annotations known as Q'ri "read" (plural, *Qarjan*), consist of glosses and euphemisms which were used in the service of the synagogue in place of the written text (K'tib); the oral tradition of these variations was known as the Masora (i. e., tradition). The Greek version (Septuagint, LXX.), which is of immense importance for the history of the text, was begun in Alexandria under Ptolemy Philadelphus (B. C. 283—247). It presents many additions and variations in the Books of Kings.§

All Hebrew manuscripts, as is well known, are of comparatively recent date, owing to the strict rule of the Jewish Schools that any manuscript which had in the slightest degree suffered from time or use was to be instantly destroyed. The oldest Hebrew manuscript is supposed to be the Codex Babylonicus at St. Petersburg (A. D. 916), unless one recently discovered by Dr. Ginsburg in the British Museum be older. Most Hebrew manuscripts are later than the twelfth century.

The variations in the Samaritan Pentateuch, and in the Septuagint version—the latter of which are often specially valuable as indications of the original text—furnish abundant proof that no miracle has been wrought to preserve the text of Scripture from the changes and corruptions which always arise in the course of constant transcriptions.

A further and serious difficulty in the reproduction of events in their historic exactitude is introduced by the certainty that many books of the Bible, in their present form, represent the results arrived at after their recension by successive editors, some of whom lived many centuries after the

* *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, i. 73.

† Even the First Book of Maccabees begins with *καὶ ἐγένετο*.

‡ Stade thinks that this is confirmed by viii. 46-49.

§ Stade, pp. 32 ff. Thus, in 1 Kings viii. 14-53, verses 12, 13 are in the Septuagint placed *after* verse 53, are incomplete in the Hebrew text, and have a remarkable reading in the Targum. Professor Robertson Smith infers that a Deuteronomic insertion has misplaced them in one text, and mutilated them in another. The order of the LXX. differs in 1 Kings iv. 19-27; and it omits 1 Kings vi. 11-14; ix. 15-26. It transposes the story of Naboth, and omits the story of Abijah and Abijah, which is added from Aquila's version to the Alexandrian MS. See Wellhausen-Bleek. *Einleitung*, §§ 114-134.

events recorded. In the Books of Kings we probably see many *nuances* which were not introduced till after the epoch-making discovery of the Book of the Law (perhaps the essential parts of the Book of Deuteronomy) in the reign of Josiah, A. D. 621 (2 Kings xxii. 8-14). It is, for instance, impossible to declare with certainty what parts of the Temple service were really coæval with David and Solomon, and what parts had arisen in later days. There appear to be liturgical touches, or alterations as indicated by the variations of the text in 1 Kings viii. 4, 12, 13. In xviii. 29-36 the allusion to the *Minchah* is absent from the LXX. in verse 36, and in 2 Kings iii. 20 another reading is suggested.

B. As regards the difficult question of *Chronology* we need add but little to what has been elsewhere said.* Even the most conservative critics admit that (1) the numbers of the Biblical text have often become corrupt or uncertain; and (2) that the ancient Hebrews were careless on the subject of exact chronology. The Chronology of the Kings, as it now stands, is historically true in its general outlines, but in its details presents us with data which are mutually irreconcilable. It is obviously artificial, and is dominated by slight modifications of the round number 40.† Thus from the Exile to the Building of the Temple is stated at 480 years, and from that period to the fiftieth year of the Exile also at 480 years. In the Chronicles there are eleven high priests from Azariah ben-Ahimaaz to the Exile of Jozadak, which, with the Exile period, gives twelve generations of 40 years each. Again, from Rehoboam to the Fall of Samaria in the sixth year of Hezekiah, following the 40 years' reign of Saul, of David, and of Solomon, we have:—

Rehoboam, Abijah.....	20	years.
Asa	41	"
Jehoshaphat, Jehoram }	40	"
Ahaziah, Athaliah }		
Joash	40	"
Amaziah, Uzziah	81	"
Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah.....	38	"

After the Fall of Samaria we have:—

Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon... 80 "

and it can hardly be a mere accident that in these lists the number 40 is only modified by slight necessary details.

The history of the Northern Kingdom seems to be roughly trisected into 80 years before Benhadad's first invasion, 80 years of Syrian war, 40 years of prosperity under Jeroboam II., and 40 years of decline.‡ This is probably a result of chronological system, not uninfluenced by mystical considerations. For $480 = 40 \times 12$. *Forty* is repeatedly used as a sacred number in connection with epochs of penitence and punishment. *Twelve* (4×3) is, according to Bähr (the chief student of numerical and other symbolism), "the signature of the people of Israel"—as a whole (4), in the midst of which God (3) resides. Similarly Stade thinks that 16 is the basal number for the reigns of kings from Jehu to Hoshea, and 12 from Jeroboam to Jehu.§

* See Appendix on the Chronology.

† See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 283-87; Robertson Smith, *Journ. of Philology*, x. 209-13.

‡ *Encycl. Brit.*, s.v. Kings (W. R. S.).

§ See Stade, i. 88-99; W. R. Smith, *l. c.*: Kreuz, *Zeitschr. f. Wiss. Theol.*, 1877, p. 404. Some of the dates, as Dr. W. R. Smith shows, are "traditional," and are probably

It is possible that the synchronistic data did not proceed from the compiler of the Book of Kings, but were added by the last redactor.

Are these critical conclusions so formidable? Are they fraught with disastrous consequences? Which is really dangerous—truth laboriously sought for, or error accepted with unreasoning blindness and maintained with invincible prejudice?

CHAPTER III.

THE HISTORIAN OF THE KINGS.

"The hearts of kings are in Thy rule and governance and Thou dost dispose and turn them as it seemeth best to Thy godly wisdom."

WERE WE to judge the compiler or epitomator of the Book of Kings from the literary standpoint of modern historians, he would, no doubt, hold a very inferior place; but so to judge him would be to take a mistaken view of his object, and to test his merits and demerits by conditions which are entirely alien from the ideal of his contemporaries and the purpose which he had in view.

It is quite true that he does not even aim at fulfilling the requirements demanded of an ordinary secular historian. He does not attempt to present any philosophical conception of the political events and complicated interrelations of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. His method of writing the story of the Kings of Judah and Israel in so many separate paragraphs gives a certain confusedness to the general picture. It leads inevitably to the repetition of the same facts in the accounts of two reigns. Each king is judged from a single point of view, and that not the point of view by which his own age was influenced, but one arrived at in later centuries, and under changed conditions, religious and political. There is no attempt to show that

"God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

The military splendour or political ability of a king goes for nothing. It has so little interest for the writer that a brilliant and powerful ruler like Jeroboam II. seems to excite in him as little interest as an effeminate weakling like Ahaziah. He passes over without notice events of such capital importance as the invasion of Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chron. xiv. 9-15, xvi. 8); the wars of Jehoshaphat against Edom, Ammon, and Moab (2 Chron. xx. 1-25); of Uzziah against the Philistines (2 Chron. xxvi. 6-8); and of the Assyrians against Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii. 71-13). He neither tells us that Omri subdued Moab, nor that he was defeated by Syria. He scarcely more than mentions events of such deep interest as the conquest of Jerusalem by Shishak (1 Kings xv. 25, 26); the war between Abijam and Jeroboam (1 Kings xv. 7); of Amaziah with Edom (2 Kings xiv. 7); or even the expedition of Josiah against Pharaoh-nechoh (2 Kings xxiii. 29).* For these events he is content to relegate us to the best authorities

taken from Temple records (*e.g.*, the invasion of Shishak, and the change of the revenue system in the twenty-third year of Joash). Taking these as data, we have (roughly) 160 years to the twenty-third year of Joash, + 160 to the death of Hezekiah, + 160 years to the return from the Exile = 480. He infers that "the existing scheme was obtained by setting down a few fixed dates, and filling up the intervals with figures in which 20 and 40 were the main units."

* *Speaker's Commentary*, ii. 477.

which he used, with the phrase "and the rest of his acts, his wars, and all that he did." The fact that Omri was the founder of so powerful a dynasty that the Kings of Israel were known to Assyria as "the House of Omri," does not induce him to give more than a passing notice to that king. It did not come within his province to record such memorable circumstances as that Ahab fought with the Aramæan host against Assyria at the battle of Karkar, or that the blood-stained Jehu had to send a large tribute to Shalmaneser II.

There is a certain monotony in the grounds given for the moral judgments passed on each successive monarch. One unchanging formula tells us of every one of the kings of Israel that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," with exclusive reference in most cases to "the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin." The unfavourable remark about king after king of Judah that "nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places" (1 Kings xv. 14, xxii. 43; 2 Kings xii. 3, xiv. 4) makes no allowance for the fact that high places dedicated to Jehovah had been previously used unblamed by the greatest judges and seers, and that the feeling against them had only entered into the national life in later days.

It belongs to the same essential view of history that the writer's attention is so largely occupied by the activity of the prophets, whose personality often looms far more largely on his imagination than that of the kings. If we were to remove from his pages all that he tells us of Nathan, Ahijah of Shiloh, Shemaiah, Jehu the son of Hanani, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Isaiah, Huldah, Jonah, and various nameless "men of God,"* the residuum would be meagre indeed. The silence as to Jeremiah is a remarkable circumstance which no theory has explained; but we must remember the small extent of the compiler's canvas, and that, even as it is, we should have but a dim insight into the condition of the two kingdoms if we did not study also the extant writings of contemporary prophets. His whole aim is to exhibit the course of events as so controlled by the Divine Hand that faithfulness to God ensured blessing, and unfaithfulness brought down His displeasure and led to national decline. So far from concealing this principle he states it, again and again, in the most formal manner.†

These might be objections against the author if he had written his book in the spirit of an ordinary historian. They cease to have any validity when we remember that he does not profess to offer us a secular history at all. His aim and method have been described as "prophetic-didactic." He writes avowedly as one who believed in the Theocracy. His epitomes from the documents which he had before him were made with a definite religious purpose. The importance or unimportance of kings in his eyes depended on their relation to the opinions which had come home to the conscience of the nation in the still recent reformation of Josiah. He strove to solve the moral problems of God's government as they presented themselves, with much distress and perplexity, to the mind of his nation in the days of its decadence and threatened obliteration. And in virtue of his method of dealing with such themes, he shares with the other historical writers of the Old Testa-

ment a right to be regarded as one of the *Propheta priores*.*

What are those problems?

They were old problems respecting God's moral government of the world which always haunted the Jewish mind, complicated by the disappointment of national convictions about the promises of God to the race of Abraham and the family of David.

The Exile was already imminent—it had indeed partly begun in the deportation of Jehoiakin and many Jews to Babylon (B. C. 598)—when the book saw the light. The writer was compelled to look back with tears on "the days that were no more." The epoch of Israel's splendour and dominion seemed to have passed for ever. And yet, was not God the true Governor of His people? Had He not chosen Jacob for Himself, and Israel for His own possession? Had not Abraham received the promise that his seed should be as the sand of the sea, and that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed? Or was it a mere illusion that "when Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son"? The writer clung with unquenchable faith to his convictions about the destinies of his people, and yet every year seemed to render their fulfilment more distant and more impossible.

The promise to Abraham had been renewed to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to the patriarchs; but to David and his house it had been reiterated with special emphasis and fresh details. That promise, as it stood recorded in 2 Sam. vii. 12-16, was doubtless in the writer's hands. The election of Israel as "God's people" is "a world-historic fact, the fundamental miracle which no criticism can explain away."† And, in addition God had sworn in His holiness that He would not forsake David. "When thy days be fulfilled," He had said, "and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever, I will be his father, and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul whom I put away before thee, and thy house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever." This promise haunted the imagination of the compiler of the Book of Kings. He repeatedly refers to it, and it is so constantly present to his mind that his whole narrative seems to be a comment, and often a perplexed and half-despairing comment, upon it.‡ Yet he resisted the assaults of despair. The Lord had made a faithful oath unto David, and He would not depart from it.

* נביאים ראשונים. The three greater and twelve minor prophets are called *propheta posteriores* (אַחֲרֵינִים). Daniel is classed among the Hagiographa (כְּתוּבֵי־הַקֹּדֶשׁ).

This title of "former prophets" was, however, given by the Jews to the historic books from the mistaken fancy that they were all written by prophets.

† Martensen, *Dogmatics*, p. 363.

‡ 2 Sam. vii. 12-16; 1 Kings xi. 36, xv. 4; 2 Kings viii. 19, xxv. 27-30. "His object evidently was," says Professor Robertson, "to exhibit the bloom and decay of the Kingdom of Israel, and to trace the influences which marked its varying destiny. He proceeds on the fixed idea that the promise given to David of a sure house remained in force during all the vicissitudes of the divided kingdom, and was not even frustrated by the fall of the kingdom of Judah."

* 1 Kings xiii. 1-32, xx. 13-15, 28, 35, 42; 2 Kings xxi. 10-15.

† 2 Kings xvii. 7-23, 32, 41, xxiii. 26, 27.

It is this that makes him linger so lovingly on the glories of the reign of Solomon. At first they seem to inaugurate an era of overwhelming and permanent prosperity. Because Solomon was the heir of David whom God had chosen, his dominion is established without an effort in spite of a formidable conspiracy. Under his wise, pacific rule the united kingdom springs to the zenith of its greatness. The writer dwells with fond regret upon the glories of the Temple, the Empire, and the Court of the wise king. He records God's renewed promises to him that there should not be any among the kings like unto him all his days. Alas! the splendid visions had faded away like an unsubstantial pageant. Glory had led to vice and corruption. Worldly policy carried apostasy in its train. The sun of Solomon set in darkness, as the sun of David had set in decrepitude and blood. "And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice: . . . but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant, . . . I will surely rend the kingdom from thee. . . . Notwithstanding in thy day I will not do it for David thy father's sake. . . . 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."*

Thus at one blow the heir of "Solomon in all his glory" dwindles into the kinglet of a paltry little province not nearly so large as the smallest of English counties. So insignificant, in fact, do the fortunes of the kingdom become, that, for long periods, it has no history worth speaking of. The historian is driven to occupy himself with the northern tribes because they are the scene of the activity of two glorious though widely different prophets. From first to last we seem to hear in the prose of the annalist the cry of the troubled Psalmist, "Lord, where are thy old lovingkindnesses which Thou swarest unto David in Thy truth? Remember, Lord, the rebukes that Thy servants have, and how I do bear in my bosom the rebukes of many people wherewith thine enemies have blasphemed Thee, and slandered the footsteps of Thine anointed." And yet, in spite of all, with invincible confidence, he adds, "Praised be the Lord for evermore. Amen and Amen."

And this is one of the great lessons which we learn alike from Scripture and from the experience of every holy and humble life. It may be briefly summed up in the words, "Put thou thy trust in God and be doing good, and He shall bring it to pass." In multitudes of forms the Bible inculcates upon us the lesson, "Have faith in God," "Fear not; only believe." The paradox of the New Testament is the existence of joy in the midst of sorrow and sighing, of exultation (*ἀγαλλίασις*) even amid the burning fiery furnaces of anguish and persecution. The secret of both Testaments alike is the power to maintain an unquenchable faith, an unbroken peace, an indomitable trust amid every complication of disaster and apparent overthrow. The writer of the Book of Kings saw that God is patient, because He is eternal; that even the histories of nations, not individual lives only, are but as one ticking of a clock amid the eternal silence; that God's ways are not man's ways. And because this is so—because God sitteth above the water

floods and remaineth a King for ever—therefore we can attain to that ultimate triumph of faith which consists in holding fast our profession, not only amid all the waves and storms of calamity, but even when we are brought face to face with that which wears the aspect of absolute and final failure. The historian says in the name of his nation what the saint has so often to say in his own, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Amos, earliest of the prophets whose written utterances have been preserved, undazzled by the magnificent revival of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam II., was still convinced that the future lay with the poor fallen "booth" of David's royalty: "And I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old, . . . saith the Lord that doeth this."* In many a dark age of Jewish affliction this fire of conviction has still burned amid the ashes of national hopes after it had seemed to have flickered out under white heaps of chilly dust.†

CHAPTER IV.

GOD IN HISTORY.

"The Lord remaineth a King for ever."

HAD the compiler of the Book of Kings been so incompetent and valueless an historian as some critics have represented, it would indeed have been strange that his book should have kindled so immortal an interest, or have taken its place securely in the Jewish canon among the most sacred books of the world. He could not have secured this recognition without real and abiding merits. His greatness appears by the manner in which he grapples with, and is not crushed by, the problems presented to him by the course of events to him so dismal.

1. He wrote after Israel had long been scattered among the nations. The sons of Jacob had been deported into strange lands to be hopelessly lost and absorbed amid heathen peoples. The district which had been assigned to the Ten Tribes after the conquest of Joshua had been given over to an alien and mongrel population. The worst anticipations of northern prophets like Amos and Hoshea had been terribly fulfilled. The glory of Samaria had been wiped out, as when one wipeth a dish, wiping and turning it upside down. From the beginning of Israel's separate dominion the prophets saw the germ of its final ruin in what is called the "calf-worship" of Jeroboam, which prepared the way for the Baal-worship introduced by the House of Omri. In the two and a half centuries of Samaria's existence the compiler of this history finds nothing of eternal interest except the activity of God's great messengers. In the history of Judah the better reigns of a Jehoshaphat, of a Hezekiah, of a Josiah, had shed a sunset gleam over the waning fortunes of the remnant of God's people. Hezekiah and Josiah, with whatever deflections, had both ruled in the theocratic spirit. They had both inaugurated reforms. The reformation achieved by the latter was so sweeping and thorough as to kindle the hope that the deep wound inflicted on the nation by the manifold crimes of Manasseh had been healed. But it was not so. The records of these two best kings end, nevertheless, in prophecies of doom.‡ The results of their reforming efforts

* Amos ix. 11, 12.

† Psalm lxxxix. 48-50.

‡ 2 Kings xx. 16-18, xxii. 16-20.

* 1 Kings xi. 9-13.

proved to be partial and unsatisfactory. A race of vassal weaklings succeeded. Jehoahaz was taken captive by the Egyptians, who set up Jehoiakim as their puppet. He submits to Nebuchadnezzar, attempts a weak revolt, and is punished. In the short reign of Jehoiachin the captivity begins, and the futile rebellion of Zedekiah leads to the deportation of his people, the burning of the Holy City, and the desecration of the Temple. It seemed as though the ruin of the olden hopes could not have been more absolute. Yet the historian will not abandon them. Clinging to God's promises with desperate and pathetic tenacity he gilds his last page, as with one faint sunbeam struggling out of the stormy darkness of the exile, by narrating how Evil-merodach released Jehoiachin from his long captivity, and treated him with kindness, and advanced him to the first rank among the vassal kings in the court of Babylon. If the ruler of Judah must be a hopeless prisoner, let him at least occupy among his fellow-prisoners a sad pre-eminence!

2. The historian has been blamed for the perpetual gloom which enwraps his narrative. Surely the criticism is unjust. He did not invent his story. He is no whit more gloomy than Thucydides, who had to record how the brief gleam of Athenian glory sank in the Bay of Syracuse into a sea of blood. He is not half so gloomy as Tacitus, who is forced to apologise for the "hues of earthquake and eclipse" which darken his every page. The gloom lay in the events of which he desired to be the faithful recorder. He certainly did not love gloom. He lingers at disproportionate length over the grandeur of the reign of Solomon, dilating fondly upon every element of his magnificence, and unwilling to tear himself away from the one period which realised his ideal expectations. After that period his spirits sink. He cared less to deal with a divided kingdom of which only the smallest fragment was even approximately faithful. There could be nothing but gloom in the record of shortlived, sanguinary, and idolatrous dynasties, which succeeded each other like the scenes of a grim phantasmagoria in Samaria and Jezreel. There could be nothing but gloom in the story of that northern kingdom in which king after king was dogged to ruin by the politic unfaithfulness of the rebel by whom it had been founded. Nor could there be much real brightness in the story of humiliated Judah. There also many kings preferred a diplomatic worldliness to reliance on their true source of strength. Even in Judah there were kings who defiled God's own temple with heathen abominations; and a saint like Hezekiah had been followed by an apostate like Manasseh. Had Judah been content to dwell in the defence of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty, she would have been defended under His wings and been safe beneath His feathers; His righteousness and truth would have been her shield and buckler. He who protected her in the awful crisis of Sennacherib's invasion had proved that He never faileth them that trust Him. But her kings had preferred to lean on such a bruised reed as Egypt, which broke under the weight, and pierced the hand of all who relied on her assistance. "But ye said, Nay, but we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift."³

3. And has not gloom been the normal char-

* Isa. xxx. 16.

acteristic of many a long period of human history? It is with the life of nations as with the life of men. With nations, too, there is "a perpetual fading of all beauty into darkness, and of all strength into dust." Humanity advances, but it advances over the ruins of peoples and the wrecks of institutions. Truth forces its way into acceptance, but its progress is "from scaffold to scaffold, and from stake to stake." All who have generalised on the course of history have been forced to recognise its agonies and disappointments. There, says Byron,

"There is the moral of all human tales;
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past;
First Freedom, and then Glory—when that fails,
Wealth, Vice, Corruption—Barbarism at last.
And History, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page: 'tis better written here
Where gorgeous tyranny hath thus amassed
All treasures, all delights that eye or ear,
Heart, soul could seek, tongue ask."

Mr. J. R. Lowell, looking at the question from another side, sings:—

"Careless seems the Great Avenger; History's pages but
record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt all systems
and the Word;
Truth for ever on the scaffold, Wrong for ever on the
throne—
Yet that scaffold sways the Future, and behind the dim
unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above
His own."

Mr. W. H. Lecky, again, considering the facts of national story from the point of view of heredity, and the permanent consequences of wrongdoing, sings:—

"The voice of the afflicted is rising to the sun,
The thousands who have perished for the selfishness of
one;
The judgment-seat polluted, the altar overthrown,
The sighing of the exile, the tortured captive's groan,
The many crushed and plundered to gratify the few,
The hounds of hate pursuing the noble and the true."

Or, if we desire a prose authority, can we deny this painful estimate of Mr. Ruskin?—"Truly it seems to me as I gather in my mind the evidence of insane religion, degraded art, merciless war, sullen toil, detestable pleasure, and vain or vile hope in which the nations of the world have lived since first they could bear record of themselves, it seems to me, I say, as if the race itself were still half serpent, not extricated yet from its clay; a lacertine brood of bitterness, the glory of it emaciate with cruel hunger and blotted with venomous stain, and the track of it on the leaf a glittering slime, and in the sand a useless furrow."⁴

Dark as is the story which the author of the Book of Kings has to record, and hopeless as might seem to be the conclusion of the tragedy, he is responsible for neither. He can but tell the things that were, and tell them as they were; the picture is, after all, far less gloomy than that presented in many a great historic record. Consider the features of such an age as that recorded by Tacitus, with the "Iliad of woes" of which he was the annalist.† Does Jewish history offer us nothing but this horrible monotony of delations and suicides? Consider the long ages of darkness and retrogression in the fifth and following centuries; or the unutterable miseries inflicted on the seaboard of Europe by the invasions of the

* *Queen of the Air*, p. 87.

† Tac., *Hist.*, i. 2: "Opus aggredior opimum casit: atrox prællis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pœcœ sevum."

Norsemen—the mere thought of which drove Charlemagne to tears; or the long complicated agony produced by hundreds of petty feudal wars, and the cruel tyranny of marauding barons; or the condition of England in the middle of the fourteenth century when the Black Death swept away half of her population; or the extreme misery of the masses after the Thirty Years' War; or the desolating horror of the wars of Napoleon which filled Germany with homeless and starving orphans. The annals of the Hebrew monarchy are less grim than these; yet the House of Israel might also seem to have been chosen out for a pre-eminence of sorrow which ended in making Jerusalem "a rendezvous for the extermination of the race." When once the Jewish wars began—

"Vengeance! thy fiery wing their race pursued,
Thy thirsty poniard blushed with infant blood!
Roused at thy call and panting still for game
The bird of war, the Latin eagle came.
Then Judah raged, by ruffian discord led,
Drunk with the steamy carnage of the dead;
He saw his sons by dubious slaughter fall,
And war without, and death within the wall."

Probably no calamity since time began exceeded in horror and anguish the carnage and cannibalism and demoniac outbreak of every vile and furious passion which marked the siege of Jerusalem; and, in the dreary ages which followed, the world has heard rising from the Jewish people the groan of myriads of broken hearts.

"The fruits of the earth have lost their savour," wrote one poor Rabbi, the son of Gamaliel, "and no dew falls."

In the crowded Ghettos of mediæval cities, during the foul tyranny of the Inquisition in Spain, and many a time throughout Europe, amid the iron oppression of ignorant and armed brutality, the hapless Jews have been forced to cry aloud to the God of their fathers: "Thou feedest Thy people with the bread of tears, and givest them plenteousness of tears to drink!" "Thou sellest Thy people for nought, and givest no money for them."

When the eccentric Frederic William I. of Prussia ordered his Court chaplain to give him in one sentence a proof of Christianity, the chaplain answered without a moment's hesitation: "The Jews, your Majesty." Truly it might seem that the fortunes of that strange people had been designed for a special lesson, not to them only, but to the whole human race; and the general outlines of that lesson have never been more clearly and forcibly indicated than in the Book of Kings.

CHAPTER V.

HISTORY WITH A PURPOSE.

"History, as distinguished from chronicles or annals, must always contain a theory whether confessed by the writer or not. A sound theory is simply a general conception which co-ordinates a multitude of facts. Without this, facts cease to have interest except to the antiquarian."—LAURIE.

THE prejudice against history written with a purpose is a groundless prejudice. Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy, Sallust, had each his guiding principle, no less than Ammianus Marcellinus, St. Augustine, Orosius, Bossuet, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Kant, Turgot, Condorcet, Hegel, Fichte, and every modern historian worthy the name. They have all, as Mr. Morley says, felt the intellectual necessity for showing "those secret dispositions of events which prepared the way for great changes, as well as the momentous conjunctures which

more immediately brought them to pass." Orosius, founding his epitome on the hint given by St. Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei*, begins with the famous words, "*Divina providentia agitur mundus et homo.*" Other serious writers may vary the formula, but in all their annals the lesson is essentially the same. "The foundation upon which, at all periods, Israel's sense of its national unity rested was religious in its character." "The history of Israel," says Stade, "is essentially a history of religious ideas."*

Of course the history is rendered valueless if, in pursuing his purpose, the writer either falsifies events or intentionally manipulates them in such a way that they lead to false issues. But the man who is not inspired by his subject, the man to whom the history which he is narrating, has no particular significance, must be a man of dull imagination or cold affections. No such man can write a true history at all. For history is the record of what has happened to men in nations, and its events are swayed by human passions, and palpitate with human emotions. There is no great historian who may not be charged with having been in some respects a partisan. The ebb and flow of his narrative, the "to-and-fro-conflicting waves" of the struggles which he records, must be to him as idle as a dance of puppets if he feels no special interest in the chief actors, and has not formed a distinct judgment of the sweep of the great unseen tidal forces by which they are determined and controlled.

The greatness of the sacred historian of the Kings consists in his firm grasp of the principle that God is the controlling power and sin the disturbing force in the entire history of men and nations.

Surely he does not stand alone in either conviction. Both propositions are confirmed by all experience. In all life, individual and national, sin is weakness; and human life without God, whether isolated or corporate, is no better than

"A trouble of ants 'mid a million million of suns."

"Why do the heathen so furiously rage together," sang the Psalmist, "and why do the people imagine a vain thing? . . . He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision." Even the oldest of the Greek poets, in the first lines of the *Iliad*, declares that amid those scenes of carnage, and the tragic fate of heroes, *Διὸς δ' ἐτέλειετο βουλή* :—

"Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumbered, Heavenly Goddess sing;
That wrath which hurled to Pluto's gloomy reign
The souls of countless chiefs untimely slain;
Whose limbs, unburied on the naked shore,
Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore:
Since great Achilles and Atreides strove,
Such was the sovereign doom, and such the will of
Jove!"

In the *Odyssey* the same conviction is repeated, where Odysseus says that "it is the fate-fraught decree of Zeus which stands by as arbiter, when it is meant that miserable men should suffer many woes."† The heathen, too, saw clearly that,

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;"

and that, alike for Trojans and Danaans, the chariot-wheels of Heaven roll onward to their destined goal.

* Wellhausen, *History of Israel*, p. 432; Stade, *Gesch. des Volkes Israel*, i., p. 12; Robinson, *Ancient History of Israel*, p. 15.

† *Od.*, ix. 57, 58.

Such words express a belief in the hearts of pagans identical with that in the hearts of the early disciples when they exclaimed: "Of a truth in this city against Thy holy Servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, *to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel foreordained to come to pass.*"

The ever-present intensity of these convictions leads the historian of the Kings to many shorter or longer "homiletic excursions," in which he develops his main theme. And if he inculcates his high faith in the form of speeches and other insertions which perhaps express his own views more distinctly than they could have been expressed by the earlier prophets and kings of Judah, he adopts a method which was common in past ages and has always been conceded to the greatest and most trustworthy of ancient historians.

CHAPTER VI.

LESSONS OF THE HISTORY.

"Great men are the inspired texts of that Divine Book of Revelation of which a chapter is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some named History."—CARLYLE.

THUS History becomes one of the most precious books of God. To speak vaguely of "a stream of tendency not ourselves which makes for righteousness," is to endow "a stream of tendency" with a moral sense. Philosophers may talk of "dass unbekannte höhere Wesen das wir ahnen"; but the great majority alike of the wisest and the humblest of mankind, will give to that moral "Not-ourselves" the name of God. The truth was more simply and more religiously expressed by the American orator when he said that "One with God is always in a majority," and "God is the only final public opinion." Only thus can we account for the fact that events apparently the most trivial have repeatedly been overruled to produce the most stupendous issues, and opposition apparently the most overwhelming has been made to further the very ends which it most fiercely resisted. "The fierceness of man shall turn to Thy praise, and the fierceness of them shalt Thou restrain."

St. Paul expresses his sense of this fact when he says, "Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, and the weak things of the world, and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised did God choose, and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are:"† and that "because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."‡

The most conspicuous instance of these laws in history is furnished by the victories of Christianity. It was against all probability that a faith not only despised but execrated—a faith whose crucified Messiah kindled unmitigated contempt, and its doctrine of the Resurrection unmingled derision—a faith confined originally to a handful of ignorant peasants drawn from the dregs of a tenth-rate and subjugated people—should prevail over all the philosophy, and genius, and ridicule, and authority of the world, supported by the diadems of all-powerful Cæsars and the swords of thirty legions. It was against all probability that a faith which,

in the world's judgment, was so abject, should in so short a space of time achieve so complete a triumph, not by aggressive force, but by meek non-resistance, and that it should win its way through armed antagonism by the sole powers of innocence and of martyrdom—"not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

But though the thoughtful Israelite had no such glorious spectacle as this before him, he saw something analogous to it. The prophets had been careful to point out that no merit or superiority of its own had caused the people to be chosen by God from among the nations for the mighty functions for which it was destined, and which it had already in part fulfilled. "And thou shalt answer before the Lord thy God, and say, A Syrian ready to perish was my father; he went down to Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number.*" The chosen people could boast of no loftier ancestry than that they sprang from a fugitive from the land of Ur, whose descendants had sunk into a horde of miserable slaves in the hot valley of Egypt. Yet from that degraded and sensuous serfdom God had led them into the wilderness "through parted seas and thundering battles," and had spoken to them at Sinai in a voice so mighty that its echoes have rolled among the nations for evermore. If through their sins and shortcomings they had once more been reduced to the rank of captive strangers in a strange land, the historian knew that even then their lot was not so abject as it once had been. They had at least heroic memories and an imperishable past. He believed that though God's face was darkened to them, the light of it was neither utterly nor finally withdrawn. Nothing could henceforth shake his trust that, even when Israel walked in the valley of the shadow of death, God would still be with His people; that "He would *love* their souls out of the pit of destruction."† The vain-glorious efforts of the heathen were foredoomed to final impotence, for God ruled the raging of the sea, the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people.

If this high faith seemed so often to lead only to frustrate hopes, the historian saw the reason. His philosophy of history reduced itself to the one rule that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people." It is a sublime philosophy, and no other is possible. It might be written as the comment on every history in the world. The prophets write it large, and again and again, as in letters of blood and fire. Upon their pages, even from the days of Balaam.

"In outline dim and vast
Their mighty shadows cast
The giant forms of Empires on their way
To ruin: one by one
They tower, and they are gone!"

Balaam had uttered his denunciation on Moab and Amalek and the Kenite. Amos hurled defiance on Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. Isaiah taunted Egypt with her splendid impotence, and had said of Babylon: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" As the sphere of national life enlarged, Nahum had poured forth his exultant dirge over the falling greatness of Assyria; and Ezekiel had painted the desolation which should come on glorious Tyre. These great prophets had read upon the palace-walls of the mightiest kingdoms the burning messages of doom, because they knew that (to quote the words of a living historian) "for every

* Acts iv. 27, 28.

† 1 Cor. I. 26-28.

‡ *Id.*, v. 25.

* Deut. xxvi. 5.

† Isa. xxxviii. 17 (Heb.).

false word and unrighteous deed, for cruelty and oppression, for lust and vanity, the price has to be paid at last. . . . Justice and truth alone endure and live. Injustice and falsehood may be long-lived, but doomsday comes to them at last."

Has the course of ages at all altered the incidence of these eternal laws? Do modern kingdoms offer any exceptions to the universal experience of the past? Look at Spain. Corrupted by her own vast wealth, by the confusion of religion with the indolent acceptance of lies which paraded themselves as catholic orthodoxy, and by the fatal disservice of religion from the moral law, she has sunk into decrepitude. Read in the utter collapse and ruin of her great Armada the inevitable Nemesis on greed, indolence, and superstition. Look at modern France. When the inflated bubble of her arrogance collapsed at Sedan as with a touch, two of her own writers, certainly not prejudiced in favour of Christian conclusions—Ernest Renan and Alexandre Dumas, *filis*—pointed independently to the causes of her ruin, and found them in her irreligion and her debauchery. The warnings which they addressed to their countrymen in that hour of humiliation, on the sanctity of family life and the eternal obligations of national righteousness, were identical with those addressed to the Israelites of old by Amos or Isaiah. The only difference was that the form in which they were uttered was modern and came with incomparably less of impassioned force.

The historian who, six hundred years before Christ, saw so clearly, and illustrated with such striking conciseness, the laws of God's moral governance of the world stands far above the casual censure of those who judge him by a mistaken standard. We owe him a debt of the deepest gratitude, not only because he has preserved for us the national records which might otherwise have perished, but far more because he has seen and pointed out their true significance. Imagine an English writer trying to give a sketch of English history since the death of Henry VI. in a thin volume of sixty or seventy octavo pages! Is it conceivable that even the most gifted and brilliant of our historians could in so short a space have rendered such a service as this sacred historian has rendered to all mankind? Do we owe nothing to the vivid insight which enabled him to set so many characters clearly before us with a few strokes of the pen? It is true that it is the *history* which is inspired rather than the *record* of the history; but the record itself is of quite exceptional value. It is true that the prophetic historian and the scientific historian must be judged by wholly different canons of criticism; but may not the prophetic historian be much the greater of the two? By the light of his histories we can read all histories, and see the common lesson taught us by the life of nations, as by the life of individuals—which is, that obedience to God's law is the only path of safety, the only condition of permanence. To fear God and keep His commandments is the end of the matter, and is the whole duty of man. To one who follows the guiding clue of these convictions history becomes "Providence made visible."

Bossuet, like St. Augustine, found the key to all events in a Divine Will controlling and overruling the course of human destinies by a constant exercise of superhuman power. Even Comte "ascribed a hardly less resistible power to a Providence of his own construction, directing present events along a groove cut ever more and more deeply for

them by the past." And Mr. John Morley admits that "whether you accept Bossuet's theory or Comte's—whether men be their own Providence, or no more than instruments or secondary agents in other hands—this classification of either Providence equally deserves study and meditation."

Thus, though the Jews were a small and insignificant people—though their kings were mere local sheykhs in comparison with the Pharaohs, or the kings of Assyria and Babylon; though they had none of that sense of beauty which gave immortality to the arts of Greece; though their temple was an altogether trivial structure when compared with the Parthenon or the Serapeum; though they had no drama which can be distantly compared with the *Oresteia* of Æschylus, and no epic which can be put beside the *Iliad* or the *Nibelungen*; though they had nothing which can be dignified with the name of a system of Philosophy—yet their influence on the human race—rendered permanent by their literature, or by that fragment of it which we call "The Books" as though there were none other in the world worth speaking of—has been more powerful than that of all nations upon the development of humanity. Millions have known the names of David or Isaiah, who never so much as heard of Sesostris or of Plato. The influence of the Hebrew race upon mankind has been a moral and a religious influence. Leaving Christianity out of sight—though Christianity itself was nursed in the cradle of Judaism, and was the fulfilment of the Messianic idea which was the most characteristic element in the ancient religion of the Hebrews—the history of Israel is more widely known a million-fold than any history of any people. Professor Huxley is an unsuspected witness to this truth. He has declared that he knows of no other work in the world by the study of which children could be so much humanised, and made to feel that each figure in that vast historical procession fills, like themselves, but a momentary space in the interval between the two eternities. What other nation has contributed to the treasure of human thought elements so immeasurably important as the idea of monotheism, and the Ten Commandments, and the high spiritual teaching by which the prophets brought home to the consciousness of our race the nearness, the holiness, and the love of God? We do not underrate the value of Eternal Inspiration in the "richly-variegated wisdom" which "multifariously and fragmentarily" the Creator has vouchsafed to man; but the Jews will ever be the most interesting of nations, chiefly because to them were entrusted the oracles of God.*

BOOK II.

DAVID AND SOLOMON.

CHAPTER VII.

DAVID'S DECREPITUDE.

I KINGS i. 1-4.

"Praise a fair day at night."

THE old age of good men is often a beautiful spectacle. They show us the example of a mellower wisdom, a larger tolerance, a sweeter temper, a more unselfish sympathy, a clearer faith.

* See *Stade*, i. 1-8.

The setting sun of their bright day tinges even the clouds which gather round it with softer and more lovely hues.

We cannot say this of David's age. After the oppressive splendour of his heroic youth and manhood there was no dewy twilight of honoured peace. We see him in a somewhat pitiable decrepitude. He was not really old; the expression of our Authorised Version, "stricken in years," is literally "entered into days," but the Book of Chronicles calls him "old and full of days."* Josephus says that when he died he was only seventy years old. He had reigned seven years and a half in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.† At the age of seventy many men are still, in full vigour of strength and intellect, but the conditions of that day were not favourable to longevity. Solomon does not seem to have survived his sixtieth year; and it is doubtful whether any one of the kings of Israel or Judah—excepting, strange to say, the wicked Manasseh—attained even that moderate age. Threescore years and ten have always been the allotted space of human life, and few who long survive that age find that their strength then is anything but labour and sorrow.

But the decrepitude of David was exceptional. He was drained of all his vital force. He took to his bed, but though they heaped clothes upon him he could get no warmth. "He remained cold amid the torrid heat of Jerusalem." Then his physicians recommended the only remedy they knew, to give heat to his chilled and withered frame. It was the primitive and not ineffectual remedy—which was suggested twenty-two centuries later to the great Frederic Barbarossa—of contact with the warmth of a youthful frame.‡ So they sought out the fairest virgin in all the coasts of Israel to act as the king's nurse, and their choice fell on Abishag, a maiden of Shunem in Issachar.§ There was no question of his taking another wife. He had already many wives and concubines, and what the bed-ridden invalid required was a strong and youthful nurse to cherish him. We are surprised at such total failure of life's forces. But David had lived through a youth of toil and exposure, of fight and hardship, in the days when his only home had been the dark and dripping limestone caves, and he had been hunted like a partridge on the mountains by the furious jealousy of Saul. The sun had smitten him by day and the moon by night, and the chill dews had fallen on him in the midnight bivouacs among the crags of Engedi. Then had followed the burdens and cares of royalty with guilty anxieties and deeds which shook his pulses with wrath and fear. Coincident with these were the demoralising luxuries and domestic sensualism of a polygamous palace. Worst of all he had sinned against God, and against light, and against his own conscience. For a time his moral sense had slumbered, and retribution had been delayed. But when he awoke from his sensual dream, the belated punishment burst over him in thunder and his conscience with outstretched finger and tones of menace must often have repeated to the murderous adulterer the doom of Nathan and the stern

sentence, "Thou art the man!" Many a vulgar Eastern tyrant would hardly have regarded David's sin as a sin at all; but when such a man as David sins, the fact that he has been admitted into a holier sanctuary adds deadliness to the guilt of his sacrilege. True he was forgiven, but he must have found it terribly hard to forgive himself. God gave back to him the clean heart, and renewed a right spirit within him; but the sense of forgiveness differs from the sweetness of innocence, and the remission of his sins did not bring with it the remission of their consequences. From that disastrous day David was a changed man. It might be said of him as of the Fallen Spirit:—

"His face
Deep scars of thunder had entrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek."

The Nemesis of sin's normal consequences pursued him to the end. Dark spirits walked in his house. Joab knew his guilty secrets, and Joab became the tyrannous master of his destiny. Those guilty secrets leaked out, and he lost his charm, his influence, his popularity among his subjects. He was haunted by an ever-present sense of shame and humiliation. Joab was a murderer, and went unpunished; but was not he too an unpunished murderer? If his enemies cursed him, he sometimes felt with a sense of despair, "Let them curse. God hath said unto them, Curse David." His past carried with it the inevitable deterioration of his present. In the overwhelming shame and horror which rent his heart during the rebellion of Absalom, he must often have felt tempted to the fatalism of desperation, like that guilty king of Greek tragedy who, burdened with the curse of his race, was forced to exclaim,—

"Ἐπει τὸ πρᾶγμα καρτ' ἐπισπέρχει θεός
Ἴτω κατ' οὐρόν, κύμα Κωκυτοῦ λαχόν,
Θεῶν στρυγγὴν πᾶν το Λαίου γένος."*

Curses in his family, a curse upon his daughter, a curse upon his sons, a curse upon himself, a curse upon his people,—there was scarcely one ingredient in the cup of human woe which, in consequence of his own crimes, this unhappy king had not been forced to taste. Scourges of war, famine, and pestilence—of a three years' famine, of a three years' flight before his enemies, of a three days' pestilence—he had known them all. He had suffered with the sufferings of his subjects, whose trials had been aggravated by his own transgressions. He had seen his sons following his own fatal example, and he had felt the worst of all sufferings in the serpent's tooth of filial ingratitude agonising a troubled heart and a weakened will. It is no wonder that David became decrepit before his time.

Yet what a picture does it present of the vanity of human wishes, of the emptiness of all that men desire, of the truth which Solon impressed on the Lydian king that we can call no man happy before his death! David's youth had been a pastoral idyll; his manhood an epic of war and chivalry; his premature age becomes the chronicle of a nursery. What different pictures are presented to us by David in his sweet youth and glowing bloom, and David in his unloved and disgraced decline! We have seen him a beautiful ruddy boy, summoned from his sheepfolds, with the wind of the desert on his cheek and its sunlight in his hair,

* Æsch., *Sept. c. Theb.*, 690.

* 1 Chron. xxiii. 1.

† 2 Sam. v. 5.

‡ It is mentioned by Galen, vii.; Valesius, *De Sacri Philo.*, xxix. p. 187; Bacon, *Hist. Vitæ et Mortis*, ix. 25; Reinhard, *Bibel-Krankheiten*, p. 171. See Josephus, *Ant.*, VII. xv. 3.

§ Now Solani, near Zerin (Jezebel), five miles south of Tabor (Robinson, *Researches*, iii. 462), on the southwest of Jebel el-Duhay (Little Hermon), Josh. xix. 13; 1 Sam. xxviii. 4.

to kneel before the aged prophet and feel the hands of consecration laid upon his head. Swift and strong, his feet like hart's feet, his arms able to bend a bow of steel, he fights like a good shepherd for his flock, and single-handed smites the lion and the bear. His harp and song drive the evil spirit from the tortured soul of the demoniac king. With a sling and a stone the boy slays the giant champion, and the maidens of Israel praise their deliverer with songs and dances. He becomes the armour-bearer of the king, the beloved comrade of the king's son, the husband of the king's daughter. Then indeed he is driven into imperilled outlawry by the king's envy, and becomes the captain of a band of freebooters; but his influence over them, as in our English legends of Robin Hood, gives something of beneficence to his lawlessness, and even these wandering years of brigandage are brightened by tales of his splendid magnanimity. The young chieftain who had mingled a loyal tenderness and genial humour with all his wild adventures—who had so generously and almost playfully spared the life of Saul his enemy—who had protected the flocks and fields of the churlish Nabal—who, with the chivalry of a Sydney, had poured on the ground the bright drops of water from the Well of Bethlehem for which he had thirsted, because they had been won by imperilled lives—sprang naturally into the idolised hero and poet of his people. Then God had taken him from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young ones, that he might lead Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance. Generous to the sad memories of Saul and Jonathan, generous to the princely Abner, generous to the weak Ishbosheth, generous to poor lame Mephibosheth, he had knit all hearts like the heart of one man to himself, and in successful war had carried all before him, north and south, and east and west. He enlarged the borders of his kingdom, captured the City of Waters, and placed the Moloch crown of Rabbah on his head. Then in the mid-flush of his prosperity, in his pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, "the tempting opportunity met the susceptible disposition," and David forgat God who had done so great things for him.

The people must have felt how deep was the debt of gratitude which they owed to him. He had given them a consciousness of power yet undeveloped; a sense of the unity of their national life perpetuated by the possession of a capital which has been famous to all succeeding ages. To David the nation owed the conquest of the stronghold of Jebus, and they would feel that "as the hills stand about Jerusalem, so standeth the Lord round about them that fear Him."* The king who associates his name with a national capital—as Nebuchadnezzar built great Babylon, or Constantine chose Byzantium—secures the strongest claim to immortality. But the choice made by David for his capital showed an intuition as keen as that which had immortalised the fame of the Macedonian conqueror in the name of Alexandria. Jerusalem is a city which belongs to all time, and even under the curse of Turkish rule it has not lost its undying interest. But David had rendered a still higher service in giving stability to the national religion. The prestige of the Ark had been destroyed in the overwhelming defeat of Israel by the Philistines at Aphek, when it fell into the hands of the uncircumcised. After that it had been neglected and half forgotten until

David brought it with songs and dances to God's holy hill of Zion. Since then every pious Israelite might rejoice that, as in the Tabernacle of old, God was once more in the midst of His people. The merely superstitious might only regard the Ark as a fetish—the fated Palladium of the national existence. But to all thoughtful men the presence of the Ark had a deeper meaning, for it enshrined the Tables of the Moral Law; and those broken Tables, and the bending Cherubim which gazed down upon them, and the blood-sprinkled gold of the Mercy-Seat were a vivid emblem that God's Will is the Rule of Righteousness, and that if it be broken the soul must be reconciled to Him by repentance and forgiveness. That meaning is beautifully brought out in the Psalm which says, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall rise up into the holy place? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his mind into vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour."

To David more than to any man that conviction of the supremacy of righteousness must have been keenly present, and for this reason his sin was the less pardonable. It "tore down the altar of confidence" in many hearts. It caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and was therefore worthy of a sorer punishment. And God in His mercy smote, and did not spare.

He sinned; then came earthquake and eclipse. His earthly life was shipwrecked in that place where two seas meet—where the sea of calamity meets the sea of crime.* Then followed the death of his infant child; the outrage of Amnon; the blood of the brutal ravisher shed by his brother's hands; the flight of Absalom; his insolence, his rebellion, his deadly insult to his father's household; the long day of flight and shame and weeping and curses, as David ascended the slope of Olivet and went down into the Valley of Jordan; the sanguinary battle; the cruel murder of the beloved rebel; the insolence of Joab; the heartrending cry. "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom; would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Not even then had David's trials ended. He had to endure the fierce quarrel between Israel and Judah; the rebellion of Sheba; the murder of Amasa, which he dared not punish. He had to sink into the further sin of pride in numbering the people, and to see the Angel of the Plague standing with drawn sword over the threshing-floor of Araunah, while his people—those sheep who had not offended—died around him by thousands. After such a life he was made to feel that it was not for blood-stained hands like his to rear the Temple, though he had said, "I will not suffer mine eyes to sleep nor mine eyelids to slumber, neither the temples of my head to take any rest till I find a place for the tabernacle of the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." And now we see him surrounded by intrigues; alienated from the friends and advisers of his youth; shivering in his sickroom; attended by his nurse; feeble, apathetic, the ghost and wreck of all that he had been, with little left of his life but its "glimmerings and decays."

It is an oft-repeated story. Even so we see great Darius

"Deserted at his utmost need
By those his former bounty fed;
On the bare ground exposed he lies
Without a friend to close his eyes."

* See Psalm cxxii. 3-5.

* See Kittel, ii. 147.

So we see glorious Alexander the Great, dying as a fool dieth, remorseful, drunken, disappointed, at Babylon. So we see our great Plantagenet:—

"Mighty victor, mighty lord,
Low on his funeral couch he lies!
No pitying heart, no eye afford
A tear to grace his obsequies."

So we see Louis XIV., *le grand monarque*, peevish, *ennuyé*, fortunate no longer, an old man of seventy-seven left in his vast lonely palace with his great-grandson, a frivolous child of five, and saying to him, "*J'ai trop aimé la guerre; ne m'imites point.*" So we see the last great conqueror of modern times, embittering his dishonoured island-exile by miserable disputes with Sir Hudson Lowe about etiquette and champagne. But among all the "sad stories of the deaths of kings" none ends a purer glory with a more pitiful decline than the poet-king of Israel, whose songs have been to so many thousands their delight in the house of their pilgrimage. Truly David's experience no less than his own may have added bitterness to the traditional epitaph of his son on all human glory: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EASTERN COURT AND HOME.

I KINGS i.

"Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness."
—EZEK. xvi. 49.

A MAN does not choose his own destiny; it is ordained for higher ends than his own personal happiness. If David could have made his choice, he might, indeed, have been dazzled by the glittering lure of royalty; yet he would have been in all probability happier and nobler had he never risen above the simple life of his forefathers. Our saintly king in Shakespeare's tragedy says:—

"My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen. My crown is called Content;
And crown it is which seldom kings enjoy."

David assuredly did not enjoy that crown. After his establishment at Jerusalem it is doubtful whether he could count more happy days than Abderrahman the Magnificent, who recorded that amid a life honoured in peace and victorious in war he could not number more than fourteen.

We admire the generous freebooter more than we admire the powerful king. As time went on he showed a certain deterioration of character, the inevitable result of the unnatural conditions to which he had succumbed. Saul was a king of a very simple type. No pompous ceremonials separated him from the simple intercourse of natural kindness. He did not tower over the friends of his youth like a Colossus, and look down on his superiors from the artificial elevation of his inch-high dignity. "In himself was all his state," and there was something kinglier in his simple majesty when he stood under his pomegranate at Migron, with his huge javelin in his hand, than in

"The tedious pomp which waits
On princes, when their rich retinue long
Of horses led, and grooms besmeared with gold
Dazzles the crowd and sets them all agape."

We should not have presumed beforehand that there was anything in David's character which

rendered external pomp and ceremony attractive to him. But the inherent flunkeyism of Eastern servility made his courtiers feed him with adulation, and approach him with genuflexions. Apparently he could not rise superior to the slowly corrupting influences of autocracy which gradually assimilated the court of the once simple warrior to that of his vulgar compeers on the neighbouring thrones. There is something startling to see what a chasm royalty has cleft between him and the comrades of his adversity, and even the partner of his guilt who had become his favourite queen. We see it throughout the story of the last scenes in which he plays a part. He can only be addressed with periphrases and in the third person. "Let there be sought for *my lord the king* a young virgin; and let her stand before *the king*, and let her lie in thy bosom, that *my lord the king* may get heat." Bathsheba can only speak to him in such terms as, "Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thy handmaid?" and even she, when she enters the sick-chamber of his decrepitude, prostrates herself and does obeisance. Every other word of her speech is interlarded with "my lord the king," and "my lord, O king"; and when she leaves "the presence" she again bows herself with her face to the earth, and does reverence to the king* with the words, "May my lord, King David, live for ever." The anointed dignity of the prophet who had once so boldly rebuked David's worst crime does not exempt him from the same ceremonial, and he too goes into the inner chamber bowing his face before the king to the earth.

Insensibly David must have come to require it all, and to like it. Yet the unsophisticated instincts of his more natural youth would surely have revolted from it. He would have deprecated it as sternly as the Greek conqueror in the mighty tragedy who hates to walk to his throne on purple tapestries, and says to his queen:—

"Ope not the mouth to me, nor cry amain
As at the footstool of a man of the East,
Prone on the ground: so stoop not thou to me;"

or, as another has more literally rendered it:—

"Nor like some barbarous man
Gape thou upon me an earth-groveling howl." †

But the royal position of David brought with it a surer curse than that which follows the extreme exaltation of a man above his fellows. It brought with it the permitted luxury or imaginary necessity for polygamy, and the man-enervating, woman-degrading paraphernalia of an Eastern harem. Jesse and Boaz, in their paternal fields at Bethlehem, had been content with one wife, and had known the true joys of love and home. But monogamy was thought unsuitable to the new grandeur of a despot, and under the curse of polygamy the joy of love, the peace of home, are inevitably blighted. In that condition man gives up the sweetest sources of earthly blessing for the meanest gratifications of animal sensuousness. Love, when it is pure and true, gilds the life of man with a joy of heaven, and fills it with a breath of Paradise. It renders life more perfect and more noble by the union of two souls, and fulfils the original

* The same word is rendered "worship" in Psalm xlvi. 11. Comp. 2 Sam. ix. 6; Esth. iii. 2-5. In 1 Chron. xxix. 20 we are told that the people "worshipped" the Lord and the king.

† "Μῆδὲ βαρβάρου φωτὸς δίκη
Χαμαιπετὲς βόαμα προσχανῆς ἐμοί."
Æsch., *Agam.*, 887.

purpose of creation. A home, blessed by life's most natural sanctities, becomes a saving ark in days of storm.

"Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights
His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
Reigns here and revels."

But in a polygamous household a home is exchanged for a troubled establishment, and love is carnalised into a jaded appetite. The Eastern king becomes the slave of every wandering fancy, and can hardly fail to be a despiser of womanhood, which he sees only on its ignoblest side. His home is liable to be torn by mutual jealousies and subterranean intrigues, and many a foul and midnight murder has marked, and still marks, the secret history of Eastern seraglios. The women—idle, ignorant, uneducated, degraded, intriguing—with nothing to think of but gossip, scandal, spite, and animal passion; hating each other worst of all, and each engaged in the fierce attempt to reign supreme in the affection which she cannot monopolise—spend wasted lives of *ennui* and slavish degradation. Eunuchs, the vilest products of the most corrupted civilisation, soon make their loathly appearance in such courts, and add the element of morbid and rancorous effeminacy to the general ferment of corruption. Polygamy, as it is a contravention of God's original design, enfeebles the man, degrades the woman, corrupts the slave, and destroys the home. David introduced it into the Southern Kingdom, and Ahab into the Northern;—both with the most calamitous effects.

Polygamy produces results worse than all the others upon the children born in such families. Murderous rivalry often reigns between them, and fraternal affection is almost unknown. The children inherit the blood of deteriorated mothers, and the sons of different wives burn with the mutual animosities of the harem, under whose shadowing influence they have been brought up. When Napoleon was asked the greatest need of France, he answered in the one laconic word, "*Mothers*"; and when he was asked the best training ground for recruits, he said, "*The nurseries, of course.*" Much of the manhood of the East shows the taint and blight which it has inherited from such mothers and such nurseries as seraglios alone can form.

The darkest elements of a polygamous household showed themselves in the unhappy family of David. The children of the various wives and concubines saw but little of their father during their childish years. David could only give them a scanty and much-divided attention when they were brought to him to display their beauty. They grew up as children, the spoiled and petted playthings of women and debased attendants, with nothing to curb their rebellious passions or check their imperious wills. The little influence over them which David exercised was unhappily not for good. He was a man of tender affections. He repeated the errors of which he might have been warned by the effects of foolish indulgence on Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, and even on the sons of the guide of his youth, the prophet Samuel. The wild careers of David's elder sons show that they had inherited his strong passions and eager ambition, and that in their case, as well as Adonijah's he had not displeased them at any time in saying, "Why hast thou done so?"

The consequences which followed had been frightful beyond precedent. David must have learnt by experience the truth of the exhortation, "Desire not a multitude of unprofitable children,

neither delight in ungodly sons. Though they multiply, rejoice not in them, except the fear of the Lord be with them: for one that is just is better than a thousand; and better it is to die without children, than to have those that are ungodly."*

David's eldest son was Amnon, the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; his second Daniel or Chileab, son of Abigail, the wife of Nabal of Carmel; the third Absalom, son of Maacah, daughter of Talmai, King of Geshur; the fourth Adonijah, the son of Haggith. Shephatiah and Ithream were the sons of two other wives, and these six sons were born to David in Hebron. When he became king in Jerusalem he had four sons by Bathsheba, born after the one that died in his infancy, and at least nine other sons by various wives, besides his daughter Tamar, sister of Absalom. He had other sons by his concubines. Most of these sons are unknown to fame. Some of them probably died in childhood. He provided for others by making them priests.† His line down to the days of Jeconiah, was continued in the descendants of Solomon, and afterwards in those of the otherwise unknown Nathan. The elder sons, born to him in the days of his more fervent youth, became the authors of the tragedies which laid waste his house. They were youths of splendid beauty, and, as they bore the proud title of "the king's sons," they were from their earliest years encircled by luxury and adulation.‡

Amnon regarded himself as the heir to the throne and his fierce passions brought the first infamy into the family of David. By the aid of his cousin Jonadab, the wily son of Shimeah, the king's brother, he brutally dishonoured his half-sister Tamar, and then as brutally drove the unhappy princess from his presence. It was David's duty to inflict punishment on his shameless heir, but he weakly condoned the crime. Absalom dissembled his vengeance for two whole years, and spoke to his brother neither good nor evil. At the end of that time he invited David and all the princes to a joyous sheep-shearing festival at Baal Hazor. David, as he anticipated, declined the invitation, on the plea that his presence would burden his son with needless expense. Then Absalom asked that, as the king could not honour his festival, at least his brother Amnon, as the heir to the throne, might be present. David's heart misgave him, but he could refuse nothing to the youth whose magnificent and faultless beauty filled him with an almost doting pride, and Amnon and all the princes went to the feast. No sooner was Amnon's heart inflamed with wine, than, at a preconcerted signal, Absalom's servants fell on him and murdered him. The feast broke up in tumultuous horror, and in the wild cry and rumour which arose the heart of David was torn with the intelligence that Absalom had murdered all his brothers. He rent his clothes, and lay weeping in the dust surrounded by his weeping servants. But Jonadab assured him that only Amnon had been murdered in revenge for his unpunished out-

* Ecclus. xvi. 1-3. He must have had at least twenty sons, and at least one daughter (2 Sam. iii. 1-5, v. 14-16; 1 Chron. iii. 1-9, xiv. 3-7. Josephus again (*Ant.*, VII. iii. 3) has a different list.

† *Kohanim*.

‡ From the fact that his son Eliada (2 Sam. v. 16) is called Beeliada (*i. e.*, "Baal knows") in 1 Chron. xiv. 7, it is surely a precarious inference that "now and then he paid his homage to some Baal, perhaps to please one of his foreign wives" (Van Oort, *Bible for Young People*, iii. 84). The true explanation seems to be that at one time Baal, "Lord," was not regarded as an unauthorised title for Jehovah. The fact that David once had *teraphim* in his house (1 Sam. xix. 13, 16) shows that his advance in knowledge was gradual.

rage, and a rush of people along the road, among whom the princes were visible riding on their mules, confirmed his words. But the deed was still black enough. Bathed in tears, and raising the wild cries of Eastern grief, the band of youthful princes stood round the father whose incestuous firstborn had thus fallen by a brother's hand, and the king also and all his servants "wept greatly with a great weeping."

Absalom fled to his grandfather the King of Geshur; but his purpose had been doubly accomplished. He had avenged the shame of his sister, and he was now himself the eldest son and heir to the throne.* His claim was strengthened by the superb physique and beautiful hair of which he was so proud, and which won the hearts both of king and people. Capable, ambitious, secure of ultimate pardon, the son and the grandson of a king he lived for three years at the court of his grandfather. Then Joab, perceiving that David was consoled for the death of Amnon, and that his heart was yearning for his favourite son,† obtained the intercession of the wise woman of Tekoah, and got permission for Absalom to return. But his offence had been terrible, and to his extreme mortification the king refused to admit him. Joab, though he had nancivered for his return, did not come near him, and twice refused to visit him when summoned to do so. With characteristic insolence the young man obtained an interview by ordering his servants to set fire to Joab's field of barley. By Joab's request the king once more saw Absalom, and, as the youth felt sure would be the case, raised him from the ground, kissed, forgave, and restored him to favour.

For the favour of his weakly-fond father he cared little; what he wanted was the throne. His proud beauty, his royal descent on both sides, fired his ambition. Eastern peoples are always ready to concede pre-eminence to splendid men. This had helped to win the kingdom for stately Saul and ruddy David; for the Jews, like the Greeks, thought that "loveliness of person involves the blossoming promises of future excellence, and is, as it were, a prelude of riper beauty."‡ It seemed intolerable to this prince in the zenith of glorious life that he should be kept out of his royal inheritance by one whom he described as a useless dotard. By his personal fascination, and by base intrigues against David, founded on the king's imperfect fulfilment of his duties as judge, "he stole the hearts of the children of Israel."§ After four years everything was ripe for revolt. He found that for some unexplained reason the tribe of Judah and the old capital of Hebron were disaffected to David's rule. He got leave to visit Hebron in pretended fulfilment of a vow, and so successfully raised the standard of revolt that David, his family, and his followers had to fly hurriedly from Jerusalem with bare feet and cheeks bathed in tears along the road of the Perfumers. Of that long day of misery—to the description of which more space is given in Scripture than to that of any other day except that of the Crucifixion—we need not speak, nor of the defeat of the rebellion. David was saved by the adhesion of his warrior-corps (the *Gibborim*) and his mercenaries (the *Krèthi* and *Plèthi*). Absalom's host was routed. He was in some strange way en-

tangled in the branches of a tree as he fled on his mule through the forest of Rephaim.* As he hung helpless there, Joab, with needless cruelty, drove three wooden staves through his body in revenge for his past insolence, leaving his armour-bearer to despatch the miserable fugitive. To this day every Jewish child flings a contumelious stone at the pillar in the King's Dale, which bears the traditional name of David's Son, the beautiful and bad.†

The days which followed were thickly strewn with calamities for the rapidly ageing and heart-broken king. His helpless decline was yet to be shaken by the attempted usurpation of another bad son.

CHAPTER IX.

ADONIJAH'S REBELLION.

I KINGS i. 5-53.

"The king's word hath power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?"—ECCLES. viii. 4.

THE fate of Amnon and of Absalom might have warned the son who was now the eldest, and who had succeeded to their claims.

Adonijah was the son of Haggith, "the dancer." His father had piously given him the name, which means "Jehovah is my Lord." He too, was "a very goodly man," treated by David with foolish indulgence, and honoured in all his wishes. Although the rights of primogeniture were ill-defined, a king's eldest son, endowed as Adonijah was, would naturally be looked on as the heir; and Adonijah was impatient for the great prize. Following the example of Absalom "he exalted himself, saying, I will be king," and, as an unmistakable sign of his intentions, prepared for himself fifty runners with chariots and horsemen.‡ David, unwarned by the past or perhaps too ill and secluded to be aware of what was going on, put no obstacle in his way. The people in general were tired of David, though the spell of his name was still great. Adonijah's cause seemed safe when he had won over Joab, the commander of the forces, and Abiathar, the chief priest. But the young man's precipitancy spoiled everything. David lingered on. It was perhaps a palace-secret that a strong court-party was in favour of Solomon, and that David was inclined to leave his kingdom to this younger son by his favourite wife. So Adonijah, once more imitating the tactics of Absalom, prepared a great feast at the Dragon-stone by the Fullers' Well in the valley below Jerusalem.§ He sacrificed sheep and fat oxen and cattle, and invited all the king's fifteen sons, omitting Solomon, from whom alone he had

* Rephaim seems a more probable reading than Ephraim in 2 Sam. xviii. 6; see Josh. xvii. 15, 18. Yet the name "Ephraim" may have been given to this trans-Jordanic wood. The notion that he *hung by his hair* is only a conjecture, and not a probable one.

† His three sons had pre-deceased him; his beautiful daughter Tamar (2 Sam. xiv. 27) became the wife of Rehoboam. She is called Maachah in 1 Kings xv. 2, and the LXX. addition to 2 Sam. xiv. 27 says that she bore both names. The so-called tomb of Absalom in the Valley of Hebron is of Asmonæan and Herodian origin.

‡ Morier tells us that in Persia "runners" before the king's horses are an indispensable adjunct of his state.

§ The Stone of Zoheleth, probably a sacred stone—one of the numerous isolated rocks of Palestine; is not mentioned elsewhere. The Fullers' Fountain is mentioned in Josh. xv. 7, xviii. 16; 2 Sam. xvii. 17. It was southeast of Jerusalem, and is perhaps identical with "Job's Fountain" where the wadies of Kedron and Hinnom meet (*Palestine Exploration Fund*, 1874, p. 86).

* Chileau was either dead, or was of no significance.

† 2 Sam. xiii. 30. "The soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom."

‡ Max. Tyr., *Dissert.*, 9 (Keil, *ad loc.*).

§ In 2 Sam. xv. 7 we should certainly alter "forty" into four.

any rivalry to fear. To this feast he also invited Joab and Abiathar, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants, by which are probably intended "all the captains of the host" who formed the nucleus of the militia forces.* At this feast Adonijah threw off the mask. In open rebellion against David, his followers shouted, "God save king Adonijah!"

The watchful eye of one man—the old prophet-statesman, Nathan—saw the danger. Adonijah was thirty-five; Solomon was comparatively a child. "Solomon, my son," says David, "is young and tender."† What his age was at the date of Adonijah's rebellion we do not know. Josephus says that he was only twelve, and this would well accord with the fact that he seems to have taken no step on his own behalf, while Nathan and Bathsheba act for him. It accords less well with the calm magnanimity and regal decisiveness which he displayed from the first day that he was seated on the throne. The Greek proverb says, *Ἀρχὴ ἄνδρα δεικνύσιν*, "Power shows the man." Perhaps Solomon, hitherto concealed in the seclusion of the harem, was, up to this time, ignorant of himself as well as unknown to the people. Being unaware of the boy's capacity, many were taken in by the more showy gifts of the handsome Adonijah, whose age might seem to promise greater stability to the kingdom.

But Solomon from his birth upwards had been Nathan's special charge.‡ No sooner had he been born than David had entrusted the infant to the care of the man who had awakened his slumbering conscience to the heinousness of his offence, and had prophesied his punishment in the death of the child of adultery. An oracle had forbidden him to build the Temple because his hands were stained with blood, but had promised him a son who should be a man of rest, and in whose days Israel should have peace and quietness.§ Long before, in Hebron, David, yearning for peace, had called his eldest son Absalom ("the father of peace"). To the second son of Bathsheba, whom he regarded as the heir of oracular promise, he gave the sounding name of Shelomoh ("the peaceful").|| But Nathan, perhaps with reference to David's own name of "the Beloved" had called the child Jedidiah ("the beloved of Jehovah").

The secret of his destiny was probably known to few, though it was evidently suspected by Adonijah. To have proclaimed it in a crowded harem would have been to expose the child to the perils of poison, and to have doomed him to certain death if one of his unruly brothers succeeded in seizing the royal authority. The oath to Bathsheba that her son should succeed must have been a secret known at the time to Nathan only. It is evident that David had never taken any step to secure its fulfilment.

* Comp. 1 Kings i. 9-25.

† The same phrase is used of Rehoboam (2 Chron. xii. 13, xiii. 7) when he was twenty-one, reading **ΝΣ** for **ΝΩ**, forty-one.

‡ 2 Sam. xii. 25: "And he sent by the hand of Nathan, the prophet; he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord" (A.V.). The verse is somewhat obscure. It either means that David sent the child to Nathan to be brought up under his guardianship, or sent Nathan to ask of the oracle the favour of some well-omened name (Ewald, iii. 168). Nathan was perhaps akin to David. The Rabbin absurdly identify him with Jonathan (1 Chron. xxvii. 32; 2 Sam. xxi. 21), nephew of David, son of Shimmeah.

§ 1 Chron. xxii. 6-9.

|| LXX. *Σαλωμών*, and in *Ecclus. xlvii. 13*. Comp. Shelomith (*lev. xxiv. 11*), Shelomi (*Num. xxxiv. 27*). But it became *Σαλωμών* in the New Testament, Josephus, the Sibylline verses, etc. The long vowel is retained in *Salome* and in the Arabic *Suleyman*, etc.

The crisis was one of extreme peril. Nathan was now old. He had perhaps sunk into the courtly complaisance which, content with one bold rebuke, ceased to deal faithfully with David. He had at any rate left it to Gad the Seer to reprove him for numbering the people. Now, however, he rose to the occasion, and by a prompt *coup d'état* caused the instant collapse of Adonijah's conspiracy.

Adonijah had counted on the jealousy of the tribe of Judah, on the king's seclusion and waning popularity, on the support of "all the captains of the host," on the acquiescence of all the other princes, and above all on the favour of the ecclesiastical and military power of the kingdom as represented by Abiathar and Joab. To Solomon himself, as yet a shadowy figure and so much younger, he attached no importance. He treated his aged father as a cipher, and Nathan as of no particular account.* He overlooked the influence of Bathsheba, the prestige which attached to the nomination of a reigning king, and above all the resistance of the body-guard of mercenaries and their captain Benaiah.

Nathan had no sooner received tidings of what was going on at Adonijah's feast than he shook off his lethargy and hurried to Bathsheba. She seems to have retained the same sort of influence over David that Madame de Maintenon exercised over the aged Louis XIV. "Had she heard," asked Nathan, "that Adonijah's coronation was going on at that moment? Let her hurry to King David, and inquire whether he had given any sanction to proceedings which contravened the oath which he had given her that her son Solomon should be his heir." As soon as she had broken the intelligence to the king, he would come and confirm her words.†

Bathsheba did not lose a moment. She knew that if Adonijah's conspiracy succeeded her own life and that of her son might not be worth a day's purchase. The helplessness of David's condition is shown by the fact that she had to make her way into "the inner chamber" to visit him. In violation of the immemorial etiquette of an Eastern household, she spoke to him without being summoned, and in the presence of another woman, Abishag, his fair young nurse. With profound obeisances she entered, and told the poor old hero that Adonijah had practically usurped the throne, but that the eyes of all Israel were awaiting his decision as to who should be his successor. She asked whether he was really indifferent to the peril of herself and of Solomon, for Adonijah's success would mean their doom.‡

* Among Solomon's adherents are mentioned "Shimei and Rei" (1 Kings i. 8), whom Ewald supposes to stand for two of David's brothers, Shimma and Raddai, and Stade to be two officers of the Gihborim. Thénius adopts a reading partly suggested by Josephus, "Hushai, the friend of David." Others identify Rei with Ira; a Shimei, the son of Elah, is mentioned among Solomon's governors (*Nitzabim*, 1 Kings iv. 18); and there was a Shimei of Ramah over David's vineyards (1 Chron. xxvii. 27). The name was common, and meant "famous."

† Duncker, Meyer, Wellhausen, Stade, regard Solomon's accession as due to a mere palace intrigue of Nathan and Bathsheba, and David's dying injunctions as only intended to excuse Solomon. They treat 1 Kings ii. 1-12 as a Deuteronomic interpolation. Dillmann, Kittel, Kuenen, Budde, rightly reject this view. Stade says, "Nach menschlichen Gefühl, ein Unrecht war die Salbung Salomos." He thinks that "the aged David was over-influenced by the intrigues of the harem and the court" (i. 292).

‡ She said that they would be counted as "offenders" (*chattain*). Comp. 1 Kings i. 12, where Nathan assumes that they will both be put to death. Thus Cassander put to death Roxana, the widow of Alexander the Great and her son Alexander (Justin., xv. 2).

While she yet spoke Nathan was announced, as had been concerted between them, and he repeated the story of what was going on at Adonijah's feast. It is remarkable that he says nothing to David either about consulting the Urim, or in any way ascertaining the will of God. He and Bathsheba rely exclusively on four motives—David's rights of nomination, his promise, the danger to Solomon, and the contempt shown in Adonijah's proceedings. "The whole incident," says Reuss, "is swayed by the ordinary movements of passion and interest."* The news woke in David a flash of his old energy. With instant decision he summoned Bathsheba, who, as custom required, had left the chamber when Nathan entered. Using his strong and favourite adjuration, "As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress,"† he pledged himself to carry out that very day the oath that Solomon should be his heir. She bowed her face to the earth in adoration with the words, "Let my lord, King David, live for ever." He then summoned Zadok, the second priest, Nathan, and Benaiah, and told them what to do. They were to take the body-guard‡ which was under Benaiah's command, to place Solomon on the king's own shemule§ (which was regarded as the highest honour of all honours), to conduct him down the Valley of Jehoshaphat to Gihon,|| where the pool would furnish the water for the customary ablutions, to anoint him king, and then to blow the consecrated ram's horn (*shophar*)¶ with the shout, "God save King Solomon!" After this the boy was to be seated on the throne, and proclaimed ruler over Israel and Judah.

Benaiah was one of David's twelve chosen captains, who was placed at the head of one of the monthly courses of 24,000 soldiers in the third month. The chronicler calls him a priest.** His available forces made him master of the situation, and he joyfully accepted the commission with, "Amen! So may Jehovah say!" and with the prayer that the throne of Solomon might be even greater than the throne of David. Joab was commander-in-chief of the army, but his forces had not been summoned or mobilised. Accustomed to a bygone state of things he had failed to observe that Benaiah's palace-regiment of six hundred picked men could strike a blow long before he was ready for action. These guards were the Krêthi and Plêthi,†† "executioners and runners," perhaps an alien body of faithful mercenaries originally composed of Cretans and Philistines. They

* Reuss, *Hist. des Israelites*, i. 409.

† Comp. 2 Sam. iv. 9; Psalm xix. 14.

‡ "The servants of your Lord." Comp. 2 Sam. xx. 6, 7.

§ Comp. Gen. xli. 43; 1 Kings i. 33; Esth. vi. 8.

|| 2 Chron. xxxii. 30, xxxiii. 14. It was apparently "the Virgin's Fountain," east of Jerusalem, in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

¶ Comp. 2 Kings ix. 13.

** 1 Chron. xxvii. 5, where the true rendering is not "Benaiah the chief priest," as in A.V., nor "principal officer," as in the margin; but "Benaiah the priest, as chief."

†† 1 Sam. xxx. 14; Josephus, *σωματοφύλακες*. The Targum calls them "archers and slingers" (which is unlikely), or "nobles and common soldiers." This body-guard is also said to be composed of Gittites (2 Sam. xv. 18, xviii. 2); but some suppose that they were so called not by nationality, but because they had served under David at Gath. The question is further complicated by the appearance of "Carians" (A.V., captains) in 2 Kings xi. 4, 15, and also in 2 Sam. xx. 23 (Heb.). The Carians were universal mercenaries (Herod., ii. 152; Liv., xxxvii. 40). That there was an early intercourse between Palestine and the West is shown by the fact that such words as peribolory, machaera, maccaina, lesche, pellex, have found their way into Hebrew (see Renan, *Hist. du Peuple Israel*, ii. 55).

formed a compact body of defenders, always prepared for action. They resemble the Germans of the Roman Emperors, the Turkish Janissaries, the Egyptian Mamelukes, the Byzantian Varangians, or the Swiss Guard of the Bourbons. Their one duty was to be ready at a moment's notice to carry out the king's behests. Such a picked regiment has often held in its hands the prerogative of Empire. They were, originally at any rate, identical with the *Gibborim*,* and had been at first commanded by men who had earned rank by personal prowess. But for their intervention on this occasion Adonijah would have become king.

While Adonijah's followers were wasting time over their turbulent banquet, the younger court-party were carrying out the unexpectedly vigorous suggestions of the aged king. While the eastern hills echoed with "Long live King Adonijah!" the western hills resounded with shouts of "Long live King Solomon!" The young Solomon had been ceremoniously mounted on the king's mule, and the procession had gone down to Gihon. There, with the solemnity which is only mentioned in cases of disputed succession,† Nathan the prophet and Zadok as priest anointed the son of Bathsheba with the horn of perfumed oil which the latter had taken from the sacred tent at Zion.‡ These measures had been neglected by Adonijah's party in the precipitation of their plot, and they were regarded as of the utmost importance, as they are in Persia to this day.§ Then the trumpets blew, and the vast crowd which had assembled shouted, "God save King Solomon!" The people broke into acclamations, and danced, and played on pipes, and the earth rang again with the mighty sound.¶ Adonijah had fancied, and he subsequently asserted, that "all Israel set their faces on me that I should reign." But his vanity had misled him. Many of the people may have seen through his shallow character, and may have dreaded the rule of such a king. Others were still attached to David, and were prepared to accept his choice. Others were struck with the grave bearing and the youthful beauty of the son of Bathsheba. The multitude were probably opportunists ready to shout with the winner whoever he might be.

The old warrior Joab, perhaps less dazed with wine and enthusiasm than the other guests of Adonijah, was the first to catch the sound of the trumpet blasts and of the general rejoicing, and to portend its significance. As he started up in surprise the guests caught sight of Jonathan, son of Abiathar, a swift-footed priest who had acted as a spy for David in Jerusalem at Absalom's rebellion.¶ and who now, like his father Abiathar and so many of his betters, had gone over to Adonijah. The prince welcomed him as a "man of worth,"

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 8-39; 1 Chron. xi. 10-47; 1 Kings i. 8. The *Gibborim* are by some supposed to be a different body from the Krêthi and Plêthi (2 Sam. xv. 18, xx. 7); but from 1 Kings i. 8, 10, 38 they seem to be the same (Stade, i. 275). The thirty heroes at their head furnish, as Renan says, the first germ of a sort of "Legion of Honour."

† Saul (1 Sam. x. 1), David (1 Sam. xvi. 13, and twice afterwards, 2 Sam. ii. 41 v. 3), Jehu (1 Kings xix. 16), Joash (2 Chron. xxiii. 17).

‡ 1 Kings i. 39. "Tent," not "Tabernacle," as in A.V. It has generally been supposed that Zadok took it from the tabernacle at Gibeon (1 Chron. xvi. 39), but there would have been no time to send so far. Zadok is called a "Seer" in the A.V. (2 Sam. xv. 27); but the true version may be "Seeth thou?" The LXX. and Vulgate omit the words.

§ Morier, quoted by Stanley, p. 172, says that the Mustched, or chief priest, and the Munajem, or prophet, are always present at a Persian coronation.

¶ LXX., ἐρράγγη, ἤχησεν; Vulg., insonuit. Comp. Josephus, *Antt.*, VII. xiv. 3, 5.

¶ 2 Sam. xv. 27, xvii. 17.

one who was sure to bring tidings of good omen;* but Jonathan burst out with, "Nay, but our Lord king David hath made Solomon king." He does not seem to have been in a hurry to bring this fatal intelligence; for he had not only waited until the entire ceremony at Gihon was over, but to the close of the enthronisation of Solomon in Jerusalem.† He had seen the young king seated on the throne of state in the midst of the jubilant people. David had been carried out upon his couch, and, bowing his head in worship before the multitude, had said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it."

This intelligence fell like a thunderbolt among Adonijah's unprepared adherents. A general flight took place, each man being only eager to save himself. The straw fire of their enthusiasm had already flared itself away. Deserted by every one, and fearing to pay the forfeit of his life, Adonijah fled to the nearest sanctuary, where the Ark stood on Mount Zion under the care of his supporter the high priest Abiathar.‡ There he caught hold of the horns of the altar—wooden projections at each of its corners, overlaid with brass. When a sacrifice was offered the animal was tied to these horns of the altar,§ and they were smeared with the victim's blood just as in after days the propitiatory was sprinkled with the blood of the bull and the goat on the Great Day of Atonement. The mercy-seat thus became a symbol of atonement, and an appeal to God that He would forgive the sinful priest and the sinful nation who came before Him with the blood of expiation. The mercy-seat would have furnished an inviolable sanctuary had it not been enclosed in the Holiest Place, unapproachable by any feet but that of the high priest once a year. The horns of the altar were, however, available for refuge to any offender, and their protection involved an appeal to the mercy of man as to the mercy of God.||

There in wretched plight clung the fallen prince, hurried down in one day from the summit of his ambition. He refused to leave the spot unless King Solomon would first of all swear that he would not slay his servant with the sword.¶ Adonijah saw that all was over with his cause. "God," says the Portuguese proverb, "can write straight on crooked lines;" and as is so often the case, the crisis which brought about His will was the immediate result of an endeavour to defeat it.

Solomon was not one of those Eastern princes who

"Bear like the Turk no brother near the throne."

Many an Eastern king has begun his reign as Baasha, Jehu, and Athaliah did, by the exile, imprisonment, or execution of every possible rival. Adonijah, caught red-handed in an attempt at rebellion, might have been left with some show of justice to starve at the horns of the altar, or to

* 2 Sam. xviii. 27. Heb., פִּי־נֶסֶם; LXX., ἀνήρ δυνάμεως; Vulg., vir fortis. It is rather "virtuous," as in Prov. xii. 4.

† It is true that Solomon's adherents had wasted no time over a feast.

‡ 1 Kings i. 50.

§ Psalm cxviii. 27, and Exod. xxvii. 2 ff., xxix. 12, xxx.

¶ Comp. Exod. xxi. 14.

|| Exod. xxi. 14. It protected the homicide, but not the willful murderer.

¶ 1 Kings i. 51. The words "this day" should be "first of all," i. e., before I leave the sanctuary. Many must have been reminded of this scene when Eutropius, the eunuch-minister of Arcadius, under the protection of St. Chrysostom, covered in front of the high altar at Constantinople.

leave his refuge and face the penalty due to crime. But Solomon, unregarded and unknown as he had hitherto been, rose at once to the requirements of his new position, and magnanimously promised his brother a complete amnesty* so long as he remained faithful to his allegiance. Adonijah descended the steps of the altar, and having made sacred obeisance to his new sovereign† was dismissed with the laconic order, "Go to thine house." If, as some have conjectured, Adonijah had once urged on his father the condign punishment of Absalom, he might well congratulate himself on receiving pardon.‡

CHAPTER X.

DAVID'S DEATH-BED.

I KINGS ii. 1-11.

"Omnibus idem exitus est, sed et idem domicilium."
—PETRON., *Satyr.*

IN the Book of Samuel we have the last words of David in the form of a brief and vivid psalm, of which the leading principle is, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." A king's justice must be shown alike in his gracious influence upon the good and his stern justice to the wicked. The worthless sons of Belial are, he says, "to be beaten down like thorns with spear-shafts and iron."§

The same principle dominates in the charge which he gave to Solomon, perhaps after the magnificent public inauguration of his reign described in 1 Chron. xxviii., xxix. He bade his young son to show himself a man, and be rigidly faithful to the law of Moses, earning thereby the prosperity which would never fail to attend true righteousness.|| Thus would the promise to David—"There shall not fail thee a man on the throne of Israel"—be continued in the time of Solomon.

With our Western and Christian views of morality we should have rejoiced if David's charge to his son had ended there. It is painful to us to read that his last injunctions bore upon the punishment of Joab who had so long fought for him, and of Shimei whom he had publicly pardoned. Between these two stern injunctions came the request that he would show kindness to the sons of Barzillai,¶ the old Gileadite sheykh who had extended such conspicuous hospitality to himself and his weary followers when they crossed the Jordan in their flight from Absalom. But the last words of David, as here recorded, are: "his (Shimei's) head bring thou down to the grave with blood."**

* "There shall not a hair of him fall." Comp. 1 Sam.

xiv. 45; 2 Sam. xiv. 11.

† "Bowed himself." Comp. 1 Kings i. 47.

‡ Grätz, i. 138 (E. T.).

§ 2 Sam. xxiii. 1-7. It is no part of my duty here to enter into the extent of David's share in the Psalms; but I think that it is an exaggerated inference (of Wellhausen and others) from Amos vi. 5, 6 to suppose that he only wrote festal and warlike songs.

|| Apparently an allusion to Deut. xvii. 18-20. We read of no such exhortation having been addressed to Saul, or to David.

¶ Chimham accompanied David to Jerusalem (2 Sam. xvii. 27, xix. 37-40), and perhaps inherited his property at Bethlehem, where he founded the Khan (Jer. xli. 17), in the cavern stable of which it may be that Christ was born.

** Wellhausen, Stade, and others venture on the conjecture that David never gave these injunctions at all, but that they were invented afterwards to excuse Solomon for his acts of severity towards Adonijah's conspirators. I cannot see any valid ground for such arbi-

In these avenging behests there was nothing which was regarded as unnatural, nothing that would have shocked the conscience of the age. The fact that they are recorded without blame by an admiring historiographer shows that we are reading the annals of times of ignorance which God "winked at." They belong to the era of imperfect moral development, when it was said to them of old time, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy," and men had not fully learnt the lesson, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." We must discriminate between the *vitia temporis* and the *vitia hominis*. David was trained in the old traditions of the "avenger of blood"; and we cannot be astonished, though we may greatly regret, that his standard was indefinitely below that of the Sermon on the Mount. He may have been concerned for the safety of his son, but to us it must remain a proof of his imperfect moral attainments that he bade Solomon look out for pretexes to "smite the hoary head of inveterate wickedness," and use his wisdom not to let the two offenders go down to the grave in peace.

The character of Joab furnishes us with a singular study. He, Abishai, and Asahel were the brave, impetuous sons of Zeruiah, the sister or half-sister of David. They were about his own age, and it is not impossible that they were the grandsons of Nahash, King of Ammon.* In the days of Saul they had embraced the cause of David, heart and soul. They had endured all the hardships and fought through all the struggles of his freebooting days. Asahel, the youngest, had been in the front rank of his *Gibborim*, and his foot was fleet as that of a gazelle upon the mountain. Abishai had been one of the three who, with jeopardy of their lives, had burst their way to Bethlehem when David longed to drink of the water of its well beside the gate. He had also, on one occasion, saved David's life from the giant Ishbi of Gath, and had slain three hundred Philistines with his spear. His zeal was always ready to flash into action in his uncle's cause. Joab had been David's commander-in-chief for forty years. It was Joab who had conquered the Ammonites and Moabites and stormed the City of Waters. It was Joab who, at David's bare request, had brought about the murder of Uriah. It was Joab who, after wise but fruitless remonstrance, had been forced to number the people. But David had never liked these rough imperious soldiers, whose ways were not his ways. From the first he was unable to cope with them, or keep them in order. In the early days they had treated him with rude familiarity, though in late years they, too, were obliged to approach him with all the forms of Eastern servility. But ever since the murder of Uriah, Joab knew that David's reputation and David's throne were in his hand. Joab himself had been guilty of two wild acts of vengeance for which he would have offered some defence, and of one atrocious crime. His murder of the princely Abner, the son of Ner, might have been excused as the duty of an avenger of blood, for Abner, with one back-thrust of his mighty spear, had killed the young Asahel, after the vain warning to desist from pursuing him. Abner had only killed Asahel in self-defence; but, jealous of Abner's power as the cousin of King Saul, the husband of

Rizpah, and the commander of the northern army, Joab, after bluntly rebuking David for receiving him, had without hesitation deluded Abner back to Hebron by a false message and treacherously murdered him. Even at that early period of his reign David was either unable or unwilling to punish the outrage, though he ostentatiously deplored it.

Doubtless in slaying Absalom, in spite of the king's entreaty, Joab had inflicted an agonising wound on the pride and tenderness of his master. But Absalom was in open rebellion, and Joab may have held that David's probable pardon of the beautiful rebel would be both weak and fatal. This death was inflicted in a manner needlessly cruel, but might have been excused as a death inflicted on the battle-field, though probably Joab had many an old grudge to pay off besides the burning of his barley field. After Absalom's rebellion David foolishly and unjustly offered the commandership of the army to his nephew Amasa. Amasa was the son of his sister Abigail by an Ishmaelite father, named Jether.* Joab simply would not tolerate being superseded in the command which he had earned by lifelong and perilous services. With deadly treachery, in which men have seen the anti-type of the world's worst crime, Joab invited his kinsman to embrace him, and drove his sword into his bowels. David had heard, or perhaps had seen, the revolting spectacle which Joab presented, with the blood of war shed in peace, dyeing his girdle and streaming down to his shoes with its horrible crimson. Yet, even by that act, Joab had once more saved David's tottering throne. The Benjamite Sheba, son of Bichri, was making head in a terrible revolt, in which he had largely enlisted the sympathy of the northern tribes, offended by the overbearing fierceness of the men of Judah. Amasa had been either incompetent or half-hearted in suppressing this dangerous rising. It had only collapsed when the army welcomed back the strong hand of Joab. But whatever had been the crimes of Joab they had been condoned. David, on more than one occasion, had helplessly cried, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?" "I am this day weak though anointed king, and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too hard for me." But he had done nothing, and, whether with or against his will, they continued to hold their offices near his person. David did not remind Solomon of the murder of Absalom, nor of the words of menace—words as bold as any subject ever uttered to his sovereign—with which Joab had imperiously hushed his wail over his worthless son. Those words had openly warned the king that, if he did not alter his line of conduct, he should be king no more. They were an insult which no king could pardon, even if he were powerless to avenge. But Joab, like David himself, was now an old man. The events of the last few days had shown that his power and influence were gone. He may have had something to fear from Bathsheba as the wife of Uriah and the granddaughter of Ahithophel; but his adhesion to the cause of Adonijah had doubtless been chiefly due to jealousy of the ever-growing influence of the priestly soldier Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, who had so evidently superseded him in his master's favour. However that may be, the historian faithfully records that David, on his

trary re-writing of the history. Shimei had taken no part in Adonijah's rebellion.

* Zeruiah was "a sister of the sons of Jesse" (1 Chron. ii. 16), and was therefore a sister of Abigail, mother of Amasa; but she is called "the daughter of Nahash" (2 Sam. xvii. 25).

* 1 Chron. ii. 17. "Jether (*i. e.*, Jethro, 'pre-eminence') the Ishmaelite" has been altered in 2 Sam. xvii. 25 into Ithra, an *Israelite* (see 2 Sam. xix. 13). The way in which names have been tampered with is an interesting study, and often conceals Masoretic secrets.

death-bed, neither forgot nor forgave; and all that we can say is, that it would be unfair to judge him by modern or by Christian principles of conduct.

The other victim whose doom was bequeathed to the new king was Shimei, the son of Gera. He had cursed David at Bahurim on the day of his flight, and in the hour of his extremest humiliation. He had walked on the opposite side of the valley, flinging stones and dust at David,* cursing him with a grievous curse as a man of Belial and a man of blood, and telling him that the loss of his kingdom was the retribution which had fallen upon him for the blood of the House of Saul which he had shed. So grievous was the trial of these insults that the place where the king and his people rested that night received the pathetic name of *Ayephim*, "the place of the weary."† For this conduct Shimei might have pleaded the pent-up animosities of the House of Saul, which had been stripped by David of all its honours, and of which poor lame Mephibosheth was the only scion left, after David had impaled Saul's seven sons and grandsons in human sacrifice at the demand of the Gibeonites. Abishai, indignant at Shimei's conduct, had said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" and had offered, then and there, to cross the valley and take his head. But David rebuked his generous wrath, and when Shimei came out to meet him on his return with expressions of penitence, David not only promised but swore that he should not die. No further danger surely could be anticipated from the ruined and humiliated House of Saul; yet David bade Solomon to find some excuse for putting Shimei to death.

How are we to deal with sins which are recorded of God's olden saints on the sacred page, and recorded without a word of blame?

Clearly we must avoid two errors—the one of injustice, the other of dishonesty.

1. On the one hand, as we have said, we must not judge Abraham, or Jacob, or Gideon, or Jael, or David, as though they were nineteenth-century Christians. Christ Himself taught us that some things inherently undesirable were yet permitted in old days because of the hardness of men's hearts; and that the moral standards of the days of ignorance were tolerated in all their imperfection until men were able to judge of their own deeds in a purer light. "The times of ignorance God overlooked," says St. Paul. "but now He commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent."‡ "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies," said our Lord.§ When Bayle and Tindal and many others declaim against "the immorality of the Bible" they are unfair in a high degree. They pass judgment on men who had been trained from infancy in opinions and customs wholly unlike our own, and whose conscience would not be wounded by many things which we have been rightly taught to regard as evil. They apply the enlightenment of two millenniums of Christianity to criticise the more rudimentary conditions of life a millennium

* David's enemies thought but little of the fact that David had spared Mephibosheth. They may have supposed that David spared him, not only because he was the son of the beloved Jonathan, but because being lame he could never become king. David's relations to him do not seem to have been very cordial.

† 2 Sam. xvi. 14 (Heb.). For Bahurim, see 2 Sam. xvi. 5, xvii. 18.

‡ Acts xvii. 30.

§ Matt. v. 43, 44.

before Christ. The wild justice inflicted by an avenger of blood, the rude atrocity of the *lex talionis*, are rightly abhorrent to us in days of civilisation and settled law; they were the only available means of restraining crime in unsettled times and half-civilised communities. In his final injunctions about his enemies, whom he might have dreaded as enemies too formidable for his son to keep in subjection, David may have followed the view of his day that his former condonations had only been co-extensive with his own life, and that the claims of justice ought to be satisfied.*

2. But while we admit every palliation, and endeavour to judge justly, we must not fall into the conventionality of representing David's un-forgiving severity as otherwise than reprehensible *in itself*. Attempts to gloss over moral wrongdoing, to represent it as blameless, to invent supposed Divine sanctions and intuitions in defence of it, can but weaken the eternal claims of the law of righteousness. The rule of right is inflexible: it is not a leaden rule which can be twisted into any shape we like. A crime is none the less a crime though a saint commits it; and imperfect conceptions of the high claims of the moral law, as Christ expounded its Divine significance, do not cease to be imperfect though they may be sometimes recorded without comment on the page of Scripture. No religious opinion can be more fatal to true religion than that wrong can, under any circumstances, become right, or that we may do evil that good may come. Because an act is relatively pardonable, it does not follow that it is not absolutely wrong. If it be dangerous to judge the essential morality of any earlier passage of Scripture by the ultimate laws which Scripture itself has taught us, it is infinitely more dangerous, and essentially Jesuitical, to explain away misdeeds as though, under any circumstances, they could be pleasing to God or worthy of a saint. The total omission of David's injunctions and of the sanguinary episodes of their fulfilment by the author of the Books of Chronicles, indicates that, in later days, they were thought derogatory to the pure fame both of the warrior-king and of his peaceful son.

David slept with his fathers, and passed before that bar where all is judged of truly. His life is an April day, half sunshine and half gloom. His sins were great, but his penitence was deep, life-long, and sincere. He gave occasion for the enemies of God to blaspheme, but he also taught all who loved God to praise and pray. If his record contains some dark passages, and his character shows many inconsistencies, we can never forget his courage, his flashes of nobleness, his intense spirituality whenever he was true to his better self. His name is a beacon-light of warning against the glamour and strength of evil passions. But he showed us also what repentance can do, and we are sure that his sins were forgiven him because he turned away from his wickedness. "The sacrifices of God are a troubled spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." "I go the way of all the earth," said David. "In life," says Calmet, "each one has his particular route: one applies to one thing, another to another. But in the way to death they are all re-united. They go to the tomb by one path."†

* There is something analogous to protection granted only for a lifetime in the fact that the homicide at a refuge city could not be slain there while the high priest lived. See Num. xxxv. 28.

† Comp. Josh. xxiii. 14; Keil, *ad loc.*

David was buried in his own city—the stronghold of Zion; and his sepulchre—on the south part of Ophel, near the pool of Siloam—was still pointed out a thousand years later in the days of Christ.* As a poet who had given to the people splendid specimens of lyric songs; as a warrior who had inspired their youth with dauntless courage; as a king who had made Israel a united nation with an impregnable capital, and had uplifted it from insignificance into importance; as the man in whose family the distinctive Messianic hopes of the Hebrews were centred, he must remain to the end of time the most remarkable and interesting figure in the long annals of the Old Dispensation.

CHAPTER XI.

AVENGING JUSTICE.

I KINGS ii. 13-46.

“The wrath of a king is as messengers of death.”—PROV. xvi. 14.

THE reign of Solomon began with a threefold deed of blood. An Eastern king, surrounded by the many princes of a polygamous family, and liable to endless jealousies and plots, is always in a condition of unstable equilibrium; the death of a rival is regarded as his only safe imprisonment.† On the other hand, it must be remembered that Solomon allowed his other brethren and kinsmen to live; and, in point of fact, his younger brother Nathan became the ancestor of the Divine Messiah of his race.‡

It was the restless ambition of Adonijah which again brought down an avalanche of ruin. He and his adherents were necessarily under the cold shadow of royal disfavour, and they must have known that they had sinned too deeply to be forgiven. They felt the position intolerable. “In the light of the king’s countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain”; but Adonijah, in the prime of strength and the heyday of passion, beautiful and strong, and once the favourite of his father, could not forget the banquet at which all the princes and nobles and soldiers had shouted, “Long live King Adonijah!” That the royalty of one delirious day should be succeeded by the dull and suspected obscurity of dreary years was more than he could endure, if, by any possible subtlety or force, he could avert a doom so unlike his former golden dreams. Was not Solomon at least ten or fifteen years younger than himself? Was not his seat on the throne of his kingdom still insecure? Were not his own followers powerful and numerous?

Perhaps one of those followers—the experienced Joab, or Jonathan, son of Abiathar—whispered to him that he need not yet acquiesce in the ruin of his hopes, and suggested a subtle method of strengthening his cause, and keeping his claim before the eyes of the people.

* Acts ii. 29. Josephus says that both Hyrcanus and Herod opened it to find the treasures which legend asserted to have been buried there (*Antt.*, VII. xv. 3. Comp. XIII. viii. 4. XVI. vii.). The kings alone were buried in Jerusalem; but legend says that an exception was made in favour of Huldah the prophetess.

† These events—like almost everything derogatory to David and Solomon—are omitted by the chronicler.

‡ Luke iii. 31. Salathiel, son of Neri (Luke iii. 27), of Nathan’s house, was probably adopted by Jeconiah, who was childless; or if he had a son Assir (captive), the son had died. 1 Chron. iii. 17; Isa. xxii. 3.

Every one knew that Abishag, the fair damsel of Shunem, the ideal of Hebrew maidenhood, was the loveliest virgin who could be found throughout all the land of Israel. Had she been in the strict sense David’s wife or concubine, it would have been regarded as a deadly contravention of the Mosaic law that she should be wedded to one of her stepsons. But as she had only been David’s nurse, what could be more suitable than that so bright a maiden should be united to the handsome prince?

It was understood in all Eastern monarchies that the harem of a predecessor belonged to the succeeding sovereign. The first thing that a rival or a usurper aimed at was to win the prestige of possessing the wives of the royal house. Nathan reminds David that the Lord had given his master’s wives into his bosom.* Ishbosheth, weak as he was, had been stung into indignation against his general and great-uncle the mighty Abner, because Abner had taken Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, Saul’s concubine, to wife, which looked like a dangerously ambitious encroachment upon the royal prerogative. Absalom, by the vile counsel of Ahithophel, had openly taken possession of the ten concubines whom his father, in his flight from Jerusalem, had left in charge of the palace. The pseudo-Smerdis, when he revolted against the absent Cambyzes, at once seized his seraglio.† It is noted even in our English history that the relations between the Earl of Mortimer and Queen Isabella involved danger to the kingdom; and when Admiral Seymour married Queen Catharine Parr, widow of Henry VIII., he at once entered into treasonable conspiracies. Adonijah knew well that he would powerfully further his ulterior purpose if he could secure the hand of the lovely Shunamite.

Yet he feared to make the request to Solomon, who had already inspired him with wholesome awe. With pretended simplicity he sought the intercession of the *Gebira* Bathsheba, who, being the queen-mother, exercised great influence as the first lady of the land.‡ She it was who had placed the jeweled bridal crown with her own hand on the head of her young son.§

Alarmed at his visit she asked, “Comest thou peaceably?” He came, he humbly assured her, to ask a favour. Might she not think of his case with a little pity? He was the elder son; the kingdom by right of primogeniture was his; all Israel, so he flattered himself, had wished for his accession. But it had all been in vain, Jehovah had given the kingdom to his brother. Might he not be allowed some small consolation, some little accession to his dignity? at least some little source of happiness in his home?

Flattered by his humility and his appeal, Bathsheba encouraged him to proceed, and he begged that, as Solomon would refuse no request to his mother, would she ask that Abishag might be his wife?

With extraordinary lack of insight, Bathsheba, ambitious as she was, failed to see the subtle significance of the request, and promised to present his petition.

She went to Solomon, who immediately rose to meet her, and seated her with all honour on a

* 2 Sam. xii. 8. Comp. 1 Kings xx. 7; 2 Kings xxiv. 15. We only know, however, of one wife of Saul, and one concubine.

† Herod., iii. 68; Justin., x. 2.

‡ Comp. 1 Kings xv. 13; 2 Kings xi. 1. The queen-mother, like the Sultana Walidé, is always more powerful than even the favourite wife.

§ Cant. iii. 11.

throne at his right hand.* She had only come, she said, to ask "a small petition."

"Ask on, my mother," said the king tenderly, "for I will not say thee nay."

But no sooner had she mentioned the "small petition" than Solomon burst into a flame of fury. "Why did she not ask for the kingdom for Adonijah at once? He was the elder. He had the chief priest and the chief captain with him. They must be privy to this new plot. But by the God who had given him his father's kingdom, and established him a house, Adonijah had made the request to his own cost, and should die that day."

The command was instantly given to Benaiah, who, as captain of the body-guard, was also chief executioner. He slew Adonijah that same hour, and so the third of David's splendid sons died in his youth a death of violence.

We pause to ask whether the sudden and vehement outburst of King Solomon's indignation was only due to political causes? If, as seems almost certain, Abishag is indeed the fair Shulamite of the Song of Songs, there can be little doubt that Solomon himself loved her,† and that she was "the jewel of his seraglio."‡ The true meaning of Canticles is not difficult to read, however much it may lend itself to mystical and allegorical applications. It represents a rustic maiden, faithful to her shepherd lover, resisting all the allurements of a king's court, and all the blandishments of a king's affection. It is the one book of Scripture which is exclusively devoted to sing the glory of a pure love. The king is magnanimous; he does not force the beautiful maiden to accept his addresses. Exercising her freedom, and true to the dictates of her heart, she rejoicingly leaves the perfumed atmosphere of the harem of Jerusalem for the sweet and vernal air of her country home under the shadow of its northern hills. Solomon's impetuous wrath would not be so unaccountable if an unrequited affection added the sting of jealousy to the wrath of offended power. The scene is the more interesting because it is one of the very few personal touches in the story of Solomon, which is chiefly composed of external details, both in Scripture and in such fragments as have been preserved of the pagan historians Dios. Eupolemos, Nicolas Polyhistor, and those referred to by Josephus, Eusebius, and Clemens of Alexandria.

The fall of Adonijah involved his chief votaries in ruin. Abiathar had been a friend and follower of David from his youthful days. When Doeg, the treacherous Edomite, had informed Saul that the priests of Nob had shown kindness to David in his hunger and distress, the demoniac king had not shrunk from employing the Edomite herdsman to massacre all on whom he could lay his

* Psalm xlv. 6. Some little mystery evidently hangs over the name of Bathsheba. In 2 Sam. xi. 3 she is called "Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite"; but in 1 Chron. iii. 5 she is called "*Bathshua*, the daughter of *Ammiel*." Now Shua was a Canaanite name (Gen. xxxviii. 12; 1 Chron. ii. 3), and it is at least remarkable that Bathsheba should be married to a Hittite. Further, the chronicler disguises "Ahiathophel the Gilonite (the father of Eliam) into Ahijah the Pelonite," who is one of David's Gibborim in 1 Chron. xi. 36. Pelonite means *nescio quis*; in Spanish, Don Fulano,—Signor So-and-so. And how are we to account for the strange name Ahiathophel ("brother of foolishness")?

† Comp. Cant. vii. 6. It has been assumed that Solomon had already married Naamah the Ammonitess, and that Rehoboam was already born (see 1 Kings xiv. 21), but this is uncertain. Rehoboam, if he had reached the age of forty-one, could hardly have been called "young and tender-hearted" (2 Chron. xiii. 7).

‡ Shunem (Sulem, Euseb., *Jer.*) is now *Solam* (Robinson, *Researches*, iii. 402).

hands. From this slaughter of eighty-five priests who wore linen ephods, Abiathar had fled to David, who alone could protect him from the king's pursuit.* In the days when the outlaw lived in dens and caves, the priest had been constantly with him, and had been afflicted in all wherein he was afflicted, and had inquired of God for him. David had recognised how vast was his debt of gratitude to one whose father and all his family had been sacrificed for an act of kindness done to himself. Abiathar had been chief priest for all the forty years of David's reign. In Absalom's rebellion he had still been faithful to the king. His son Jonathan had been David's scout in the city. Abiathar had helped Zadok to carry the Ark to the last house by the ascent to the Mount of Olives, and there he had stood under the olive tree by the wilderness† till all the people had passed by. If his loyalty had been less ardent than that of his brother-priest Zadok, who had evidently taken the lead in the matter, he had given no ground for suspicion. But, perhaps secretly jealous of the growing influence of his younger rival, the old man, after some fifty years of unswerving allegiance, had joined his lifelong friend Joab in supporting the conspiracy of Adonijah, and had not even now heartily accepted the rule of Solomon. Assuming his complicity in Adonijah's request, Solomon sent for him, and sternly told him that he was "a man of death," i. e., that death was his desert. But it would have been outrageous to slay an aged priest, the sole survivor of a family slaughtered for David's sake, and one who had so long stood at the head of the whole religious organisation, wearing the Urim and carrying the Ark. He was therefore summarily deposed from his functions, and dismissed to his paternal fields at Anathoth, a priestly town about six miles from Jerusalem.‡ We hear no more of him; but Solomon's warning, "I will not at *this time* put thee to death," was sufficient to show him that, if he mixed himself with court intrigues again, he would ultimately pay the forfeit with his life. Solomon, like Saul, paid very little regard to "benefit of the clergy."§

The doom fell next on the arch-offender Joab, the white-haired hero of a hundred fights, "the Douglas of the House of David." He had, if the reading of the ancient versions be correct, "turned after Adonijah, and had not turned after Solomon." Solomon could hardly have felt at ease when a general so powerful and so popular was disaffected to his rule, and Joab read his own sentence in the execution of Adonijah. On hearing the news the old hero fled up Mount Zion, and clung to the horns of the altar. But Abiathar, who might have asserted the sacredness of the asylum, was in disgrace, and Joab was not to escape. "What has happened to thee that thou hast fled to the altar?" was the message sent to him by the king. "Because," he answered, "I was afraid of thee, and fled unto the Lord."¶ It was Solomon's habit to give his autocratic orders with laconic brevity. "Go, fall upon him," he said to Benaiah.

The scene which ensued was very tragic.

* 1 Sam. xxii. 23.

† 2 Sam. xv. 18 (LXX.).

‡ *Anata*, Robinson, *Researches*, ii. 319; Josh. xxi. 18; 1 Chron. vi. 60. It was the native town of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 1).

§ It should be remembered that, as Ewald points out, imprisonment for life was a thing unknown.

¶ This interesting addition is found in the Septuagint version.

The two rivals were face to face. On the one side the aged general, who had placed on David's head the crown of Rabbah, who had saved him from the rebellions of Absalom and of Sheba, and had been the pillar of his military glory and dominion for so many years; on the other the brave soldier-priest, who had won a chief place among the *Gibborim* by slaying a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and "two lion-like men of Moab,"* and a gigantic Egyptian whom he had attacked with only a staff, and out of whose hand he had plucked a spear like a weaver's beam and killed him with his own spear. As David lost confidence in Joab he had reposed more and more confidence in this hero. He had placed him over the bodyguards, whom he trusted more than the native militia.

The Levite-soldier had no hesitation about acting as executioner, but he did not like to slay any man, and above all such a man, in a place so sacred,†—in a place where his blood would be mingled with that of the sacrifices with which the horns of the altar were besmeared.

"The king bids thee come forth," he said.

"Nay," said Joab, "but I will die here."

Perhaps he thought that he might be protected by the asylum, as Adonijah had been; perhaps he hoped that in any case his blood might cry to God for vengeance, if he was slain in the sanctuary of Mount Zion, and on the very altar of burnt offering.

Benaiah naturally scrupled under such circumstances to carry out Solomon's order, and went back to him for instruction. Solomon had no such scruples, and perhaps held that this act was meritorious.‡ "Slay him," he said, "where he stands. He is a twofold murderer; let his blood be on his head." Then Benaiah went back and killed him, and was promoted to his vacant office. Such was the dismal end of so much valour and so much glory. He had taken the sword, and he perished by the sword. And the Jews believed that the curse of David clung to his house for ever, and that among his descendants there never lacked one that was a leper, or a lame man, or a suicide, or a pauper.§

Shimei's turn came next. A watchful eye was fixed implacably on this last indignant representative of the ruined House of Saul. Solomon had sent and ordered him to leave his estate at Bahurim, and build a house at Jerusalem, forbidding him to go "any whither,"|| and telling him that if on any pretence he passed the wady of Kidron he should be put to death. As he could not visit Bahurim, or any of his Benjamite connections, without passing the Kidron, all danger of further intrigues seemed to be obviated.¶ To these terms the dangerous man had sworn, and for three years he kept them faithfully. At the end of that time two of his slaves fled from him to Achish, son of Maachah, King of Gath.** When informed

of their whereabouts, Shimei, apparently with no thought of evil, saddled his mule and went to demand their restoration. As he had not crossed the Kidron, and had merely gone to Gath on private business, he thought that Solomon would never hear of it, or would at any rate treat the matter as harmless. Solomon, however, regarded his conduct as a proof of retributive demeritation. He sent for him, bitterly upbraided him, and ordered Benaiah to slay him. So perished the last of Solomon's enemies; but Shimei had two illustrious descendants in the persons of Mordecai and Queen Esther.*

Solomon perhaps conceived himself to be only acting up to the true kingly ideal. "A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes." "A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them." "An evil man seeketh only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him." "The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion, whoso provoketh him to anger endangereth his own soul."† On the other hand, he continued hereditary kindness to Chimham, son of the old chief Barzillai the Gileadite, who became the founder of the Khan at Bethlehem in which a thousand years later Christ was born.‡

The elevation of Zadok to the high priesthood vacated by the disgrace of Abiathar restored the priestly succession to the elder line of the House of Aaron. Aaron had been the father of four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. The two eldest had perished childless in the wilderness, apparently for the protanation of serving the tabernacle while in a state of intoxication and offering "strange fire" upon the altar.§ The son of Eleazar was the fierce priestly avenger Phinehas. The order of succession was as follows:—

AARON.	
Eleazar.	Ithamar.
Phinehas.	(gap.)
Abishua.	Eli.
Bukki.	Phinehas.
Uzzi.	Ahitub.
Zerahiah.	Ahiah (1 Sam. xiv. 3).
Meraioth.	Ahimelech.
Amariah.	Abiathar (1 Sam. xxii. 20).
Ahitub.	
Zadok.¶	

The question naturally arises how the line of succession came to be disturbed, since to Eleazar, and his seed after him, had been promised "the covenant of an everlasting priesthood."¶ As the elder line continued unbroken, how was it that, for five generations at least, from Eli to Abiathar, we find the *younger* line of Ithamar in secure and lineal possession of the high priesthood? The answer belongs to the many strange reserves of Jewish history. It is clear from the silence of the Book of Chronicles that the intrusion, however

* Esth. ii. 5.

† Prov. xix. 17, xx. 2, 8, 26.

‡ 1 Kings ii. 7; Jer. xli. 17.

§ Lev. x. 1-20; Num. iii. 4, xxvi. 61. This has been not unnaturally inferred from the prohibition to the priests to drink wine while serving the tabernacle lest they die, which occurs immediately after the catastrophe of the two priests (Lev. x. 9-11).

¶ 1 Chron. vii. 4-75. In David's time there were only eight descendants of Ithamar, but sixteen of Eleazar (1 Chron. xxiv. 4). For full discussion of these priestly genealogies, see Lord A. Hervey, *On the Genealogies*, pp. 277-305. It is true that they are not free from elements of difficulty, but I am unable to find any valid ground for the suspicion of some critics that Zadok was not even a priest, or of the priestly house at all. All the evidence we have points in the opposite direction.

¶ Num. xxv. 13.

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 20. Ewald, Thénius, and most other critics, followed by the R.V., adopt the LXX. reading, "Slew the two sons of Ariel of Moab."

† Comp. 2 Kings xi. 15.

‡ See Deut. xix. 13.

§ 2 Sam. iii. 28, 29.

¶ יְהוֹנָתָן (1 Kings ii. 36).

¶ It should be remembered that when Shimei came to meet David on his return, he managed to muster one thousand of his Benjamite kinsmen. Such local influence might prove troublesome.

** Achish seems to have been the dynastic name of the kings of Gath (1 Sam. xxi. 10, xxvii. 2). If this was the Achish, son of Maach, with whom David had taken refuge fifty years before, he must now have been a very old man.

caused, was an unpleasant recollection. Jewish tradition has perhaps revealed the secret, and a very curious one it is. We are told that Phinehas was high priest when Jephthah made his rash vow, and that his was the hand which carried out the human sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. But the inborn feelings of humanity in the hearts of the people were stronger than the terrors of superstition, and arising in indignation against the high priest who could thus imbrue his hands in an innocent maiden's blood, they drove him from his office and appointed a son of Ithamar in his place. The story then offers a curious analogy to that told of the Homeric hero Idomeneus, King of Crete. Caught in a terrible storm on his return from Troy, he too vowed that if his life were saved he would offer up in sacrifice the first living thing that met him. His eldest son came forth with gladness to meet him. Idomeneus fulfilled his vow, but the Cretans rose in revolt against the ruthless father, and a civil war ensued, in which a hundred cities were destroyed and the king was driven into exile. The Jewish tradition is one which could hardly have been invented. It is certain that Jephthah's daughter *was* offered up in sacrifice, in accordance with his rash vow. This could hardly have been done by any but a priest, and the ferocious zeal of Phinehas would not perhaps have shrunk from the horrible consummation. Revolting, even abhorrent, as is such a notion from our views of God, and decisively as human sacrifice is condemned by all the highest teaching of Scripture, the traces of this horrible tendency of human guilt and human fear are evident in the history of Israel as of all other early nations. Some thought akin to it must have lain under the temptation of Abraham to offer up his son Isaac. Twelve centuries later Manasseh "made his son pass through the fire," and kindled the furnaces of Moloch at Tophet in Gehenna, the valley of the sons of Hinnom.* His grandfather Ahaz had done the same before him, offering sacrifice and burning his children in the fire.† Surrounded by kindred tribes, to which this worship was familiar, the Israelites, in their ignorance and backsliding, were not exempt from its fatal fascination. Solomon himself "went after," and built a high place for Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, on the right hand of "the hill that is before Jerusalem," which from this desecration got the name of "The Mount of Corruption." These high places continued, and it must be supposed, had their votaries on "that opprobrious hill," until good Josiah dismantled and defiled them about the year 639, some three centuries after they had been built.

But whether this legend about Phinehas be tenable or not, it is certain that the House of Ithamar fell into deadly disrepute and abject misery. In this the people saw the fulfilment of an old traditional curse, pronounced by some unknown "man of God" on the House of Eli, that there should be no old man in his house for ever; that his descendants should die in the flower of their age; and that they should come cringing to the descendants of the priest whom God would raise up in his stead, to get some humble place about the priesthood for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread.‡

The prolongation of the curse in the House of Joab and of Eli furnishes an illustration of the

* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 6; 2 Kings xxi. 6. "His children."

† 2 Chron. xxviii. 3; 2 Kings xvi. 3. "His son."

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 27-36. For eight centuries there was no other instance of a high priest's deposition.

menacing appendix to the second commandment—"For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands (of generations) of them that love Me and keep My commandments."

There is in families, as in communities, a solidarity alike of blessing and curse. No man perishes alone in his iniquity, whether he be an offender like Achan or an offender like Joab. Families have their inheritance of character, their prerogative examples of misdoing, their influence of the guilty past flowing like a tide of calamity over the present and the future! The physical consequences of transgression remain long after the sins which caused them have ended. Three things, however, are observable in this, as in every faithfully recorded history. One is that mercy boasteth over justice, and the area of beneficent consequence is more permanent and more continuous than that of the entailed curse, as right is always more permanent than wrong. A second is that, though man at all times is liable to troubles and disabilities, no innocent person who suffers temporal afflictions from the sins of his forefathers shall suffer one element of unjust depression in the eternal interests of life. A third is that the ultimate prosperity of the children, alike of the righteous and of sinners, is in their own control; each soul shall perish, and shall only perish, for its own sin. In this sense, though the fathers have eaten sour grapes, the teeth of the children shall *not* be set on edge. In the long generations the line of David no less than the line of Joab, the line of Zadok no less than that of Abiathar, was destined to feel the Nemesis of evil-doing, and to experience that, of whatever parentage men are born, the law remains true—"Say ye of the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him."*

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOY-KING'S WISDOM.

I KINGS iii. 1-28.

"An oracle is upon the lips of a king."—PROV. xvi. 10 (Heb.).

"A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eye."—PROV. xx. 8.

"Ch' ei fu Rè, che chiese senno,
Acciocchè Rè sufficiente fosse."

DANTE, *Parad.*, xiii. 95.

"Deos ipsos precor ut mihi ad finem usque vitæ quietam et intelligentem humani diviniq̄ue juris mentem duint."—TAC., *Ann.*, iv. 38.

It would have thrown an interesting light on the character and development of Solomon, if we had been able to conjecture with any certainty what was his age when the death of David made him the unquestioned king. The pagan historian Eupolemos, quoted by Eusebius, says that he was twelve; Josephus asserts that he was fifteen. If Rehoboam was indeed as old as forty-one when he came to the throne (1 Kings xiv. 21), Solomon can hardly have been less than twenty at his ac-

* Isa. iii. 10.

cession, for in that case he must have been married before David's death (1 Kings xi. 42). But the reading "forty-one" in 1 Kings xiv. 21 is altered by some into "twenty-one," and we are left in complete uncertainty. Solomon is called "a child" (1 Kings iii. 7), "young and tender" (1 Chron. xxix. 1); but his acts show the full vigour and decision of a man.*

The composite character of the Books of Kings leads to some disturbance of the order of events, and 1 Kings iii. 1-4 is perhaps inserted to explain Solomon's sacrifice at the high place of Gibeon,† where stood the brazen altar of the old Tabernacle.‡ But no apology is needed for that act.§ The use of high places, even when they were consecrated to the worship of Jehovah, was regarded in later days as involving principles of danger, and became a grave offence in the eyes of all who took the Deuteronomic standpoint. But high places to Jehovah, as distinct from those dedicated to idols, were not condemned by the earlier prophets, and the resort to them was never regarded as blameworthy before the establishment of the central sanctuary.

After the frightful massacre of the descendants of Aaron at Nob, the old "Tabernacle of the congregation" and the great brazen altar of burnt offerings had been removed to Gibeon from a city defiled by the blood of priests.|| Gibeon stood on a commanding elevation within easy distance of Jerusalem, and was henceforth regarded as "the great high place," until the Temple on Mount Zion was finished. Thither Solomon went in that imposing civil, religious, and military procession of which the tradition may be preserved in the name of Wady Suleimān still given to the adjoining valley. There, with Oriental magnificence, like Xerxes at Troy, he offered what the Greeks called a *chilombē*, that is, a tenfold hecatomb of burnt offerings.¶ This "thousandfold holocaust," as the Septuagint terms it, must have been a stately and long-continued function, and in approval of his sacrifice Jehovah granted a vision to the youthful king. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rains and ten thousands of rivers of oil, when all the beasts of the forest are His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills? "Thinkest thou," He asked, in the words of the Psalmist, "that I will eat bull's flesh or drink the blood of goats?" No; but God always accepts a willing sacrifice in accordance with the purpose and sincerity of the giver. In reward for the pure intention of the king He appeared to Solomon in a dream, and said, "Ask what I shall give thee."

The Jews recognised three modes of Divine communication—by dreams, by Urim, and by prophets. The highest and most immediate illumination was the prophetic. The revelation by

means of the primitive Urim and Thummim, the oracle and jewelled breast-plate of the high priest, was the poorest, the most elementary, the most liable to abuse. It was analogous to the method used by the Egyptian chief priests, who wore round their necks a sapphire ornament called Thmei, or "truth," for purposes of divination.* After the death of David the Urim and Thummim fell into such absolute desuetude, as a survival of primitive times, that we do not read of its being consulted again in a single instance. It is not so much as mentioned during the five centuries of the history of the kings, and we do not hear of it afterwards. Solomon never once inquired of the priests as David did repeatedly. In the reign of Solomon the voice of prophecy, too, was silent, until disasters began to cloud its close. Times of material prosperity and autocratic splendour are unfavourable to the prophet's function, and sometimes, as in the days of Ahab, the prophets themselves "philippised" in Jehovah's name. But revelation by dreams occurs in all ages. In his prophecy of the great future, Joel says, "Your old men shall see visions, your young men shall dream dreams." It is true that dreams must always have a subjective element, yet, as Aristotle says, "The visions of the noble are better than those of common men."† The dreams of night are reflections of the thoughts of day. "Solomon worships God by day; God appears to Solomon by night. Well may we look to enjoy God, when we have served him."‡ Full of the thoughts inspired by an intense devotion, and a yearning desire to rule aright, the sleeping soul of Solomon became bright with eyes,§ and in his dream he made a worthy answer to the appeal of God.

"Ask what I shall give thee!" That blessed and most loving offer is made to every human soul. To the meanness of us all God flings open the treasures of heaven. The reason why we fatally lose them is because we are blinded by the glamour of temptation, and snatch instead at glittering bubbles or Dead Sea fruits. We fail to attain the best gifts, because so few of us earnestly desire them, and so many disbelieve the offer that is made of them. Yet there is no living soul to which God has not given the choice of good and evil. "He hath set fire and water before thee: stretch forth thy hand unto whether thou wilt. Before man is life and death; and whether him liketh shall be given him."|| Even when our choice is not evil it is often desperately frivolous, and it is only too late that we rue the folly of having rejected the better and chosen the worse.

"Damsels of Time the hypocritical days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
To each they offer gifts after his will,—
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
Forgot my morning wishes; hastily
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn." ¶

* Hence, perhaps, the LXX. rendering of *Δήλωσις* καὶ Ἀλήθεια. This view is accepted by Hengstenberg (*Egypt and the Five Books of Moses*, chap. vi.) and Kalisch (on Exod. xxviii. 31).

† Arist., *Eth. Nic.*, i 13: "βελτίω τὰ φαντάσματα τῶν ἐπιεικῶν ἢ τῶν τυχόντων."

‡ Bishop Hall.

§ "Εὐδουσα γὰρ φρήν ὄμμασιν λαμπρύνεται."—Æsch., *Eum.*, 104.

|| Ecclus. xv. 16, 17.

¶ Emerson.

* See 1 Sam. xxi. 6, compared with 1 Chron. xvi. 39, 40; 2 Chron. i. 3.

† An old Hivite capital (Josh. xviii. 21-25), now El Jib. Josephus alters it to "Hebron."

‡ See 1 Chron. xvi. 39, 40, xxi. 29; 2 Chron. i. 3. The annals of Solomon fall into three divisions; first, his secure establishment upon the throne (1 Kings i. ii.); next, his wisdom, wealth, glory, and great buildings, especially the building of the Temple (iii.-x.); lastly, his fall and death (xi.).

§ It was sufficiently sanctioned by Exod. xx. 24, and Jerusalem was not yet chosen (Deut. xii. 13, 14). See Judg. vi. 24, xiii. 19; 1 Sam. ix. 12, etc. This seems to have been the last great sacrifice there. In 1 Kings iii. 5-15 the sacrifice is regarded with approval; in verses 2, 3 it is condemned, but excused by circumstances; in the verses inserted by the chronicler (2 Chron. i. 3-6) it is said that the Tabernacle was there.

¶ See 1 Sam. xxii. 17-19.

¶ Herod., vii. 43. Xerxes offered one thousand at Troy, and Croesus three thousand at Delphi (*Id.*, i. 50).

But Solomon made the wise choice. In his dream he thanked God for His mercifully fulfilled promise to David his father, and with the touchingly humble confession, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in,"* he begged for an understanding heart to judge between right and wrong in guiding his great and countless people.†

God was pleased with the noble, unselfish request. The youthful king might have besought the boon of "many days," which was so highly valued before Christ had brought life and immortality to light; or for riches, or for victory over his enemies. Instead of this he had asked for "understanding, to discern judgment," and the lesser gifts were freely accorded him. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."‡ God promised him that he should be a king of unprecedented greatness. He freely gave him riches and honour, and, conditionally on his continued faithfulness, a long life. The condition was broken, and Solomon was not more than sixty years old when he was called before the God whom he forsook.§

"And Solomon awoke, and behold it was a dream." But he knew well that it was also more than a dream, and that "God giveth to His beloved even sleeping.¶

In reverential gratitude he offered a second sacrifice of burnt offerings before the ark on Mount Zion, and added to them peace offerings, with which he made a great feast to all his servants. Twice again did God appear to Solomon; but the second time it was to warn, and the third time to condemn.

In the parallel account given by the chronicler, Solomon says, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge," and God replies, "Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee." There is a wide difference between the two things. Knowledge may come while wisdom still lingers, and wisdom may exist in Divine abundance where knowledge is but scant and superficial. The wise may be as ignorant as St. Antony, or St. Francis of Assisi; the masters of those who know may show as little "wisdom for a man's self" as Abélard, or as Francis Bacon. "Among the Jews one set of terms does service to express both intellectual and moral wisdom. The 'wise' man means the righteous man; the 'fool' is one who is godless. Intellectual terms that describe knowledge are also moral terms describing life." No doubt in the ultimate senses of the words there can be no true knowledge, as there can be no perfect wisdom, without goodness. This was a truth with which Solomon himself became deeply impressed. "The fear of the Lord," he said, "is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise knowledge and understanding." The lineaments of "a fool" are drawn in the Book of Proverbs, and they bear the impress of moral baseness and moral aberrations.

To Solomon both boons were given, "wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness

of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore." Of his many forms of intellectual eminence I will speak later on. What he longed for most was evidently moral insight and practical sagacity. He felt that "through justice shall the throne be established."

Practical wisdom was eminently needed for the office of a judge.* Judgeship was a main function of Eastern royalty, and rulers were called *Shophetim* or judges.† The reality of the gift which Solomon had received from God was speedily to be tested.‡ Two harlots came before him.§ One had overlaid her child in the night, and stealing the living child of the other she put her dead child in its place. There was no evidence to be had. It was simply the bare word of one disreputable woman against the bare word of the other. With instant decision, and a flash of insight into the springs of human actions, Solomon gave the apparently childish order to cut the children in two, and divide them between the claimants. The people laughed,¶ and the delinquent accepted the horrible decision; but the mother of the living child yearned for her babe, and she cried out, "O my lord, give her the living babe,¶ and in no wise slay it." "Give her the living babe, and in no wise slay it," murmured the king to himself, repeating the mother's words; and then he burst out with the triumphant verdict, "Give her the living child! she is the mother thereof!"***

The story has several parallels. It is said by Diodorus Siculus that when three youths came before Ariopharnes, King of Thrace, each claiming to be the only son of the King of the Cimmerians, he ordered them each to hurl a javelin at their father's corpse. Two obeyed, one refused, and Ariopharnes at once proclaimed him to be the true son.†† Similarly an Indian story tells that a woman, before she bathed, left her child on the bank of the pool, and a female demon carried it off. The goddess, before whom each claimed the child, ordered them to pull it in two between them, and consigned it to the mother who shuddered at the test.‡‡ A judgment similarly founded on filial instinct is attributed to the Emperor Claudius. A mother refused to acknowledge her son; and as there were no proofs Claudius ordered her to marry the youth, whereupon she was obliged to acknowledge that he was her son.§§

Modern critics, wise after the event, express themselves very slightly of the amount of intelligence required for the decision; but the people saw the value of the presence of mind and rapid

* 1 Sam. viii. 6, 20; 2 Sam. xv. 4. "To rule was with the ancients the synonym of to judge." Artemidorus, *Oneirocr.*, ii. 14. (Bähr, *ad loc.*)

† Compare the Phœnician's *Suffetes* (Liv.).

‡ As instances of the lower sense in which the term "wisdom" was applied, see 2 Sam. xiii. 3 (Joradab), xiv. 2 (the woman of Tekoa); xx. 16 (the woman of Abel of Beth-maachah).

§ The Rabbis call them "innkeepers," as they call Rahab.

¶ I follow the not improbable additional details given by Josephus from tradition.

*** LXX., *παιδιον*.

** So the Greek version, which represents the clause rightly. Tradition narrates a yet earlier specimen of Solomon's wisdom. Some sheep had strayed into a pasture. The owner of the land demanded reparation. David said that to repay his loss he might keep the sheep. "No," said Solomon, who was but eleven years old, "let him keep them only till their wool, milk, and lambs have repaid the damage; then let him restore them to their owner." David admitted that this was the more equitable judgment, and he adopted it. See The Qur'an, *Sura* xxi. 70 (Palmer's Qur'an, ii. 52).

†† The parallel is adduced by Grotius.

‡‡ Quoted by Bähr.

§§ *Sutta, Clind.*, 13.

* The phrase "a little child" (comp. Jer. i. 6) hardly bears on his actual age. See Gen. xliii. 3; Exod. xxxiii. 11. It is proverbial like the subsequent phrase, for which see Deut. xxviii. 6; Psalm cxxi. 8, etc.

† Heb., "A hearing heart." LXX., "A heart to hear and judge Thy people in righteousness." In 2 Chron. i. 10, "Wisdom and knowledge."

‡ Matt. vi. 33.

§ Josephus (*Antt.*, VIII. vii. 8) makes him die at ninety-four, and become king at fourteen. Perhaps he mistook *ii* for *π* in the LXX.

¶ Psalm cxxvii. 2 (uncertain).

intuition which settled the question by bringing an individual dilemma under the immediate arbitrament of a general law. They rejoiced to recognise the practical wisdom which God had given to their young king. The word *Chokhmah*, which is represented by one large section of Jewish literature, implied the practical intelligence derived from insight or experience, the power to govern oneself and others. Its conclusions were expressed chiefly in a gnomic form, and they pass through various stages in the Sapiential Books of the Old Testament. The chief books of the *Chokhmah* are the Books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, followed by such books as Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. On the Divine side Wisdom is the Spirit of God, regarded by man under the form of Providence (Wisdom i. 4, 7, vii. 7, 22, ix. 17); and on the human side it is trustworthy knowledge of the things that are (*id.* vii. 17). It is, in fact, "a knowledge of Divine and human things, and of their causes" (4 Macc. ii. 16). This branch of wisdom could be repeatedly shown by Solomon at the city gate and in the hall of judgment.

2. His varied *intellectual* wisdom created deeper astonishment. He spake, we are told, "of trees from the cedar which is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts and fowl and of creeping things and of fishes." This knowledge has been misunderstood and exaggerated by later tradition. It is expanded in the Book of Wisdom (viii. 17) into a perfect knowledge of kosmogony, astronomy, the alterations of solstices, the cycles of years, the natures of wild beasts, the forces of spirits, the reasonings of men, the diversities of plants. Solomon became to Eastern legend

"The warrior-sage, whose restless mind
Through nature's mazes wandered unconfined,
Who every bird, and beast, and insect knew,
And spake of every plant that quaffs the dew."

His knowledge, however, does not seem to have been even empirically scientific. It consisted in the moral and religious illustration of truth by emblems derived from nature.* He surpassed, we are told, the ethnic gnomic wisdom of all the children of the East—the Arabians and Chaldeans and all the vaunted scientific and mystic wisdom of Egypt.† Ethan and Heman were Levitic poets and musicians;‡ Chalcol and Darda§ were "sons of the choir," *i. e.*, poets (Luther), or sacred singers;|| and all four were famed for wisdom; but Solomon excelled them all. Of his one thousand and five songs, the majority were probably secular. Only two psalms are even traditionally assigned to him.¶ Of his three thousand proverbs not more than two hundred survive, even if all in the Book of Proverbs be his. Tradition adds that he was a master of "riddles" or "dark sayings," by which he won largely in fines from Hiram, whom he

challenged for their solution, until the Tyrian king defeated him by the aid of a sharp youth named Abdeemon.* Specimens of these riddles with their answers may be found in the Book of Proverbs,† for the Hebrew word "proverb" (*Mashal*) probably means originally, an illustration. This book also contains various ambiguous hard sayings of which the skilful construction awoke admiration and stimulated thought.‡ The Queen of Sheba is said to have tested Solomon by riddles.§ The tradition gradually spread in the East that Solomon was also skilled in magic arts, that he knew the language of the birds,|| and possessed a seal which gave him mastery over the genii. In the Book of Wisdom he is made to say, "All such things as are either secret or manifest, them I know." Josephus attributes to him the formulæ and spells of exorcism, and in Eccles. ii. 8 the words rendered "musical instruments" (*shiddah* and *shiddoth*; R. V., "concubines very many") were understood by the Rabbis to mean that he was the lord over male and female demons.¶

3. Far more precious than practical or intellectual ability is the gift of *moral* wisdom, which Solomon so greatly appreciated but so imperfectly attained. Yet he felt that "wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom." The world gives that name to many higher and lower manifestations of capacity and attainment, but wisdom is in Scripture the one law of all true life. In that magnificent outburst of Semitic poetry, the twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Job, after pointing out that there is such a thing as natural knowledge—that there is a vein for the silver, and ore of gold, and a place of sapphires, and reservoirs of subterranean fire—the writer asks: "But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?" After showing with marvellous power that it is beyond man's unaided search—that the depths and the seas say, "It is not in us," and destruction and death have but heard the fame thereof with their ears—he adds with one great crash of concluding music, "God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. . . . And unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."** And again we read, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."†† The sated cynic of the Book of the Ecclesiastes, or one who had studied, not without dissatisfaction, his sad experience, adds, "Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." And in answer to the question "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?" St. James, the Lord's brother, who had evidently been a deep student of the Sapiential literature, does not answer, "He who understands all mysteries," or, "He who speaks with the tongue

* See Euseb., *Præf. Evang.*, ix. 34, § 19.

† Prov. xi. 22, xxiv. 30-34, xxv. 25, xxvi. 8, xxx. 15.

‡ *E. g.*, Prov. vi. 10.

§ 1 Kings x. 1; LXX., *ἐν ἀντίμασι*. See Wünsche, *Die Räthselweisheit*, 1883; Grätz, *Hist. of the Jews*, i. 162. For specimens of her traditional puzzles see the author's *Solomon*, p. 135 (Men of the Bible).

|| "And Solomon was David's heir, and said, Ye folk! we have been taught the speech of birds, and we have been given everything: verily this is a Divine grace" (Qur'an, *Sura* xxvii. 15). For the legend of Solomon and the hoopoes, see *Sura* 27.

** According to Suidas (s. v., Ἱεζεκιᾶς) Hezekiah found his (magic?) formulæ for the cure of diseases engraved on the posts of the Temple. See Targum on Esth. i. 2; Eccles. ii. 8.

†† Job xxviii. 23, 28.

†† Prov. i. 7.

* For references to animals, etc., see Prov. vi. 6, xxiv. 30-34, xxx. 15-19, 24-31; Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. ii. 5; Eccles. xlvii. 17.

† See Isa. xix. 11, xxxi. 2; Acts vii. 22; Herod., ii. 160; Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. ii. 5 (Keil).

‡ See 1 Chron. ii. 6, vi. 44, xv. 17, xxv. 5. Titles of Psalms xviii., lxxxviii., lxxxix. "Ezrahite," perhaps, is a transposition of Zerahite.

§ 1 Chron. ii. 6. In *Seder Olam* they are called "prophets who prophesied in Egypt."

|| "Sons of Mahol" (comp. Eccles. xii. 4).

¶ Psalms lxxii., cxlvii. The so-called "Psalms of Solomon," fifteen in number, are of the Maccabean age; Josephus calls his songs *βιβλία περὶ ᾠδῶν καὶ μελῶν*, and his proverbs *βιβλίου παραβολῶν καὶ εἰκόνων*

of men or of angels," but, "Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." Men whom the world has deemed wise have often fallen into utter infatuation, as it is written, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness"; but heavenly wisdom may belong to the most ignorant and simplehearted. It is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

We should observe, however, that the *Chokmah*, or wisdom-literature of the Jews, while it incessantly exalts morality, and sometimes almost attains to a perception of the spiritual life, was neither prophetic nor priestly in its character. It bears the same relation to the teaching of the prophets on the one hand, and the priests on the other, as morality does to religion and to externalism. Its teaching is loftier and truer than the petty insistence of Pharisaism on meats and drinks and divers washings, in that it deals with the weightier matters of the law; but it does not attain to the passionate spirituality of the greater Hebrew seers. It cares next to nothing for ritual, and therefore rises above the developed Judaism of the post-exilic epoch. It is lofty and true inasmuch as it breathes the spirit of the Ten Commandments, but it has not learnt the freedom of love and the beatitudes of perfect union with God. In one word, it finds its culmination in Proverbs and Ecclesiastics, rather than in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of St. John.

We cannot better conclude this chapter than with the eulogy of the son of Sirach: "Solomon reigned in a peaceable time and was honoured; for God made all quiet round about him, that he might build a house in His name and prepare His sanctuary for ever. How wise wast thou in thy youth, and as a flood, filled with understanding! Thy soul covered the whole earth, and thou fillest it with dark parables. Thy name went far unto the islands, and for thy peace thou wast beloved. The countries marvelled at thee for thy songs, and proverbs, and parables, and interpretations. By the name of the Lord God, who is called the Lord God of Israel, thou didst gather gold as tin, and didst multiply silver as lead."^{*}

CHAPTER XIII.

SOLOMON'S COURT AND KINGDOM.

1 KINGS iv. 1-34.

"But what more oft in nations grown corrupt
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty?"
Samson Agonistes.

WHEN David was dead, and Solomon was established on his throne, his first thoughts were turned to the consolidation of his kingdom. He was probably quite a youth.† He was not, nor did he ever desire to be, a warlike prince; but he was compelled to make himself secure from two enemies—Hadad and Rezon—who began almost at once to threaten his frontiers. Of these, however, we shall speak later on, since it is only towards the close of Solomon's reign that they seem to have given serious trouble. If the second

psalm is by Solomon it may point to some early disturbances among heathen neighbours which he had successfully put down.

The only actual expedition which Solomon ever made was one against a certain Hamath-Zobah, to which, however, very little importance can be attached. It is simply mentioned in one line in the Book of Chronicles, and it is hard to believe—considering that Rezon had possession of Damascus—that Solomon was master of the *great Hamath*.* He made a material alteration in the military organisation of his kingdom by establishing a standing army of fourteen hundred war chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he dispersed in various cities and barracks, keeping some of them at Jerusalem.†

In order to save his kingdom from attack Solomon expended vast sums on the fortification of frontier towns. In the north he fortified Hazor; in the northwest Megiddo. The passes to Jerusalem on the west were rendered safe by the fortresses at Upper and Nether Bethhoron. The southern districts were overawed by the building of Baalath and Tamar, "the palm-city," which is described as "in the wilderness in the land,"—perhaps in the desolate tract on the road from Hebron to Elath‡ Movers thinks that Hazezon-Tamar or Engedi is meant, as this town is called Tamar in Ezek. xlvi. 19.

As the king grew more and more in power he gave full reins to his innate love of magnificence. We can best estimate the sudden leap of the kingdom into luxurious civilisation if we contrast the royalty of Saul with that of Solomon. Saul was little more than a peasant-prince, a local emir, and such state as he had was of the humblest description. But Solomon vied with the gorgeous secular dynasts of historic empires.

His position had become much more splendid owing to his alliance with the King of Egypt—an alliance of which his humbler predecessors would scarcely have dreamed. We are not told the name of his Egyptian bride, but she must have been the daughter of one of the last kings of the twenty-first Tanite dynasty—either Psinaces, or Psusenens II.§ The dynasty had been founded at Tanis (Zoan) about B. C. 1100 by an ambitious priest named Hir-hor. It only lasted for five generations. Whatever other dower Solomon received with this Egyptian princess, his father-in-law rendered him one signal service. He advanced from Egypt with an army against the Canaanite town of Gezer, which he conquered and destroyed.¶ Solomon rebuilt it as an outpost of defence for Jerusalem. Further than this the Egyptian alliance did

* 2 Chron. viii. 3. Ewald thinks it is confirmed by 2 Kings xiv. 28, where, however, the Hebrew is obscure.

† 1 Kings x. 26.

‡ 1 Kings ix. 18. Here the "O'ri," the marginal, or "read" text, has Tadmor (*i. e.*, Palmyra), as also in 2 Chron. viii. 4. But this Tamar (Ezek. xlvii. 10, xlviii. 28) is "in the land" on the south border. In the Chronicles Tadmor is the right reading, for the chronicler is speaking of Hamath-Zobah and the north. It is not at all unlikely that Solomon also built Tadmor (Josephus, *Ant.*, VIII. vi. 1) to protect his commerce on the route to the Euphrates.

§ The forty-fifth psalm is supposed by old interpreters to have been an epithalamium on this occasion, but was probably much later. Perhaps notices like 1 Kings iii. 1-3 (the Egyptian alliance), the admonition in 1 Kings ix. 1-9 and the luxury described in x. 14-29, are meant as warning notes of what follows in xi. 1-8 (the apostasy), 9-13 (the prophecy of disruption), and 14-43 (the concluding disaster).

¶ Gezer is Abu-Shnshah, or Tell-el-Gezer, between Ramleh and Jerusalem (Oliphant, *Haiifa*, p. 253), on the lower border of Ephraim. Ewald identifies it with Geshur, the town of Talmai, Absalom's grandfather. See Lenormant, *Hist. anc. de l'Orient*, i. 337-43. The gene-

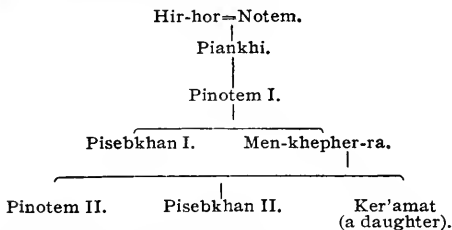
* Eccles. xlvii. 13-18.

† Josephus, *Ant.*, VIII. vii. 8. According to one tradition he lived to fifty-three (Ewald, iii. 208), and was only twelve when he succeeded David.

not prove to be of much use. The last king of this weak twenty-first dynasty was succeeded b. c. 990 by the founder of a new Bubastite dynasty, the great Shishak I. (Shesonk. *Σεσόνηχος*), the protector of Jeroboam and the plunderer of Jerusalem and its Temple. Ker'amat, niece of the last king of the dynasty, married Shishak, the founder of the new dynasty, and was the mother of U-Sark-on I. (Zerah the Ethiopian).

It has been a matter of dispute among the Rabbis whether Solomon was commendable or blameworthy for contracting this foreign alliance. If we judge him simply from the secular standpoint, nothing could be more obviously politic than the course he took. Nor did he break any law in marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Moses had not forbidden the union with an Egyptian woman. Still, from the religious point of view, it was inevitable that such a connection would involve consequences little in accordance with the theocratic ideal. The kings of Judah must not be judged as though they were ordinary sovereigns. They were meant to be something more than mere worldly potentates. The Egyptian alliance, instead of flattering the pride, only wounded the susceptibilities of the later Jews. The Rabbis had a fantastic notion that Shimei had been Solomon's teacher, and that the king did not fall into the error of wedding an alien* until Shimei had been driven from Jerusalem.† That there was some sense of doubt in Solomon's mind appears from the statement in 2 Chron. viii. 11, that he deemed it unfit for his bride to have her residence on Mount Moriah, a spot hallowed by the presence of the Ark of God.‡ That she became a proselytess has been suggested, but it is most unlikely. Had this been the case it would have been mentioned in contrast with the heathenism of the fair idolatresses who in later years beguiled the king's heart. On the other hand, the princess, who was his chief if not his earliest bride, does not seem to have asked for any shrine or chapel for the practice of her Egyptian rites. This is the more remarkable since Solomon, ashamed of the humble cedar house of David—which would look despicable to a lady who had lived in "the gigantic edifices, and labyrinthine palace of Egyptian kings"§—expended vast sums in building her a palace which should seem worthy of her royal race.

alogy of this dynasty is thus given by Brugsch-Bey (Gen. Table iv.), *Hist. of Egypt*, vol. ii. :—



* See Deut. xxiii. 7, 8.

† Schwab's *Berakhoth*, p. 252; Herndon, *Treasures of the Talmud*, p. 25. In Sanhedrin, ff. 21, 22, there is another trace of the dislike with which the marriage (though not forbidden, Deut. xxiii. 7, 8) was regarded: "When Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh, Gabriel descended and fixed a reed in the sea. A sand-bank formed around it on which Rome was subsequently built." In Shabbath, ff. 51, 52, we are told that "the princess brought with her one thousand different kinds of musical instruments, and taught Solomon the chants to his various idols."

‡ No trace of any such misgiving is found in the Book of Kings.

§ Seine Liebhaberei sind kostbare Bauten, fremde Weiber, reiche Prachtentfaltung" (Kittel, ii. 160).

From this time forward the story of Solomon becomes more the record of a passing pageant preserved for us in loosely arranged fragments. It can never be one thing so interesting as the history of a human heart with its sufferings and passions. "Solomon in all his glory," that figure so unique, so lonely in its wearisome pomp, can never stir our sympathy or win our affection as does the natural, impetuous David, or even the fallen, unhappy Saul. "The low sun makes the colour." The bright gleams and dark shadows of David's life are more instructive than the dull monotony of Solomon's magnificence.

The large space of Scripture devoted to him in the Books of Kings and Chronicles is occupied almost exclusively with the details of architecture and display. It is only in the first and last sections of his story that we catch the least glimpse of the man himself. In the central section we see nothing of him, but are absorbed in measurements and descriptions which have a purely archæological, or, at the best, a dimly symbolic significance. The man is lost in the monarch, the monarch in the appurtenances of his royal display. His annals degenerate into the record of a sumptuous parade.

The fourth chapter of the Book of Kings gives us the constitution of his court as it was in the middle of his reign, when two of his daughters were already married. It need not detain us long.

The highest officers of the kingdom were called *Sarim*, "princes," a title which in David's reign had been borne almost alone by Joab, who was *Sar-ha-zaba*, or captain of the host. The son of Zadok* is named first as "the priest." The two chief secretaries (*Sopherim*) were Elihoreph and Ahiah. They inherited the office of their father Shavsha (1 Chron. xviii. 16),† who had been the secretary of David. It was their duty to record decrees and draw up the documents of state. Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, continued to hold the office of annalist or historiographer (*Mazkir*), the officer known as the *Waka Nuwish* in Persian courts.‡ Azariah was over the twelve prefects (*Nitzabim*), or farmers-general, who administered the revenues.§ His brother Zabud became "priest" and "king's friend."|| Ahishar was "over the household" (*al-hab-Baith*); that is, he was the chamberlain, vizier, or mayor of the palace, wearing on his shoulder the key which was the symbol of his authority.¶ Adoniram or Adoram, who had been tax-collector for David, still held that onerous and invidious office,** which subsequently, in his advanced old age, cost him his life. Benaiah succeeded to the chief-captaincy of Joab. We hear nothing more of him, but the subsequent history shows that when David gathered around him this half alien and wholly mercenary force in a country which had no standing army, he turned the sovereignty into what the Greeks would have called a tyranny. As the only armed force in the kingdom the body-guard overawed opposition, and was

* Perhaps rather "the grandson." He was the son of Ahimaz (comp. Gen. xxix. 5; Ezra v. 1, where *son* = *grandson*).

† Shisha and Shavsha are perhaps corruptions of Seraiah (2 Sam. viii. 17).

‡ Comp. Esth. vi. 1. LXX., Isa. xxxvi. 3. ὁ ὑπομνηματογράφος 2 Sam. viii. 17. ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν ὑπομνημάτων. Jerome, "a commentarius." Comp. Suet., Aug. 79, "qui e memoria Augusti."

§ It is a somewhat ominous fact that *netsib* means properly an ἐπιτειχισμός, a garrison in a hostile country.

|| The king's friend (2 Sam. xv. 37) seems to have been a sort of confidential privy councillor (Prov. xxii. 11).

¶ Isa. xxii. 21.

** 2 Sam. xx. 24.

wholly at the disposal of the king. These troops were to Solomon at Jerusalem what the Prætorians were to Tiberius at Rome.

The chief points of interest presented by the list are these:—

1. First we mark the absence of any prophet. Neither Nathan nor Gad is even mentioned. The pure ray of Divine illumination is overpowered by the glitter of material prosperity.

2. Secondly, the priests are quite subordinate. They are only mentioned fifth in order, and Abiathar is named with Zadok, though after his deposition he was living in enforced retirement.* The sacerdotal authority was at this time quite overshadowed by the royal. In all the elaborate details of the pomp which attended the consecration of the Temple, Solomon is everything, the priests comparatively nothing. Zadok is not even mentioned as taking any part in the sacrifices in spite of his exalted rank. Solomon acts throughout as supreme head of the Church. Nor was this unnatural, since the two capital events in the history of the worship of Jehovah—the removal of the Ark to Mount Zion, and the suggestion, inception, and completion of the building of the Temple—were due to Solomon and David, not to Zadok or Abiathar. The priests, throughout the monarchy, suggest nothing, inaugurate nothing. They are lost in functions and formal ceremonies. They are but obedient administrative servants, and, so far from protecting religion, they acquiesce with tame indifference in every innovation and every apostasy. History has few titles which form so poor a claim to distinction as that of Levitic priest.

3. Further, we have two curious and significant phenomena. The title "the priest" is given to Azariah, who is first mentioned among the court functionaries. Solomon had not the least intention to allow either the priestly or the much loftier prophetic functions to interfere with his autocracy. He did not choose that there should be any danger of a priest usurping an exorbitant influence, as Hir-hor had done in Egypt, or Ethbaal afterwards did in the court of Tyre, or Thomas à-Becket in the court of England, or Torquemada in that of Spain. He was too much a king to submit to priestly domination. He therefore appointed one who should be "the priest" for courtly and official purposes, and should stand in immediate subordination to himself.

4. The Nathan whose two sons, Azariah and Zabud, held such high positions, was in all probability not Nathan the Prophet, who is rarely introduced without his distinctive title, but Nathan, the younger brother of Solomon, in whose line the race of David was continued after the extinction of the elder branch in Jeconiah. Here again we note the union of *civil* with priestly functions. Zabud is called "a priest" though he is a layman, a prince of the tribe of Judah. Nor was this the first instance in which princes of the royal house had found maintenance, occupation, and high official rank by being in some sort engaged in the functions of the priesthood. Already in David's reign we find the title "priests" (*Kohanim*) given to the sons of David in the list of court officials†—

* Possibly this clause is an interpolation.

† 2 Sam. viii. 18. Even "Ira the Jairite" is called "a priest" (2 Sam. xx. 26). An attempt has been made to explain the word away because it obviously clashes with Levitic ordinances; but the word "priest" could not be used in two different senses in two consecutive lines. Dogmatic considerations have tampered with the obvious meaning of the word. The LXX. omits it, and in the case of David's sons calls them *ἀνδράρα*. The A. V. renders it "chief officer." The Vulgate wrongly refers it

"and David's sons were priests." In this we trace the possible results of Phœnician influences.

5. Incidentally it is pleasing to find that, though Solomon put Adonijah to death, he stood in close and kindly relations with his other brothers, and gave high promotions to the sons of the brothers who stood nearest to him in age, in one of whom we see the destined ancestor of the future Messiah.*

6. The growth of imposing officialism, and its accompanying gulf between the king and his people, is marked by the first appearance of "the chamberlain" as a new functionary. On him fell the arrangement of court pageants and court etiquette. The chamberlain in despotic Eastern courts becomes a personage of immense importance because he controls the right of admission into the royal presence. Such officers, even when chosen from the lowest rank of slaves—like Eutropius the eunuch-minister of Arcadius,† or Olivier le Daim, the barber-minister of Louis XI.—often absorb no mean part of the influence of the sovereign with whom they are brought into daily connection. In the court of Solomon the chamberlain stands only ninth in order; but three centuries later, in the days of Hezekiah, he has become the greatest of the officials, and "Eliakim who was over the household" is placed before Shebna, the influential scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph the recorder.‡

7. Last on the list stands the minister who has the ominous title of *al-ham-Mas*, or "over the tribute." The Mas means the "levy," *corvée*, or forced labour. In other words, Adoram was overseer of the soccagers. Saul had required an overseer of the flocks and David a guardian of the treasury, but Adoram is not mentioned till late in his reign.§ The *gravamen* of David's numbering of the people seems to have lain in the intention to subject them to a poll tax, or to personal service, such as had become necessary to maintain the expenses of the court. It is obvious that, as royalty developed from the conception of the theocratic king to that of the Oriental despot, the stern warning of Samuel to the people of Israel was more and more fulfilled. They had said, "Nay, but we will have a king to reign over us, when Jehovah was their king"; and Samuel had told them how much less blessed was bondage with ease than their strenuous liberty. He had warned them that their king would take their sons for his runners and charioteers and reapers and soldiers and armourers, and their daughters for his perfumers and confectioners; and that he would seize their fields and vineyards for his courtiers, and claim the tithes of their possession, and use their asses, and put their oxen to his work. The word "*Mas*" representing soccage, serfdom, forced labour (*corvée*; Germ., *Frohndienst*), first became odiously familiar in the days of Solomon.

to Zadok (filius Sadoc *sacerdotis*). Movers (*Krit. Unters.* 301 ff.) renders it "court chaplains." Already in 1 Chron. xviii. 17 we find that the title gave offence, and we read instead, "And the sons of David were at the hand of the king" (see Ewald, *Alterthumsk.* p. 276). Compare the title "Bishop of Osnaburg," borne by Frederick, Duke of York, son of George III.

* 2 Sam. v. 14; Zech. xii. 12; Luke iii. 31.

† The degraded and ominous apparitions of *Sarisim* (eunuchs) probably began at the court of Solomon on a large scale, though the name occurs in the days of David (1 Sam. viii. 15; 1 Chron. xxviii. 1). In the Northern Kingdom we first hear of them in the harem of the polygamous Ahab.

‡ 2 Kings xviii. 18; Isa. xxii. 15.

§ 2 Sam. xx. 24. He is not mentioned in 1 Chron. xxvii. 25-31.

Solomon was an expensive king, and the Jewish kings had no private revenue from which the necessary resources could be supplied. In order to secure contributions for the maintenance of the royal establishment, Solomon appointed his twelve Prefects. The list of them is incorporated from a document so ancient that in several instances the names have dropped out, and only "son of" remains.* The districts entirely and designedly ignored the old tribal limits, which Solomon probably wished to obliterate. Ben-Hur administered the hill country of Ephraim; Ben-Dekar had his headquarters in Dan; Ben-Hesed had the maritime plain; Ben-Abinadab the fertile region of Carmel, and he was wedded to Solomon's daughter Taphath; † Baana, son of Ahilud, managed the plain of Esdraelon; Ben-Geber the mountainous country east of Jordan, including Gilead and Argob with its basaltic towns; Ahinadab, son of Iddo, was officer in Mahanaim; Ahimaaz in Naphtali (he was married to Solomon's daughter Basmath, and was perhaps the son of Zadok); Baanah, son of David's faithful Hushai, was in Asher; Shimei, son of Elah, in Benjamin; Jehoshaphat in Issachar. Geber administered alone the ancient dominions of Sihon and Og. We see with surprise that Judah seems to have been exempted from the burdens imposed on the other districts, and if so the impolitic exemption was a main cause of the subsequent jealousies. ‡

The chief function of these officers was to furnish provisions for the immense numbers who were connected with the court. The curious list is given of the provision required for one day—thirty measures of fine flour, sixty of bread, § ten fat oxen, twenty pasture oxen, and one hundred sheep, besides the delicacies of harts, gazelles, fallow-deer, and fatted guinea-hens or swans. || Bunson reckons that this would provide for about fifteen thousand persons. In this there is nothing extraordinary, though the number is disproportionate to the smallness of the kingdom. About the same number were daily supported by the kings of the great empire of Persia. ¶ We see how rapidly the state of royalty had developed when we compare Solomon's superb surroundings with the humble palace of Ishbosheth less than fifty years earlier—a palace of which the only guard was a single sleepy woman, who had been sifting wheat in the noontide, and had fallen asleep over her task in the porch. **

Yet in the earlier years of the reign, while the people, dazzled by the novel sense of national importance, felt the stimulus given to trade and industry, the burden was not painfully felt. They multiplied in numbers, and lived under their vines

and fig trees in peace and festivity.* But much of their prosperity was hollow and shortlived. Wealth led to vice and corruption, and in place of the old mountain breezes of freedom which purified the air, the nation, like Issachar, became like an ass crouching between two burdens, and bowing its shoulders to the yoke in the hot valley of sensuous servitude.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay!"

It is impossible to overlook the general drift of Jewish royalty towards pure materialism in the days of Solomon. We search in vain for the lofty spirituality which survived even in the rough epoch of the Judges and the rude simplicity of David's earlier reign. The noble aspirations which throb in one Davidic psalm are worth all the gorgeous formalism of the Temple service. Amid the luxuries of plenty and the feasts of wine on the lees there seems to have been an ever-deepening famine of the Word of God.

There was one innovation, which struck the imagination of Solomon's contemporaries, but was looked on with entire disfavour by those who had been trained in the old pious days. Solomon had immense stables for his chariot horses (*susim*), and the swift riding horses of his couriers (*parashim*). † It seems to have been Solomon's ambition to equal or outshine "the chariots of Pharaoh," ‡ with which his Egyptian queen had been familiar at Tanis. This feature of his reign is dwelt upon in the Arabian legends, as well as in all the historical records of his greatness. § But the maintenance of a cavalry force had always been discouraged by the religious teachers of Israel. The use of horses in war is forbidden in Deuteronomy. || Joshua had houghed the horses of the Canaanites, and burned their chariots at Misrephoth-maim. David had followed his example. Barak had defeated the iron chariots of Sisera, and David the splendid cavalry of Hadadezer with the simple infantry of Israel. ¶ The spirit of the olden faithfulness spoke in such words as, "Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God." Solomon's ** successors discovered that they had not gained in strength by adopting this branch of military service in their hilly and rocky land. They found that "a horse is but a vain thing to save a man, neither shall he deliver any man by his great strength." ††

For a time, however, Solomon's strenuous centralisation was successful. His dominion extended, at least nominally, from Tiphzah (Thapsacus), be-

* This use of patronymics only is common among the Arabs, but not in Scripture (Reuss, *Hist. d. Isr.*, i. 423).

† If he was the son of David's elder brother (1 Sam. xvi. 8, xvii. 13) he was Solomon's first cousin. The materialistic or non-religious element in Solomon seems to come out in the names of his only known children. The element "Jehovah," afterwards so universal, does not occur in them. Basmath, characteristically, means "fragrant"; Taphath is perhaps connected with פתח, to go merrily; Rehoboam means "enlarger of the people."

‡ The LXX. indeed reads *καὶ νασέφ εἰς ἐν γῆ Τούδα* ("and he was the only officer in the land of Judah"). But this would make thirteen fiscal overseers. The Targum, adopting the same reading, says that the thirteenth *nizab* was to maintain the king in the intercalary month.

§ Taking the *cor* at a low estimate this would amount to eighteen thousand pounds of bread a day.

¶ 1 Kings iv. 23 בַּרְבִּים. Vulg., *Avium altitium*.

¶ Athen., *Deipnos.*, iv. 146.

** 2 Sam. iv. 6 (LXX).

* This description of agricultural felicity soon became an anachronism.

† Not "dromedaries" (A. V.) The ruins of his stables are still pointed out at Jerusalem. He traded with Egypt for horses and chariots which his merchants brought to Tekoa, and he then sold them at a profit to the Hittite princes. The forty thousand stalls of 1 Kings iv. 26 should doubtless be four thousand (2 Chron. ix. 25), as Solomon only had fourteen hundred chariots (1 Kings x. 26). In 1 Kings x. 28 the meaning and reading is "as for the export of horses, which Solomon got from Egypt even from Tekoa" (LXX., *καὶ ἐκ Θεκωῆ*), "the royal merchants used to fetch a troop of horses at a price." The "linen yarn" of the A. V. is a mistranslation.

‡ Cant. i. 9.

§ 1 Kings v. 6, ix. 19, x. 26, 28. Two of these passages are omitted in the LXX. Comp. 1 Kings xvi. 9.

|| Deut. xvii. 16.

¶ Josh. xi. 9; 1 Sam. viii. 11, 12; 2 Sam. viii. 4.

** The energetic dislike to the importation or use of horses is also found in Isa. ii. 7, xxx. 16, 17, xxxi. 1-3; Micah v. 10-14; Zech. ix. 10, x. 5, xii. 4.

†† Psalm xxxiii. 17, lxxvi. 6, cxlvii. 10.

side the ford on the west bank of the Euphrates, to the Mediterranean; over the whole domain of the Philistines; and from Damascus to "the river of Egypt." that is, the Rhinokolura or Wady el-Areesh. The names Jeroboam and Rehoboam imply that they were born in an epoch of prosperity.* But the sequel proves that it was that sort of empire which,

"Like expanded gold,
Exchanges solid strength for feeble splendour."†

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TEMPLE.

1 KINGS v., vi., vii.

"And his next son, for wealth and wisdom famed,
The clouded Ark of God, till then in tents
Wandering, shall in a glorious temple enshrine."
Paradise Lost, xii. 340.

AFTER the destructive battle of Aphek, in which the Philistines had defeated Israel, slain the two sons of Eli, and taken captive the Ark of God, they had inflicted a terrible vengeance on the old sanctuary at Shiloh. They had burnt the young men in the fire, and slain the priests with the sword, and no widows were left to make lamentation.‡ It is true that, terrified by portents and diseases, the Philistines after a time restored the Ark, and the Tabernacle of the wilderness with its brazen altar still gave sacredness to the great high place at Gibeon, to which apparently it had been removed.§ Nevertheless, the old worship seems to have languished till it received a new and powerful impulse from the religious earnestness of David. He had the mind of a patriot-statesman as well as of a soldier, and he felt that a nation is nothing without its sacred memories. Those memories clustered round the now-discredited Ark. Its capture, and its parade as a trophy of victory in the shrine of Dagon, had robbed it of all its superstitious prestige as a fetish; but, degraded as it had been, it still continued to be the one inestimably precious historic relic which enshrined the memories of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and the dawn of its heroic age.

As soon as David had given to his people the boon of a unique capital, nothing could be more natural than the wish to add sacredness to the glory of the capital by making it the centre of the national worship. According to the Chronicles, David—feeling it a reproach that he himself should dwell in palaces ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion while the Ark of God dwelt between curtains—had made unheard-of preparations to build a house for God. But it had been decreed unfit that the sanctuary should be built by a man whose hands were red with the blood of many wars, and he had received the promise that the great work should be accomplished by his son.¶

Into that work Solomon threw himself with hearty zeal in the month Zif¶ of the fourth year of

his reign, when his kingdom was consolidated.* It commanded all his sympathies as an artist, a lover of magnificence, and a ruler bent on the work of centralisation. It was a task to which he was bound by the solemn exhortation of his father, and he felt, doubtless, its political as well as its religious importance. With his sincere desire to build to God's glory was mingled a prophetic conviction that his task would be fraught with immense issues for the future of his people and of all the world. The presence of the Temple left its impress on the very name of Jerusalem. Although it has nothing to do with the Temple or with Solomon, it became known to the heathen world as Hierosolymia, which, as we see from Eupolemos (Euseb., *Præp. Evang.*, ix. 34), the Gentile world supposed to mean "the Temple (*Hieron*) of Solomon."

The materials already provided were of priceless value. David had consecrated to God the spoils which he had won from conquered kings. We must reject, as the exaggerations of national vanity, the monstrous numbers which now stand in the text of the chronicler; but a king whose court was simple and inexpensive was quite able to amass treasures of gold and silver, brass and iron, precious marbles and onyx stones. Solomon had only to add to these sacred stores.†

He inherited the friendship which David had enjoyed, with Hiram, King of Tyre, who, according to the strange phrase of the Vatican Septuagint, sent his servants "to anoint" Solomon. The friendliest overtures passed between the two kings in letters, to which Josephus appeals as still extant. A commercial treaty was made by which Solomon engaged to furnish the Tyrian king with annual revenues of wheat, barley, and oil,‡ and Hiram put at Solomon's disposal the skilled labour of an army of Sidonian wood-cutters and artisans.§ The huge trunks of cedar and cypress were sent rushing down the heights of Lebanon by schlit-tage, and laboriously dragged by road or river to the shore. There they were constructed into immense rafts, which were floated a hundred miles along the coast to Joppa, where they were again dragged with enormous toil for thirty-five miles up the steep and rocky roads to Jerusalem. For more than twenty years, while Solomon was building the Temple and his various royal constructions, Jerusalem became a hive of ceaseless and varied industry. Its ordinary inhabitants must have been swelled by an army of Canaanite serfs and Phœnician artisans to whom residences were assigned in names as preserved in the Bible: *Zif*, "brightness" (comp. *Floral, Lenz*); *Bul*, "rain-month" (*Pluviose*); *Abib*, "corn-ear month"; *Ethanim*, "fruit-month" (*Fructidor*).

* In 1 Kings vi. 1 we read "in the 480th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt." This may possibly be a later gloss. The LXX., Origen, Josephus, etc., omit the words, and the Old Testament does not, as a rule, date events by epochs. Further, the date is full of difficulties, though our received chronology is based on it. It was perhaps arrived at after the Exile, by counting backwards from the Decree of Cyrus, B. C. 535. See note at the end of the volume.

† 1 Chron. xxii. 14 says that David (comp. xxviii., xxix.) "with much labour" (A. V., "in my trouble," 1 Chron. xxii. 14) bequeathed to Solomon 100,000 talents of gold and 100,000 talents of silver! This impossible number is very considerably reduced in 1 Chron. xxix. 4, where the mention of *darics* shows an author living in the captivity.

‡ Comp. Ezek. xxvii. 7; Acts xii. 20.

* Compare Poludemus, Eurudemus.

† Xen. *Anab.* i. 4, 11; Arrian, ii. 13, iii. 7. For the phrase "on this side of the river," see *ante*, p. 220.

‡ Psalm lxxviii. 58-64.

§ According to 2 Chron. i. 3.

¶ David's suggestion does not seem to have been received favourably at first (2 Sam. vii. 1-17). The chronicler (1 Chron. xxviii. 10) indulges in the amazing hyperbole that David had been made to understand all the works of the pattern of the Temple "in writing from the hand of the Lord."

¶ The ancient Israelites named their months from the seasons, as did the Canaanites. Only four of those old

§ According to Tatian, *Orat. ad Græc.*, p. 171, Solomon married a daughter of Hiram. Hiram, like the Queen of Sheba, acknowledges Jehovah as the (local) God of Israel. He was the son of Abibah, and according to Menander (a Greek historian of Ephesus about B. C. 300, who consulted Tyrian records) he began to reign at nineteen, and reigned thirty-four years. Josephus thinks that there were two successive Hiram.

Ophel. There lived the hewers and bevellers of stone; the cedar-cutters of Gebal or Biblos;* the cunning workmen in gold or brass; the bronze-casters who made their moulds in the clay ground of the Jordan valley; the carvers and engravers; the dyers who stained wool with the purple of the murex, and the scarlet dye of the trumpet fish; the weavers and embroiderers of fine linen. Every class of labourer was put into requisition, from the descendants of the Gibeonite *Nethinim*, who were rough hewers of wood and drawers of water, to the trained artificers whose beautiful productions were the wonder of the world. The "father," or master-workman, of the whole community was a half-caste, who also bore the name of Hiram, and was the son of a woman of Naphtali by a Tyrian father.†

Some writers have tried to minimise Solomon's work as a builder, and have spoken of the Temple as an exceedingly insignificant structure which would not stand a moment's comparison with the smallest and humblest of our own cathedrals. Insignificant in size it certainly was, but we must not forget its costly splendour, the remote age in which the work was achieved, and the truly stupendous constructions which the design required. Mount Moriah was selected as a site hallowed by the tradition of Abraham's sacrifice, and more recently by David's vision of the Angel of the Pestilence with his drawn sword on the threshing-floor of the Jebusite Prince Araunah.‡ But to utilise this doubly consecrated area involved almost superhuman difficulties, which would have been avoided if the loftier but less suitable height of the Mount of Olives could have been chosen. The rugged summit had to be enlarged to a space of five hundred yards square, and this level was supported by Cyclopean walls, which have long been the wonder of the world.§ The magnificent wall on the east side, known as "the Jews' wailing-place," is doubtless the work of Solomon, and after outlasting "the drums and trappings of a

hundred triumphs," it remains to this day in uninjured massiveness. One of the finely bevelled stones is 38½ feet long and 7 feet high, and weighs more than 100 tons. These vast stones were hewn from a quarry above the level of the wall, and lowered by rollers down an inclined plane. Part of the old wall rises 30 feet above the present level of the soil, but a far larger part of the height lies hidden 80 feet under the accumulated *débris* of the often captured city. At the southwest angle, by Robinson's arch, three pavements were discovered, one beneath the other, showing the gradual filling up of the valley; and on the lowest of these were found the broken *voussoirs* of the arch. In Solomon's day the whole of this mighty wall was visible. On one of the lowest stones have been discovered the Phœnician paint-marks which indicated where each of the huge masses, so carefully dressed, edge-drafted, and bevelled, was to be placed in the structure. The caverns, quarries, water storages, and subterranean conduits hewn out of the solid rock, over which Jerusalem is built, could only have been constructed at the cost of immeasurable toil. They would be wonderful even with our infinitely more rapid methods and more powerful agencies; but when we remember that they were made three thousand years ago we do not wonder that their massiveness has haunted the imagination of so many myriads of visitors from every nation.

It was perhaps from his Egyptian father-in-law that Solomon, to his own cost, learnt the secret of forced labour which alone rendered such undertakings possible. In their Egyptian bondage the forefathers of Israel had been fatally familiar with the ugly word *Mas*, the labour wrung from them by hard task-masters.* In the reign of Solomon it once more became only too common on the lips of the burdened people.†

Four classes were subject to it.

1. The lightest labour was required from the native freeborn Israelites (*ezrach*). They were not regarded as bondsmen (עבדים), yet 30,000 of these were required in relays of 10,000 to work one month in every three, in the forest of Lebanon.‡

2. There were strangers, or resident aliens (*Gerim*), such as the Phœnicians and Gibletes, who were Hiram's subjects and worked for pay.

3. There were three classes of slaves—those taken in war, or sold for debt, or home-born.

4. Lowest and most wretched of all, there were the vassal Canaanites (*Toshabim*), from whom were drawn those 70,000 burden-bearers, and 80,000 quarry-men, the Helots of Palestine, who were placed under the charge of 3600 Israelite officers. The blotches of smoke are still visible on the walls and roofs of the subterranean quarries where there poor serfs, in the dim torchlight and suffocating air, "laboured without reward, perished without pity, and suffered without redress." The sad narrative reveals to us, and modern research confirms, that the purple of Solomon had a very

* Exod. i. ii.

† 1 Kings iv. 6, v. 13, 14, 17, 18, ix. 15, 21, xii. 18.

‡ Ewald thinks that it was only "at the beginning" that Solomon, like Sesostris (Diod. Sic., *Hist.*, i. 56), could boast that his work was done without exacting bitter labour from his own countrymen. But 1 Kings ix. 22 shows that the king's opinion on this subject differed widely from that of his people (1 Kings xi. 28, xii. 3); for we are told that he did not make *servants* of the children of Israel, but used them as military officers (*Sarim*) and chariot-warriors (*Shalishim, τροστῆται*) and knights. It required a little euphemism to gild the real state of affairs. The details of numbers in the Books of Chronicles differ from those in the Kings.

* *Giblin*, 1 Kings v. 18, where "and the stone-squarers" should be "and especially the men of Gebal." LXX., *Alex.*, *oi Biβλιοι*; Vulg., *Giblin*. Comp. Ezek. xxvii. 9, Psalm lxxxiii. 7, "The ancients of Gebal and the wise thereof were in thee." It is now Jebel, between Beyrout and Tripoli. The Phœnician and Sidonian artisans were famous from the earliest antiquity for metal-work, embroidery, dyes, ship-building, and the fine arts (*Hom.*, *Il.*, xxiii. 743; *Od.*, iv. 614-18, xv. 425; *Herod.*, iii. 19, vii. 23, 96, etc.).

† 2 Chron. ii. 13, iv. 16, where "a cunning man of Huram my father's" should be "even Hiram, my father," *i. e.* master-workman or deviser (comp. Gen. xlv. 8). In Chronicles he is called the son of a Danite mother. Here we have another of the manipulations used by later Jewish tradition to get rid of what they disliked; for in Euseb., *Præp. Evang.*, ix. 34 Hiram is said to belong to the family of David. "Quite a little romance," as Wellhausen says, "has been constructed out of the fact that the chronicler assigns his mother to the tribe of Dan; but it is not worth repeating, being a mass of hypotheses." To the dislike of Sidonian and semi-Sidonian influence, we perhaps owe the notion that David had already received a design from the hand of God Himself (2 Chron. xxviii. 11-16) (Ewald, iii. 227). Jerome mentions the Jewish fable that the artist Hiram was of the family of Aholiab, the artist of the wilderness.

‡ "Araunah the king" (2 Sam. xxiv. 23). The Temple Mount was usually called the "Mount of the House." It is only called Mount Moriah in 2 Chron. iii. 1. It cannot be regarded as certain that "the land of Moriah" (Gen. xxii. 2) is identical with it.

§ "The present platform is 1321 feet long on the east, 940 on the south, 1617 on the west, 1020 on the north." Bartlett, *Walks about Jerusalem*, pp. 161-70; Williams, *The Holy City*, pp. 315-62. Kugle, *Gesch. der Baukunst*, p. 125. The excellent stone was supplied by quarries at Jerusalem itself. Comp. "Cavati sub terra montes" (Tac., *Hist.*, v. 12). It may have been extended by Justinian when he built his church. See Ewald, iii. 232, "The Mount of the Temple was 500 yards square"; *Middoth*, c. 2. Comp. Ezek. xiii. 15-20, xlv. 2; Josephus, *Antt.*, XV. xi. 3.

seamy side, and that an abyss of misery heaved and moaned under the glittering surface of his splendour.* Jerusalem during the twenty years occupied by his building must have presented the disastrous spectacle of task-masters, armed with rods and scourges, enforcing the toil of gangs of slaves, as we see them represented in the tombs of Egypt and the palaces of Assyria. The sequel shows the jealousies and discontents even of the native Israelites, who felt themselves to be "scourged with whips and laden with heavy burdens." They were bondmen in all but name, for purposes which bore very little on their own welfare. But the curses of the wretched aborigines must have been deeper, if not so loud. They were torn from such homes as the despotism of conquest still left to them, and were forced to hopeless and unrewarded toil for the alien worship and hateful palaces of their masters. Five centuries later we find a pitiable trace of their existence in the 392 *Hierodouloi*, menials lower even than the enslaved *Nethinim*, who are called "*sons of the slaves of Solomon*"—the dwindling and miserable remnant of that vast levy of Palestinian serfs.

Apart from the lavish costliness of its materials the actual Temple was architecturally a poor and commonplace structure. It was quite small—only 90 feet long, 35 feet broad, and 45 feet high. It was meant for the symbolic habitation of God, not for the worship of great congregations. It only represented the nascent art and limited resources of a tenth-rate kingdom, and was totally devoid alike of the pure and stately beauty of the Parthenon and the awe-inspiring grandeur of the great Egyptian temples with their avenues of obelisks and sphinxes and their colossal statues of deities and kings

"Staring right on with calm, eternal eyes."

When Justinian boastfully exclaimed, as he looked at his church, "*I have vanquished thee, O Solomon*,"† and when the Khalif Omar, pointing to the Dome of the Rock, murmured, "*Behold, a greater than Solomon is here*," they forgot the vast differences between them and the Jewish king in the epoch at which they lived and the resources which they could command. The Temple was built in "majestic silence."

"No workman's axe, no ponderous hammer rung,
Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung."

This was due to religious reverence. It could be easily accomplished, because each stone and beam was carefully prepared to be fitted in its exact place before it was carried up the Temple hill.

The elaborate particulars furnished us of the measurements of Solomon's Temple are too late in age, too divergent in particulars, too loosely strung together, too much mingled with later reminiscences, and altogether too architecturally insufficient, to enable us to re-construct the exact building, or even to form more than a vague conception of its external appearance. Both in Kings and Chronicles the notices, as Keil says, are "incomplete extracts made independently of one another," and vague in essential details. Critics and architects have attempted to reproduce the Temple on

* 1 Kings v. 13, ix. 22; 2 Chron. viii. 9. (Omitted in the LXX.)

† In token of this defeat of Solomon he was represented in a statue outside the church leaning his hand on his cheek with a gesture of sorrow.

Greek,* Egyptian,† and Phœnician‡ models, so entirely unlike each other as to show that we can arrive at no certainty.§ It is, however, most probable that, alike in ornamentation and conception, the building was predominantly Phœnician.|| Severe in outline, gorgeous in detail, it was more like the Temple of Venus-Astarte at Paphos than any other. Fortunately the details, apart from such dim symbolism as we may detect in them, have no religious importance, but only an historic and antiquarian interest.¶

The Temple—called *Baith* (בַּיִת) or *Hêkâl* (הֵיכָל)—was surrounded by the thickly clustered houses of the Levites, and by porticoes** through which the precincts were entered by numerous gates of wood overlaid with brass. A grove of olives, palms, cedars, and cypresses, the home of many birds, probably adorned the outer court.†† This court was shut from the "higher court,"‡‡ afterwards known as "the Court of the Priests," by a partition of three rows of hewn stones surmounted by a cornice of cedar beams. In the higher court, which was reached by a flight of steps, was the vast new altar of brass, 15 feet high and 30 feet long, of which the hollow was filled with earth and stones, and of which the blazing sacrifices were visible in the court below.§§ Here also stood the huge molten sea, borne on the backs of twelve brazen oxen, of which three faced to each quarter of the heavens.¶¶ It was in the form of a lotus blossom, and its rim was hung with three hundred wild gourds in bronze, cast in two rows. Its reservoir of eight hundred and eighty gallons of water was for the priestly ablutions necessary in the butcheries of sacrifice, and its usefulness was supplemented by ten brazen caldrons on wheels, five on each side, adorned like "the sea," with pensive garlands and cherubic emblems.¶¶ Whether "the brazen serpent of the wilderness," to which the children of Israel burnt

* Professor Williams, *Probus, Architectonica*.

† Professor Hoskins (*Enc. Brit.*); Canina, *Jewish Antiquities*; Thrupp, *Ancient Jerusalem*; Count de Vogüé, *Le Temple de Jérusalem*.

‡ Fergusson, *Temples of the Jews*; E. Robbins, *Temple of Solomon*.

§ Eupolemos (Euseb., *Præp. Evang.*, ix. 30) and Alex. Polyhistor (Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, i. 21) idly talk of help furnished to Solomon in building the Temple by an Egyptian King Vaphres, and of letters interchanged between them. Vaphres seems to be a mere anachronism for Hophra.

¶ The Phœnician style may, however, have been borrowed in part from Egypt.

¶¶ I have spoken of the Temple in *Solomon and his Times* (Men of the Bible), and have there furnished some illustrations. The following special authorities may be referred to. Stade, i. 311-57; Friederich, *Tempel und Palast Salomo's* (Innsbruck, 1887); Chipiez et Perrot, *Le Temple de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1887); Warren, *Underground Jerusalem*; Wilson and Warren, *Recov. of Jerusalem* (1871).

** *Parbarim* (2 Kings xxiii. 11). Comp. 1 Chron. xxvi. 18 (A. V., "suburbs"); R. V., "precincts" and "Parbar"). Descriptions of the Temple, imperfect, and not always accordant with each other, are found in 1 Kings v.-viii.; 2 Chron. ii.-v.; Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. iii. 7, 8.

†† As we infer from Psalms lli. 8, lxxxiv. 3, lxxvi. 2 (where "tabernacle" should be "covert"). Eupolemos (*ap. Euseb., Præp. Evang.*, etc.). Scattered passages of the Talmud which refer mainly to Herod's Temple are full of extravagances.

‡‡ Jer. xxxvi. 10.

§§ 2 Chron. iv. 1. This could not have been the brazen altar of the wilderness, the fate of which we do not know. It was far larger, but probably on the same model, except that steps were forbidden as an approach to the altar of the tabernacle (Exod., xx. 24-26). It is difficult to reconcile the description of the brazen altar with the distinct prohibition of that passage. Comp. Ezek. xliii. 17.

¶¶ The huge stone vase of Amathus was borne on a bull (Duncker, ii. 184). Josephus says that in making these oxen Solomon broke the law (*Antt.*, VIII. vii. 5), as well as by the lions on his throne. The Romans called huge vases *lacus*.

¶¶ The descriptions of these lavers, whether in the He-

incense down to the days of Hezekiah, was in that court or in the Temple we do not know.

On the western side of this court, facing the rising sun, stood the Temple itself, on a platform elevated some sixteen feet from the ground. Its side chambers were "lean-to" annexes (Heb., ribs; LXX., *μέλαθρα*; Vulg., *tabulata*.) in three stories, all accessible by one central entrance on the outside. Their beams rested on rebatements in the thickness of the wall, and the highest was the broadest. Above these were windows "skewed and closed," as the margin of the A. V. says; or "broad within and narrow without"; or, as it should rather be rendered, "with closed cross-beams," that is, with immovable lattices, which could not be opened and shut, but which allowed the escape of the smoke of lamps and the fumes of incense. These chambers must also have had windows. They were used to store the garments of the priests and other necessary paraphernalia of the Temple service, but as to all details we are left completely in the dark.

Of the external aspect of the building in Solomon's day we know nothing. We cannot even tell whether it had one level roof, or whether the Holy of Holies was like a lower chancel at the end of it; nor whether the roof was flat or, as the Rabbis say, ridged; nor whether the outer surface of the three-storeyed chambers which surrounded it was of stone, or planked with cedar, or overlaid with plinths of gold and silver;* nor whether, in any case, it was ornamented with carvings or left blank; nor whether the cornices only were decorated with open flowers like the Assyrian rosettes. Nor do we know with certainty whether it was supported within by pillars† or not. In the state of the records as they have come down to us, all accurate or intelligible descriptions are slurred over by compilers who had no technical knowledge and whose main desire was to impress their countrymen with the truth that the holy building was—as indeed for its day it was—"exceeding magnificent of fame and of glory throughout all countries."

In front of or just within the porch were two superb pillars, regarded as miracles of Tyrian art, made of fluted bronze, 27 feet high and 18 feet thick. Their capitals of 7½ feet in height resembled an open lotus blossom, surrounded by double wreaths of two hundred pensive bronze pomegranates, supporting an abacus, carved with conventional lily work. Both pomegranates and lilies had a symbolic meaning.‡ The pillars were, for unknown reasons, called Jachin and Boaz.§ Much about them is obscure. It is not even known whether they stood detached like obelisks, or formed Propylæa; or supported the architraves of the porch itself, or were a sort of gateway, sur-
brew, the LXX., or Josephus, are not intelligible, and are wholly unimportant.

* Like the palace of Ecbatana (Polyb., x. 27, 10; Herod., i. 98), and possibly the upper stories of the great temple of Bel at Birs-Nimrud (Borsippa).

† In 1 Kings x. 12 "pillars" should be "a rail" or "balustrade." Heb. *עֲמֻדֹת*; LXX., *ὑποστηρίγματα*; Vulg., *fulcra*.

‡ Lilies symbolised beauty and innocence; pomegranates good works (so the Chaldee in Cant. iv. 13, vi. 11, Bähr, *Symbol*, ii. 122). Raphael crowns his Theology with pomegranates, Giotto places a pomegranate in the hand of his youthful Dante, and Giovanni Bellini in the hand of the Virgin Mary.

§ Some suppose that the words imply "He will establish" (Jachin) "in strength" (Boaz). "After some favourite persons of the time, perhaps young sons of Solomon," says Ewald, very improbably. LXX. (2 Chron. iii. 17), *Καρόθωσις* and *Ἰσχύς*. See a description of these pillars in Jer. lii. 21-22.

mounted by a *melathron* with two *epithemas*, like a Japanese or Indian *toran*.

The porch (*Olam*), which was of the same height as the house (i. e. 45 feet high),* was hung with the gilded shields of Hadadezer's soldiers which David had taken in battle,† and perhaps also with consecrated armour, like the sword of Goliath,‡ to show that "unto the Lord belongeth our shield" (Psalm lxxxix. 18), and that "the shields of the earth belong unto God" (Psalm xlvii. 9).

A door of cypress wood, of two leaves, made in four squares, 7½ feet broad and high, turning on golden hinges overlaid with gold, and carved with palm branches and festoons of lilies and pomegranates, opened from the porch into the main apartment. This was the *Mikdash* (מִקְדָּשׁ), Holy Place, or Sanctuary, and sometimes specially called in Chaldee "the Palace" (*Hékâl*, or *Birah*) (Ezra v. 14, 15, etc.). Before it, as in the Tabernacle, hung an embroidered curtain (*Masak*). It was probably supported by four pillars on each side. In the interspaces were five tables on each side, overlaid with gold, and each encircled by a wreath of gold (*zêr*). On these were placed the cakes of shewbread.§ At the end of the chamber, on each side the door of the Holiest, were five golden candlesticks with chains of wreathed gold hanging between them. In the centre of the room stood the golden altar of incense, and somewhere (we must suppose) the golden candlestick of the Tabernacle, with its seven branches ornamented with lilies, pomegranates, and calices of almond flowers. Nothing which was in the darkness of the Holiest was visible except the projecting golden staves with which the Ark had been carried to its place. The Holy Place itself was lighted by narrow slits.

The entrance to the Holiest, the *Debir*, or oracle,|| which corresponded to the Greek *adytum*, was through a two-leaved door of olive wood, 6 feet high and broad, overlaid with gold, and carved with palms, cherubim, and open flowers. The partition was of cedar wood. The floor of the whole house was of cedar overlaid with gold. The interior of this "Oracle," as it was called—for the title "Holy of Holies" is of later origin—was, at any rate in the later Temples, concealed by an embroidered veil of blue, purple, and crimson, looped up with golden chains.

The Oracle, like the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse, was a perfect cube, 30 feet broad and long and high, covered with gold, but shrouded in perpetual and unbroken darkness.¶

* Some writers have supplied the Temple with a porch 180 feet high, misled by the astounding method of the chronicler of adding the four sides into the total. Thus, he tells us that the wings of the cherubim were 30 feet long, meaning that each single wing was 7½ feet long (2 Chron. iii. 11). Josephus does the same in telling us the height of the Temple wall.

† The ground plans of most ancient temples were alike.

‡ 2 Sam. viii. 7; 1 Chron. xviii. 7.

§ So 2 Chron. iv. 8. But it would seem from 1 Kings vii. 48; 2 Chron. xiii. 11, xxix. 18 that only one table and one candlestick were ordinarily used.

|| St. Jerome rendered *debir* by *oraculum*, but some derive it from the Arabic root *dabar*, "to be behind," not from *דָּבַר*, "to speak" (Munk, p. 290).

¶ In Zerubbabel's and Herod's Temples there was a curtain (*Parocheth*) before the Holiest; but we read of no such curtain in Solomon's, except in 2 Chron. iii. 14. The fact that the staves of the Ark were *visible* seems to show that there was not one. The chronicler speaks of "the veil" (2 Chron. iii. 14), showing, apparently, that there was only one; and does not mention the *Masak*, which hung between the Porch and the Holy Place. Except in 2 Chron. iii. 12, the only mention of either is in the "Priestly Code." Since the Oracle had a door, one hardly

No light was ever visible in it save such as was shed by the crimson gleam of the thrivable of incense which the high priest carried into it once a year on the Great Day of Atonement.* In the centre of the floor must apparently have risen the mass of rock which is still visible in the Mosque of Omar, from which it is called *All Sakhra*, "the Dome of the Rock." Tradition pointed to it as the spot on which Abraham had laid for sacrifice the body of his son Isaac, when the angel restrained the descending knife. It was also the site of Araunah's threshing-floor, and had been therefore hallowed by two angelic apparitions.† On it was deposited with solemn ceremony the awful palladium of the Ark, which had been preserved through the wanderings and wars of the Exodus and the troublous days of the Judges.‡ It contained the most sacred possession of the nation, the most priceless treasure which Israel guarded for the world. This treasure was the Two Tables of the Ten Commandments, graven (in the anthropomorphic language of the ancient record) by the actual finger of God; the tables which Moses had shattered on the rocks of Mount Sinai as he descended to the backsliding people.§ The Ark was covered with its old "Propitiatory," or "Mercy-seat," overshadowed by the wings of two small cherubim; but Solomon had prepared for its reception a new and far more magnificent covering, in the form of two colossal cherubim, 15 feet high, of which each expanded wing was 7½ feet long. These wings touched the outer walls of the Oracle, and also touched each other over the centre of the Ark.

Such was the Temple.

It was the "forum, fortress, university, and sanctuary" of the Jews, and the transitory emblem of the Church of Christ's kingdom. It was destined to occupy a large share in the memory, and even in the religious development, of the world, because it became the central point round which crystallised the entire history of the Chosen People. The kings of Judah are henceforth estimated with almost exclusive reference to the relation in which they stood to the centralised worship of Jehovah. The Spanish kings who built and decorated the Escorial caught the spirit of Jewish annals when, in the Court of the Kings, they reared the six colossal statues of David the originator, of Solomon the founder, of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Manasseh the restorers or purifiers of the Temple worship.¶

It required the toil of 300,000 men for twenty years to build one of the pyramids. It took two hundred years to build and four hundred to embellish the great Temple of Artemis of the Ephesians. It took more than five centuries to see why there should also have been a curtain. But the whole subject is obscure, and perhaps the chronicler is sometimes thinking of the second Temple.

* We read nothing, however, of any observance of the Day of Atonement till centuries later.

† 2 Sam. xxiv. 25 (LXX.); 1 Chron. xxiii. 1; 2 Chron. iii. 1; Josephus, *Antt.*, I. xiii. 1, VII. xiii. 4; Targum of Onkelos on Gen. xii.

‡ "The Ark of the Lord," or "of the Testimony," or "of the Covenant," was an oblong chest of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, surmounted by a border of gold, and rested on four feet, to which (A.V. corners) were attached golden rings.

§ 1 Kings viii. 9. The pot of manna and the budded rod of Aaron were placed before it (Exod. xvi. 24; Num. xvii. 10), and the Book of the Law beside it (Deut. xxxi. 26). The Mercy-seat above was more sacred than the Ark itself (Lev. xvi. 2). It was the cover (*Kapporeth*, *ἐπίθεα*) of the Ark, and was partly formed of two winged cherubim which gazed down upon it and faced each other.

¶ Stanley ii. 202

give to Westminster Abbey its present form. Solomon's Temple only took seven and a half years to build; but, as we shall see, its objects were wholly different from those of the great shrines which we have mentioned. The wealth lavished upon it was such that its dishes, bowls, cups, even its snuffers and snuffer trays, and its meanest utensils, were of pure gold. The massiveness of its substructions, the splendour of its materials, the artistic skill displayed by the Tyrian workmen in all its details and adornments, added to the awful sense of its indwelling Deity, gave it an imperishable fame. Needing but little repair, it stood for more than four centuries. Succeeded as it was by the Temples of Zerubbabel and of Herod, it carried down till seventy years after the Christian era the memory of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, of which it preserved the general outline, though it exactly doubled all the proportions and admitted many innovations.*

The dedication ceremony was carried out with the utmost pomp. It required nearly a year to complete the necessary preparations, and the ceremony with its feasts occupied fourteen days, which were partly coincident with the autumn Feast of Tabernacles.†

The dedication falls into three great acts. The first was the removal of the Ark to its new home (1 Kings viii. 1-11); then followed the speech and the prayer of Solomon (vv. 12-61); and, finally, the great holocaust was offered (vv. 62-66).

The old Tabernacle, or what remained of it, with its precious heirlooms, was carried by priests and Levites from the high place at Gibeon, which was henceforth abandoned.‡ This procession was met by another, far more numerous and splendid, consisting of all the princes, nobles, and captains, which brought the Ark from the tent erected for it on Mount Zion by David forty years before.

The Israelites had flocked to Jerusalem in countless multitudes, under their sheykhs and emirs§ from the border of Hamath on the Orontes,|| north of Mount Lebanon, to the Wady el-Areesh.¶ The king, in his most regal state, accompanied the procession, and the Ark passed through myriads of worshippers crowded in the outer court, from the tent on Mount Zion into the darkness of the Oracle on Mount Moriah, where it continued, unseen perhaps by any human eye but that of the high priest once a year, until it was carried away by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon.** To indicate that this

* The Tyrian adornments; the steps to the altar; the ten candlesticks, and tables; the lions and oxen.

† The Temple was finished in the eighth month of Solomon's eleventh year, and dedicated in the seventh month (*Ethanim*, or *Tisri*) of the twelfth year. The first eight days (8th to 15th) were devoted to the Feast of the Dedication, and then from the 15th to the 22nd they kept the Feast of Tabernacles. On the 23rd (the eighth day from the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles, called *'atsareth*, 2 Chron. 10) Solomon dismissed the people. The קָהָל , "solemn assembly," is not mentioned in Exodus or Deuteronomy, but in Lev. xxiii. 36.

‡ It was perhaps stored away in one of the Temple chambers (2 Macc. ii. 4). The Gibeonites (*Nethinim*) were at the same time transferred to Jerusalem. The chronicler (2 Chron. v. 6) says that the Levites took the Ark, according to the Levitic rule; but 1 Kings viii. 3 says that the priests bore it, as in Deut. xxxi. 9, and in all the pre-exilic histories (Josh. iii. 3, vi. 6; 2 Sam. xv. 24-29, etc.). W. Robertson Smith, p. 144.

§ The sheykhs are heads of clans; the emirs of tribes (Reuss, i. 444).

¶ The Greek *Ἐπιφάνεια*. Solomon seems to have had some jurisdiction there (2 Chron. viii. 6).

** The torrent (*nachal*) of Egypt.

** The Holiest, being an unlighted cube, must always have been dim; but, as we have seen, we have no proof that in Solomon's Temple the entrance to it was shrouded by a curtain. In 1 Kings viii. 12, for "The Lord said that

was to be its rest for ever, the staves, contrary to the old law, were drawn out of the golden rings through which they ran, in order that no human hand might touch the sacred emblem itself when it was borne on the shoulders of the Levitic priests. "And there they are unto this day," writes the compiler from his ancient record, long after Temple and Ark had ceased to exist.*

The king is the one predominant figure, and the high priest is not once mentioned. Nathan is only mentioned by the heathen historian Eupolemos. Visible to the whole vast multitude, Solomon stood in the inner court on a high scaffolding of brass. Then came a burst of music and psalmody from the priests and musicians, robed in white robes, who densely thronged the steps of the great altar.† They held in their hands their glittering harps and cymbals, and psalteries in their precious frames of red sandal wood, and twelve of their number rent the air with the blast of their silver trumpets as Solomon, in this supreme hour of his prosperity, shone forth before his people in all his manly beauty.

At the sight of that stately figure in its gorgeous robes the song of praise was swelled by innumerable voices, and, to crown all, a blaze of sudden glory wrapped the Temple and the whole scene in heaven's own splendour (2 Chron. v. 13, 14). First, the king, standing with his back to the people, broke out into a few words of prophetic song. Then, turning to the multitude, he blessed them—he, and not the high priest—and briefly told them the history and significance of this house of God, warning them faithfully that the Temple after all was but the emblem of God's presence in the midst of them, and that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything. After this he advanced to the altar, and kneeling on his knees (2 Chron. vi. 13)—a most unusual attitude among the Jews, who, down to the latest ages, usually stood up to pray—he prayed with the palms of his hands upturned to heaven, as though to receive in deep humility its outpoured benefits. The prayer, as here given, consists of an introduction, seven petitions, and a conclusion. It was a passionate entreaty that God would hear, both individually and nationally, both in prosperity and in adversity, the supplications of His people, and even of strangers, who should either pray in the courts of that His house, or should make it the *Kibleh* of their devotions.‡

He would dwell in the thick darkness," the Targum had "In Jerusalem."

* In 1 Kings viii. 4 we read that "the priests and the Levites" brought up to Jerusalem "the Tabernacle of the congregation." But the LXX. only has *οἱ ἱερεῖς*. In 2 Chron. v. 5 the Hebrew text has "the Levites" in some MSS., or "the priests, the Levites"—*i. e.*, the Levitic priests. For "the priests took up the ark" (1 Kings viii. 3) the chronicler has "the Levites" (comp. Num. iii. 31, iv. 15). It is at least doubtful whether the distinction between priests and Levites is older than the Priestly Code and the days of Ezekiel. Also, the LXX. in 1 Kings viii. 4 puts "witness" for "congregation," and some critics maintain that "congregation" (*edah*) is post-exilic. (See Robertson Smith, *Enc. Brit.*, s. v. Kings). See *infra*, pp. 189, 190.

† Some psalm, like Psalm cxxxvi., was probably sung by alternate choirs, but hardly in the attitude of prostration which followed the sudden blaze of glory (2 Chron. vii. 3).

‡ The prayer "is of extreme beauty, but it belongs by its ideas to the seventh and not to the eleventh or tenth centuries B. C. (Ewald). It is probably added by a later editor who took the Deuteronomic standpoint. It is found, sometimes almost word for word, in Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii.; but there are many variations between the Hebrew and the LXX., and Kings and Chronicles. Looking only at actual facts, not at *a priori* theories, we see

After the dedicatory prayer both the outer and the inner court of the Temple reeked and swam with the blood of countless victims—victims so numerous that the great brazen altar became wholly insufficient for them.* At the close of the entire festival they departed to their homes with joy and gladness.†

But whatever the Temple might or might not be to the people, the king used it as his own chapel. Three times a year, we are told, he offered—and for all that appears, offered with his own hand without the intervention of any priest—burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar. Not only this, but he actually "burnt incense therewith upon the altar which was before the Lord,"—the very thing which was regarded as so deadly a crime in the case of King Uzziah.‡ Throughout the history of the monarchy, the priests, with scarcely any exception, seem to have been passive tools in the hands of the kings. Even under Rehoboam—much more under Ahaz and Manasseh—the sacred precincts were defiled with nameless abominations, to which, so far as we know, the priests offered no resistance.

CHAPTER XV.

THE IDEAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEMPLE.

1 KINGS vii. 13-51, viii. 12-61.

"The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."—JOHN iv. 21, 23.

FIVE long chapters of the First Book of Kings are devoted to the description of Solomon's Temple, which occupies a still larger space in the Books of Chronicles. The Temple was regarded as the permanent form of the ancient Tabernacle, which is described with lengthy and minute detail in Exodus.§ It might seem, therefore, that there must be some clear explanation of the idea which this sacred building was intended to embody. Yet it is by no means easy to ascertain what this idea

that, as Professor Driver says (*Contemporary Review*, Feb. 1890), "the Hebrew historians used some freedom in attributing speeches to historical characters." Thus, both the syntax and vocabulary, to say nothing of the thoughts of various speeches attributed to David by the chronicler, are sometimes such as mark the latest period in the history of the language, and are often quite without precedent in pre-exilic literature. Some feelings which gathered around the Temple find expression in Psalms xxiv., xxvii., xlii., lxxii., lxxxiv., cxxii., and in more extravagant and less spiritual forms throughout the Talmud. *Sotah*, f. 48; *Berachoth*, f. 59r; *Moed Qaton*, f. 26i, etc.

* The Khalif Moktader sacrificed at Mecca 40,000 camels and 50,000 sheep (Burton's *Pilgrimage*, i. 318). Solomon offered burnt offerings (*oloth*) and thank offerings (*shelamim*). No mention is made of sin offerings; and it may be doubted whether they had any separate existence till the days of the Exile.

† 1 Kings viii. 66, "went into their tents," is a reminiscence of earlier days. The chronicler (1) extends the feast to fourteen days, according to which there is an interpolation, "and seven days, even fourteen days," in verse 65; (2) he says that the sacrifices were consumed by fire from heaven.

‡ 1 Kings ix. 25. The Hebrew text seems to have been tampered with, and the allusions significantly disappear from 2 Chron. viii. 12, 13. The commentators assiduously try to clear away the difficulty.

§ The scepticism of modern critics, who doubt whether there ever was a Tabernacle in the wilderness at all, seems to be insufficiently grounded.

was, and those who have deeply studied the question have in age after age been led to widely different views.

1. Philo and Josephus,* with certain variations of detail, regard it as a symbol of the universe—the world of idea and the world of sense. Thus the seven-branched candlestick represents the seven planets; the twelve cakes of shewbread are the twelve signs of the Zodiac; the court is the earth; the sanctuary the sea; and the oracle the heavens. The theory derives no importance from its authorship. Neither Philo nor Josephus, nor the Rabbis, nor the Fathers who adopted their views,† have the least authority in such matters; and Philo, who led the way in mystical interpretation, abounds in fantasies which are ludicrously impossible, and are now universally rejected.

2. The Talmudists held that the Tabernacle was the exact copy of one in heaven,‡ and that its services reflected those of the heavenly hierarchy. This view went into the extreme of literalism, as the other did into the extreme of spiritualisation. It was based on the text, "Look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount."§ The Book of Chronicles goes so far in this direction as to say that David received from Jehovah the exact pattern of the Temple down to its minutest details, together with the entire priestly and Levitic organisation of its services. "All this," says David to Solomon, "the Lord made me to understand in writing, by His hand upon me, even all the works in the pattern."

3. Christian writers have seen in the Temple an emblem of the visible, the invisible, and the triumphant Church. Such symbolic interpretation depends on the most arbitrary combinations, and does not rise higher than an exercise of fancy. It has not the smallest exegetic importance.

4. Luther thought that the Tabernacle and Temple were emblems of human nature:—the court, the sanctuary, and the oracle corresponding to the body, the soul, and the spirit. Later writers have pushed this opinion, already sufficiently baseless, into the absurdest detail.

5. The much simpler view of Maimonides¶ who is followed by our learned Spencer, is that the Temple was simply the palace of Jehovah, with its vestibule, its audience hall, its Presence-chamber, its attendant courtiers, its throne, and its offerings of food and wine and sacrifice. The simplicity of this conception seems to be in accordance with what we know of ancient forms of worship, and it is certain that in many heathen temples the offerings of food and wine were supposed to be consumed by the god. The name "palace" is, however, only given to the Temple in one chapter (1 Chron. xxix. 1, 19); and the Hebrew, or rather the Persian,¶ word so rendered (*birah*) may also be rendered "fortress."

6. In truth we cannot be sure that the idea of the Temple remained single and definite through so many ages. It was probably a composite and

varying emblem, of which the original significance had become mingled with many later elements. It is, however, certain that many numbers and details were symbolical, and there was a deep insight and magnificent completeness in the manner in which certain truths were shadowed forth by its construction and its central service.

The book in which its symbolism is most thoroughly worked out is Bähr's *Symbolik*. He elaborates, in a simpler form, the opinion of Philo, that the Temple represented "the structure which God has erected, the house in which God lives." So far the fact cannot be disputed for, in Exod. xxix. 45 we are told that the Tabernacle is called the "House of God" because "I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and will be their God." But Bähr takes a great leap when he proceeds to explain the house of God as "the creation of heaven and earth." If his views were true *as a whole*, it would indeed be strange that they are not indicated in a single passage either of the Old or New Testaments.

The Tabernacle was called "the Tabernacle of the Testimony" because its two tables of stone were a witness of the covenant between God and man. It was also called "the Tabernacle of Meeting," by which is not meant the place where Israel assembled, but the place where God met Moses and the children of Israel.* "For there will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat," says Jehovah to Moses;† and "at the entrance of the tent of meeting I will meet with you to speak there unto thee, and there I will meet with the children of Israel."‡ Thus, in its broadest idea, the Temple brought before the soul of every thoughtful Israelite the three great beliefs, (1) that God deigned to dwell in the midst of His people; (2) that, in His infinite mercy and condescension, He admitted a reciprocity between Himself and His human children; and (3) that the most absolute expression of His will was the moral law, obedience to which was the condition of heavenly favour and earthly happiness.

"In the Porch," says Bishop Hall, "we may see the regenerate soul entering into the blessed society of the Church; in the Holy Place we may see a figure of the Communion of the true visible Church on earth; in the Holy of Holies the glories of Heaven opened to us by our true High Priest Christ Jesus, who entered once for all to make an Atonement betwixt God and man."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ARK AND THE CHERUBIM.

I KINGS vi. 23-30, viii. 6-11.

"Jehovah, thundering out of Zion, throned
Between the cherubim."

MILTON.

THE inculcation of truths so deep as the unity, the presence, and the mercy of God would alone have sufficed to give preciousness to the national sanctuary, and to justify the lavish expenditure with which it was carried to completion. But as

* Numb. xvii. 7, xviii. 2; 2 Chron. xxiv. 6; Acts vii. 44; Exod. xxix. 10, etc.; 1 Kings viii. 4; 2 Chron. viii. 13. The phrase "Tent of Meeting" in the R. V. removes the complete obscuring of the meaning involved by the A. V. rendering of "Tabernacle of the Congregation."

† Exod. xxv. 22.

‡ Exod. xxix. 42, 43.

* *Vit. Mos.*, iii.; *Antt.*, III. vi. 4, vii. 7; *B. J.*, VII. v. 5.

† *E. S.*, Origen (*Hom.*, ix.), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.*, v.), Theodoret (*Qu. xl. in Exod.*) Jerome (*Ep.* i. iv.), and others. See Kalisch, *Exodus*, p. 405.

‡ Wisdom ix. 8: "A copy of the holy tabernacle which thou didst prepare from the beginning."

§ Exod. xxv. 40, xxvii. 30; Acts vii. 44; Hebrews viii. 5.

¶ *More Nebochim*, iii. 45-49; Kalisch, *Exodus*, p. 407.

‡ The three names given to the Tabernacle are *Ohel* ("tent"), *Mishkan* ("tabernacle," "habitation," or "dwelling-place") and *Bairth* ("house"). It is undoubted that the Tabernacle followed the ordinary construction of the Oriental tent, with its two divisions, of which the interior could not be entered by strangers.

in the Tabernacle, so in the Temple, which was only a more rich and permanent structure, the numbers, the colours, and many details had a real significance. The unity of the Temple shadowed forth the unity of the Godhead; while the concrete and perfect unity, resulting from the reconciliation of unity with difference and opposition (1+2), is "the signature of the Deity." Hence, as in our English cathedrals, three was the predominant number. There were three divisions,—Porch, Holy Place, Oracle. Each main division contained three expiatory objects. Three times its width (which was 3 x 10) was the measure of its length. The number ten is also prominent in the measurements. It includes all the cardinal numbers, and, as the completion of multiplicity, is used to indicate a perfect whole. The seven pillars which supported the house, and the seven branches of the candlestick, recalled the sacredness of the seventh day hallowed by the Sabbath, by circumcision, and by the Passover. The number of the cakes of shewbread was twelve, "the signature of the people of Israel, a whole in the midst of which God resides, a body which moves after Divine laws." Of the colours predominant in the Temple, *blue*, the colour of heaven, symbolises revelation; *white* is the colour of light and innocence; *purple*, of majesty and royal power; *crimson*, of life, being the colour of fire and blood. Every gem on the high priest's pectoral had its mystic significance, and the bells and pomegranates which fringed the edge of his ephod were emblems of devotion and good works.

Two instances will suffice to indicate how deep and rich was the significance of the truths which Moses had endeavoured to engraft in the minds of his people, and to which Solomon, whether with full consciousness or not, gave permanence in the Temple.

1. Consider, first, *the Ark*.

Every step towards the Holiest was a step of deepening reverence. The Holy Land was sacred, but Jerusalem was more sacred than all the rest. The Temple was the most sacred part of the city; the Oracle was the most sacred part of the Temple; the Ark was the most sacred thing in the Oracle; yet the Ark was only sacred because of that which it contained.

And what did it contain? What was it which enshrined in itself this quintessence of all sanctitude? When we pierce to the inmost recesses of a pyramid, we find there only the ashes of a dead man, or even of an animal. Within the adytum of an Egyptian temple we might have found "an ox wallowing on purple tapestry." The Egyptians, too, had their arks, as the Greeks had the cyst of Cybele, and the *vanius* of Iacchus. What did *they* contain? At the best phallic emblems, the emblems of prolific nature. But the Ark of Jehovah contained nothing but the stone tablets on which were carved the Ten Words of the Covenant, the briefest possible form of the moral law of God. In the inmost heart of the Temple was its most inestimable treasure,—a protest against all idolatry; a protest against all polytheism, or ditheism, or atheism; a protest, too, against the formalism which the Temple itself and its services might tend to produce in its least spiritually minded worshippers. Thus the entire Temple was a glorification of the truth that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and that the one end to be produced by the fear of the Lord is obedience to His commandments. The Ark and its unseen treasure taught that no re-

ligion can be of the least value which does not result in conformity with the plain moral laws:—Be obedient; be kind; be pure; be honest; be truthful; be contented; and that this obedience can only spring from faith in the one God whom all real worshippers must worship in spirit and truth.

Obvious as this lesson might seem to be, it was entirely missed by the Jews in general. The Ark, too, was degraded into a fetish, and Jeremiah says (iii. 16) of the exiles, "They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they miss it: neither shall it be made any more" (Heb.). When a symbol has been perverted into a source of materialism and superstition, it becomes not only useless but positively dangerous. No religions have fallen so absolutely dead as those which have sunk into petty formalism. The Ark, for all its quintessential sacredness, had been suffered to fall into the hands of uncircumcised Philistines, and to be placed in their Dagon temple, to show that it was no mere idolatrous amulet. Ultimately it was carried away to Babylon, to adorn the palace of a heathen tyrant, and probably to perish by fire in his captured city. In the second Temple there was no ark. Nothing remained but the rock of Araunah's threshing-floor, on which it once had stood.

2. Consider, next, the meaning of *the Cherubim*.

(1) The infinite sanctity given to the conception of the moral law was enhanced by the introduction of these overshadowing figures. We are never told in the entire books of Scripture what was the form of these cherubim; nor is their function anywhere specially defined; nor, again, can we be at all certain of the derivation of the name. That the cherubim over the Ark were not identical with the fourfold-visaged four of Ezekiel's cherub-chariot we know, because they certainly had but one face. But we now know that among the Assyrians, Persians, Egyptians, and other nations nothing was more common than these cherubic emblems, which were introduced into their palaces and temples under the forms of winged lions, oxen, men, and eagle-headed human figures. We see also that in the Tabernacle,* and to a still greater extent in the Temple, a tacit exception to the stringency of the Second Commandment seems to have been made in favour of the component parts of these cherubic figures. If Solomon was aware (as he surely must have been) of the existence of the law, "*Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image*," he must either have laid stress on the words "*to thyself*," and have excused the brazen oxen which supported his great laver on the ground that they could not be turned into objects of worship, or he must have held, as Ezekiel apparently did, that the ox was the predominant form in the cherubic emblem.† From the Vision of Ezekiel we see that the cherubim—like the "Immortalities" (ζῶα) of the Apocalypse, which had faces of the ox, the eagle, the lion, and the man—were conceived of as "living creatures" upholding the sapphire Throne of God. They had wings,

* Kuenen's notion that the cherubim had come to the Jews through the Phœnicians from the Assyrians is quite improbable. The symbol was common throughout the East, whatever be the derivation of the word.

† Compare Ezek. i. 10, with x. 14, where "the face of an ox" is identical with "the face of a cherub." Perhaps this gave rise to the pagan calumnies that the Jews worshipped an ass. Josephus says (insincerely) that no man could tell or even conjecture the shape of the cherubim.

and the similitude of hands under their wings. They flashed to and fro like lightning in the midst of a great cloud, and an enfolding fire, and a rolling mass of amber-coloured flame. Of the form of this "changeable hieroglyphic" we need say no more. Perhaps originally suggested by the wreathing fires and rolling stormclouds, which were regarded as immediate signs of the Divine proximity, the cherubim came to be regarded as the genius of the created universe in its richest perfection and energy, at once revealing and shrouding the Presence of God.* Their eyes represent His omniscience, for "the eyes of the Lord are in every place"; their wings and straight feet represent the speed and fiery gliding of His omnipresence;† each element of their fourfold shape indicates His love, His patience, His power, His sublimity. Their wheels imply that "the dread magnificence of the unintelligent creation" is under His entire control; and, as a whole, they symbolise the dazzling beauty of the universe, alike conscious and material. They were the ideal *anima animantium*—the perfection of existence emanating from and subject to the Divine Creator whose tender mercy is over all His works. Their function, when they are first introduced in the Book of Genesis, is at once vengeful and protective; vengeful of the violated law, protective of the treasure of life.‡ They are here the Erinyes of the Dawn, revealing and avenging the works of darkness. Their "dreadful faces and fiery arms" at the gate of Eden typify guilty awakening, realised retribution, conscious alienation from God, the universe siding with His awakened anger.

(2) But when next they are mentioned, God says to Moses, "Thou shalt make a mercy-seat of pure gold, and thou shalt make two cherubim of gold at the two ends of the mercy-seat." But for their presence on the mercy-seat how terrible would have been the symbolism of the Holy of Holies—God's darkness, man's crime, a broken law! It would have represented Him who hath clouds and darkness round about Him, and dwelleth in darkness which no man can approach unto; and the Ark would only have treasured up, as a witness against man's apostasy, the shattered slabs of the words of Sinai.§ But over that Ark, and its saddening because dishallowed treasure, bent once more these mystic figures, these "cherubim of glory." They bent down as though at once to protect with outspread wings, and to regard with awful contemplation, that mystic gift of a law promulgated to all nations as their moral heritage and as the revealed will of God. These are no longer cherubim of vengeance or awakened wrath, for they stand on the *Capporeth*, the "covering," or "propitiatory" of the Ark.|| They gleamed out in the red light of the high priest's

golden brazier on the one day when human foot entered the darkness in which they were shrouded; and even by him they were but dimly discerned through the ascending wreaths of fragrant incense. But he stood before them, where, on their spreading wings, the light of the Divine presence was deemed to dwell; and with the blood of expiation he sprinkled seven times the mercy-seat over which these adoring figures leaned. The wrathful cherubim of the lost Eden had driven man from a treasure which he had forfeited; but these, though they guard the ten words of a law which man had broken, were cherubim of mercy and reconciliation. Those of Eden were armed with swords of flame; those of the Temple were reddened with the blood of forgiveness. Those typified a covenant destroyed and ended; these a covenant broken yet renewed. Those spoke of awakened wrath; these of covenanted mercy. Those kept men back from the Tree of Life; these guarded that which is a Tree of Life to them that love it.

Could the whole covenant of the law and the gospel have been symbolised more simply, yet with Diviner force? The Temple itself, with all its sacrifices, with all its service and ceremonial and all the gorgeous vestments of Aaron's vestry, served but to teach the infinite worth of simple righteousness. The heart of the Mosaic legislation was nothing so poor, so paltry, so material as the promotion of liturgical Levitism, and the pomp of ritual, and the organisation of priestly functions—as though these in themselves had any value in the sight of God. It lay in the lesson that "Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The law of Moses—the ten words which constituted the inmost preciousness of his legislation—was, alas! a violated law. For the disobedient it had no message but the wrathful menace of death. But to show that God has not abandoned His disobedient children, but would still enable them to keep that law, and to repent for its transgression, the cherubim are there. Their presence on the propitiatory was meant to reveal the glory of the gospel. The high priest, who alone saw them on the Great Day of Israel, was a type of Him who, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but in His own blood (*i.e.*, in the glory of the life outpoured for man), entered into God's presence within the veil.

(3) In the dazzling living creatures before the throne in the Revelation of St. John, we see once more these cherubim of Eden, who, having indicated at the Fall an awful warning, and represented in the Tabernacle a blessed hope, symbolise, in the last book of the Bible, a Divine fulfilment. They are there no longer with fiery swords, in wrathful aspect, in repellent silence; but, gracious and beautiful, they join in the new song of the redeemed multitude under the shadow of the Tree of Life, to which all have free access in that recovered Eden. In the Temple—glimmering through the rising fumes of incense, which were the type of accepted prayer, their golden plumage sprinkled with the blood of the atoning sacrifice—they became a type both of all creation, up to its most celestial beings, gazing in adoration on the will of God, and of all creation, in its groaning and travailing, restored through the precious blood that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. Not all, of course, of these deep meanings were present to the souls of Israel's worshippers; but the best of them might with joy see something of the things which we see when we

* Bähr, whose profound studies on symbolism command respect, says that "as standing on the highest step of created life, and uniting in themselves the most perfect created life, they are the most perfect revelation of God and the Divine" (*Symbolik*, i. 340).

† Compare the Homeric epithet *νέποδες*, and Milton's "smooth-gliding, without step."

‡ One of the Scriptural functions of the cherubim was to guard treasure (*Ezek.* xxviii. 13-15). This conception, too, was widely diffused throughout the East—

"As when the Gryphon through the wilderness
Pursues the Arimasian, who, by stealth,
Has from his watchful custody purloined
The guarded gold." MILTON.

§ Follow the Rabbis in saying that the first broken slabs were in the Ark.

|| Like the Greek images of the gods, they were made of live, the least corruptible kind of wood, and overlaid with the purest gold.

say that in these glorious figures are summed up the three chief images of all Scripture: first, the Primæval Dispensation, "*In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*"; next, in the wilderness, "*This do, and thou shalt live*"; last of all, in the Gospel Dispensation, "*Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.*"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GRADUAL GROWTH OF THE LEVITIC RITUAL.

I KINGS viii. 1-66.

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."—I SAM. xv. 22.

BEFORE we enter on the subject of the Temple worship, it is necessary to emphasise a fact which will meet us again and again in many forms as we consider the history of the Chosen People: it is the amazing ignorance which seems to have prevailed among them for centuries as to the most central and decisive elements of nearly the whole of the Mosaic law as we now read it in the Pentateuch.

1. Take, for instance, the law of a central sanctuary. It is strongly laid down, and incessantly insisted on, throughout the Book of Deuteronomy.* Yet that law does not seem to have been so much as noticed by any of the earlier prophets or judges, or by Saul, or by David. The judges and early kings offer sacrifices at any place which they regard as sacred—Bochim, Ophrah, Mizpeh, Gilgal, Bethel, Bethlehem, etc.† The rule of one place for sacrifice was not regarded for a moment by the kings of the Northern Kingdom. The transgression of it was not made a subject of complaint by Elijah, Elisha, or any of the earlier prophets. Not one of the kings, even of the most pious kings—Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham—rigidly enforced it until the reign of Josiah. The law seems to have remained an absolutely dead letter for hundreds of years. Now this would be amply accounted for if the Deuteronomic and Levitic Codes only belonged in reality to the days of Josiah and of the Exile; for in "the Book of the Covenant" (Exod. xxiv. 7), which is the most ancient part of these codes, and comprises Exod. xx.—xxviii. 33, and is briefly repeated in Exod. xxxiv. 10-28, there is not only no insistence on a central shrine, but many of the regulations would have been rendered impossible had such a shrine existed (e.g., Exod. xxi. 6, xxii. 7, 8, where "the judges" should be "God," as in the R. V.). Indeed, so far from insistence on one Temple, we expressly read (Exod. xx. 24), "An altar of earth shalt thou make Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen, *in all places where I record My name*, and I will come unto thee and bless thee."

2. Again, the Book of Leviticus lays down a singularly developed code of ritual, "extending to the minutest details of worship and of life."

* See, especially, Deut. xii. 5-19. In the later Priestly Code the centralisation of worship is not inculcated, but supposed to be already established. In the original Book of the Covenant it is not required at all.

† Judg. ii. 5, vi. 24, viii. 27, xx. 1, xxi. 2, 4; 1 Sam. vii. 9, x. 8, xi. 15, xiii. 9, xvi. 5, etc.

Yet there is scarcely the shadow of a trace of the observance of even its most reiterated and important provisions during centuries of Israelitish history. It is emphatically a priestly book; yet from the days of David down to those of Josiah, the priests, with few exceptions, are almost ignored in the national records. They took the colour of their opinions from the reigning kings, even in matters which were contrary to the whole extent and spirit of the Mosaic Code. Samuel, who was not a priest, nor even a Levite, performed every function of a priest, and of a high priest, all his life long.

3. Again, as we have seen, in spite of the positive distinctness of the Second Commandment, not only is the "calf-worship" established, with scarcely a protest, throughout the Northern Kingdom; but Solomon even ventures, without question or reproof, to place twelve oxen under his brazen sea, and to adorn the steps of his throne with golden lions.

4. Again, no ceremony was more awful, or more strikingly symbolical, in the later religion of Israel, than that of the Great Day of Atonement. It was the *only* appointed fast in the Jewish year,* a day so sacred that it acquired the name of *Yoma*, "the Day." Yet the Day of Atonement, with its arresting ceremonies and intense significance, is not so much as once mentioned outside the Levitical Code by a single prophet, or priest, or king. It is not even mentioned—which is exceedingly strange—in the post-exilic Books of Chronicles. Between the Book of Leviticus (with its supposed date of 1491 B.C.), down to the days of Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament, there is not so much as a hint of the observance of this central ceremony of the whole Levitic law! What is more perplexing is, that, in the ideal legislation of Ezekiel, where alone anything distantly resembling the Day of Atonement is alluded to (Ezek. xlv. 18-20), the time, manner, and circumstances are as absolutely different as if Ezekiel had never read the Levitic law at all. How would any prophet have dared to ignore or alter, without a word of reference or apology, a rite of Divine origin and immemorial sanctity, if he had been aware of its existence?

5. Nor is this only the case with the Day of Atonement. It seems certain that at Jerusalem there was not for centuries anything distantly resembling the due Levitic observance of the three great yearly feasts. Nehemiah, for instance, tells us in so many words that since the days of Joshua the son of Nun down to B.C. 445—perhaps for a thousand years—the Feast of Tabernacles had never been observed in the most characteristic of all its appointed rites—the dwelling in booths.†

6. Again, although there are slight allusions in some of the Prophets to "laws" and "statutes" and "commandments," their silence about, if not their absolute ignorance of, anything which resembles the Levitic legislation as a whole is a startling problem. Thus, even a late prophet like Jeremiah, alludes, without a word of reprobation, to men cutting and making themselves bald for the dead (Jer. xvi. 6; comp. xli. 5) in a way which the Levitic law (Lev. xix. 28; Deut. xiv. 1) strenuously forbids.

7. Again, as is well known, there is a fundamental difference between the three codes as to the relative position of the priests and Levites. (i) In Exod. xix. 6 all Israel is regarded as "a king-

* ἡ νηστεία (Acts xxvii. 9); Philo, *Lib. de Septenariis*.

† Neh. viii. 17.

dom of priests and an holy nation," and in Exod. xxiv. 5 the young men of the children of Israel "offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings." (ii) In Numb. iii. 44-51 the Levites are set aside for the service of the Tabernacle in place of the firstborn. But neither in "the Book of the Covenant" nor in Deuteronomy is there any *distinction* between the services of the priests and the Levites. (iii) In Deut. x. 8 every Levite may become a priest. All priestly functions are open to the Levites, and the arrangements for the Levites are wholly different from those of Numbers. (iv) But in the Priestly Code only the sons of Aaron are to be priests (Numb. vi. 22-27. xviii. 1-7; Lev. i. 5, 8). The Levites are to minister to them in more or less menial functions, and are permitted a share in the tithes, but not (as in Deut. xviii. 1) in the firstfruits. We have first identity of priests and Levites, then partial, then absolute separation.* The earliest trace of this degradation of the Levites is propounded as something quite new in Ezek. xliv. 10-16, which distinctly implies (see verse 13) that up to that time the Levites had enjoyed full priestly rites.

It must be admitted that these facts are not capable of easy explanation, nor is it strange that they have led the way to unexpected conclusions. We have to face the certainty that, for ages together, the Levitic law was not only a dead letter among the people for whom it was intended, but that its very existence does not seem to have been known. "For long periods," says Professor Robertson, "the people of Israel seem to have been as ignorant of their own religion as the people of Europe were of theirs in the Dark Ages."† But the problem, were we to pursue it into its details, is far more perplexing than can be accounted for by the very partial and misleading parallel which Professor Robertson adduces. The parallel would be nearer if, throughout the Dark Ages for a thousand years together, scarcely a single trace were to be found, even under the best popes and the most pious kings, and even in theologic and sacred literature, of so much as the existence of a New Testament, or of any observance of the most distinctive festivals and sacraments of Christianity. And this, as Professor Robertson knows, is infinitely far from being the case. It is true that an argument *ex silentio* may easily be pushed too far; but we cannot ignore it when it is so striking as this, and when it is also strengthened by so many positive and corroborative facts.

A solution of this phenomenon—which becomes most salient in the Book of Kings—is proposed by the criticism which has received the title of "The Higher Criticism," because it is historic and constructive, and rises above purely verbal elements. That solution is that the Pentateuch is not only a composite structure (which all would concede), but that it was written in very different ages, and that much of it is of very late origin. Critics of the latest school believe that it consists of three well-marked and entirely different codes of laws—namely, "the Book of the Covenant" (Exod. xx. 23—xxiii.); the "Deuteronomic Code," first brought into prominence in the reign of Josiah, and written shortly before that reign; and the "Levitical" or "Priestly Code," which

comprises most of Exodus, and nearly all Leviticus, and was not introduced till after the Exile. This would be indeed a radical conclusion, and cannot yet be regarded as having been conclusively established. But so remarkable has been the rapidity with which the opinion of religious critics has advanced on the subject, that now even the strongest opponents of this extreme view admit that *the existence of the three separate codes* has been demonstrated, although they still think that all three may belong to the Mosaic age.* It is obvious, however, that this view leaves many of the difficulties entirely untouched. Criticism has not yet spoken her last word upon the subject, but we ought to take her views into account in considering the judgments pronounced by the historian of the Kings. They were judgments which, in their details, though not as regards broad moral principles, were based on the standpoint of a later age. The views of that later age must be discounted if we have to admit that some of the ritual innovations and legal transgressions of the kings were transgressions of laws of the very existence of which they were profoundly ignorant. That they were thus ignorant of them is not only implied throughout, but appears from the direct statements of the sacred historians.†

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TEMPLE WORSHIP.

I KINGS viii. 1-11.

"Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these. . . . Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit."—JER. vii. 4, 8.

THE actual Temple building, apart from its spacious courts, was neither for worshippers nor for priests, neither for sacrifice nor for prayer. It existed only for symbolism and, at least in later days, for expiation. No prayer was offered in the sanctuary. The propitiatory was the symbol of expiation, but even after the introduction of the Day of Atonement the atoning blood was only carried into it once a year.

All the worship was in the outer court, and consisted mainly, (1) of praise and (2) of offerings. Both were prominent in the Dedication Festival.

"It is written," said our Lord, "My house shall be called a House of Prayer, but ye have made it a den of robbers." The quotation is from the later Isaiah, and represents a happy advance in spiritual religion. Among the details of the Levitic Tabernacle no mention is made of prayer, though it was symbolised both in the incense and in the sacrifices which have been called "unspoken prayers."‡ "Let my prayer be set forth as incense," says the Psalmist, "and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." In the New Testament we read that "the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense." But during the whole history of the

* See Professor Robertson, *Book by Book*, p. 56. I quote Professor Robertson as one of the ablest and most competent opponents of extreme conclusions; but it does not seem to me that he touches on some of the arguments which constitute the main strength of the case against him.

† See 2 Kings xxii. 11; Ezra ix. 1, 7; Neh. ix. 3.

‡ "Sacrificia symbolicae preces" (Outram, *De Sacrif.*, p. 108).

* Canon Cook in the *Speaker's Commentary* (Leviticus, p. 406) admits: "It is by no means unlikely there are insertions of a later date, which were written and sanctioned by the prophets and holy men who after the captivity arranged and edited the Scriptures of the Old Testament."

† *Book by Book*, p. 7.

first Temple we only hear—and that very incidentally—of *private* prayer in the Temple. Solomon's prayer was public, and combined prayer with praises and benedictions. But no fragments of Jewish liturgies have come down to us which we can with any probability refer to the days of the kings. The Psalms which most clearly belong to the Temple service are mainly services of praise.

In the mind of the people the *sacrifices* were undoubtedly the main part of the Temple ritual. This fact was specially emphasised by the scene which marked the Festival of the Dedication.

It is difficult to imagine a scene which to our unaccustomed senses would have been more revolting than the holocausts of a great Jewish Festival like that of Solomon's Dedication. As a rule the daily sacrifices, exclusively of such as might be brought by private worshippers, were the lambs slain at morning and evening. Yet Maimonides gives us the very material and unpoetic suggestion that the incense used was to obviate the effluvia of animal sacrifice. The suggestion is unworthy of the great Rabbi's ability, and is wholly incorrect; but it reminds us of the almost terrible fact that, often and often, the Temple must have been converted into one huge and abhorrent *abattoir*, swimming with the blood of slaughtered victims, and rendered intolerably repulsive by heaps of bloody skins and masses of offal. The smell of burning flesh, the swift putrescence caused by the tropic heat, the unlovely accompaniments of swarms of flies, and ministers with blood-drenched robes would have been inconceivably disagreeable to our Western training—for no one will believe the continuous miracle invented by the Rabbis, who declare that no fly was ever seen in the Temple, and no flesh ever grew corrupt.* No doubt the brazen sea and the movable caldrons were in incessant requisition, and there were provisions for vast storages of water. These could have produced a very small mitigation of the accompanying pollutions during a festival which transformed the great court of the Temple into the reeking shambles and the charnel-house of sheep and oxen "which could not be told nor numbered for multitude."

Had such spectacles been frequent, we should surely have had to say of the people of Jerusalem as Sir Monier Williams says of the ancient Hindus, "The land was saturated with blood, and people became wearied and disgusted with slaughtered sacrifices and sacrificing priests."† What infinite, and what revolting labour, must have been involved in the right burning of "the two kidneys and the fat," and the due disposition of the "inwards" of all these holocausts! The groaning brazen altar, vast as it was, failed to meet the requirements of the service, and apparently a multitude of other altars were extemporised for the occasion.

When the festival was over God appeared to Solomon in vision, as He had done at Gibeon. So far Solomon had not gravely or consciously deflected from the ideal of a theoretic king. Anything which had been worldly or mistaken in his policy—the oppression into which he had been led, the heathen alliances which he had formed, his

crowded harem, his evident fondness for material splendour which carried with it the peril of selfish pride—were only signs of partial knowledge and human frailty. His heart was still, on the whole, right with God. He was once more assured in nightly vision that his prayer and supplication were accepted. The promise was renewed that if he would walk in integrity and uprightness his throne should be established for ever; but that if he or his children swerved into apostasy Israel should be driven into exile, and, as a warning to all lands, "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."

Here, then we are brought face to face with problems which arise from the whole system of worship in the Old Dispensation. Whatever it was, to whatever extent it was really carried out and was not merely theoretical, at whatever date its separate elements originated, and however clear it is that it has utterly passed away, there must have been certain ideas underlying it which are worthy of our study.

1. Of the element of praise, supported by music, we need say but little. It is a natural mode of expressing the joy and gratitude which fill the heart of man in contemplating the manifold mercies of God. For this reason the pages of Scripture ring with religious music from the earliest to the latest age. We are told in the Chronicles that triumphant praise was largely introduced into the great festival services, and that the Temple possessed a great organisation for vocal and orchestral music. David was not only a poet, but an inventor of musical instruments.* Fifteen musical instruments are mentioned in the Bible, and five of them in the Pentateuch. Most important among them are cymbals, flutes, silver trumpets, rams' horns, the harp (*Kinnor*) and the ten-stringed lute (*Nevel*).† The remark of Josephus that Solomon provided 40,000 harps and lutes and 200,000 silver trumpets is marked by that disease of exaggeration which seems to infect the mind of all later Jewish writers when they look back with yearning to the vanished glories of their past. There can, however, be no doubt that the orchestra was amply supplied, and that there was a very numerous and well-trained choir.‡ We read in the Psalms and elsewhere of tunes which they were trained to sing. Such tunes were "The Well," and "The Bow," and "The Gazelle of the morning," and "All my fresh springs shall be in Thee," and "Die for the son" (*Muth-labben*).§ In the second Temple female singers were admitted;|| in Herod's Temple Levite choir-boys took their place.¶ The singing was often antiphonal. Some of the music still used in the syn-

* Amos vi. 5; 1 Chron. xxiii. 5.

† Edersheim, *The Temple and its Services*, p. 54.

‡ The chronicler says that there were 38,000 Levites, of which 24,000 were "to oversee the work of the house of the Lord; and 6000 were officers and judges, and 4000 door-keepers; and 4000 praised the Lord with the instruments which I made," said David, "to praise therewith."

§ Some of these titles of the Psalms are, however, very uncertain. Gesenius thinks that this last title (Psalm ix.) means that the Psalm "was to be sung by boys with virgins' voices." It is, to say the least, a very curious coincidence, that in 1 Chron. xxv. 4 the names of the sons of Heman, Giddalti and Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, Mahazioth, mean (omitting the strange Joshbekashah, for which the LXX. Cod. Alex. reads Σξ. βακαίρων), consecutively, "I have given | great and high help: | I have spoken | visions | in abundance." Had the names any reference to tunes?

|| Ezra ii. 65; Neh. vi. 67; Psalm lxxxvii. 7.

¶ Of these, perhaps, were "the children" who shouted their hosannas to Jesus in the Temple (Matt. xxi. 15).

* *Yoma*, f. 21, a.

† On vast ancient holocausts, see Athen., *Deipnos.* i. 5; Diod. Sic. xi. 72; Porph., *De abst.*, ii. 60; Suet., *Culig.*, 14; Sen. *De Benef.*, iii. 27; Ammian. Marcell., xxii. 4, xxv. 4; and other passages collected by the diligence of commentators. See, too, Josephus (*B. J.*, VI. ix. 3) who reckons that at a passover in Nero's time 256,000 sacrifices were offered.

agogue must date from these times, and there is no reason to doubt that in the so-called Gregorian *tones* we have preserved to us a close approximation to the ancient hymnody of the Temple. This element of ancient worship calls for no remark. It is a religious instinct to use music in the service of God; and perhaps the imagination of St. John in the Revelation, when he describes the rapture of the heavenly host pouring forth the chant "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," was coloured by reminiscences of gorgeous functions in which he had taken part on the "Mountain of the House."

2. When we proceed to speak of *the Priesthood* we are met by difficulties, to which we have already alluded, as to the date of the varying regulations respecting it. "It would be difficult," says Dr. Edersheim, "to conceive arrangements more thoroughly or consistently opposed to what are commonly called 'priestly pretensions' than those of the Old Testament."* According to the true ideal, Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests and an holy nation";† but the institution of *ministering* priests was of course a necessity, and the Jewish Priesthood, which is now utterly abrogated, was or gradually became, representative. Representatively they had to mediate between God and Israel, and typically to symbolise the "holiness," *i.e.*, the consecration of the Chosen People. Hence they were required to be free from every bodily blemish. It was regarded as a deadly offence for any one of them to officiate without scrupulous safeguard against every ceremonial defilement, and they were specially adorned and anointed for their office. They were an extremely numerous body, and from the days of David are said to have been divided into twenty-four courses. They were assisted by an army of attendant Levites, also divided into twenty-four courses, who acted as the cleansers and keepers of the Temple. But the distinction of priests and Levites does not seem to be older than "the Priestly Code," and criticism has all but demonstrated that the sections of the Pentateuch known by that name belong, in their present form, not to the age of Moses, but to the age of the successors of Ezekiel. The elaborate priestly and Levitic arrangements ascribed to the days of Aaron by the chronicler, who wrote six hundred years after David's day, are unknown to the writers of the Book of Kings.

In daily life they wore no distinctive dress. In the Temple service, all the year round, their vestments were of the simplest. They were of white *byssus* to typify innocence,‡ and four in number to indicate completeness. They consisted of a turban, breeches, and seamless coat of white linen, together with a girdle, symbolic of zeal and activity, which was assumed during actual ministrations.§ The only magnificent vestments were those worn for a few hours by the high priest once a year on the Great Day of Atonement. These "golden vestments" were eight in number. To the ordinary robes were added the robe of the ephod (*Meil*) of dark blue, with seventy-two golden bells, and pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet; a jewelled pectoral containing the Urim and Thummim; the mitre; and the golden frontlet (*Ziz*), with its inscription of "Holiness to the Lord." The ideal type was fulfilled, and the poor shadows abolished for ever, by Him of

whom it is said, "Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

The priests were poor; they were very often entirely unlettered; they seem to have had for many centuries but little influence on the moral and spiritual life of the people. Hardly any good is recorded of them as a body throughout the four hundred and ten years during which the first Temple stood, as very little good had been recorded of them in the earlier ages, and not much in the ages which were to follow. We read of scarcely a single moral protest or spiritual awakening which had its origin in the priestly body. Their temptation was to be absorbed in their elaborate ceremonials. As these differed but little from the ritual functions of surrounding heathendom they seem to have relapsed into apostasy with shameful readiness, and to have submitted without opposition to the idolatrous aberrations of king after king, even to the extent of admitting the most monstrous idols and the most abhorrent pollutions into the sacred precincts of the Temple, which it was their work to guard. When a prophet arose out of their own supine and torpid ranks he invariably counted his brethren amongst his deadliest antagonists. They ridiculed him as they ridiculed Isaiah; they smote him on the cheek as they smote Jeremiah. The only thing which roused them was the spirit of revolt against their vapid ceremonialism, and their abject obedience to kings. The Presbyterate could have no worse ideal, and could follow no more pernicious example, than that of the Jewish priesthood. The days of their most rigid ritualism were the days also of their most desperate moral blindness. The crimes of their order culminated when they combined, as one man, under their high priest Caiaphas and their sagan Annas* to reject Christ for Barabbas, and to hand over to the Gentiles for crucifixion the Messiah of their nation, the Lord of Life.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TEMPLE SACRIFICES.

I KINGS viii. 62-66, ix. 25.

"I have chosen this house to Myself for an house of sacrifice."—2 Chron. vii. 12.

"Gifts and sacrifices, that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect, being only carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation."—Heb. ix. 9, 10.

THE whole sacrificial system with which our thoughts of Judaism are perhaps erroneously, and much too exclusively identified, furnishes us with many problems.

Whether it was originally of Divine origin, or whether it was only an instinctive expression, now of the gratitude, and now of the guilt and fear, of the human heart, we are not told. Nor is the basal idea on which it was founded ever explained to us. Were the ideas of "atonement" or propitiation (*Kippurim*) really connected with those of substitution and vicarious punishment? Or was the main conception that of *self-sacrifice*, which was certainly most prominent in the burnt offerings? Doubtless the views alike of priests and worshippers were to a great extent indefinite. We are not told what led Cain and Abel to present

* On this sagan, the later title for the second priest," see 2 Kings xxv. 18; Jer. lii. 24.

* *The Temple and its Services*, p. 67.

† Exod. xix. 5, 6.

‡ Rev. xv. 6.

§ Comp. Rev. i. 13, xv. 6.

their sacrifices to God; nor did Moses—if he were its founder—furnish any theories to explain the elaborate system laid down in the book of Leviticus. The large majority of the Jews probably sacrificed simply because to do so had become a part of their religious observances, and because in doing so they believed themselves to be obeying a Divine command. Others, doubtless, had as many divergent theories as Christians have when they attempt to explain the Atonement. The "substitution" theory of the "sin offering" finds little or no support from the Old Testament; not only is it never stated, but there is not a single clear allusion to it. It is emphatically asserted by later Jewish authorities, such as Rashi, Aben Ezra, Moses ben-Nachman, and Maimonides, and is enshrined in the Jewish liturgy. Yet Dr. Ederheim writes: "The common idea that the burning, either of part or the whole of the sacrifice, pointed to its destruction, and symbolised the wrath of God and the punishment due to sin, does not seem to accord with the statements of Scripture."^{*}

Sacrifices were of two kinds, bloody (*Zebach*; LXX., *θυσία*), or unbloody (*minchah*, *korban*; LXX., *δῶρον*, *προσφορά*). The latter were oblations. Such were the cakes of shewbread, the meal and drink offerings, the first sheaf at Passover, the two loaves at Pentecost. In almost every instance the *minchah* accompanied the offering of a sacrificial victim.

The two general rules about all victims for sacrifice were, (1) that they should be without blemish and without spot, as types of perfectness; and (2) that every sacrifice should be salted with salt, as an antiseptic, and therefore a type of incorruption.†

Sacrificial victims could only be chosen from oxen, sheep, goats, turtle doves, and young pigeons—the latter being the offering of the poor who could not afford the costlier victims.

Sacrifices were also divided generally (1) into free, or obligatory; (2) public, or private; and (3) most holy or less holy, of which the latter were slain at the north and the former at the east side of the altar.‡ The offerer, according to the Rabbis, had to do five things—to lay on hands, slay, skin, dissect, and wash the inwards. The priest had also to do five things at the altar itself—to catch the blood, sprinkle it, light the fire, bring up the pieces, and complete the sacrifices.

Sacrifices are chiefly dwelt upon in the Priestly Code; but nowhere in the Old Testament is their significance formally explained, nor for many centuries was the Levitic ritual much regarded.§

The sacrifices commanded in the Pentateuch fall under four heads. (1) The burnt offering (*Olah*, *Kali*),¶ which typified complete self-dedication, and which even the heathen might offer; (2) the sin offering (*Chattath*),‡ which made

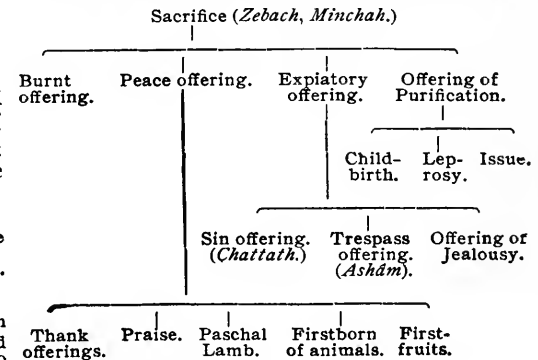
atonement for the offender; (3) the trespass offering (*Asham*),* which atones for some special offence, whether doubtful or certain, committed through ignorance; and (4) the thank offering, eucharistic peace offering (*Shelem*),† or "offering of completion," which followed the other sacrifices, and of which the flesh was eaten by the priest and the worshippers.‡

The oldest practice seems only to have known of burnt offerings and thank offerings, and the former seem only to have been offered at great sacrificial feasts. Even in Deuteronomy a common phrase for sacrifices is "eating before the Lord," which is almost ignored in the Priestly Code. Of the sin offering, which in that code has acquired such enormous importance, there is scarcely a trace—unless Hosea iv. 8 be one, which is doubtful—before Ezekiel, in whom the *Asham* and *Chattath* occur in place of the old pecuniary fines (2 Kings xii. 16). Originally sacrifice was a glad meal, and even in the oldest part of the code (Lev. xviii—xxvi.) sacrifices are comprised under the *Olam* and *Zebach*. The turning-point of the history of the sacrificial system is Josiah's reformation, of which the Priestly Code is the matured result.§

It is easy to see that sacrifices in general were eucharistic, dedicatory, and expiatory.

The eucharistic sacrifices (the meal and peace offerings) and the burnt offerings, which indicated the entire sacrifice of self, were the offerings of those who were in communion with God. They were recognitions of His absolute supremacy. The sin and trespass offerings were intended to recover a lost communion with God, and thus the sacrifices were, or ultimately came to be, the expression of the great ideas of thanksgiving, of self-dedication, and of propitiation. But the Israelites, "while they seem always to have retained the idea of propitiation and of eucharistic offering, constantly ignored the self-dedication, which is the link between the two, and which the regular burnt offering should have impressed upon them as their daily thought and duty." Had they kept this in view they would have been saved from the superstitions and degeneracies which made their use of the sacrificial system a curse and not a blessing. The expiatory conception, which was probably the latest of the

Leviticus, part ii., p. 272). The general scheme of sacrifices as they now stand in the Pentateuch, is as follows:



* LXX., *πλημμελεια*.

† LXX., *θυσία σωτηριον*.

‡ The phrase "wave offering" indicates the ceremony used by the priests in presenting peace offerings to God.

§ For the full development of these views, see Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*.

* He refers to Wünsche, *Die Leiden des Messias*.

† Mark ix. 49.

‡ Lev. vi. 17, vii. 1, xiv. 13. On this whole subject see Ederheim, pp. 79-111.

§ See Judg. vi. 19-21; 1 Sam. ii. 13, xiv. 35; 1 Kings xix. 21; 2 Kings v. 17.

¶ LXX., *ὀλοκαύτωμα*.

‡ LXX., *περι ἁμαρτίας*. *Chattath* and *Asham* both imply guilt, debt, sin. "The trespass offering affected rights of property, but no precise definition of the two kinds of expiatory offerings can be based upon the statements made in the Pentateuch in respect to them. Perhaps they cannot all be referred to the same time and to one author; for they prescribe both sin and trespass offerings in cases of Levitical impurity, and also for moral offences. All Levites attempting to establish palpable distinctions between them must inevitably fail" (Kalisch,

three, expelled the others, and was perverted into the notion that God was a God of wrath, whose fury could be averted by gifts and His favour won by bribes. There was this truth in the notion of propitiation—that God hates, and is alienated by, and will punish, sin; and yet that in His mercy He has provided an Atonement for us. But in trying to imagine *how the sacrifice affected God*, the Israelites lost sight of the truth that *this is an inexplicable mystery*, and that all which we can know is the effect which *it can produce on the souls of man*. If they had interpreted the sacrifices as a whole to mean this only—that man is guilty and that God is merciful; and that though man's guilt separates him from God, re-union with him can be gained by confession, penitence, and self-sacrifice, by virtue of an Atonement which he had revealed and would accept—then the effect of them would have been spiritually wholesome and ennobling. But when they came to think that sacrifices were presents to God, which might be put in the place of amendment and moral obedience, and that the punishment due to their offences might be thus mechanically diverted upon the heads of innocent victims, then the sacrificial system was rendered not only nugatory but pernicious. Nor have Christians been exempt from a similar corruption of the doctrine of the Atonement. In treating it as vicarious and expiatory they have forgotten that it is unavailing unless it be also representative. In looking upon it as the atonement for sin they have overlooked that there can be no such atonement unless it be accompanied by redemption from sin. They have tacitly and practically acted on the notion, which in the days of St. Paul some even avowed, that “we may continue in sin that grace may abound.” But in the great work of redemption the will of man cannot be otiose. He must himself die with Christ. As Christ was sacrificed for him, he, too, must offer his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. “Without the sin offering of the Cross,” says Bishop Barry, “our burnt offering (of self-dedication) would be impossible; so also without the burnt offering the sin offering will, to us, be unavailing.”*

Many of the crudities, and even horrors, which, alike in Jewish and Christian times, have been mixed up with the idea of bloody sacrifices, would have been removed if more attention had been paid to the prominence and real significance of *blood* in the entire ritual. As taught by some revivalists the doctrine of the blood adds the most revolting touches to theories which assimilate God to Moloch; but the true significance of the phrase and of the symbol elevates the entire doctrine of sacrifice into a purer and more spiritual atmosphere.

The central significance of the whole doctrine lies in the ancient opinion that “the blood” of the sacrifice was “its life.” This was why an expiatory power was ascribed to the blood. There was certainly no transfer of guilt to the animal, for *its blood remained clean and cleansing*. Nor was the animal supposed to undergo the transgressor's punishment; first, because this is nowhere stated, and next, because had that been the case, fine flour would certainly not have been permitted (as it was) as a sin offering.† Moreover, no wilful offence, no offence “with uplifted hand,” i.e.,

with evil premeditation, *could* be atoned for either by sin or trespass offerings;—though certainly so wide a latitude was given to the notion of sin as an *involuntary* error as to tend to break down the notion of moral responsibility. The sin offering was further offered for some purely accidental and ceremonial offences, which could not involve any real consciousness of guilt.* The “blood of the covenant” (Exod. xxiv. 4-8) was not of the *sin* offering, but of peace and burnt offerings; and though, as Canon Cook says, we read of blood in paganism as a propitiation to a hostile demon, “we seem to seek in vain for an instance in which the blood, as a natural symbol for the soul, was offered as an atoning sacrifice.”† “The atoning virtue of the blood lies not in its material substance, but in the life of which it is the vehicle,” says Bishop Westcott. “The blood always includes the thought of the life preserved and active beyond death. It is not simply the price by which the redeemed were purchased, but the power by which they were quickened so as to be capable of belonging to God.” “To drink the blood of Christ,” says Clement of Alexandria, “is to partake of the Lord's incorruption.”‡

Besides the points to which we have alluded, there is a further difficulty created by the singular silence *respecting sin offerings of any kind*, except in that part of the Old Testament which has recently acquired the name of the Priestly Code.§

The word *Chattath*, in the sense of sin offering, occurs in Exod. xxix., xxx., and many times in Leviticus and Numbers, and six times in Ezekiel. Otherwise in the Old Testament it is barely mentioned, except in the post-exilic Books of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxix. 24) and Ezra (viii. 25).¶ It is not mentioned in any other historic book; nor in any prophet except Ezekiel. Again as we have seen, the Day of Atonement leaves not a trace in any of the earlier historic records of Scripture, and is found only in the authorities above mentioned. Through all the rest of Scripture the scapegoat is unmentioned, and Azazel is ignored. Dr. Kalisch goes so far as to say that “there is conclusive evidence to prove that the Day of Atonement was instituted considerably more than a thousand years after the death of Moses and Aaron.” For even in Ezekiel, who wrote B. C. 574, there is no Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month, but on the first and seventh of the first month (Abib, Nisan). He thinks it utterly impossible that, had it existed in his time, Ezekiel could have blotted out the holiest day of the year, and substituted two of his own

* See Kuenen, *Rel. of Israel*, ii. pp. 250-76.

† *Speaker's Commentary*, Leviticus, p. 508. In Lev. xvii. 11.—“For the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I have ordained it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for the blood it is which makes atonement by means of the soul”—Kurtz points out that the blood is simply *chosen as a symbol*, and the superstition that there is any atoning virtue in the blood itself is excluded.

‡ *Pad.*, ii. 2, § 10.

§ The Priestly Code is that part of the Pentateuch which is occupied with public worship and the function of priests—viz., most of Leviticus; Exod. xxv.-xl.; Numb. i.-x., xv.-xx., xxv.-xxvii. (with inconsiderable exceptions).

¶ In Psalm xl. 6, “Sin offering hast Thou not required.” The Psalm is perhaps of the age of Jeremiah.

‡ He argues that even in Chronicles it is not mentioned; and that there was no curtain (*Parocheth*) before the Holiest in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings vi. 31, 32. Comp. Ezek. xli. 23, 24; 1 Kings viii. 8). He considers that 2 Chron. iii. 14 (the only place in the Old Testament where *Parocheth* occurs except in the P. C.) cannot overthrow 1 Kings vi. 21, which speaks only of chains of gold between the Holy and the Holiest. (There was a curtain in Herod's Temple (Matt. xxvii. 51; Heb. ix. 3). But if there was no *Parocheth* in Solomon's Temple, the rule of Lev. xvi. 2, 12, 13 could not have been observed.

* See Bishop Barry's article on Sacrifice in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, to which, in this paragraph, I am much indebted.

† Lev. v. 11-13.

arbitrary choice.* The rites, moreover, which he describes differ wholly from those laid down in Leviticus. Even in Nehemiah there is no notice of the day of Atonement, though a day was observed on the twenty-fourth of the month. Hence this learned writer infers that even in B. C. 440 the Great Day of Atonement was not yet recognised, and that the pagan element of sending the scape-goat to Azazel, the demon of the wilderness, proves the late date of the ceremony.

It is interesting to observe how utterly the sacrificial priestly system, in the abuses which not only became involved in it, but seemed to be almost inseparable from it, is condemned by the loftier spiritual intuition which belongs to phases of revelation higher than the external and the typical.

Thus in the Old Testament no series of inspired utterances is more interesting, more eloquent, more impassioned and ennobling, than those which insist upon the utter nullity of all sacrifices in themselves, and their absolute insignificance in comparison with the lightest element of the moral law. On this subject the Prophets and the Psalmists use language so sweeping and exceptionless as almost to repudiate the desirability of sacrifices altogether. They speak of them with a depreciation akin to scorn. It may be doubted whether they had the Mosaic system with all its details, as we know it, before them. They do not enter into those final elaborations which it assumed, and not one of them so much as alludes to any service which resembles the powerfully symbolic ceremonial of the Great Day of Atonement. But they speak of the ceremonial law in such fragments and aspects of it as were known to them. They deal with it as priests practised it, and as priests taught—if they ever taught anything—respecting it. They speak of it as it presented itself to the minds of the people around them, with whom it had become rather a substitute for moral efforts and an obstacle in the path of righteousness, than an aid to true religion. And this is what they say:—

"Hath the Lord as great delight in sacrifice," asks the indignant SAMUEL, "as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."†

"I hate, I despise your feasts," says Jehovah by AMOS, "and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer Me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Turn thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."‡

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord," asks MICAH, "and bow myself before the most high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"§

HOSEA again in a message of Jehovah, twice

* This caused immense perplexity to the Rabbis. *Shab-bath*, xiii. 2; *Chagigah*, xiii. 1; *Menachoth*, xlv. 1.

† 1 Sam. xv. 22.

‡ Amos v. 21-23.

§ Micah vi. 6-8. Some suppose that the words are attributed to Balaam (see verse 5).

quoted on different occasions by our Lord, says: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."*

ISAIAH also, in the word of the Lord, gives burning expression to the same conviction: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of lambs, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to trample My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth: they are a cumbrance unto Me; I am weary to bear them. . . . Wash you, make you clean!"†

The language of JEREMIAH's message is even more startling: "*I spake not unto your fathers*, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey My voice." And again—in the version of the LXX., given in the margin of the Revised Version for the unintelligible rendering of the Authorised Version—he asks: "Why hath the beloved wrought abomination in My house? Shall vows and holy flesh take away from thee thy wickedness, or shalt thou escape by these?"‡

Jeremiah, is, in fact the most anti-ritualistic of the prophets. So far from having hid and saved the Ark, he regarded it as entirely obsolete (iii. 16). He cares only for the spiritual covenant written on the heart, and very little, if at all, for Temple services and Levitic scrupulosities (vii. 4-15, xxxi. 31-34).§

THE PSALMISTS are no less clear and emphatic in putting sacrifices nowhere in comparison with righteousness:—

"I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices;
Nor for thy burnt offerings which are continually before Me.

I will take no bullock out of thine house,
Nor he-goats out of thy folds.

Will I eat the flesh of bulls,
Or drink the blood of goats?
Offer unto God thanksgiving;
And pay thy vows unto the Most High."¶

And again:—

"For Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it Thee:
Thou delightest not in burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."¶¶

And again:—

"Sacrifice and offering Thou hast no delight in;
Mine ears hast thou opened:
Burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required."***

* Hosea vi. 6.

† Isa. i. 11-16.

‡ Jer. vii. 22, xi. 15.

§ Jer. xxxiii. 14-26 seems to speak in a different tone, but is probably an interpolation. It is not found in the LXX.

¶ Psalm l. 8-14.

¶¶ Psalm li. 16, 17. It is difficult to believe that the two

last verses of the Psalm are not a later addition.

*** Psalm xl. 6.

And again:—

"To do justice and judgment
Is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."*

And again:—

"I will praise the name of God with a song,
And magnify it with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the Lord
Rather than a bullock that hath horns and
hoofs."†

Surely the most careless and conventional reader cannot fail to see that there is a wide difference between the standpoint of the prophets, which is so purely spiritual, and that of the writers and redactors of the Priestly Code, whose whole interest centred in the sacrificial and ceremonial observances.

Nor is the intrinsic nullity of the sacrificial system less distinctly pointed out in the New Testament. The better-instructed Jews, enlightened by Christ's teaching, could give emphatic testimony to the immeasurable superiority of the moral to the ceremonial. The candid scribe, hearing from Christ's lips the two great commandments, answers, "Of a truth, Master, Thou hast well said that He is one; and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, . . . and to love his neighbour as himself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."‡

And our Lord quoted Hosea with the emphatic commendation, "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."§ And on another occasion: "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."||

The presenting of our bodies, says St. Paul, as a living sacrifice is our reasonable service; and St. Peter calls all Christians a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifice.¶

"It is impossible," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins;" and he speaks of the priests "daily offering the same sacrifice, the which can never take away sins."**

And again:—

"To do good and to distribute forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."††

The wisest fathers of Jewish thought in the post-exilic epoch held the same views. Thus the son of Sirach says: "He that keepeth the law bringeth offerings enough."‡‡ And Philo, echoing an opinion common among the best heathen moralists from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius,§§ writes, "The mind, when without blemish, is itself the most holy sacrifice, being entirely and in all respects pleasing to God."|||

And what is very remarkable, modern Judaism now emphasises its belief that "neither sacrifices nor a Levitical system belong to the essence of the Old Testament."¶¶ Such was the view of the ancient Essenes, no less than of Maimonides or

Abarbanel. Modern Rabbis even go so far as to argue that the whole system of Levitical sacrifice was an alien element, introduced into Judaism from without, tolerated indeed by Moses, but only as a concession to the immaturity of his people and their hardness of heart.*

Such, too, was the opinion of the ancient Fathers—the author of the Epistle of Barnabas, of Justin Martyr, Origen, Tertullian, Jerome, Chrysostom, Epiphanius, Cyril, and Theodoret, who are followed by such Roman Catholic theologians as Petavius and Bellarmine.†

This at any rate is certain:—that the Judaic system is not only abrogated, but rendered impossible. Whatever were its functions, God has stamped with absolute disapproval any attempt to continue them. They are utterly annulled and obliterated for ever.

"I am come to repeal the sacrifices." Such is the *ἄγραφον δόγμα* ascribed to Christ; "and unless ye desist from sacrificing, the wrath of God will not desist from you."‡ The argument of St. Paul in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, show us why this was inevitable; and they were but following the initiative of Christ and the teaching of His Spirit. It is a mistake to imagine that our Lord merely repudiated the inane pettinesses of Pharisaic formalism. He went much further. There is not the slightest trace that He personally observed the requirements of the ceremonial law. It is certain that He broke them when He touched the leper and the dead youth's bier. The law insisted on the centralisation of worship, but Jesus said, "The day cometh, and now is, when neither in Jerusalem, nor yet in this mountain, shall men worship the Father. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The law insisted, with extreme emphasis, on the burdensome distinctions between clean and unclean meats. Jesus said that it is not that which cometh from without, but that which cometh from within which defileth a man, and this He said "making all meats clean."§ St. Paul, when the types of Moaism had been for ever fulfilled in Christ, and the antitype had thus become obsolete and pernicious, went further still. Taking circumcision, the most ancient and most distinctive rite of the Old Dispensation, he called it "concision" or mere mutilation, and said thrice over, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but 'a new creature'"; "but faith working by love," "but the keeping of the commandment of God." The whole system of Judaism was local, was external, was minute, was inferior, was transient, was a concession to infirmity, was a yoke of bondage: the whole system of Christianity is universal, is spiritual, is simple, is unsacrificial, is unsacerdotal, is perfect freedom. Judaism was a religion of a temple, of sacrifices, of a sacrificial priesthood: Christianity is a religion in which the Spirit of God

"Doth prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure."

It is a religion in which there is no more sacrifice for sin, because the one perfect and sufficient sac-

* Prov. xxi. 3.

† Psalm lxxix. 30, 31.

‡ Mark xii. 32, 33. So in the Talmud; "Acts of justice are more meritorious than all sacrifices" (*Succoth*, lxxix. 2).

§ Matt. ix. 13.

¶ Matt. xii. 7.

‡ Rom. xii. 1; 1 Peter ii. 5.

** Heb. x. 4, 11.

†† Heb. xiii. 16.

‡‡ Eccles. xxxv. 1-15.

§§ Comp. Ov., *Trist.*, ii. 1, 75; Ep. xx. 81; Persius, ii. 45; Varro, *ap. Arnob.*, c. *Natt.*, vii. 1. "Dii veri neque desiderant ea, neque deprecant."

¶¶ Philo, *De Victimis*, 5.

¶¶ A. Geiger, *Judenthum und seine Geschichte*. Sect. 5.

* Vajikra, R. 22 and 34 b. They got over Jer. xxxiii. 18 (in Yalkuth, on the passage) by saying "He that doeth repentance it is counted to him as if he offered all the sacrifices of the land." They held that the place of sacrifices was taken by prayer, penitence and good works. See Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah*, i. 275.

† See Spencer, *De Legg. Ritual.*, iii.; *Dissert.*, ii., chap. 1.

‡ Evang. Ebion, *ap. Epiph.*, *Hær.*, xxx. 16.

§ Mark vii. 19.

riſce, oblation and ſatisfaction, has been conſummated for ever. It is a religion in which there is no altar but the *Cross*; in which there is no prieſt but *Chriſt*, except ſo far as *every* Chriſtian is by metaphor a prieſt to offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices which alone are acceptable to God.

The Temple of Solomon laſted only four centuries, and they were for the moſt part years of diſhonour, diſgrace, and decadence.* Solomon was ſcarcely in his grave before it was plundered by Shishak. During its four centuries of exiſtence it was again ſtripped of its precious poſſeſſions at leaſt ſix times, ſometimes by foreign oppreſſors, ſometimes by diſtreſſed kings. It was deſpoiled of its treaſure by Aſa, by Jehoahſh of Judah, by Jehoahſh of Iſrael, by Ahaz, by Hezekiah, and laſtly by Nebuchadnezzar. After ſuch plunderings it muſt have completely loſt its priſtine ſplendour. But the plunder of its treaſures was nothing to the pollutions of its ſanctity. They began as early as the reigns of Rehoboam and Abijah. Ahaz gave it a Syrian altar, Manasseh ſtained it with impurities, and Ezekiel in its ſecret chambers ſurveyed “the dark idolatries of alienated Judah.”

And in the days when Judaism moſt prized itſelf on ritual faithfulness, the Lord of the Temple was inſulted in the Temple of the Lord, and its courts were turned by greedy prieſts and Sadducees into a cowshed, and a dovecot, and a fair, and a uſurer’s mart, and a robber’s den.

From the firſt the centraliſation of worſhip in the Temple muſt have been accompanied by the danger of diſſociating religious life from its daily ſocial environments. The multitudes who lived in remote country places would no longer be able to join in forms of worſhip which had been carried on at local ſhrines. Judaism, as the prophets ſo often complain, tended to become too much a matter of officialiſm and function, of rubric and technique, which always tend to ſubſtitute external ſervice for true devotion, and to leave the ſhell of religion without its ſoul.†

Even when it had been purified by Joſiah’s reformation, the Temple proved to be a ſource of danger and falſe ſecurity. It was regarded as a ſort of Palladium. The formalists began to talk and act as though it furniſhed a mechanical protection, and gave them license to tranſgreſs the moral law. Jeremiah had ſternly to warn his countrymen againſt this truſt in an idle formalism. “Amend your ways and your doings,” he ſaid. “Behold, ye truſt in lying words which cannot profit. Will ye ſteal, murder, and commit adultery, and ſwear falſely, and burn incenſe unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye have not known, and come and ſtand before Me in this houſe, which is called by My name, and ſay, We are delivered; that ye may do all theſe abominations?”

The Temple of Solomon was defaced and deſtroyed and polluted by the Babylonians, but not until it had been polluted by the Jews themſelves with the blood of prophets, by idolatries, by chambers of unclean imagery. It was rebuilt by a poor band of diſheartened exiles to be again polluted by Antiochus Epiphaneſ, and ultimately to become the headquarters of a narrow, arrogant,

and intriguing Phariſaiſm. It was rebuilt *more* by Herod, the brutal Idumean uſurper, and its ſplendour inſpired ſuch paſſionate enthuſiaſm that when it was wrapped in flames by Titus, it wiſſeſſed the carnage of thouſands of mad-dened and deſpairing combatants.

“As ’mid the cedar courts and gates of gold
The trampled ranks in miry carnage rolled
To ſave their Temple every hand eſſayed,
And with cold fingers graſp’d the feeble blade;
Through their torn veins reviving fury ran
And life’s laſt anger warm’d the dying man.”

Yet that laſt Temple had been defiled by a worſe crime than the other two. It had wiſſeſſed the prieſtly idols and the prieſtly machinations which ended in the murder of the Son of God. From the Temple ſprang little or nothing of ſpiritual importance. Intended to teach the ſupremacy of righteouſneſs, it became the ſtronghold of mere ritual. For the development of true holineſs, as apart from ceremonial ſcrupuloſity, its official protectors rendered it valueleſs.

We are not ſurpriſed that Chriſtianity know no temple but the hearts of all who love the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity and truth; and that the characteristic of the New Jeruſalem, which deſcends out of heaven like a bride adorned for her huſband, is:—

“And I ſaw no temple therein.”*

Abundantly was the menace fulfilled in which Jehovah warned Solomon after the Feaſt of Dedi- cation that if Iſrael ſwerved into immorality and idolatry, that houſe ſhould be an awful warning—that its bleſſing ſhould be exchanged into a curſe, and that every one who paſſed by it ſhould be aſtoniſhed and ſhould hiſs.†

CHAPTER XX.

SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY.

I KINGS x. 1-29.

“O Luxury! thou curſ’d by Heaven’s decree!
How do thy potions with inſidious joy
Diffuſe their pleaſures only to deſtroy!
Kingdoms by thee to ſickly greatness grown
Boaſt of a florid vigour not their own.”
GOLDSMITH, *Deserted Village*.

“The Queen of the South ſhall riſe up in judgment againſt this generation, and ſhall condemn it. For ſhe came from the uttermoſt parts of the earth to hear the wiſdom of Solomon.”—MATT. xii. 42.

THE history of the Temple is the event which gives ſupreme religious importance to the reign of one who became in other reſpects a worldly and irreligious king. It is for this reaſon that I have dwelt upon its ſignificance, and on the many intereſting queſtions which its worſhip naturally ſuggeſts. Solomon gave an impuſe to outward ſervice, not to ſpiritual life. His religion was mainly that form of externaliſm which roſe but little above the

“Gay religions full of pomp and gold”

of the ſurrounding heathens. The other fragments of hiſtory which have been preſerved for us are mainly of a political character. They point us to Solomon in hiſ wealth and oſtentation, and

* Rev. xxi. 22.

† 1 Kings ix. 6-9. The phrase “at this houſe which is high” is uncertain. The Vulgate has “domus hæc erit in exemplum”; the Peshito and Arabic have “and this houſe ſhall be deſtroyed.”

* It was twice repaired—about B. C. 856 in the reign of Joſiah, and about two centuries later under Joſiah.

† See Iſa. xxix. 13, 14; Ezek. xxxiii. 31; Matt. xv. 7-9; Col. i. 20-22, etc. Comp. Wellhauſen, pp. 77-79.

contain nothing specially edifying. Our Lord thought less of all this splendour than of the flower of the field. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Princes who have once begun to build find a certain fascination in the task. After the seven years devoted to the Temple, Solomon occupied thirteen more in building "halls of Lebanonian cedar" for himself, for his audience-chamber, and for Pharaoh's daughter.

Chief of these were:—

1. The house of the forest of Lebanon, a sort of arsenal so called from its triple rows of cedar pillars, on which hung the golden shields for the king's guards when they attended his great visits to the Temple.

2. The justice hall, the "Sublime Porte" of Jerusalem, built of gold and cedar. It contained the famous Lion Throne of gold and ivory, with two lions on each of its six steps.* It is not known whether these buildings formed part of the palace and harem of Solomon, nor is it worth while to waste time on the impossible attempt to reconstruct them.

Solomon also built the fortification of Jerusalem known as the "Millo," and the wall of David,† as well as the fortresses and treasure cities to which we have already alluded, and the summer palaces in the region of Lebanon known as "the delights of Solomon."‡ Amid these records of palatial architecture we hear next to nothing of the religious life.

He further dazzled his people by an extensive system of foreign commerce. His land-traffic with Arabia familiarised them with spicery (*ne-coth*), gum tragacanth, frankincense, myrrh, aloes, and cassia, and with precious stones of all kinds. From Egypt he obtained horses and chariots. They were brought from Tekoa, by his merchants, and kept by Solomon, or sold at a profit.§

He found a ready market for them among the Hittite and Aramæan kings. Emulating the Phœnicians, and apparently invading the monopoly of Tyre, he had—if we may take the chronicler literally—a fleet of "ships of Tarshish" which sailed along the coasts of Spain.¶ Above all, he made the daring attempt to establish a fleet of Tarshish-ships at Ezion-Geber, the port of Elath, at the north of the Gulf of Akaba. This fleet sailed down the Red Sea to Ophir—perhaps Abhira, at the mouth of the Indus—and amazed the simple Hebrews with the sight of gorgeous iridescent peacocks, wrinkled chattering apes, the red and richly scented sandal wood of India, and the large tusks of elephants from which cunning artificers carved the smooth ivory to inlay furniture, thrones, and ultimately even houses, with

* To form some notion of these buildings, see the excellent illustrations in Stade, i. 318-25.

† The hill of Zion, the city of David, had become overcrowded, and the hill which lay to the north, which was called Millo, or "the border," had to be included in it. A narrow valley lay between them. "Mount Moriah, and its offshoot Ophel, remained outside the city, and the latter was inhabited by the remnant of the Jebusites" (Grätz, *Hist. of the Jews*, E. T., i. 121); Millo, LXX., ἡ ἄκρα. See 1 Macc. iv. 41, xiii. 49-52; Josephus, *Ant.*, XIII. vi. 7.

‡ 1 Kings ix. 19.

§ The "linen yarn" of 1 Kings x. 28 seems to be an error. The Hebrew is לְבָנִים ; LXX., ἐκ θεκωνί; Vulg., *le od*; R.V., "in droves." ¶ 2 Chron. ix. 21.

lustrous ornamentation. Cinnamon came to him from Ceylon, and "sapphires" (*lapis lazuli*) from Babylon.* Other services which he rendered to his capital and kingdom were more real and permanent.

1. Jerusalem may have been in part indebted to Solomon for its supply of water. The magnificent springs of pure gushing water at Etam are still called "Solomon's fountains," and it is believed that he used their rocky basins as reservoirs from which to irrigate his garden in the Wady Urtas (Lat. *Hortus*). Etam is two hours distant from Jerusalem, and if Solomon built the aqueduct which once conveyed its water supply to the city he proved himself a genuine benefactor.† There was immense need of the "fons perennis aquæ" of which Tacitus speaks for the purifications of the Temple, soiled by the reek and offal of so many holocausts.

2. Maritime allusions now began to appear in Hebrew literature;‡ and maritime enterprise produced the marvellous effect it always produces on the character and progress of the nation. Along the black basalt roads—the king's highways—of which the construction was necessitated by the outburst of commercial activity flocked hundreds of foreign visitors, not only merchantmen and itinerant traffickers, but governors of provinces, and vassal or allied princes. The isolated and stationary tribes of Palestine suddenly found themselves face to face with a new and splendid civilisation. Admiring visitors flocked to see the great king's magnificence and to admire his foreign curiosities, bringing with them presents of gold and silver, armour§ and spicery, horses and mules, the brodered garments of Babylon, and robes rich with the crimson, purple, and scarlet dyes of Tyre.¶ Instead of riding like his predecessors on a humble mule, the king made his royal progress to his watered garden at Etam drawn by steeds magnificently caparisoned. He reclined in "Pharaoh's chariot" richly chased and brilliantly coloured. He was followed by a train of archers riding on war-horses and clothed in purple, and was escorted by a body-guard of youths tall and beautiful, whose dark and flowing locks glittered with gold dust. In the heat of summer, if we may accept the poetic picture of the Song of Songs, he would be luxuriously carried to some delicious retreat amid the hills of myrrh and leopard-haunted woods of Lebanon, in a palanquin of cedar wood with silver pillars, purple cushions, and richly embroidered curtains, wearing the jewelled crown which his mother placed on his head on the day of his espousals.¶ Or he would sit to do justice on his throne of ivory and gold,** with its steps guarded by golden lions leaning upon the golden bull of Ephraim

* See Max Müller, *Lectures on Language*, i. 101. The names *Shen Habbim*, "ivory" (Sansk. *ibhas*, "elephant"), *Kophim*, "apes" (Sansk. *kapi*), *Tukkyim*, "peacocks" (Tamil, *toget*), "algum" (trees) (Sansk. *Valgaka*, LXX. πλεκτητά , Alex. ἀπελέκτητα , Vulg. *thyina*), all point to India. Aloes (καλίμ , Psalm xlv. 8) are a fragrant tree of Malacca; *cassia* (Ind. *koost*), cinnamon (*cayn-nama*) come from Ceylon. See Stanley, ii. 185. European history here first comes into contact with Sanskrit.

† See Eccles. ii. 4-6. See on the extensive water-works, *Encycl. Brit.* lii. 252-57.

‡ 2 Chron. ix. 21.

§ לְבָנִים ; LXX., στακτή , "oil of sweet." ¶ 1 Kings x. 25.

** See Cant. i. 9, iii. 6-11, iv. 8; 2 Chron. xi. 6; Josephus, *Ant.*, VIII. vii. 3; Psalm xlv.

*** The great statue of Athene by Phidias was of this "Caryselephantine" work. Comp. "Ivory palaces" $\text{צְרִיפֵי אִיבֹרִים}$ xlv. 8; 1 Kings xxii. 39; Amos iii. 15) and "Ivory benches" (Amos vi. 4)

which formed its back,* in all his princely beauty, "anointed with the oil of gladness," his lips full of grace, his garments breathing of perfume. On great occasions of state his Queen, and the virgins that bore her company, would stand among the crowd of inferior princesses, in garments of the wrought gold of Ophir, in which she had been carried from the inner palace upon tapestries of needlework. In the pomp of such ceremonials, amid bursts of rejoicing melody, the people began to believe that not even the Pharaohs of Egypt, or the Tyrian kings with "every precious stone as their covering," could show a more glorious pageant of royal state.†

This career of magnificence culminated in the visit of Balkis, the Queen of Sheba,‡ who came to him across the desert with "a very great train of her camels, bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones." She saw his abounding prosperity, his peaceful people, his houses, his vineyards at Beth-Haccerem, his parks and gardens, his pools and fruit trees, his herds of cattle, his horses, chariots, and palanquins, and all the delight of the sons of men. She saw his men singers and women singers with their harps of red sandal wood and gold. She saw him at the banquet at his golden table covered in boundless profusion with delicacies brought from every land. She saw his hosts of beautiful and richly dressed slaves with lavers, dishes, and goblets all made of the gold of Uphaz. She saw him dispensing justice in his pillared hall of cedar, seated on the lion-throne. She saw the golden shields and targets§ carried before him as he went in state to the Temple over the Mount, across the valley, and mounted from the palace to the sacred courts by the gilded staircase with its balustrades of aromatic sandal wood.¶ Perhaps she was present as a spectator at some great Temple festival. And when she had tested his wisdom by communing with him of all that was in her heart, "there was no more spirit in her." She confessed that the half of his wisdom and glory had not been reported to her. Happy were his servants, happy the courtiers who stood by him and heard his words! Blessed was the Lord his God who delighted in him, and who, out of love for Israel, had given them such a king to do justice and judgment among them. The visit ended with an interchange of royal presents.¶ Solomon, we are vaguely told, "gave unto her all her desire, whatsoever

she asked," and sent her away glad-hearted to her native land, leaving behind her a trail of legends. Before her departure she opened her treasures, and gave him vast stores of spicery and gold.*

And to sum up the accounts, which read like a page of the story of Haroun al Raschid, the king made silver to be as stones in Jerusalem, so that it was nothing accounted of in the day of Solomon,† and the cedars made he to be as the sycomores which are in the "Shefelah" for multitude.

It is around this epoch of Solomon's career that the legends of the East mainly cluster. They have received a larger development from the allusions to Mohammed in the Qur'an.‡ They take the place of the personal incidents of which so few are recorded, although Solomon occupies so large a space in sacred history. "That stately and melancholy figure—in some respects the grandest and the saddest in the Sacred Volume—is in detail little more than a mighty 'shadow.' Yet in later Jewish records he is scarcely mentioned. Of all the characters in the sacred history he is the most purely secular; and merely secular magnificence was an excrescence, not a native growth of the chosen people."§

CHAPTER XXI.

HOLLOW PROSPERITY.

I KINGS xi.

"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."—ECCLES. i. 2.

"At every draught more large and large they grow,
A bloated mass of rank unwhieldy woe,
Till, sapp'd their strength, and every part unsound,
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round."
GOLDSMITH.

THERE was a *ver rongeur* at the root of all Solomon's prosperity. His home was afflicted with the curse of his polygamy, his kingdom with the curse of his despotism. Failure is stamped upon the issues of his life.

1. His Temple was a wonder of the world; yet his own reign was scarcely over before it was plundered by the Egyptian king who had overthrown the feeble dynasty on alliance with which he had trusted. Under later kings its secret chambers were sometimes desecrated, sometimes deserted. It failed to exercise the unique influence in support of the worship of Jehovah for which it had been designed. Some of Solomon's successors confronted it with a rival temple, and a rival high priest, of Baal, and suffered atrocious emblems of heathen nature-worship to profane its courts. He

* Psalm lxxii. 15. Spices, Herod., iii. 107-113. For one hundred and twenty talents we should probably read twenty (comp. Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. vi. 6), *i. e.*, twelve thousand pounds. Into the riddles of Balkis (1 Kings x. 1, "hard questions"; LXX., *αδινυατα*), and all the strange Talmudic and Arabian legends which have gathered round her visit, we need not enter. I may perhaps refer to my little monograph on Solomon (pp. 134-37), in the Men of the Bible series.

† The 666 gold talents of his revenue are estimated at £3,613,500, and this is described as *his own* revenue, exclusive of tolls, tributes, etc. (1 Kings x. 15). Presents reached him from "kings of the mingled people" (Jer. xxv. 24), Paclias of the country (עֲבָדָה Ezra v. 6; Neh. v. 14).

‡ See Weil, *Bibliche Legenden*; D'Herbelot, *Bibl. Oriental*, s. v. Soliman ben-Daoud; Qur'an, *Suras* xxii., xxvii., xxviii., xxxiv. "Suleyman" means "Little Solomon" a term of affection.

§ Stanley, *Lectures*, ii. 106, 167.

* Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. v. 2; Hosea iv. 16; Jer. xxxi. 18, etc.

† Ezek. xxvii., xxviii.; Zech. ix. 3.

‡ The Abyssinian, confusing Sheba (Arabia Felix) with Seba (as do Origen and Augustine), call her Makeda, Queen of Abyssinia, and say that she had a son by Solomon named Melinek (Ludolphus, *Ethiop.*, ii. 3), from whom all their emperors down to Theodore were descended. The legend of the Queen of Sheba is related in the Qur'an, *Surat* xxvii. 20-40 (chapter of the Ant). The Arabs call her Balkis, whose legends are narrated by D'Herbelot (*Bibl. Or.*, s. v. Balki). Josephus identifies her with Nicaule (the Nitocris of Herod., ii. 100), Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. vi. 2. In the New Testament she is called "the Queen of the South" (Matt. xii. 42).

§ He had made two hundred large shields (*tzinnim*, *θυρεοί, scuta*) and three hundred targets (*maginnim*, *ἀσπίδες, clypei*) of gold at fabulous cost (1 Kings x. 16). They were all plundered by Shishak.

¶ 1 Kings x. 5, but "ascend" should perhaps be "burnt offering," as in margin of R.V. and in all the versions. Comp. 2 Chron. ix. 4 (LXX.). A special seat or platform of brass seems to have been assigned to Solomon in the Temple court (2 Kings xi. 14, xv. 18, xxiii. 3; 2 Chron. vi. 13).

¶ Josephus says that she introduced the balsam plant into Palestine, which, in later years at Jericho, became a great source of revenue. Jer. viii. 22, xlv. 11; Ezek. xxvii. 17; Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. vi. 6, XIV. iv. 1, XV. iv. 2; Pliny, *H. N.*, xii. 54, xiii. 9 (but see Gen. xliii. 11).

himself became an apostate from the high theoretic ideal which had inspired its origin.

2. His long alliance and friendship with Hiram ended, to all appearance, in coolness and disgust, even if it be true that a daughter of Hiram was one of the princesses of his harem.* For his immense buildings had so greatly embarrassed his resources that, when the day for payment came, the only way in which he could discharge his obligations was by alienating a part of his dominions. He gave Hiram "twenty cities in the land of Galilee." The kings of Judah, down to the days of Hezekiah, and even of Josiah, show few traces of any consciousness that there was such a book as the Pentateuch and such a code as the Levitic law. Solomon may have been unaware that Phœnicia itself was part of the land which God had promised to His people. If that gift had lapsed through their inertness,† the law still remained, which said, "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is Mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." It was a strong measure to resign any part of the soil of Judæa, even to discharge building debts, much more to pay for mercenaries and courtly ostentation. The transaction, dubious in every particular, was the evident cause of deep-seated dissatisfaction. Hiram thought himself ill-paid and unworthily treated. He found, by a personal visit, that these inland Galilæan towns, which were probably inhabited in a great measure by a wretched and dwindling remnant of Canaanites,‡ were useless to him, whereas he had probably hoped to receive part, at least, of the Bay of Acco (Ptolemais).§ They added so little to his resources, that he complained to Solomon. He called the cities by the obscure, but evidently contemptuous name "*Cabul*," and gave them back to Solomon in disgust as not worth having.¶ What significance lies in the strange and laconic addition, "And Hiram sent to the king six-score talents of gold," it is impossible for us to understand. If the Tyrian king gave as a present to Solomon a sum which was so vast as at least to equal £720,000—"apparently," as Canon Rawlinson thinks, "to show that, although disappointed, he was not offended!"—he must have been an angel in human form.

3. Solomon's palatial buildings, while they flattered his pride and ministered to his luxury, tended directly, as we shall see, to undermine his power. They represented the ill-requited toil of hopeless bondmen, and oppressed freedmen, whose sighs rose, not in vain, into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth.

4. His commerce, showy, as it was, turned out to be transitory and useless. If for a time it enriched the king, it did not enrich his people. At Solomon's death, if not earlier, it not only languished but expired. Horses and chariots might

give a pompos aspect to stately pageants, but they were practically useless in the endless hills of which Palestine is mainly composed. Apes, peacocks, and sandal wood were curious and interesting, but they certainly did not repay the expense incurred in their importation. No subsequent sovereign took the trouble to acquire these wonders, nor are they once mentioned in the later Scriptures. Precious stones might gleam on the necks of the concubine, or adorn the housings of the steed, but nothing was gained from their barren splendour. At one time the king's annual revenue is stated to have been six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold; but the story of Hiram, and the impoverishment to which Rehoboam succeeded, show that even this exchequer had been exhausted by the sumptuous prodigalities of a too luxurious court. And, indeed, the commerce of Solomon gave a new and untheocratic bias to Hebrew development. The ideal of the old Semitic life was the pastoral and agricultural ideal. No other is contemplated in Exod. xxi.-xxix. Commerce was left to the Phœnicians and other races, so that the word for "merchant" was "Canaanite." But after the days of Solomon in Judah, and Ahab in Israel, the Hebrews followed eagerly in the steps of Canaan, and trade and commerce acting on minds materialised into worldliness brought their natural consequences. "He is a merchant," says Hosea (xii. 7); "the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to defraud." Here the words "he is a merchant" may equally well be rendered "as for Canaan"; and by Canaan is here meant Canaanised or commercial Ephraim. And the prophet continues, "And Ephraim said, Surely I am become rich. I have found me wealth: in all my labour they shall find in me none iniquity that were sin." In other words, these influences of foreign trade had destroyed the moral sense of Israel altogether: "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh"—i.e., "The Mortar," a bazaar of that name in Jerusalem—"for all the people of Canaan" (i.e., the merchants) "are brought to silence." But the hypnotising influence of wealth became more and more a potent factor in the development of the people. By an absolute reversal of their ancient characteristics they learnt, in the days of the Rabbis, utterly to despise agriculture and extravagantly to laud the gains of commerce. Of too many of them it became true, that they

"With dumb despair their country's wrongs behold,
And dead to glory, only burn for gold."

It was the mighty hand of Solomon which first gave them an impulse in this direction, though he seems to have managed all his commerce with exclusive reference to his own revenues.

In the wake of commerce, and the inevitable intercourse with foreign nations which it involves, came as a matter of course the fondness for luxuries; the taste for magnificence; the fraternisation with neighbouring kings; the use of cavalry; the development of a military caste; the attempts at distant navigation; the total disappearance of the antique simplicity. In the train of these innovations followed the disastrous alterations of the old conditions of society of which the prophets so grievously complain—extortions of the corn market; the formation of large estates; the frequency of mortgages; the misery of peasant proprietorship, unable to hold its own against the accumulations of wealth; the increase of the wage-receiving class; and the fluctuations of the labour

* See Euseb., *Præp. Evang.*, x. 11.

† Lev. xxv. 23, 24. See Judg. i. 31, 32.

‡ Hence, perhaps, the name "Galilee of the nations" (Isa. ix. 1). Comp. "Harosheth of the nations" (Judg. iv. 2, 13). Hazor was in this district.

§ Milman, *Hist. of the Jews*, i. 321.

¶ 1 Kings ix. 10-13. There was a place called Cabul in Asher (Josh. xix. 27). Ewald thinks that Cabul was a sort of witticism meaning "as nothing." Josephus (*Ant.*, VIII. v. 3) says that in Phœnician *χαβαλὼν* means "not pleasing," and that Hiram would not take the cities. Nothing can be made of the allusion to this transaction in 2 Chron. viii. 1, 2. Why did Solomon re-occupy these cities? and why did Hiram give him one hundred and twenty talents of gold? The gloss put on the matter by late tradition cannot conceal the fact that Solomon tried to diminish his embarrassments by alienating some of the sacred territory.

market. These changes caused, by way of consequence, so much distress and starvation that even freeborn Hebrews were sometimes compelled to sell themselves into slavery as the only way to keep themselves alive.

So that the age of Solomon can in no respect be regarded as an age of gold. Rather, it resembled that grim Colossus of Dante's vision, which not only rested on a right foot of brittle clay, but was cracked and fissured through and through, while the wretchedness and torment which lay behind the outward splendour ever dripped and trickled downward till its bitter streams swelled the rivers of hell:—

“Abhorred Styx, the flood of deadly hate,
Sad Acheron of sorrow black and deep,
Corytus named of lamentation loud
Heard on its rueful stream, fierce Phlegethon,
Whose waves of torrent fire inflame with rage.”

But there was something worse even than this. The Book of Proverbs shows us that, as in Rome, so in Jerusalem, foreign immoralities became fatal to the growing youth. The *picta lupa barbara mitrâ*, with her fatal fascinations, and her banquets of which the guests were in the depths of Hades, became so common in Jerusalem that no admonitions of the wise were more needful than those which warned the “simple ones” that to yield to her seductive snares was to go as an ox to the slaughter, as a fool to the correction of the stocks.

5. Even were there no disastrous sequel to Solomon's story—if we saw him only in the flush of his early promise, and the noon of his highest prosperity—we could still readily believe that he passed through some of the experiences of the bitter and sated voluptuary who borrows his name in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The human pathos, the fresh and varied interest, which meet us at every page of the annals of David, are entirely lacking in the magnificent monotony of the annals of Solomon. The splendours of materialism, which are mainly dwelt upon, could never satisfy the poorest of human souls. There are but two broad gleams of religious interest in his entire story—the narrative of his prayer for wisdom, and the prayer, in its present form of later origin, attributed to him at the Dedication Festival. All the rest is a story of gorgeous despotism, which gradually paled into

“The dim grey life and apathetic end.”

“There was no king like Solomon: he exceeded all the kings of the earth,” we are told, “for riches and for wisdom.” But all that we know of such kings furnishes fresh proof of the universal experience that “the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” are absolutely valueless for all the contributions they can lend to human happiness. The autocrats who have been most conspicuous for unchecked power and limitless resources have also been the most conspicuous in misery. We have but to recall Tiberius “*tristissimus ut constat hominum*,” who, from the enchanted isle which he had degraded into the sty of his infamies, wrote to his servile senate that “all the gods and goddesses were daily destroying him”; or Septimius Severus, who, rising step by step from a Dalmatian peasant and common soldier to be emperor of the world, remarked with pathetic conviction, “*Omnia fui et nihil expedit*”; or Abderrahman the Magnificent,

who, in all his life of success and prosperity, could only count fourteen happy days; or Charles V., over-eating himself in his monastic retreat at San Yuste in Estremadura; or Alexander,* dying “as a fool dieth”; or Louis XIV., surrounded by a darkening horizon, and disillusioned into infinite *ennui* and chagrin; or Napoleon I., saying, “I regard life with horror,” and contrasting his “abject misery” with the adored and beloved dominion of Christ, who was meek and lowly of heart. Napoleon confessed that, even in the zenith of his empire, and the fullest flush of his endless victories, his days were consumed in vanity and his years in trouble. The cry of one and all, finding that the soul, which is infinite, cannot be satisfied with the transient and hollow boons of earth, is, and ever must be, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” And this is one main lesson of the life of Solomon. Nothing is more certain than that, if earthly happiness is to be found at all, it can only be found in righteousness and truth; and if even these do not bring earthly happiness they securely give us a *blessedness* which is deeper and more eternal.

If the Book of Ecclesiastes, even traditionally, is the reflection and echo of Solomon's disenchantment, we see that in later years his soul had been sullied, his faith had grown dim, his fervour cold. All was emptiness. He stood horribly alone. His one son was not a wise man, but a fool. Gewgaws could no longer satisfy him. His wealth exhausted, his fame tarnished, his dominions reduced to insignificance, himself insulted by contemptible adversaries whom he could neither control nor punish, he entered on the long course of years “*plus pâles et moins couronnées*.” The peaceful is harried by petty raids; the magnificent is laden with debts; the builder of the Temple has sanctioned polytheism; the favourite of the nation has become a tyrant, scourging with whips an impatient people; the “darling of the Lord” has built shrines for Moloch and Astarte. The glamour of youth, of empire, of gorgeous tyranny was dispelled, and the splendid boy-king is the weary and lonely old man. Hiram of Tyre has turned in disgust from an ungenerous recompense. A new Pharaoh has dispossessed his Egyptian father-in-law and shelters his rebel servant. His shameful harem has given him neither a real home nor a true love; his commerce has proved to be an expensive failure; his politic alliances a hollow sham. In another and direr sense than after his youthful vision, “Solomon awoke, and behold it was a dream.”†

The Talmudists show some insight amid their fantasies when they write: “At first, before he married strange wives, Solomon reigned over the angels (1 Chron. xxix. 23); then only over all kingdoms (1 Kings iv. 21); then only over Israel (Eccles. i. 12); then only over Jerusalem (Eccles. i. 1). At last he reigned only over his staff—as it is said, ‘And this was the portion of my labour’; for by the word ‘*this*,’” says Rav, “he meant that the only possession left to him was the staff which he held in his hand.” The staff was not “the rod and staff” of the Good Shepherd, but the earthly staff of pride and pomp, and (as in the Arabian legend) the worm of selfishness and sensuality was gnawing at its base.

* The later Jews chose the name “Alexander” as the Western equivalent for Solomon: hence the names “Alexander Jannæus,” etc.

† 1 Kings iii. 15. See Eccles. xlvii. 12–21.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OLD AGE OF SOLOMON.

I KINGS XI. 1-13.

"That uxorious king, whose heart, though large,
Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell
To idols foul."

MILTON, *Paradise Lost*.

"Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things?"
NEA. xiii. 26.

"That they might know, that wherewithal a man sin-
neth, by the same also shall he be punished."—WISDOM
*i. 16.

SOLOMON had endeavoured to give a one-sided development to Israelitish nationality, and a development little in accord with the highest and purest traditions of the people. What he did with one hand by building the Temple he undid with the other by endowing and patronising the worship of heathen deities.* In point of fact, Solomon was hardly a genuine off-shoot of the stem of Jesse. It is at least doubtful whether Bathsheba was of Hebrew race, and from her he may have derived an alien strain. It is at all events a striking fact that, so far from being regarded as an ideal Hebrew king, he was rather the reverse. The chronicler, indeed, exalts him as the supporter and reintegrator of the Priestly-Levitic system, which it is the main object of that writer to glorify; but this picture of theocratic purity, even if it be not altogether an anachronism, is only obtained by the total suppression of every incident in the story of Solomon which militates against it. In the Book of Kings we are faithfully told of the disgust of Hiram at the reward offered to him; of the alienation of a fertile district of the promised land; of the apostasy, the idolatries, and the reverses which disgraced and darkened his later years. The Book of Chronicles ignores every one of these disturbing particulars. It does not tell us of the depths to which Solomon fell, though it tells us of the extreme scrupulosity which regarded as a profanation the residence of his Egyptian queen on the hill once hallowed as the resting-place of Jehovah's Ark. Yet, if we understand in their simple sense the statements of the editor of the Book of Kings, and the documents on which he based his narrative, Solomon, even at the Dedication Festival, ignored all distinction between the priesthood and the laity. Nay, more than this, he seems to have offered, with his own hands, both burnt offerings and peace offerings three times a year,† and, unchecked by priestly opposition or remonstrance, to have "burnt incense before the altar that was before the Lord," though, according to the chronicler, it was for daring to attempt this that Uzziah was smitten with the horrible scourge of leprosy.

The ideal of a good and great king is set before us in the Book of Proverbs, and in many respects Solomon fell very far short of it. Further than this, there are in Scripture two warning sketches of everything which a good king should not be and should not do, and these sketches exactly describe the very things which Solomon was

* "L'amour du luxe et de la nouveauté le conduira peu à peu à défaire l'œuvre de son père, à ruiner le peuple dont il pouvait faire le bonheur, à détruire les institutions, et à dédaigner le culte national, auquel il avait d'abord cherché à donner le plus grand éclat."—Munk, *Palestine*, v. 285.

† 1 Kings ix. 25.

and did. Those who take the view that the books of Scripture have undergone large later revision, see in each of these passages an unfavourable allusion to the king who raised Israel highest amongst the nations, only to precipitate her disintegration and ruin, and who combined the highest service to the centralisation of her religion with the deadliest insult to its supreme claim upon the reverence of the world.

1. The first of these pictures of selfish autocrats is found in 1 Sam. viii. 10-18:—

"And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of Him a king. 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. And he will appoint his 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. And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his courtiers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants and your maidservants, and your goodliest oxen, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep, and you shall be his servants. 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."

2. The other, which is still more detailed and significant, was perhaps written with the express intention of warning Solomon's descendants from the example which Solomon had set.* It is found in Deut. xvii. 14-20. Thus, speaking of a king, the writer says:—

"Only he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself; that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be that when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book . . . that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, . . . that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, . . . to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel."

If Deuteronomy be of no older date than the days of Josiah, it is difficult not to see in this passage a distinct polemic against Solomon; for he did not do what he is here commanded, and he most conspicuously did every one of the things which is here forbidden.

It is quite clear that in his foreign alliances, in his commerce, in his cavalry, in his standing army, in his extravagant polygamy, in his exaggerated and exhausting magnificence, in his despotic autocracy, in his palatial architecture, and in his patronage of alien art, in his system of enforced labour, in his perilous religious syncretism,

* Modern criticism generally regards the Book of Deuteronomy, or some elements of it, as "the Book of the Law" which was found in the Temple by the high priest Hilkiah in the reign of Josiah. We shall speak of this in the following volume (in 2 Kings). See Deut. xvii. 18.

Solomon was by no means a king after the hearts of the old faithful and simple Israelites. They did not look with entire favour even on the centralisation of worship in a single Temple which interfered with local religious rites sanctioned by the example of their greatest prophets. His ideal differed entirely from that of the older patriarchs. He gave to the life of his people an alien development; he obliterated some of their best national characteristics; and the example which he set was at least as powerful for evil as for good.

When we read the lofty sentiments expressed by Solomon in his dedication prayer, we may well be amazed to hear that one who had aspirations so sublime could sink into idolatry so deplorable. If it was the object of the chronicler to present Solomon in unsullied splendour, he might well omit the deadly circumstance that when he was old, and prematurely old, "he loved many strange women, and went after *Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.* And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord as did David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molch the abomination of the children of Ammon.† And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.‡"*

The sacred historian not only records the shameful fact, but records its cause and origin. The heart of Solomon was perverted, his will was weakened, his ideal was dragged into the mire by the "strange wives" who crowded his seraglio. He went the way that destroys kings.§ The polygamy of Solomon sprang naturally from the false position which he had created for himself. A king who puts a space of awful distance between himself and the mass of his subjects—a king whose will is so absolute that life is in his smile and death in his frown—is inevitably punished by the loneliest isolation. He may have favourites, he may have flatterers, but he can have no friends. A thronged harem becomes to him not only a matter of ostentation and luxury, but a necessary resource from the vacuity and *ennui* of a desolate heart. Tiberius was driven to the orgies of Caprææ by the intolerableness of his isolation. The weariness of the king who used to take his courtiers by the button-hole and say, "*Ennuyons-nous ensemble,*" drove him to fill up his degraded leisure in the *Parc aux Cerfs*. Yet even Louis XV. had more possibilities of rational intercourse with human beings than a Solomon or a Xerxes. It was in the nature of things that Solomon, when he had imitated all the other surroundings of an Oriental despot, should sink, like other Oriental despots, from sensuousness into sensualism, from sensualism into religious degeneracy and dishonourable enervation.

* LXX., ἦν φιλογύνης. Vulg., *adamavit mulieres alienigenas.*

† Some suppose that this clause about Milcom is an interpolation from 2 Kings xxiii. 13.

‡ See Exod. xxxiv. 11-17; Deut. vii. 1-4. The Talmud makes one of its dishonest attempts to get rid of the fact; Sabbath, p. 56, b. Sanhedrin, ff. 55, 56. Justin Martyr preserves a tradition (*Dial. c. Tryph.*, 34) that Solomon in taking a Sidonian wife worshipped idols at Sidon. Muslim tradition attributes Solomon's idolatry to the tricks of demons who assumed his form (Qur'an, *Sura* ii. 99; but see *Sura* xxxviii. 30).

§ Prov. xxxi. 3.

Two facts, both full of warning, are indicated as the sources of his ruin: (1) the number of his wives; and (2) their heathen extraction.

1. "He had," we are told, "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines."*

The numbers make up a thousand, and are almost incredible. We are told indeed that in the monstrosities of Indian absolutism the Great Mogul had a thousand wives; but even Darius, "the king" *par excellence*, the awful autocrat of Persia, had only one wife and thirty-two concubines.† It is inconceivable that the monarch of a country so insignificant as Palestine could have maintained so exorbitant a household in a small city like Jerusalem. Moreover, there is, on every ground, reason to correct the statement. Saul, so far as we know, had only one wife, and one concubine; David, though he put so little restraint on himself, had only sixteen; no subsequent king of Israel or Judah appears to have had even a small fraction of the number which is here assigned to Solomon, either by the disease of exaggeration or by some corruption of the text. More probably we should read seventy wives, which at least partially assimilates the number to the "threescore queens" of whom we read in the Canticles.‡ Even then we have a household which must have led to miserable complications. The seraglio at Jerusalem must have been a burning fiery furnace of feuds, intrigues, jealousies, and discontent. It is this fact which gives additional meaning to the Song of Songs. That unique book of Scripture is a sweet idyll in honour of pure and holy love. It sets before us in glowing imagery and tender rhythms how the lovely maiden of Shunem, undazzled by all the splendours and luxuries of the great king's court, unseduced by his gifts and his persistence, remained absolutely faithful to her humble shepherd lover, and, amid the gold and purple of the palace at Jerusalem, sighed for her simple home amid the groves of Lebanon. Surely she was as wise as fair, and her chances of happiness would be a thousandfold greater, her immunities from intolerable conditions a thousandfold more certain, as she wandered hand in hand with her shepherd youth amid pure scenes and in the vernal air, than amid the heavy exotic perfumes of a sensual and pampered court.

Perhaps in the word "princesses" we see some sort of excuse for that effeminating self-indulgence which would make the exhortations to simplicity and chastity in the Book of Proverbs sound very hollow on the lips of Solomon. It may have been worldly policy which originally led him to multiply his wives. The alliance with Pharaoh was secured by a marriage with his daughter, and possibly that with Hiram by the espousal of a Tyrian princess. The friendliness of Edom on the south, of Moab and Ammon on the east, of Sidon and the Hittites and Syria on the north, might be enhanced by matrimonial connections from which the greater potentates might profit and of which

* The Song of Solomon (vi. 8) gives him besides the '*alamoth* ("damsels") "without number," the sixty wives (*saroth*), and the eighty concubines, who were partly perhaps their slaves.

† *Parmen. ap. Athen., Deipnos.*, iii. 3. *Comp. Quint. Curt., Vit. Alex.*, iii. 3. Amehhate of Egypt had more than three hundred and seventeen wives (*Brugsch, Egypt.*, iii. 607, E. T.). Rehoboam, who had eighteen wives and sixty concubines, left twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. Solomon, so far as we know, had only one son and two daughters.

‡ *Cant.* vi. 8.

the smaller sheykhs were proud.* Yet if this were so, the policy, like all other worldly policy un-sanctioned by the law of God, was very unsuccessful. Egypt as usual proved herself to be a broken reed. The Hittites only preserved a dream and legend of their olden power. Edom and Moab neither forgot nor abandoned their implacable and immemorial hatred. Syria became a dangerous rival awaiting the day of future triumphs. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in man; it is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in princes."

2. But the heathen religion of these strange women from so many nations "turned away the heart of Solomon after other gods." It may be doubted whether Solomon had ever read the stern prohibitions against intermarriage with the Canaanite nations which now stand on the page of the Pentateuch. If so he broke them, for the Hittites and the Phœnicians were Canaanites. Marriages with Egyptians, Moabites, and Edomites had not been, in so many words, forbidden, but the feeling of later ages applied the rule analogously to them. The result proved how necessary the law was. When Solomon was old his heart was no longer proof against feminine wiles. He was not old in years, for this was some time before his death, and when he died he was little more than sixty. But a polygamous despot gets old before his time.

The attempt made by Ewald and others to gloss over Solomon's apostasy as a sign of a large-hearted tolerance is an astonishing misreading of history. Tolerance for harmless divergences of opinion there should always be, though it is only a growth of modern days; but tolerance for iniquity is a wrong to holiness.

The worship of these devils adored for deities was stained with the worst passions which degrade human nature. They were themselves the personification of perverted instincts. The main facts respecting them are collected in Selden's famous *De Dis Syris Syntagma*, and Milton has enshrined them in his stateliest verse:—

"First Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood
Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears; . . .
Next Chemosh, the obscene dread of Moab's sons,
Peor his other name, when he enticed
Israel in Sittim, on their march from Nile,
To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe.
Yet thence his lustful orgies he enlarged
Even to that hill of scandal, by the Grove
Of Moloch homicide; lust, hard by hate:
Till good Josiah drove them thence to hell.
. . . With these in troop
Came Ashtoreth, whom the Phœnicians call
Astarte, queen of heaven, with crescent horns;
To whose bright image nightly by the moon
Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs;
In Sion also not unsung, where stood
Her temple on the offensive mountain, built
By that uxorious king, whose heart, though large,
Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell
To idols foul."

What tolerance should there be for idols whose service was horrible infanticide and shameless lust? "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" How vile the worship of Chemosh was, Israel had already experienced in the wilderness where he was called Peor.† What

* The Vatican MS. of the LXX. adds Syrian and Amorite princesses to the number. Marriages with Sidonians and Hittites are expressly forbidden in Exod. xxxiv. 12-16, and with Canaanites in Deut. vii. 3 (comp. Ezra ix. 2 and Neh. xiii. 23).

† Numb. xxx. 3.

Moloch was they were to learn thereafter by many a horrible experience. Had Solomon never heard that the Lord God was a jealous God, and would not tolerate the rivalries of gods of fire and of lust? At least he was not afraid to desecrate one, if not two, of the summits of the Mount of Olives with shrines to these monstrous images, which seem to have been left "on that opprobrious mount" for many an age, so that they "durst abide"

"Jehovah, thundering out of Sion throned
Between the cherubim; yea, often placed
Within His sanctuary itself their shrines,
Abominations, and with cursed things
His holy rites and solemn feasts profaned,
And with their darkness durst affront His light."

And, to crown all, Solomon not only showed this guilty complaisance to all his strange wives, but even, sinking into the lowest abyss of apostasy "burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods."

"He that built a temple for himself and for Israel in Sion," says Bishop Hall, "built a temple for Chemosh in the Mount of Scandal for his mistresses in the very face of God's house. Because Solomon feeds them in their superstition, he draws the sin home to himself, and is branded for what he should have forbidden."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WIND AND THE WHIRLWIND.

I KINGS xi. 14-41.

"He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."—GAL. vi. 8.

SUCH degeneracy could not show itself in the king without danger to his people. "*Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.*" In the disintegration of Solomon's power and the general disenchantment from the glamour of his magnificence, the land became full of corruption and discontent. The wisdom and experience of the aged were contemptuously hissed off the seat of judgment by the irreverent folly of the young. The existence of a corrupt aristocracy is always a bad symptom of national disease. These "lispings hawthorn-buds" of fashion only burgeon in tainted soil. The advice given by the "young men" who had "grown up with Rehoboam and stood before him" shows the insolence preceding doom which had been bred by the idolism of tyranny in the hearts of silly youths who had ceased to care for the wrongs of the people or to know anything about their condition. Violence, oppression, and commercial dishonesty, as we see in the Book of Proverbs, had been bred by the mad desire for gain; and even in the streets of holy Jerusalem, and under the shadow of its Temple, "strange women," introduced by the commerce with heathen countries and the attendants on heathen princesses, lured to their destruction the souls of simple and God-forgetting youths.* The simple and joyous agricultural prosperity in which the sons of the people grew up as young plants and their daughters as the polished corners of the Temple was replaced by struggling discontent and straining competition. And amid all these evils the voices of the courtly priests were silent, and for a long time, under the menacing and irresponsible

* See Prov. ii. 10-22, v. 1-14, vi. 24-35, etc. (contrast Psalm cxliv. 12-15).

dominance of an oracular royalty, there was no prophet more.

Early in Solomon's reign two adversaries had declared their existence, but only became of much account in the darker and later days of its decline.*

One of these was Hadad, Prince of Edom. Upon the Edomites in the days of David the prowess of Joab had inflicted an overwhelming and all but exterminating reverse. Joab had remained six months in the conquered district to bury his comrades who had been slain in the terrible encounter, and to extirpate as far as possible the detested race. But the king's servants had been able to save Hadad, then but a little child, from the indiscriminate massacre, as the sole survivor of his house.† The young Edomite prince was conveyed by them through Midian and the desert of Paran into Egypt, and there, for political reasons, had been kindly received by the Pharaoh of the day, probably Pinotem I. of the Tanite dynasty, the father of Psinaces whose alliance Solomon had secured by marriage with his daughter. Pinotem not only welcomed the fugitive Edomite as the last scion of a kingly race, but even deigned to bestow on him the hand of the sister of Tahpenes, his own *Gebria* or queen-mother.‡ Their son Genubath was brought up among the Egyptian princes. But amid the luxurious splendours of Pharaoh's palace Hadad carried in his heart an undying thirst for vengeance on the destroyer of his family and race. The names of David and Joab inspired a terror which made rebellion impossible for a time; but when Hadad heard, with grim satisfaction, of Joab's judicial murder, and that David had been succeeded by a peaceful son, no charm of an Egyptian palace and royal bride could weigh in the balance against the fierce passion of an avenger of blood. Better the wild freedom of Idumea than the sluggish ease of Egypt. He asked the Pharaoh's leave to return to his own country, and, braving the reproach of ingratitude, made his way back to the desolated fields and cities of his unfortunate people.§ He developed their resources, and nursed their hopes of the coming day of vengeance. If he could do nothing else he could at least act as a desperate marauder, and prove himself a "satan" to the successor of his foe.|| Solomon was strong enough to keep open the road to Exion-Gebir, but Hadad was probably master of Sela and Maon.¶

* In 1 Kings xi. 9-25 the mischief inflicted by Rezon and Hadad is represented as a punishment for Solomon's apostasy. It has been said that here "the pragmatism belongs to the redactor," because these enemies sprang into existence when he came to the throne. But, as I have here represented it, nothing seems more probable than that Rezon and Hadad were practically impotent to inflict much damage before the period of Solomon's decline. (Verse 23 is omitted in some MSS. of the LXX.)

† An isolated anecdote of the exterminating war is preserved in 1 Chron. xi. 22, 23, from which it would seem that Egypt had interfered in favour of Edom.

‡ Renan conjectures that the real Egyptian name is Ahotepes. The LXX. wrongly calls this Pharaoh She-shonk (*Σουσακιμ*), who came later, and whose queen's name was Karaâma (not Thekemina as the LXX. says).

§ Canon Rawlinson (*Speaker's Commentary ad loc.*) points out that fugitives once received at Eastern courts found it very difficult to get away, *e. g.*, Democedes, Herod., iii, 132-37. Histiaeus, in leaving the court of Persia, has expressly to say that he had lacked nothing—*τεῦ δὲ ἐνδοθῆς ὄν*; Herod., v. 106; comp. 1 Kings xi. 22.

|| 1 Kings xi. 14: "The Lord stirred up an adversary" (*יָדָהּ*).

¶ Stade, i. 302. In 1 Kings xi. 22, 25 the text is corrupt. Verse 25 should partly be transferred to the end of verse 22, and should run, "And Hadad returned to his own

land." Another enemy was Rezon, of whom but little is known. David had won a great victory, the most remarkable of all his successes, over Hadad-ezer, King of Zobah, and had then signalled his conquest by placing garrisons in Syria of Damascus. On this occasion Rezon, the son of Eli, who is perhaps identical with Hezion, the grandfather of Benhadad, King of Syria in the days of Asa, fled from the host of Hadadezer with some of the Syrian forces. With these and all whom he could collect about him, he became a guerilla captain. After a successful period of predatory warfare he found himself strong enough to seize Damascus, where, to all appearance, he founded a powerful hereditary kingdom. Thus with Hadad in the south to plunder his commercial caravans, and Rezon on the north to threaten his communication with Tiphseh, and alarm his excursions to his pleasantries in Lebanon, Solomon was made keenly to feel that his power was rather an unsubstantial pageant than a solid dominion.

The enmity of these powerful Emirs of Edom and Syria was an hereditary legacy from the wars of David and the ruthless savagery of Joab. A third adversary was far more terrible, and he was called into existence by the conduct of Solomon himself. This was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. In himself he was of no account, being a man of isolated position and obscure origin. He was the son of a widow named Zeruah,* who lived at Zarthan in the Jordan valley. The position of a widow in the ancient world was one of feebleness and difficulty; and if we may trust the apocryphal additions to the Septuagint, Zeruah was not only a widow but a harlot. But Jeroboam, whose name perhaps indicates that he was born in the golden days of Solomon's prosperity, was a youth of vigour and capacity. He made his way from the wretched clay fields of Zeredah to Jerusalem, and there became one of the vast undistinguished gang who were known as "slaves of Solomon." The *corvée* of many thousands from all parts of Palestine was then engaged in building the *Millo* and the huge walls and causeway in the valley between Zion and Moriah, which was afterwards known as the Valley of the Cheesemongers (*Tyropon*). Here the unknown youth distinguished himself by his strenuousness, and by the influence which he rapidly acquired. Solomon knew the value of a man "diligent in his business," and therefore worthy to stand before kings. Untrammelled by any rules of seniority, and able to make and unmake as he thought fit, Solomon promoted him while still young, and at one bound, to a position of great rank and influence. Jeroboam was an Ephraimite, and Solomon therefore "gave him charge over all the compulsory levies (*Mas*) of the tribe of the house of Joseph"—that is, of the proud and powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasse, who practically represented all Israel except Judah, Benjamin, and the almost nominal Simeon.

The spark of ambition was now kindled in the youth's heart, and as he toiled among the workmen he became aware of two secrets of deadly import to the master who had lifted him out of the dust—secrets which he well knew how to use. One was that a deep undercurrent of tribal jealousy was setting in with the force of a tide. Solo-

land," *i. e.*, to Edom. (Edom has been confused with "Aram.")

* The additions to the LXX. call her Sarira. But the names "Sarira," "Enlomite," "Ano" are all suspicious; and possibly the LXX. additions may be only part of some Alexandrian Haggadah.

mon had unduly favoured his own tribe by exemptions from the general requisition, and Ephraim fretted under a sense of wrong. That proud tribe, the heir of Joseph's pre-eminence, had never acquiesced in the loss of the hegemony which it so long had held. From Ephraim had sprung Joshua, the mighty successor of Moses, the conqueror of the Promised Land, and his sepulchre was still among them at Timnath-Serah. From their kith had sprung the princely Gideon, the greatest of the judges, who might, had he so chosen, have anticipated the foundation of royalty in Israel. Shiloh, which God had chosen for His inheritance, was in their domains. It required very little at any time to make the Ephraimites second the cry of the insurgents who followed Sheba, the son of Bichri,—

"We have no part in David,
Neither have we inheritance in the son of
Jesse.

Every man to his tents, O Israel."

Jeroboam, who was now by Solomon's favour a chief ruler over his fellow-tribesmen, had many opportunities to foment this jealousy, and to win for himself by personal graciousness the popularity of Solomon which had so long begun to wane.

But a yet deeper feeling was at work against Solomon. The men of Ephraim and all the northern tribes had not only begun to ask why Judah was to monopolise the king's partiality, but the much more dangerous question, What right has the king to enforce on us these dreary and interminable labours, in making a city of palaces and an impregnable fortress of a capital which is to overshadow our glory and command our subjection? With consummate astuteness, by a word here and a word there, Jeroboam was able to pose before Solomon as the enforcer of a stern yoke, and before his countrymen as one who hated the hard necessity and would fain be their deliverer from it.

And while he was already in heart a rebel against the House of David, he received what he regarded as a Divine sanction to his career of ambition.

The prophets, as we have seen, had sunk to silence before the oracular autocrat who so frequently impressed on the people that there is "a Divine sentence on the lips of kings." No special inspiration seemed to be needed either to correct or to corroborate so infallible a wisdom. But the heaven-enkindled spark of inspiration can never be permanently suffocated. Priests as a body have often proved amenable to royal seductions, but individual prophets are irrepensible.

What were the priests doing in the face of so fearful an apostasy? Apparently nothing. They seem to have sunk into comfortable acquiescence, satisfied with the augmentation of rank and revenue which the Temple and its offerings brought to them. They offered no opposition to the extravagances of the king, his violations of the theocratic ideal, or even his monstrous tolerance for the worship of idols. That prophets as a body existed in Judah during the early years of this reign there is no proof. The atmosphere was ill-suited to their vocation. Nathan probably had died long before Solomon reached his zenith.*

* In 2 Chron. ix. 20 the LXX. reads "Joel." He wrote "visions" against Jeroboam, a life of Ahijah, and a book "on (or after the manner of) genealogies" (2 Chron. ix. 20, xii. 15, xiii. 22). Jerome (on 2 Chron. xv. 1) identifies him with Oded.

Of Iddo we know almost nothing. Two prophets are mentioned, but only towards the close of the reign—Ahijah of Shiloh,* and Shemaiah; and there seems to have been some confusion in the rôles respectively assigned to them† by later tradition.

But the hour had now struck for a prophet to speak the word of the Lord. If the king, surrounded by formidable guards and a glittering court, was too exalted to be reached by a humble son of the people, it was time for Ahijah to follow the precedent of Samuel. He obeyed a divine intimation in selecting the successor who should punish the great king's rebellion against God, and inaugurate a rule of purer obedience than now existed under the upas-shadow of the throne. He was the *Mâzkir*, the annalist or historiographer of Solomon's court (2 Chron. ix. 29); but loyalty to a backsliding king had come to mean disloyalty to God. There was but one man who seemed marked out for the perilous honour of a throne. It was the brave, vigorous, ambitious youth of Ephraim who had risen to high promotion and had won the hearts of his people, though Solomon had made him the task-master of their forced labour. On one occasion Jeroboam left Jerusalem, perhaps to visit his native Zeredah and his widowed mother.‡ Ahijah intentionally met him on the road. He drew him aside from the public path into a solitary place. There, seen by none, he took off his own shoulders the new stately *abba* § in which he had clad himself, and proceeded to give to Jeroboam one of those object-lessons in the form of an acted parable, which to the Eastern mind are more effective than any words.¶ Rending the new garment into twelve pieces, he gave ten to Jeroboam, telling him that Jehovah would thus rend the kingdom from the hands of Solomon because of his unfaithfulness, leaving his son but one tribe¶¶ that the lamp of David might not be utterly extinguished. Jeroboam should be king over Israel; to the House of David should be left but an insignificant fragment. God would build a sure house for Jeroboam as He had done for David, if he would keep His commandments, though the House of David "should not be afflicted for ever."***

A scene so memorable, a prophecy of such grave significance, could hardly remain a secret. Ahijah may have hinted it among his sympathisers. Jeroboam would hardly be able to conceal

* 2 Chron. ix. 29. Perhaps 1 Kings xi. may be borrowed from the historic records of Ahijah.

† For in the LXX. 1 Kings xi. 29-39 is absent in some MSS., as well as 1 Kings xiv. (Ahijah and Abijah), which has been added from the Greek version of Aquila. In verse 29, for "Ahijah the Shilonite" we have in some MSS. of the LXX. "Shemaiah the Elamite" or "Enlamite."

‡ 1 Kings xi. 20, addition of LXX.

§ The square cloth worn over the other dress, and now called *abba*, seems to represent the *saemâh* (שַׁמַּיִת) here mentioned.

¶ The story is usually made to apply to Jeroboam's new robe; but in the addition to the LXX., where the action is ascribed to Shemaiah, the word of the Lord says to him, *λάβε σεαυτῷ ἱμάτιον καινὸν τὸ οὐκ εἰσεληλυθὸς εἰς ὕδωρ κ. τ. λ.* The method of "acted parables" was common among the Hebrew prophets (See Jer. xiii., xix., xxvii., Ezek. iii., iv., v., etc.); but this is the earliest recorded instance of the kind.

¶¶ Not "two tribes," as the LXX. says. But neither the number 1 nor the number 2 are literally exact, for certainly Jeroboam did not command the territory of Simeon, south of Judah. The adherence of Benjamin, or part of Benjamin, to Judah was mainly a geographical accident, due to the fact that Jerusalem lay in both tribes (Josh. xv. 8, xviii. 16; Jer. xx. 2). Late in David's reign a Benjamite (Sheba, son of Bichri) had headed a revolt against David (2 Sam. xx. 1).

*** 1 Kings xi. 34-39.

from his friends the immense hopes which it excited; and as his position probably gave him the command of troops he became dangerous. His designs reached the ears of Solomon, and he sought to put Jeroboam to death. The young man, who had probably betrayed his secret ambition, and may even have attempted some premature and abortive insurrection, escaped from Jerusalem, and took refuge in Egypt. There the Bubastite dynasty had displaced the Tanite and from Shishak I., the earliest Pharaoh whose individuality eclipsed the common dynastic name, he received so warm a welcome that, according to one story, Shishak gave him in marriage Anò, the elder sister of his Queen Tahpanes (or Thekemina, LXX.) and of Hadad's wife.* He stayed in Egypt till the death of Solomon, and then returned to Zeredah, either in consequence of the summons of his countrymen, or that he might be ready for any turn of events.

Under such melancholy circumstances the last great king of the united kingdom passed away. Of the circumstances of his death we are told nothing, but the clouds had gathered thickly round his declining years. "The power to which he had elevated Israel," says the Jewish historian Grätz, "resembled that of a magic world built up by spirits. The spell was broken at his death." It must not, however, be imagined that no abiding results had followed from so remarkable a rule. The nation which he left behind him at his death was very different from the nation to whose throne he had succeeded as a youth. It had sprung from immature boyhood to the full-grown stature of manhood. If the purity of its spiritual ideal had been somewhat corrupted, its intellectual growth and its material power had been immensely stimulated. It had tasted the sweets of commerce, and never forgot the richness of that intoxicating draught which was destined in later ages to transform its entire nature. Tribal distinctions, if not obliterated, had been subordinated to a central organisation. The knowledge of writing had been more widely spread, and this had led to the dawn of that literature which saved Israel from oblivion, and uplifted her to a place of supreme influence among the nations. Manners had been considerably softened from their old wild ferocity. The more childish forms of ancient superstition, such as the use of ephods and teraphim, had fallen into desuetude. The worship of Jehovah, and the sense of His unique supremacy over the whole world, was fostered in many hearts, and men began to feel the unfitness of giving to Him that name of "Baal" which began henceforth to be confined to the Syrian sun-god.† Amid many aberrations the sense of religion was deepened among the faithful of Israel, and the ground was prepared for the more spiritual religion which in later reigns found its immortal expositors in those Hebrew prophets who rank foremost among the teachers of mankind.‡

But as for Solomon himself it is a melancholy thought that he is one of the three or four of whose salvation the Fathers and others have open-

* The story occurs in the additions to the LXX., and is highly improbable. Shishak came to the throne, according to R. S. Poole, about B. C. 972; others date his accession in 975 or 988. No such name as Tahpanes or Thekemina is found in the Egyptian records, and the wife of Shishak was Karaamat.

† Compare the names Eshbaal, Meribaal, Jerubbaal, Baaljada, with Ishjo (LXX. 1 Sam. xiv. 49, Heb.), Mephibosheth Eliada. In later days Baal was changed into the nickname *Bosheth*, "shame"; hence Ishbosheth, Jerubesheth, Mephibosheth. See Kittel, ii. 87.

‡ See Kittel, *Gesch. der Hebr.*, ii. 169-76.

ly ventured to doubt.* The discussion of such a question is, indeed, wholly absurd and profitless, and is only here alluded to in order to illustrate the completeness of Solomon's fall. As the Book of Ecclesiastes is certainly not by him it can throw no light on the moods of his latter days, unless it be conceivable that it represents some faint breath of olden tradition. The early commentators acquitted or condemned him as though they sat on the judgment-seat of the Almighty. They would have shown more wisdom if they had admitted that such decisions are—fortunately for all men—beyond the scope of human judges. Happily for us God, not man, is the judge, and He looks down on earth

"With larger other eyes than ours
To make allowance for us all."

Orcagna was wiser when, in his great picture in the Campo Santo at Pisa and in the Strozzi Chapel at Florence, he represented Solomon rising out of his sepulchre in robe and crown at the trumpet of the archangel, uncertain whether he is to turn to the right hand or to the left.

And Dante, as all men know, joins Solomon in Paradise with the Four Great Schoolmen. The great mediæval poet of Latin Christianity did not side with St. Augustine and the Latin Fathers against the wise king, but with St. Chrysostom and the Greek Fathers for him. He did so because he accepted St. Bernard's mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs:—

"La quinta luce, ch'è tra noi più bella
Spira di tale amor, che tutto il mondo
Laggiù ne gola di saver novella.
Entro v'è l'alta mente, u' sì profondo
Saver fu messo, che si il vero è vero,
A veder tanto non surse il secondo."†

There is a famous legend in the Qur'an about the death of Solomon.‡

"Work ye righteousness O ye family of David: for I see that which ye do. And we made the wind subject unto Solomon. . . . And we made a fountain of molten brass to flow for him. And some of the genii were obliged to work in his presence by the will of his Lord. They made for him whatever he pleased of palaces, and statues, and large dishes like fishponds, and caldrons standing firm on their trivets; and we said, Work righteousness, O family of David, with thanksgiving; for few of my servants are thankful. And when we had decreed that Solomon should die, nothing discovered his death unto them, except the creeping thing of the earth that gnawed his staff. And when his body fell down, the genii plainly perceived that if they had known that which is secret they had not continued in a vile punishment.§

The legend briefly alluded to was that Solomon employed the genii to build his Temple, but, foreseeing that he would die before its completion, he prayed God to conceal his death from them, so that they might go on working. His prayer was

* See Buddeus, *Hist. Eccl.*, ii. 237.

† "The fifth light shining with a beauty pure
Breathes from such love that all the world below
Craves to have tidings of him true and sure.
Within it is the lofty mind, where so
Deep knowledge dwelt, that, if the truth be true,
Such insight ne'er a second rose to know."

‡ Qur'an, xxiv. 10; and Dean Plummer's notes.

§ Sale's Koran, ii. 287; Palmer's Qur'an, ii. 152.

heard, and the rest of the legend may best be told in the words of a poet:*—

“ King Solomon stood in his crown of gold,
Between the pillars, before the altar
In the House of the Lord. And the king was old,
And his strength began to falter,
So that he leaned on his ebony staff,
Sealed with the seal of the Pentegraph.

And the king stood still as a carven king,
The carven cedar beams below,
In his purple robe, with his signet-ring,
And his beard as white as snow.
And his face to the Oracle, where the hymn
Dies under the wings of the cherubim.

And it came to pass as the king stood there,
And looked on the House he had built with pride,
That the hand of the Lord came unawares
And touched him, so that he died
In his purple robe and his signet-ring
And the crown wherewith they had crowned him king.

And the stream of folk that came and went
To worship the Lord with prayer and praise,
Went softly ever in wonderment,
For the king stood there always;
And it was solemn and strange to behold
The dead king crowned with a crown of gold.

So King Solomon stood up dead in the House
Of the Lord, heid there by the Pentegraph,
Until out from the pillar there ran a red mouse,
And gnawed through his ebony staff;
Then flat on his face the king fell down,
And they picked from the dust a golden crown.”

The legends of the East describe Solomon as tormented indeed, yet not without hope. In the romance of Vathek he is described as listening earnestly to the roar of a cataract, because when it ceases to roar his anguish will be at an end.

“ The king so renowned for his wisdom was on the loftiest elevation, and placed immediately beneath the Dome. ‘ The thunder,’ he said, ‘ precipitated me hither, where, however, I do not remain totally destitute of hope; for an angel of light hath revealed that, in consideration of the piety of my early youth, my woes shall come to an end. Till then I am in torments, ineffable torments; an unrelenting fire preys on my heart.’ The caliph was ready to sink with terror when he heard the groans of Solomon. Having uttered this exclamation, Solomon raised his hands towards heaven, in token of supplication; and the caliph discerned through his bosom, which was transparent as crystal, his heart enveloped in flames.”

So Solomon passed away—the last king of all Palestine till another king arose a thousand years later, like him in his fondness for magnificence, like him in his tamperings with idolatry, like him in being the builder of the Temple, but in all other respects a far more grievous sinner and a far more inexcusable tyrant—Herod, falsely called “ The Great.”

And in the same age arose another King of Solomon’s descendants, whose palace was the shop of the carpenter and His throne the cross, and whose mortal body was the true Temple of the Supreme—that King whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and whose dominion endureth throughout all ages.

* The Earl of Lytton.

BOOK III.

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM.

B.C. 937-889.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NEW REIGN.

I KINGS xii. 1-5.

“ A foolish son is the calamity of his father. —PROV. xix. 13.
“ He left behind him Roboam, even the foolishness of the people, and one that had no understanding.” —ECCLES. xlvii. 23.

REHOBOAM, who was Solomon’s only son, succeeded in Jerusalem without opposition, B.C. 937.* But the northern tribes were in no mood to regard as final the prerogative acceptance of the son of Solomon by the rival tribe of Judah. David had won them by his vivid personality; Solomon had dazzled them by his royal magnificence. It did not follow that they were blindly to accept a king who emerged for the first time from the shadow of the harem, and was the son of an Ammonitess, who worshipped Chemosh. Instead of going to Rehoboam at Jerusalem as the tribes had gone to David at Hebron, they summoned an assembly at their ancient city of Shechem, on the site of the modern Nablus, between Mount Ebal and Gerizim. In this fortress-sanctuary they determined, as “ men of Israel,” to bring their grievances under the notice of the new sovereign before they formally ratified his succession. According to one view they summoned Jeroboam, who had already returned to Zeredah, to be their spokesman.† When the assembly met they told the king that they would accept him if he would lighten their grievous service which his father had put upon them.‡ Rehoboam, taken by surprise, said that they should receive his answer in “ three days.” In the interval he consulted the aged counsellors of his father. Their answer was astute in its insight into human nature. It resembled the “ long promises, short performance ” which Guido da Montefeltro recommended to Pope Boniface VIII. in the case of the town of Penestrino.§ They well understood the maxim of “ *omnia scribitur pro imperio,* ” which has paved the way to power of many a usurper from Otho to Bolingbroke. “ Give the people a civil answer,” they said; “ tell them that *you* are *their* servant. Content with this they will be scattered to their homes, and you will bind them to your

* “ Rehoboam ” means “ enlarger of the people ” (comp. Eurudemos); Jeroboam, “ whose people is many ” (Poludemos; comp. Thiodric, Thierry). But Cheyne makes it mean “ the kingdom contendeth ” (Kleinert, *Volkstreiter*).

† So we read in the LXX. Cod. Vat., and (partly) in the Vulgate (see Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament*, p. 117). Unless Jeroboam had spontaneously returned from Egypt on hearing of the death of Solomon, there would hardly have been time to summon him thence. 2 Chron. x. 2 represents the matter thus. Possibly his name has crept by error into 1 Kings xii. 3. See Wellhausen-Bleek’s *Einleitung*, p. 243.

‡ In the LXX. the Ephraimites complain of the expensive provision for Solomon’s table. “ Thy father made his yoke grievous upon us, and made grievous to us the meats of his table.” LXX. (Cod. Vat.), καὶ ἐβάρυνε τὰ βρώματα τῆς τραπέζης αὐτοῦ.
§ Dante, *Inferno*, Cant. xxvii.

yoke for ever." In an answer so deceptive, but so immoral, the corrupting influence of the Solomonian autocracy is as conspicuous as in that of the malapert youths who make their appeal to the king's conceit.

"Who knoweth whether his son will be a wise man or a fool?" asks Solomon in the Book of Proverbs. Apparently he had done little or nothing to save his only son from being the latter. Despots in polygamous households, whether in Palestine or Zululand, live in perpetual dread of their own sons, and generally keep them in absolute subordination. If Rehoboam had received the least political training, or had been possessed of the smallest common sense, he would have been able to read the signs of the times sufficiently well to know that everything might be lost by blustering arrogance, and everything gained by temporising plausibility. Had Rehoboam been a man like David, or even like Saul in his better day, he might have grappled to himself the affections of his people as with hooks of steel by seizing the opportunity of abating their burdens, and offering them a sincere assurance that he would study their peace and welfare above all. Had he been a man of ordinary intelligence, he would have seen that the present was not the moment to exacerbate a discontent which was already dangerous. But the worldly-wise counsel of the "elders" of Solomon was utterly distasteful to a man who, after long insignificance, had just begun to feel the vertigo of autocracy. His sense of his right was strong in exact proportion to his own worthlessness. He turned to the young men who had grown up with him, and who stood before him—the *jeunesse dorée* of a luxurious and hypocritical epoch, the aristocratic idlers in whom the insolent self-indulgence of an enervated society had expelled the old spirit of simple faithfulness.* Their answer was the sort of answer which Buckingham and Sedley might have suggested to Charles II. in face of the demands of the Puritans; and it was founded on notions of inherent prerogative, and "the right Divine of kings to govern wrong," such as the Bishops might have instilled into James I. at the Hampton Court Conference, or Archbishop Laud into Charles I. in the days of "Thorough."

"Threaten this insolent canaille," they said, "with your royal severity. Tell them that you do not intend to give up your sacred right to enforced labour, such as your brother of Egypt has always enjoyed.† Tell them that your little finger shall be thicker than your father's loins,‡ and that instead of his whips you will chastise them with leaded thongs.§ That is the way to show yourself every inch a king."

The insensate advice of these youths proved itself attractive to the empty and infatuated prince. He accepted it in the demetation which is a presage of ruin; for, as the pious historian says, "the cause was from the Lord."

The announcement of this incredibly foolish reply woke in the men of Israel an answering shout of rebellion. In the rhythmic war-cry of

Sheba, the son of Bichri, which had become proverbial,* they cried:—

"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!"†

Unable to appease the wild tumult, Rehoboam again showed his want of sense by sending an officer to the people whose position and personality were most sure to be offensive to them. He sent "Adoram, who was over the tribute"—the man who stood, before the Ephraimites especially, as the representative of everything in monarchical government which was to them most entirely odious. Josephus says that he hoped to mollify the indignant people. But it was too late. They stoned the aged *Al-ham-Mas* with stones that he died; and when the foolish king witnessed or heard of the fate of a man who had grown grey as the chief agent of depotism he felt that it was high time to look after his own safety. Apparently he had come with no other escort than that of the men of Judah who formed a part of the national militia. Of Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites we hear no more. The princeling of a despoiled and humiliated kingdom was perhaps in no condition to provide the pay of these foreign mercenaries. The king found that the name of David was no longer potent, and that royalty had lost its awful glamour. He made an effort‡ to reach his chariot, and, barely succeeding, fled with headlong speed to Jerusalem. From that day for ever the unity of Israel was broken, and "the twelve tribes" became a name for two mutually antagonistic powers.§ The men of Israel at once chose Jeroboam for their king, and an event was accomplished which had its effect on the history of all succeeding times. The only Israelites over whom the House of David continued to rule were those who, like the shattered remnant of Simeon, dwelt in the cities of Judah.¶

Thus David's grandson found that his kingdom over a people had shrunk to the headship of a tribe, with a sort of nominal suzerainty over Edom and part of Philistia. He was reduced to the comparative insignificance of David's own position during the first seven years, when he was only king in Hebron. This disruption was the beginning of endless material disasters to both kingdoms; but it was the necessary condition of high spiritual blessings for "it was of the Lord."

Politically it is easy to see that one cause of the revolt lay in the too great rapidity in which kings, who, as it was assumed, were to be elective, or at least to depend on the willing obedience of the people, had transformed themselves into hereditary despots. Judah might still accept the sway of a king of her own tribe; but the powerful and jealous Ephraimites, at the head of the Northern Confederation, refused to regard themselves as the destined footstool for a single family. As in the case of Saul and of David, they determined

* 2 Sam. xx. 1.

† Or, "Now feed thine own house" (LXX., *βόσκει*, reading *βοσκει* for *βοσκει*); and the LXX. adds, "For this man is not (fit) to be a ruler, nor to be a prince." Evidently the revolt was the culmination of those jealousies which the haughty tribe of Ephraim had already manifested in the lives of Gideon, Abimelech, and David.

‡ Heb., "strengthened himself."

§ In fact, the *δαδαι καφύλον* became more of a reminiscence than anything else. Simeon, for instance, practically disappeared (1 Chron. iv. 24-43).

¶ 1 Kings xii. 17.

* They are called *yeladim*, which surely cannot apply to men of forty, so that Rehoboam was probably little more than a youth, *na'ar* (2 Chron. xiii. 7; comp. Gen. xxxiii. 13).

† Herod., ii. 124-28.

‡ "My little finger." Heb., "my littleness"; LXX.,

§ *ἡ μικρότης μου*. But the paraphrase is perfectly correct (Vulg., Pesh., Josephus, and the Rabbis).

¶ Virga si est nodosa et aculeata scorpions vocatur, quia arcuato vulnere in corpus infigitur" (Isidor., *Orig.*, i. 175).

once more to accept no king who did not owe his sovereignty to their own free choice.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DISRUPTION.

I KINGS xii. 6-20.

"It was of the Lord." It is no small proof of the insight and courageous faithfulness of the historian that he accepts without question the verdict of ancient prophecy that the disruption was God's doing; for everything which happened in the four subsequent centuries, alike in Judah and in Israel, seemed to belie this pious conviction. We, in the light of later history, are now able to see that the disseverance of Israel's unity worked out results of eternal advantage to mankind; but in the sixth century before Christ no event could have seemed to be so absolutely disastrous. It must have worn the aspect of an extinction of the glory of the House of Jacob. It involved the obliteration of the great majority of the descendants of the patriarchs, and the reduction of the rest to national insignificance and apparently hopeless servitude. Throughout those centuries of troubled history, in the struggle for existence which was the lot of both kingdoms alike, it was difficult to say whether their antagonism or their friendship, their open wars or their matrimonial alliances, were productive of the greater ruin. Each section of the nation fatally hampered and counterpoised the other with a perpetual rivalry and menace. Ephraim envied Judah, and Judah vexed Ephraim. In extreme cases the south was ready to purchase the intervention of Syria, or even of Assyria, to check and overwhelm its northern rival, while the north could raise up Egypt or Edom to harass the southern kingdom with intolerable raids.

To us the Southern Kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, seems the more important and the more interesting division of the people. It became the heir of all the promises, the nurse of the Messianic hope, the mother of the four greater prophets, the continuer of all the subsequent history after the glory of Israel had been stamped out by Assyria for ever.

1. But such was not the aspect presented by the kingdom of Judah to contemporary observers. On the contrary, Judah seemed to be a paltry and accidental fragment—one tribe, dissevered from the magnificent unity of Israel. Nothing redeemed it from impotence and obliteration but the splendid possessions of Jerusalem and the Temple, which guaranteed the often threatened perpetuity of the House of David. The future seemed to be wholly with Israel when men compared the relative size and population of the disunited tribes. Judah comprised little more than the environs of Jerusalem. Except Jerusalem, Mizpeh, Gibeon, and Hebron, it had no famous shrines and centres of national traditions. It could not even claim the southern town of Beersheba as a secure possession.* The tribe of Simeon had melted away into a shadow, if not into non-existence, amid the surrounding populations, and its territory was under the kings of Judah; but they did not even

* In 1 Kings xiv. 3 it is reckoned as belonging to Judah (comp. Josh. xv. 28), being really a town of Simeon (Josh. xix. 2); but from Amos v. 5, viii. 14, we should infer that it was at any rate largely frequented by Israelites.

possess the whole of Benjamin, and if that little tribe was nominally reckoned with them, it was only because part of their capital city was in Benjaminite territory, to which belonged the valley of Hinnom. To Israel, on the other hand, pertained all the old local sanctuaries and scenes of great events. On the east of Jordan they held Mahanaim; on the west Jericho, near as it was to Jerusalem, and Bethel with its sacred stone of Jacob, and Gilgal with its memorial of the conquest, and Shechem the national place of assembly, and Accho and Joppa on the sea shore. Israel, too, inherited all the predominance over Moab and Ammon, and the Philistines, which had been secured by conquest in the reign of David.*

2. Then, again, the greatest heroes of tradition had been sons of the northern tribes. The fame of Joshua was theirs, of Deborah and Barak, of fierce Jephthah, of kingly Gideon, and of bold Abimelech. Holy Samuel, the leader of the prophets, and heroic Saul, the first of the kings, had been of their kith and kin. Judah could only claim the bright personality of David, and the already tarnished glories of Solomon, which men did not yet see through the mirage of legend but in the prosaic light of every day.

3. Again, the Northern Kingdom was unhampered by the bad example and erroneous development of the preceding royalty. Jeroboam had not stained his career with crimes like David; nor had he sunk, as Solomon had done, into polygamy and idolatry. It seemed unlikely that he, with so fatal an example before his eyes, could be tempted into oppressive tyranny, futile commerce, or luxurious ostentation. He could found a new dynasty, free from the trammels of a bad commencement, and as fully built on Divine command as that of the House of Jesse.

4. Nor was it a small advantage that the new kingdom had an immense superiority over its southern compeer in richness of soil and beauty of scenery. To it belonged the fertile plain of Jezreel, rolling with harvests of golden grain. Its command of Accho gave it access to the treasures of the shore and of the sea. To it belonged the purple heights of Carmel, of which the very name meant "a garden of God"; and the silver Lake of Galilee, with its inexhaustible swarms of fish; and the fields of Gennesareth, which were a wonder of the world for their tropical luxuriance. Theirs also were the lilled waters and paper-reeds of Merom, and the soft, green, park-like scenery of Gerizim, and the roses of Sharon, and the cedars of Lebanon, and the vines and fig trees and ancient terebinths of all the land of Ephraim, and the forest glades of Zebulon and Naphtali, and the wild uplands beyond the Jordan—which were all far different from the "awful barrenness" of Judah, with its monotony of rounded hills.†

5. Under these favourable conditions three great advantages were exceptionally developed in the Northern Kingdom.

(1) It evidently enjoyed a larger freedom as well as a greater prosperity. How gay and bright, how festive and musical, how worldly and luxurious, was the life of the wealthy and the noble in the ivory palaces and on the gorgeous divans of Samaria and Jezreel, as we read of it in the pages of the contemporary prophets!‡ Naboth and Shemer show themselves as independent of tyr-

* 1 Kings xvi. 3; 2 Kings ii. 4.

† See Stanley, *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, ii. 265-71.

‡ Amos v. 11, vi. 4-6.

anny as any sturdy dalesman or feudal noble, and the great lady of Shunem, on the slopes of Esdraelon, in her well-known home, is a sample of Israelite life in the north as true as that of the reaper Boaz in the south. She leaves her home under the pressure of famine, and goes down to the plains of Philistia. When she returns and finds a stranger in her corn-fields, she insists on restitution, even at the hand of the king himself.*

(2) The Ten Tribes also developed a more brilliant literature. Some of the most glowing psalms are probably of northern origin, as well as the Song of Deborah, and the work of the writer who is now generally recognised by critics under the name of the Deuteronomist. The loveliest poem produced by Jewish literature—the Song of Songs—bears on every page the impress of the beautiful and imaginative north. The fair girl of Shunem loves her leopard-haunted hills, and the vernal freshness of her northern home, more than the perfumed chambers of Solomon's seraglio; and her poet is more charmed with the lustre and loveliness of Tirzah than with the palaces and Temple of Jerusalem. The Book of Job may have originated in the Northern Kingdom, from which also sprang the best historians of the Jewish race.†

(3) But the main endowment of the new kingdom consisted in the magnificent development and independence of the prophets.

It was not till after the overthrow of the Ten Tribes that the glory of prophecy migrated southwards and Jerusalem produced the mighty triad of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. For the two and a half centuries that the Northern Kingdom lasted scarcely one prophet is heard of in Judah except the scarcely known Hanani, the Eliezer, the son of Mareshah,‡ who is little more than a *nominiis umbra*. To the north belongs the great herald-prophet of the Old Dispensation, the mighty Elijah; the softer spirit of the statesman-prophet Elisha; the undaunted Micaiah, son of Imlah; the picturesque Micah; the historic Jonah; the plaintive Hosea; and that bold and burning patriot, a fragment of whose prophecy now forms part of the Book of Zechariah. Amos, indeed, belonged by birth to Tekoa, which was in Judah, but his prophetic activity was confined to Bethel and Jezreel. The Schools of the Prophets at Ramah, Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal were all in Israel. The passages in the third section of the Book of Zechariah are alone sufficient to show how vast was the influence in the affairs of the nation of the prophets of the north, and how fearless their intervention. Even when they were most fiercely persecuted, they were not afraid to beard the most powerful kings—an Ahab and a Jeroboam II.—in all their pride.§ Samaria and Galilee were rich in prophetic lives; and they, too were the destined scene of the life of Him of whom all the prophets prophesied, and from whose inspiration they drew their heavenly fire.

Against these advantages, however, must be set two serious and ultimately fatal drawbacks—germs of disease which lay in the very constitution of the kingdom, and from the first doomed it to death.

One of these was the image-worship, of which I shall speak in a later section; the other was the lack of one predominant and continuous dynasty.

The royalty of the north did not spring up

through long years of gradual ascendancy, and could not originally appeal to splendid services and heroic memories. Jeroboam was a man of humble, and, if tradition says truly, of tainted origin. He was not a usurper, for he was called to the throne by the voice of prophecy and the free spontaneous choice of his people; but in Solomon's days he had been a potential if not an actual rebel. He set the example of successful revolt, and it was eagerly followed by many a soldier and general of similar antecedents. In the short space of two hundred and forty-five years there were no less than nine changes of dynasty, of which those of Jeroboam, Baasha, Kobolam,* Menahem, consisted only of a father and son. There were at least four isolated or partial kings: Zimri, Tibni, Pekah, and Hosea. Only two dynasties, those of Omri and Jehu, succeeded in maintaining themselves for even four or five generations, and they, like the others, were at last quenched in blood. The close of the kingdom in its usurpations, massacres, and catastrophes reminds us of nothing so much as the disastrous later days of the Roman Empire, when the purple was so often rent by the dagger-thrust, and it was rare for emperors to die a natural death. The kingdom which had risen from a sea of blood set in the same red waves.

On the other hand, whatever may have been the drawback of the small and hampered Southern Kingdom, it had several conspicuous advantages. It had a settled and incomparable capital, which could be rendered impregnable against all ordinary assaults; while the capital of the Northern Kingdom shifted from Shechem to Penuel‡ and Tirzah, and from Tirzah to Samaria and Jezreel. It had the blessing of a loyal people, and of the all-but-unbroken continuity of one loved and cherished dynasty for nearly four centuries. It had the yet greater blessing of producing not a few kings who more or less fully attained to the purity of the theocratic ideal. Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, were good and high-minded kings, and the two latter were religious reformers. Whatever may have been the sins and shortcomings of Judah—and they were often very heinous—still the prophets bear witness that her transgressions were less incurable than those of her sister Samaria. All good men began to look to Jerusalem as the nursing mother of the Promised Deliverer. "Out of Judah," said the later Zechariah, "shall come forth the corner stone, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every governor together."‡ Amos was born in Judah; Hosea took refuge there; the later Zechariah laboured (ix., xi., xiii. 7-9) for the fusion of the two kingdoms. From the unknown, or little known, seers who endeavoured to watch over the infant destinies of Judah, to the mighty prophets who inspired her early resistance to Assyria, or menaced her apostasy with ruin at the hands of Babylon, she rarely lacked for any long period the inspired guidance of moral teachers. If Judah was for many years behind-

* If we may regard Kobolam as a real person (2 Kings xv. 10, LXX.). Thus, in the Northern Kingdom twenty kings belong to *nine* different dynasties in two hundred and forty-five years; and in the Southern only nineteen kings of *one* dynasty rule for three hundred and forty-five years.

† Jeroboam lived for a time at Penuel on the east of the Jordan, perhaps to escape all danger from Shishak's invasion. For Penuel, on the eastern side of the Jabbok, see Gen. xxxiii. 22, 30; Judg. viii. 8, 17. It was important as commanding the caravan route from Damascus to Shechem.

‡ Zech. x. 4 (R. V., "exacters").

* 2 Kings iv. 18, 22, viii. 1-6; Stanley, ii. 272.

† See Ewald, iv. 9 (E. T.).

‡ 2 Chron. xx. 37.

§ Zech. xi. 4-17, xiii. 7-9.

hand in power, in civilisation, in literature, even in the splendour of prophetic inspiration, she still managed on the whole to uplift to the nations the standard of righteousness. That standard was often fiercely assaulted, but the standard-bearers did not faint. The torn remnants of the old ideal were still upheld by faithful hands. Neither the heathen tendencies of princes nor the vapid ceremonialism of priests were allowed unchallenged to usurp the place of religion pure and undefiled. The later Judæan prophets, and especially the greatest of them, rose to a spirituality which had never yet been attained, and was never again equalled till the rise of the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings.

How clearly, then, do we see the truth of the prophetic announcement that the disruption of the kingdom was "of the Lord"! Out of apparent catastrophe was evolved infinite reparation. The abandonment of the Davidic dynasty of the Ten Tribes looked like earthly ruin. It did indeed hasten the final overthrow of all national autonomy; but that would have come in any case, humanly speaking, from Assyria, or Babylonia, or Persia, or the Seleucids, or the Ptolemies, or Rome. On the other hand, it fostered a religious power and concentration which were of more value to the world than any other blessings. "On all the past greatness and glory of Israel," says Ewald,* "Judah cast its free and cheerful gaze. Before its kings floated the vision of great ancestors; before its prophets examples like those of Nathan and Gad; before the whole people the memory of its lofty days. And so it affords us no unworthy example of the honourable part which may be played for many centuries in the history of the world, and the rich blessings which may be imparted, even by a little kingdom, provided it adheres faithfully to the eternal truth. The gain to the higher life of humanity acquired under the earthly protection of this petty monarchy far outweighs all that has been attempted or accomplished for the permanent good of man by many much larger states." "The people of Israel goes under," says Stade, "but the religion of Israel triumphs over the powers of the world, while it changes its character from the religion of a people into a religion of the world." This development of religion, as he proceeds to point out, was mainly due to the long, slow enfeeblement of the people through many centuries, until at last it had acquired a force which enabled it to survive the political annihilation of the nationality from which it sprang.

In reality both kingdoms gained under the appearance of total loss. "Every people called to high destinies," says Renan, "ought to be a small complete world, enclosing opposed poles within its bosom. Greece had at a few leagues from each other, Sparta and Athens, two antipodes to a superficial observer, but in reality rival sisters, necessary the one to the other. It was the same in Palestine."

The high merit of the historian of the two kingdoms appears in this, that, without entangling himself in details, and while he contents himself with sweeping and summary judgments, he established a moral view of history which has been ratified by the experience of the world. He shows us how the tottering and insignificant kingdom of Judah, secured by God's promise, and rising through many backslidings into higher spirituality and faithfulness, not only out-lived for a

century the overthrow of its far more powerful rival, but kept alive the torch of faith, and handed it on to the nations of many centuries across the dust and darkness of intervening generations. And in drawing this picture he helped to secure the fulfilment of his own ideal, for he inspired into many a patriot and many a reformer the indomitable faith in God which has enabled men, in age after age, to defy obloquy and opposition, to face the prison and the sword, secure in the ultimate victory of God's truth and God's righteousness amidst the most seemingly absolute failure, and against the most apparently overwhelming odds.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"JEROBOAM THE SON OF NEBAT, WHO MADE ISRAEL TO SIN."

1 KINGS xii. 21-23.

"For from Israel is even this; the workman made it, and it is no god: yea, the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces."—HOSEA viii. 6.

THE condemnation of the first king of Israel sounds like a melancholy and menacing refrain through the whole history of the Northern Kingdom.* Let us consider the extent and nature of his crime; for though the condemnation is most true if we judge merely by the issue of Jeroboam's acts, a man's guilt cannot always be measured by the immensity of its unforeseen consequences, nor can his actions and intentions be always fairly judged after the lapse of centuries. The moral judgments recorded in the Book of Kings concerning legal and ritual offences are measured by the standard of men's consciences nearly a century after Josiah's Reformation in B.C. 623, not by that which prevailed in B.C. 937, when Jeroboam came to the throne. It seems clear that, even in the opinion of his contemporaries, Jeroboam was unfaithful to the duties of the call which he had received from God; but it would be an error to suppose that his sin was, in itself, so heinous as those of which both Solomon and Rehoboam and other kings of Judah were guilty. "Calf-worship," as it was contemptuously called in later days, did not present itself as "calf-worship" to Jeroboam or his people. To them it was only the more definite adoration of Jehovah under the guise of the cherubic emblem which Solomon had himself enshrined in the Temple and Moses himself had sanctioned in the Tabernacle. There is not a word to show that they were cognisant of the book which had narrated the fierce reprobation by Moses of Aaron's "golden calf" in the wilderness. Jeroboam's chief sin was not that as a king he tolerated, or even set up, a sort of idolatry, but that he induced the whole body of his subjects to share in his evil innovations.

The charge brought against him was threefold. First, he set up the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Secondly, he "made priests from among all the people, which were not of the sons of Levi." Thirdly, he established his "harvest feast" not on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, which was the Feast of Tabernacles, but on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. In estimating these sins let us endeavour—for it is a sacred duty—to be just.

* It recurs twenty-three times: 1 Kings xiv. 16, xv. 26, 30, 34, xvi. 2, 10, 26, 31, xxi. 22, xxii. 52; 2 Kings iii. 3, x. 29, 31, xliii. 2, 6, xiv. 24, xv. 9, 13, 24, 28, xvii. 21, 22, xxiii. 15.

* *Hist. of Isr.* iv. 12.

1. We read in the Authorised Version that "he made priests of the *lowest* of the people,"* and this tends to increase the prejudice against him. But to have done this wilfully would have been entirely against his own interests. The more honourable his priests were, the more was his new worship likely to succeed. The Hebrew only says that "he made priests of all classes of the people," or, as the Revised Version renders it, "from among all the people." No doubt this would appear to have been a heinous innovation, judged from the practice of later ages; it is not clear that it was equally so in the days of Jeroboam. If David, unrebuked, made his sons priests; if Ira the Ithrite was a priest; if Solomon, by his own fiat, altered the succession of the priesthood; if Solomon (no less than Jeroboam) arrogated to himself priestly functions on public occasions, the opinion as to priestly rights may not have existed in the days of Jeroboam, or may only have existed in an infinitely weaker form than in the days of the post-exilic chronicler. An incidental notice in another book shows us that in Dan, at any rate, he did *not* disturb the Levitic ministry. There the descendants of Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the grandson of Moses,† continued their priestly functions from the day when that unworthy descendant of the mighty lawgiver was seduced to conduct a grossly irregular cult for a few shillings a year, down to the day when the golden calf at Dan was carried away by Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria. If the Levites preferred to abide by the ministrations of Jerusalem, and migrated in large numbers to the south, Jeroboam may have held that necessity compelled him to appoint priests who were not of the House of Levi. Neither for this, nor for his new feast of Tabernacles, nor for the calf-worship, were the kings of Israel condemned (so far as is recorded) even by such mighty prophets as Elijah and Elisha.

In choosing Dan and Bethel as the seats for his new altars, the king was not actuated by purely arbitrary considerations. They were ancient and venerated shrines of pilgrimage and worship (Judg. xviii. 30, xx. 18, 26; 1 Sam. x. 3.) He did not create any sacredness which was not already attached to them in the popular imagination.‡ In point of fact he would have served the ends of a worldly policy much better if he had chosen Shechem; for Dan and Bethel were the two farthest parts of his kingdom. Dan was in constant danger from the Syrians, and Bethel, which is only twelve miles from Jerusalem, more than once fell into the hands of the kings of Judah, though they neither retained possession of it, nor disturbed the shrines, nor threw down the

* Literally, "he filled the hand," because the priests were consecrated by putting into their hands the parts of the sacrifice which were to be presented to God on the altar (Exod. xxviii. 41, xxix. 9-35; Lev. viii. 27).

† Such is the true reading. The "Manasseh" of our existing text is a Jewish falsification of the text timidly and tentatively introduced to protect the memory of Moses (see Judg. xviii. 26 ff.).

‡ For the sanctity of Bethel, "House of God," where God had twice appeared to Jacob, see Gen. xxviii. 11-19, xxxv. 9-15. The ark had once rested there under Phinehas (Judg. xx. 26-28), and it had been the home of Samueel (1 Sam. vii. 16). Dan, too, was "a holy city" (Judg. xviii. 30, 31; Tobit i. 5, 6). In 1 Kings xii. 30 ("the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan") some words may have dropped out. Klostermann adds, "and neglected Bethel"; but is that the fact? The LXX. adds *καὶ ἔλασαν τὸν ἄκρον Κυρίου*. On the other hand, the clause has been taken to imply the opposite—i. e., that even as far as Dan some were found who went in preference to Bethel, "the king's chapel" (Amos vii. 13). In 1 Kings xii. 28 the fairer rendering would be, "These are thy God," not "gods."

"calf" of the new worship. Jeroboam could not have created the "calf-worship" if he had not found everything prepared for its acceptance. Dan had been, since the earliest days, the seat of a chapelry and ephod served by the lineal descendants of Moses in unbroken succession; Bethel was associated with some of the nation's holiest memories since the days of their forefather Israel.

2. Again, if in Jeroboam's day the Priestly Code was in existence, he was clearly guilty of unjustifiable wilfulness in altering the time for observing the Feast of Tabernacles from the seventh to the eighth month. But if there be little or no contemporary trace of any observation of the Feast of Tabernacles—if, as Nehemiah tells us, it had not once been *properly* observed from the days of Joshua to his own, or if Jeroboam was unaware of any sacred legislation on the subject—the writers of the tenth century may have judged too severely the fixing of a date for the Feast of Ingathering, which may have seemed more suitable to the conditions of the northern and western tribes. For in parts of that region the harvest ripens a month earlier than in Judah, and the festival was meant to be kept at the season of harvest.*

3. These, however, were but incidental and subordinate matters compared with the setting up of the golden calves.

Jeroboam felt that if his people flocked to do sacrifice at the new and gorgeous Temple in Jerusalem they would return to their old monarchy and put him to death. He wished to avoid the fate of Ishbosheth.† He believed that he should be doing both a popular and a politic act if he saved them from the burden of this long journey and again decentralised the cult which Solomon had so recently centralised. He determined, therefore, to furnish the Ten Tribes with high places, and temples of high places, and objects of worship which might rival the golden cherubim of Zion, and be honoured with festal music and royal pomp.

He never dreamed either of apostatising from Jehovah, or of establishing the worship of idols. He broke the Second Commandment under pretence of helping the people to keep the first. The images which he set up were not meant to be *substitutes* for the one God, the God of their fathers, the God who had brought them from the land of Egypt; they were regarded as figures of Jehovah under the well understood and universally adopted emblem of a young bull, the symbol of fertility and strength.‡ Some have fancied that he was influenced by his Egyptian reminiscences, and perhaps by Anu, his traditional Egyptian bride. This is an obvious error. In Egypt *living* bulls were worshipped under the names of Apis and Mnevis, not idol-figures. Egyptian gods would have been strange reminders of Him who delivered His people from Egyptian tyranny. It would have been insensate, by quoting the very words of Aaron, to recall to the minds of the people the disasters which had followed the worship of the golden calf in the wilderness.§ Beyond all

* Lev. xxiii. 39. There is no hint about the other two annual feasts of Passover and Pentecost. Josephus implies that Jeroboam's feast was in the *seventh* month, as in Judah (*Antt.*, VIII. viii. 5).

† 2 Sam. iv. 7.

‡ Conceivably there may have been a reference to the heraldic sign of Ephraim (Deut. xxxiii. 17), as Klostermann supposes.

§ Exod. xx. 23, xxxii. 4, 8. See Professor Paul Cassel, *König Jeroboam*, p. 6. The identity of Jeroboam's words with Exod. xxxii. 4 may be due to the narrator.

question, Jeroboam neither did nor would have dreamed of bidding his whole people to abandon their faith and worship Egyptian idols, which never found any favour among the Israelites. He only encouraged them to worship Jehovah under the form of the cherubim.* Whatever may have been the aspect of the cherubim in the Oracle of the Temple, cherubic emblems appeared profusely amid its ornamentation, and the most conspicuous object in its courts was the molten sea, supported on the backs of twelve bulls. It is true that later prophets and poets, like Hosea and the Psalmist, spoke in scorn of his images as mere "calves," and spoke of him as likening his Maker to "an ox that eateth hay."† They even came in due time to regard them as figures of Baal and Astarte,‡ but this view is falsified by the entire annals of the Northern Kingdom from its commencement to its close. Jeroboam was, and always regarded himself as, a worshipper of Jehovah. He named his son and destined successor Abijah ("Jehovah is my Father"). Rehoboam himself was a far worse offender than he was, so far as the sanction of idolatry was concerned.

And yet he sinned, and yet he made Israel to sin. It is true that he did not sin against the full extent of the light and knowledge vouchsafed to men in later days. The sin of which he was guilty was the sin of worldly policy. With professions of religion on his lips he pandered to the rude and sensuous instinct which makes materialism in worship so much more attractive to all weak minds than spirituality. Proclaiming as his motive the rights of the people, he accelerated their religious degeneracy. "The means to strengthen or ruin the civil power," says Lowth, "is either to establish or destroy the right worship of God. The way to destroy religion is to embase the dispenser of it. . . . This is to give the royal stamp to a piece of lead." If we may trust to Jewish tradition, there were some families in Israel who, though they clung to their old homes, and would not migrate to the south, yet refused to worship what is, not quite justly, called "the heifer Baal."§ The legendary Tobit (i. 4-7) boasts that "when all the tribes of Naphtali fell from the house of Jerusalem and sacrificed to the heifer Baal I alone went often to Jerusalem at the feasts," and, in general, observed the provisions of the Levitic law.

There seems to have been but little religion in Jeroboam's temperament. In every other great national gathering at Shechem and other sacred places we read of religious rites.¶ No mention is made of them, no allusion occurs respecting them, in the assembly to which Jeroboam owed his throne. He might at least have consulted Ahijah, who had given him, when he was still a subject, the Divine promise and sanction of royalty. He

* It has been considered probable that he found an additional sanction for these material symbols in an ancient existing image at Gilgal, to which there may be obscure allusion in the Prophet Hosea (iv. 15, ix. 15).

† See 2 Chron. xi. 15, where the chronicler in his flaming hatred calls them devils (*i. e.*, "satyrs," *Feldtäufel*, Isa. xiii. 21; comp. Hosea viii. 5, xiii. 2). They were probably two young bulls of brass overlaid with gold (see Psalm cvi. 19; Isa. xl. 19).

‡ Tobit i. 5.

§ *Ἡ δαίμωνος Βάαλ*. If this be the right reading, not *δύναμις*, the feminine implies special scorn, either implying *ἡ ἀσχήνη* (*Bosheth*) or pointing, as Baudissin thinks, to an androgynous deity. Grätz thinks that "Bethel" may be the true reading.

¶ Josh. xxiv. 1; 1 Sam. x. 19; 2 Sam. v. 1-3; 1 Kings viii. 1-5, 62.

might, had he chosen, have followed a higher and purer guidance than that of his own personal misgiving and his own arbitrary will. The error which he committed was this—he trusted in policy, not in the Living God. "It was," says Dean Stanley, "precisely the policy of Abder-Rahman, Caliph of Spain, when he arrested the movement of his subjects to Mecca, by the erection of a Holy Place of the Zeca at Cordova, and of Abd-el-Malik when he built the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem, because of his quarrel with the authorities at Mecca." He was not guilty of revolt, for he acted under prophetic sanction; nor of idolatry, for he did not abandon the worship of Jehovah; but "he broke the unity and tampered with the spiritual conception of the national worship. From worshipping God under a gross material symbol, the Israelites gradually learnt to worship other gods altogether; and the venerable sanctuaries of Dan and Bethel prepared the way for the temples of Ashtaroth and Bethel at Samaria and Jezreel. The religion of the kingdom of Israel at last sank lower than that of the kingdom of Judah against which it had revolted. 'The sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin,' is the sin again and again repeated in the policy, half-worldly, half religious, which has prevailed through large tracts of ecclesiastical history. Many are the forms of worship which, with high pretensions, have been nothing else but so many various and opposite ways of breaking the Second Commandment. Many a time has the end been held to justify the means, and the Divine character been degraded by the pretence, or even the sincere intention, of upholding His cause, for the sake of secular aggrandisement; for the sake of binding together good systems, which it was feared would otherwise fall to pieces; for the sake of supporting the faith of the multitude for fear they should otherwise fall away to rival sects, or lest the enemy should come and take away their place and nation. False arguments have been used in support of religious truths, false miracles promulgated or tolerated, false readings in the sacred text defended. . . . And so the faith of mankind has been undermined by the very means intended to preserve it. The whole subsequent history is a record of the mode by which, with the best intentions, a Church and nation may be corrupted."

This view of Dean Stanley is confirmed by another wise teacher, Professor F. D. Maurice. Jeroboam, he says, "did not trust the Living God. He thought, not that his kingdom stood upon a Divine foundation, but that it was to be upheld by certain Divine props and sanctions. The two doctrines seem closely akin. Many regard them as identical. In truth there is a whole heaven between them. The king who believes that his kingdom has a Divine foundation confesses his own subjection and responsibility to an actual living ruler. The king who desires to surround himself with Divine sanctions would fain make himself supreme, knows that he cannot, and would therefore seek help from the fear men have of an invisible power in which they have ceased to believe. He wants a God as the support of his authority. *What God he cares very little.*"

And thus, to quote once more, "The departure from spiritual principles out of political motives surely leads to destruction, and is here portrayed for all times." *

* Vilmar.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JEROBOAM AND THE MAN OF GOD.

I KINGS xiii. 1-34.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."—1 JOHN iv. 1.

"Ὁὐ γὰρ ἔδει τὸν τῆς θείας ἀκροῦτα φωνῆς ἀνθρωπίνῃ πιστεῦσαι τὰνάντια λεγούσῃ."—THEODORET.

WE are told that Jeroboam, whose position probably made him restless and insecure, first built or fortified Shechem, and then went across the Jordan and established another palace and stronghold at Penuel. After this he shifted his residence once more to the beautiful town of Tirzah,* where he built for himself the palace which Zimri afterwards burnt over his own head. Although the prophet Shemaiah forbade Rehoboam's attempt to crush him in a great war, Jeroboam remained at war with him and Abijah all his life, till his reign of two-and-twenty troubled years ended apparently by a sudden death—for the chronicler says that "the Lord struck him, and he died."

Nearly all that we know of Jeroboam apart from these incidental notices is made up of two stories, both of which are believed by critics to date from a long subsequent age, but which the compiler of the Book of Kings introduced into his narrative from their intrinsic force and religious instructiveness.

The first of these stories tells us of the only spontaneous prophetic protest against his proceedings of which we read. So ancient is this curious narrative that tradition had entirely forgotten the names of the two prophets concerned in it. It probably assumed shape from the dim local reminiscences evoked in the days of Josiah's reformation, when the grave of a forgotten prophet of Judah was discovered among the tombs at Bethel, three hundred and twenty years after the events described.

A nameless man of God—Josephus calls him Jadon, and some have identified him with Iddo †—came out of Judah to atone for the silence of Israel, and to protest in God's name against the new worship. His protest, however, is against "the altar." He does not say a word about the golden calves. Jeroboam, perhaps, at his dedication festival of the king's shrine at Bethel, was standing on the altar-slope, ‡ as Solomon had done in the Temple, to burn incense. Suddenly the man of God appeared, and threatened to the altar the destruction and desecration which subsequently fell upon it. We cannot be sure that some of the details are not later additions supplied from subsequent events. Josephus rationalises the story very absurdly in the style of Paulus. The sign of the destruction or rending of the altar, and the outpouring of the ashes, § may have been first fulfilled in that memorable earthquake

* Now Talura, six miles north of Nablus.

† So, too, Jarchi. No doubt they were guided by the remark in 2 Chron. ix. 29, "the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam." But it is not possible, for Iddo lived to a later date (2 Chron. xiii. 22). Ephrem Syrus and Tertullian suppose him to have been Shemaiah (comp. 2 Chron. xii. 5). These are untenable guesses. Epiphanius calls him Joas; Clement, Abd-adonai; Tertullian, Sameas.

‡ Not "by the altar," as in A. V. LXX, ἐπὶ τὸ θυσια-
στήριον, Vulg., super altare.

§ The ashes of the animal offerings (שֵׂמֶט) used to be carried away to a clean place (Lev. vi. 11).

which became a date in Israel.* The desecration which it received at the hands of Josiah reminded men of the threat of the unknown messenger. † Then we are told that Jeroboam raised his hand in anger, with the order to secure the bold offender, but that his arm at once "dried up," and was only restored by the man of God ‡ at the king's entreaty. The king invites the prophet to go home and refresh himself and receive a reward; but he replies that not half Jeroboam's house could tempt him to break the command which he had received to eat no bread neither drink water at Bethel. An old Israelite prophet was living at Bethel, and his son told him what had occurred. Struck with admiration by the faithfulness of the southern man of God, he rode after him to bring him to his house. He found him seated under "the terebinth"—evidently some aged and famous tree. When he refused the renewed invitation, the old man lyngly said to him that he too was a man of God, and had been bidden by an angel to bring him back. Deceived, perhaps too easily deceived, the man of God from Judah went back. It would have been well for him if he had believed that even "an angel of God," or what may seem to wear such a semblance, may preach a false message, and may deserve nothing but an anathema. § With terrible swiftness the delusion was dispelled. While he was eating in Bethel, the old prophet, overcome by an impulse of inspiration, told him that for his disobedience he should perish and lie in a strange grave. Accordingly he had not gone far from Bethel when a lion met and killed him, not, however, mangling or devouring him, but standing still with the ass beside the carcase. || On hearing this the old prophet of Bethel went and brought back the corpse. He mourned over his victim with the cry, "Alas, my brother," ¶ and bade his sons that when he died they should bury him in the same sepulchre with the man of God, for all that he had prophesied should come to pass.

Josephus adds many idle touches to this story. If in a tale which assumed its present form so long after the events imaginative details were introduced, the incident of the lion subserves the

* Amos ix. 1. The Vatican LXX, distinctly makes the sign a future one (1 Kings xiii. 3), καὶ δώσει ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ τέρας. The narrative seems to suppose, but it does not assert that the altar was rent then and there. Had these miracles immediately followed, it is difficult to imagine that no deeper impression should have been made. As it was the new cult does not seem to have been interrupted for a single day.

† The mention by name of a king three centuries before he was even born is wholly alien from every characteristic of Jewish prophecy, and, as in the case of Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 28), it would be false to say that we have even a particle of evidence to show that the name was not added from a marginal gloss or by the latest redactor. He also makes the mistake of putting into the old prophet's mouth the phrase "all the cities of Samaria" at least fifty years before Samaria existed (1 Kings xvi. 24). Kell's remark that "Josiah" is only used appellatively for one whom Jehovah will support (!) is one of the miserable expedients of reckless harmonists. Even Bähr, *ad loc.*, admits that the narrative is of later date and has received a traditional colouring. In 2 Kings xxiii. 15-18 there is no hint that Josiah had been prophesied of by name.

‡ 1 Kings xii. 6, "Intreat now" (*lit.*, "make soft") "the face of the Lord." Klostermann, "Besänftige noch das Angesicht Jahve's."

§ Gal. i. 8.

|| Klostermann, in his *Kurzgefasster Kommentar*, gets rid of the lion altogether by one of his sweeping emendations of the text, p. 352. He considers that the whole story comes from a book of edifying anecdotes for the use of young prophets in the schools; and that it may have some connection with the threat of another Jewish prophet against the altar at Bethel in the days of another Jeroboam (Amos iii. 14, vii. 9).

¶ Comp. Jer. xxii. 18.

moral aim of the narrative (2 Kings xvii. 25; Jer. xxv. 30, xlix. 19; Wisdom xi. 15-17, etc.). The significance of the story for us is happily neither historic nor evidential, but it is profoundly moral. It is the lesson not to linger in the neighbourhood of temptation, nor to be dilatory in the completion of duty.* It is the lesson to be ever on our guard against the tendency to assume inspired sanction for the conduct and opinions which coincide with our own secret wishes. Satan finds it easy to secure our credence when he answers us according to our idols, and can quote Scripture for our purpose as well as his own; and God sometimes punishes men by granting them their own desires, and sending leanness withal into their bones. The man of God from Judah had received a distinct injunction from which the invitation of a king had been insufficient to shake him. If the old prophet wilfully lied, his victim was willingly seduced. We may think his sin venial, his punishment excessive. It will not seem so unless we unduly extenuate his sin and unduly exaggerate the nature of his penalty.

His sin consisted in his ready acceptance of a sham inspiration which came to him from a tainted source, and which he ought to have suspected because it conceded what he desired. God's indisputable intimations to our individual souls are not to be set aside except by intimations no less indisputable. There had been an obvious reason for the command which God had given. The reason still existed; the prohibition had not been withdrawn. The sham revelation furnished him with an excuse; it did not give him a justification. Doubtless Jadon's first thought was that

"He lied in every word,
That hoary prophet, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie."

Why did he yield so readily? It was for the same reason which causes so many to sin. "The tempting opportunity" did but meet, as sooner or later it always *will* meet, "the susceptible disposition."

Yet his punishment does not justify us in branding him as a weak or a vicious man. We must judge him and all men, at his best, not at his worst; in his hours of faithfulness and splendid courage, not in his moment of unworthy acquiescence.

And his speedy punishment was his best blessing. Who knows what might not have happened to him if the speck of conventionality and corruption had been allowed to spread? Who can tell whether in due time he might not have sunk into something no better than his miserable tempter? Rather than that we should be in any respect false to our loftiest ideals, or less noble than our better selves, let the lion meet us, let the tower of Siloam fall on us, let our blood be mingled with our sacrifices. Better physical death than spiritual degeneracy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DOOM OF THE HOUSE OF NEBAT.

1 KINGS xiv. 1-20.†

"Whom the gods love die young."

"Τὸ παιδίον ἀπέθανεν; ἀπέθθη."—ΕΡΙΣΤΕΤ.

THE other story about Jeroboam is full of pathos; and though here, too, there are obvious

* The older expositors at any rate see in the prophet's rest under the terebinth, so near Bethel, "peccati initium; moras utique nectere non debuit." It was like Eve's lingering near the place where temptation lay.

† "Whom the gods love die young" was said of yore

signs that, in its present form, it could hardly have come from a contemporary source, it doubtless records an historic tradition. It is missing in the Septuagint, though in some copies the blank is supplied from Aquila's version.

Jeroboam was living with his queen at Tirzah when, as a judgment on him for his neglect of the Divine warning, his eldest and much loved son, Ahijah, fell sick. Torn with anxiety the king asked his wife to disguise herself that she might not be recognised on her journey, and to go to Shiloh, where Ahijah the prophet lived,* to inquire about the dear youth's fate. "Take with you," he said, "as a present to the prophet ten loaves, and some little cakes for the prophet's children,† and a cruse of honey."

Jeroboam remembered that Ahijah's former prophecy had been fulfilled, and believed that he would again be able to reveal the future, and say whether the heir to the throne would recover. The queen obeyed; and if she were indeed the Egyptian princess Ano, it must have been for her a strange experience. Through the winding valley, she reached the home of the aged prophet unrecognised. But he had received a Divine intimation of her errand; and though his eyes were now blind with the *gutta serena*,‡ he at once addressed her by name when he heard the sound of her approaching footsteps. The message which he was bidden to pronounce was utterly terrible; it was unrelieved by a single gleam of mitigation or a single expression of pity. It reproached and denounced Jeroboam for faithless ingratitude in that he had cast God behind his back;§ it threatened hopeless and shameful extermination to all his house.|| His dynasty should be swept away like dung. The corpses of his children should be left unburied and be devoured by vultures and wild dogs.¶ The moment the feet of the queen reached her house the youth should die, and this bereavement, heavy as it was, should be the sole act of mercy in the tragedy, for it should take away (Byron). It was said by Menander: "Ὁν γὰρ θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν ἀποθνήσκει νεὸς"; and by Plautus: "Quem dii diligunt, adolescens moritur" (*Bacch.*, iv. 7, 18). A similar thought is found in Plutarch, in St. Chrysostom, and many others.

* Ahijah had not followed the example of the Levites and pious persons who, the chronicler says, went in numbers to the Southern Kingdom.

† Nikuddim (only elsewhere in Josh. ix. 5-12); LXX., *κόλλυριδες*; Vulg., *crustula*; A. V., "cracknels." They were some sort of cakes. Presents to prophets were customary (see 1 Sam. ix. 7, 8; 1 Kings xiii. 7; 2 Kings v. 5, viii. 8, 9).

‡ Heb., "His eyes stood" (comp. 1 Sam. iv. 15). It seems to imply *amaurosis*.

§ This tremendous expression only occurs elsewhere in Ezek. xxiii. 35; but comp. Psalm l. 17; Neh. ix. 26.

|| The coarse expression of 1 Kings xiv. 10 (1 Sam. xxv. 22; 2 Kings ix. 8) means "every male." The phrase "him that is shut up and him that is left in Israel" (Deut. xxxiii. 36) is obscure and alliterative. It has been variously explained to mean, (1) "bond and free," (2) "imprisoned or released," (3) "kept in by legal impurity or at large" (Jer. xxxvi. 5), (4) "under or over age," (5) "married or unmarried." (Reuss renders the paronomasia, "qui'l soit caché ou lâché en Israel.") LXX., *ἐχόμενον καὶ ἐγκαταλειμμένον*; Vulg. *clausum et novissimum*.

¶ In ancient days this was regarded as the most terrible of calamities.

"Ἄλλ' ἄρα τόνγε κύνες τε καὶ οἰῶνοι κατέδαψαν

Κείμενον ἐν πεδίῳ ἐκάς ἄστεος, οὐδὲ κέ τις μιν

Κλαῦσεν Ἀχαιῶδων· μάλα γὰρ μέγα μῆστο ἔργον.

Hom., *Od.*, iii. 258.

Comp. Deut. xxviii. 26; 1 Sam. xvii. 44, 45. And after in Jeremiah (vii. 33, viii. 2, ix. 22, etc.) and Ezekiel (xxix. 5, xxxix. 17, etc.).

Abijah from the dreadful days to come, because in him alone of the House of Jeroboam had God seen something good. The avenger should be a new king, and all this should come to pass "even now."*

This speech of the prophet is given in a rhythmical form, and has probably been mingled with later touches. It falls into two strophes (7-11, 12-16) of 3+2 and 2+3 verses.† The expressions "thou hast done above all that were before thee, for thou hast gone and made thee other gods" (verse 9) hardly suits the case of Jeroboam; and the omission by the LXX. of the prophecy of Israel's ultimate captivity, together with the treatment of the prophecy by Josephus, throw some doubt on verses 9, 15, and 16.‡ They seem to charge Jeroboam with sanctioning *Asherim*, or wooden images of the Nature-goddess Asherah, of which we read in the history of Judah, but which are never mentioned in the acts of Jeroboam, and do not accord with his avowed policy. These may possibly be due to the forms which the tradition assumed in later days.

The awful prophecy was fulfilled. As the hapless mother set foot on the threshold of her palace at beautiful Tirzah the young prince died, and she heard the wail of the mourners for him.§ He alone was buried in the grave of his fathers, and Israel mourned for him. He was evidently a prince of much hope and promise, and the deaths of such princes have always peculiarly affected the sympathy of nations. We know in Roman history the sigh which arose at the early death of Marcellus:—

"Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata neque ultra
Esse sinent. Nimum vobis, Romana propago,
Visa potens, superi, propria hæc si dona fuissent,
Heu miserande puer, si qua fata aspera rumpas
Tu Marcellus eris" |

We know the remark of Tacitus as he contemplates the deaths of Germanicus, Caius, and Drusus, Piso Licinianus, Britannicus, and Titus, "*brevæ atque infastos Populi Romani amores.*" We know how, when Prince William was drowned in the *White Ship*, Henry of England never smiled again; and how the nation mourned the deaths of Prince Alfonso, of the Black Prince, of Prince Arthur, of Prince Henry, of the Princess Charlotte, of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale. But these untimely deaths of youths in their early bloom, before their day,

"Impositique rogis juvenes ante ora parentum."

are not half so deplorable as the case of those who have grown up like Nero to blight every hope which has been formed of them. When Louis le *Bien-Aimé* lay ill of the fever at Metz which seemed likely to be fatal, all France wept and prayed for him. He recovered, and grew up to be that portent of selfish boredom and callous sensuality, Louis XV. It was better that Abijah should die than that he should live to be overwhelmed in the shameful ruin which soon overtook his house.

* 1 Kings xiv. 14: "That day: but what? even now."

† It is almost identical with the message of doom pronounced on other kings, like Baasha (1 Kings xvi. 3-5) and Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 19-23).

‡ Ewald pronounces them to be clearly an addition of the Deuteronomist.

§ LXX. εἰς γῆν Σαριρᾶ. The additions to the LXX. have the touching incident, "Καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὴν Σαριρᾶ καὶ τὸ παιδάριον ἀπέθανεν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἡ κραυγὴ εἰς ἀπαντὴν."

| Verg., *Æn.*, vi. 870.

It was better far that he should die than that he should grow up to frustrate the promise of his youth. He was beckoned by the hand of God, "because in him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel." We are not told wherein the goodness consisted, but Rabbinic tradition guessed that in opposition to his father he discountenanced the calf-worship and encouraged and helped the people to continue their visits to Jerusalem. Such a king might indeed have recovered the whole kingdom, and have dispossessed David's degenerate line. But it was not to be. The fiat against Israel had gone forth, though a long space was to intervene before it was fulfilled. And God's fiats are irrevocable, because with Him there is no changeableness neither shadow of turning.

"The moving finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

But the passage about Abijah has a unique preciousness, because it stands alone in Scripture as an expression of the truth that early death is no sign at all of the Divine anger, and that the length or brevity of life are matters of little significance to God, seeing that, at the best, the longest life is but as one tick of the clock in the eternal silence. The promise to filial obedience, "that thy days may be long," in the Fifth Commandment is primarily national; and although undoubtedly "length of days" then, as now, was regarded as a blessing,* yet the blessing is purely relative, and wholly incommensurate with others which affect the character and the life to come. This passage may be the consolation of many thousands of hearts that ache for some dear lost child. "Is it well with the child?" "It is well!" The story of Cleobis and Biton shows how fully the wisest of the ancients had recognised the truth that early death may be a boon of God to save His children from being snared in the evil days. "Honourable age," says the Book of Wisdom, "is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age. He pleased God, and was beloved of Him: so that living among sinners he was translated. Yea, speedily was he taken away, lest that wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul. . . . He, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased the Lord: therefore He hastens to take him away from among the wicked."† It is the truth so beautifully expressed by Seneca: "*Vita non quam diu sed quam bene acta refert*"; by St. Ambrose: "*Perfecta est ætas, ubi perfecta est virtus*"; by Shakspeare:—

"The good die early
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket;"

and by Ben Jonson:—

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be:
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall, a log at last, dry, bald and sere;
A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night—
It was the plant and flower of Light.
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures life may perfect be."

* See Job xii. 12; Psalm xxi. 4; Prov. iii. 2-16.

† Wisdom iv. 8-14.

It is recorded also on the tomb of a gallant youth, in Westminster Abbey, "Francis Holles, who died at eighteen years of age after noble deeds" :—

"Man's life is measured by the work, not days ;
Not aged sloth, but active youth, hath praise."

CHAPTER XXIX.

NADAB; BAASHA; ELAH.

I KINGS xv. 25-xvi. 10.

"Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together."—MATT. xxiv. 28.

JEROBOAM slept with his fathers and went to his own place, leaving behind him his dreadful epitaph upon the sacred page. His son Nadab succeeded him. In his reign of twenty-two years the first king of Israel had outlived Rehoboam and his son Abijah. Asa, the great grandson of Solomon, was already on the throne of Judah. Of Nadab we are told next to nothing. The appreciation of the kings of Israel tends to drift into the meagre formula that they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he caused Israel to sin. In the second year of his reign Nadab was engaged in a wearisome military expedition against Gibbethon in the Shephelah, which belonged to the Philistines. It was a Levitical city in the tribe of Dan, which had been assigned to the Kohathites, and its siege continued for twenty-seven years with no apparent result.* That the Philistines, who had been so utterly crushed by David and who were an insignificant power, should have thus been able to assert themselves once more, is a proof of the weakness to which Israel had been reduced. While Nadab was thus occupied, an obscure conspirator, Baasha, son of Ahijah, of the tribe of Issachar, † actuated perhaps by tribal jealousy, or stirred up as Jeroboam had been before him and as Jehu was after him by some prophetic message, conspired against him, and slew him. As soon as this military revolt had placed Baasha on the throne he fulfilled the frightful curse which Ahijah had uttered against the House of Jeroboam. He absolutely exterminated the family of Nebat, and left him neither kinsman nor friend to avenge his death. He seems to have been a powerful soldier, and he inflicted severe humiliation on the Southern Kingdom until Asa bribed Benhadad to invade his territory. He reigned at Tirzah for twenty-four years, of which nothing is recorded but the ordinary formula. Towards the close of his reign he received from the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani, the message of his doom. Jehu must have been at this time a young prophet. According to the Chronicles his father Hanani rebuked Asa for the alliance which (as we shall see) he made with the Syrian against Baasha; ‡ and he himself rebuked Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Ahab, and lived to be his annalist. § Like Amos, he lived in Judah, but prophesied also against a king of Israel. He told Baasha

that God, who had exalted him out of the dust to be king of Israel, should inflict on his family the same terrible extirpation which He had inflicted on the House of Jeroboam, whose sins he had, nevertheless, followed.

Baasha "slept with his fathers," and his son Elah succeeded him. Elah seems to have been an incapable drunkard, and reigned in Tirzah for less than two years. While he was drinking himself drunk, not even secretly in his own palace, but in the house of his chamberlain Arza—a shamelessness which was regarded as an aggravation of his offence*—he was murdered by Zimri, the captain of half of his chariots, and the revolting tragedy of massacre was enacted once again. † The fact that Baasha was a man of no distinction, but "exalted out of the dust" (1 Kings xvi. 2), probably added to the weakness of his dynasty.

From such meagre records of horror there is not much to learn beyond the general truth of the Nemesis which dogs the heels of crime; but there is one significant clause which throws great light on the judgment which we are asked to form of these events. The prophet Jehu rebukes Baasha for showing himself false to the destiny to which God had summoned him. He implies, therefore, that Baasha had some Divine sanction for the revolution which he headed; and certainly in his slaughter of the House of Jeroboam he was the instrument of a Divine decree. Yet we are expressly told that "he provoked the Lord to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the House of Jeroboam, and because he killed him," or, as it is rendered in the Revised Version margin, "because he smote it." This is not the only place where we find that a man may be in one sense commissioned to do a deed of blood, yet in another sense may be held guilty for fulfilment of the commission. ‡ The prophecy of extirpation had been passed, but the cruel agent of its accomplishment was not thereby condoned. God's decrees are carried out as part of the vast scheme of Providence, and He may use guilty hands to fulfil His purposes. King Jehu is His minister of vengeance, but the tiger-like ferocity with which he carried out his work awoke God's anger and received God's punishment. The King of Babylon fulfils the purpose for which he had been appointed, but his ruthlessness receives its just recompense. The wrath of man may accomplish the decrees of God, but it worketh not His righteousness. Herod and Pontius Pilate, Jews and Gentiles, priests and Pharisees, rulers and the mob may rage against Christ, but all they can accomplish is "whatsoever God's hand and God's counsel determine before to be done."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE EARLIER KINGS OF JUDAH.

I KINGS xiv. 21-31, xv. 1-24.

THE history of "the Jews" begins, properly speaking, from the reign of Rehoboam, and for

* Comp. Hosea vii. 3-7.

† If Zimri was a descendant of the House of Saul, as is possible from the occurrence of the name in the number of Saul's descendants (1 Chron. viii. 36), we perhaps see an excuse for his ill-considered conspiracy. He acted, says Grotius, upon the principle, *Νηπίος ὁς πατέρα κτείνανος υἱοῦς καταλείπει*.

‡ Comp. 2 Kings ix. 7 with Hosea i. 4. Thus Babylon is at once commissioned to punish, and condemned for ruthlessness: Isa. xlvi. 6.

* Josh. xix. 44, xxi. 23; 1 Kings xv. 27, xvi. 15.

† His father therefore could not have been Ahijah the prophet, who was an Ephraimite. He was the only ruler who came from slothful Issachar (Gen. xlix. 14, 15) except the unknown Tola (Judge. x. 1).

‡ For any other records of Nadab the writer refers to "the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel."

§ 2 Chron. xvi. 7-10.

|| 2 Chron. xx. 34.

four centuries it is mainly the history of the Davidic dynasty.

The only records of the son of Solomon are meagre records of disaster and disgrace. He reigned seventeen years, and his mother, the Ammonitess Naamah, occupied the position of queen-mother.* She was, doubtless, a worshipper in the shrine which Solomon had built for her national god, Molech of Ammon, who was the same as the Ashtar-Chemosh of the Moabite stone—the male form of Ash-toreh.† Whether her son was twenty-one or forty-one when he succeeded to the throne we do not know.‡ His attempted expedition against Jeroboam was forbidden by Shemaiah;§ but ineffectual and distressing war smouldered on between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. If Jeroboam sinned by the erection in the old sanctuaries of the two golden calves, Rehoboam surely sinned far more heinously. He not only sanctioned the high places—which in him may have been very venial, since they held their own unchallenged till the days of Hezekiah—but he allowed stone obelisks (*Matstseboth*) in honour of Baal, and pillars (*Chammanim*) of the Nature-goddess (*Asherah*) to be set up on every high hill and under every green tree.¶ Worse than this, and a proof of the abyss of corruption into which the evil example of Solomon had beguiled the nation, there were found in the land the *Kedeshim*, the infamous eunuch-ministers of a most foul worship.¶¶ In spite of Temple and priesthood, “they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord drave out before the children of Israel.”** Since Rehoboam thus sinned so much more heinously than his northern compeer we can hardly admire the conduct of the Levites, who, according to the chronicler, fled southward in swarms from the innovations of the son of Nebat. The Scylla of calf-worship was incomparably less shameful than the Charybdis of these heathen abominations.

Such atrocities could not be left unpunished. Where the carcass is the eagles will gather. In the fifth year of Rehoboam, Shishak, King of Egypt,†† put an end to the shortlived glories of the age of Solomon. Of his reason for invading Palestine we know nothing. It was probably mere ambition and the love of plunder, stimulated by

* According to the LXX. she was a daughter of Hanan, son of Naash, King of Ammon (2 Sam. x. 1).

† Canon Rawlinson, *Kings of Israel and Judah*.

‡ 1 Kings xiv. 21. “A boy and faint-hearted” (2 Chron. xiii. 7). The additions to the LXX. say that he was sixteen, and reigned twelve years.

§ In the LXX. additions it was a little before this occasion (after the revolt) that “Shemaiah the Enlomite” tore his new cloak and gave ten parts to Jeroboam.

¶ The *Chammanim* were, according to some, pillars to Baal-Hammon. For the *Asherah*, see Deut. xvi. 21; 2 Kings xii. 3. They were wooden pillars to Asherah, and were called *Asherah* just as statues of the Virgin are called “Virgins.” *Asheroth* seem to be various forms of the Nature-goddess herself (2 Chron. xxxiii. 3). *Asherah* = Ὀρθία. Like the other kings of Judah, Rehoboam had an exaggerated harem, and provided for the young princes by settling them in separate cities as governors.

¶¶ Jerome compares them to the horrible *Galli* of the Syrian goddess. LXX., τετελεσμένοι (“initiated”); Aquila, ἐνηλλαγμένοι (“changed”); Theodotion, κειχωρισμένοι (“set apart”); Symmachus, ἑταίριδες. They were also called “dogs” (comp. Deut. xxiii. 18).

** According to the chronicler Rehoboam’s defection only began in the fourth year of his reign.

†† He was the first king of the twenty-second dynasty of Bubastis or Pibeseth, and succeeded about B. C. 988 in the fourteenth year of Solomon. The Egyptians (Manetho) called him Shesok (Sesonsochosis Sasychis, Herod., ii. 136; LXX., Σουβάκιμ; Vulg., *Sesac*).

stories which Jeroboam may have brought to him about the inexhaustible riches of Jerusalem. He is the first Pharaoh whose individuality was so marked as to transcend and replace the common dynastic name.* He was astute enough to seize the opportunity of self-aggrandisement which offered itself when Jeroboam took refuge at his court; but the conjecture that former friendly relations induced Jeroboam to invite the services of Shishak for the destruction of his rival, is rendered impossible if Egyptologists have correctly deciphered the splendid memorial of his achievements which he twice carved on the great Temple of Amon at Karnak. There the most conspicuous figure is the colossal likeness of the king. His right hand holds a sword; † his left grasps by the hair a long line which passes round the necks of a troop of thirty-eight mean and diminutive Jewish captives. The smaller figure of the god Amon leads other strings of one hundred and thirty-three captives, and the third king from his left hand bears a name which Champollion deciphered *Yudeh-Malk*, which he took to mean King of Judah.‡ If the interpretation were correct, we should here have a picture of the son of Solomon. On the other figures are the names of the cities of which they were kings or sheykhs. Among these are not only the names of southern towns, like Ibleam, Gibeon, Bethhoron, Ajalon, Mahanaim, but even of Canaanite and Levitic cities in the Northern Kingdom, including Taanach and Megiddo.§ Shashonq (as the monuments call him) came with a huge and motley army of many nationalities, among whom were Libyans, Troglodytes, and Ethiopians. This host was composed of twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and a numberless infantry of mercenaries. Such an invasion, though it was little more than an insulting military parade and predatory incursion, rendered resistance impossible, especially to a people enervated by luxury. Shishak came, saw,—and plundered. His chief spoil was taken from the poor dishonoured Temple and the king’s palace.¶ Judah specially grieved for the loss of the shields of gold which hung on the cedar pillars of the house of the forest of Lebanon.¶—apparently both those which Solomon had made, and those which David had consecrated from the spoils of Hadadezer, King of Zobah.** Perhaps a great soul would hardly have been con-

* He was of alien, perhaps of Assyrian race. His family had settled at Bubastis, and his grandfather had married the daughter of the Pharaoh. His son Osorkhon also married the Princess Keramat, a daughter of the last Tanite king. Imitating the example of Hir-hor, he combined many offices, and then quietly seized the crown.

† Brugsch, *Geogr. Inschriften altägyptischer Denkmäler*, ii. 58; Lepsius, *Denkmäler*, iii. 252; *Story of the Nations: Egypt*, pp. 228–307; Stade, i. 354 (who reproduces the sculptures). They are carved on the wall of a Temple of Amon on the southern side of a smaller temple (built by Rameses III.). Shishak is smiting with his club a number of captive Jews, whom he grasps by the hair. The names of the towns and districts are paraded in two long rows, each name being enclosed in a shield. Amon is delivering them all to his beloved son “Shashonq.” These smitten people are described as “the *Am* of a distant land, and the Penekh” (Phœnicians).

‡ *Lit.*, “Judah-king.” Brugsch thinks it is the name of a town. It cannot mean, as Champollion thought, “King of Judah.”

§ See Shishak in *Bibi Dict.* It is extremely difficult to believe that these cities were taken by the Egyptian army in order to help Jeroboam.

¶ Josephus says that Shishak did all this ἀμαχητῶ (*Antt.*, VIII. x. 2, 3), but he confuses Shishak with Sesotris (Herod., ii. 102, 106).

¶ 1 Kings x. 17.

** LXX., 2 Sam. viii. 7; 1 Kings x. 17. A timely humiliation saved Jeroboam from extinction, but he practically became a vassal of Egypt (2 Chron. xii. 5).

soled by putting mean substitutes in their place. Rehoboam, however, made bronze imitations of them in the guard-room,* and marched in pomp to the Temple preceded by his meanly armed runners,† “as though everything was the same as before.” “The bitter irony with which the sacred historian records the parade of these counterfeits,” says Stanley, “may be considered as the keynote to this whole period. They well represent the ‘brazen shields’ by which fallen churches and kingdoms have endeavoured to conceal from their own and their neighbour’s eyes that the golden shields of Solomon have passed away from them.” ‡ The age of pinchbeck follows the age of gold, and a Louis XV. succeeds Le Grand Monarque.§

Rehoboam had many sons, and he “wisely” (2 Chron. xi. 23) gave them, by way of maintenance, the governorship of his fenced cities. That “he sought for them a multitude of wives” was perhaps a stroke of worldly policy, but an unwise and unworthy one. But their little courts and their little harems may have helped to keep them out of mischief. They might otherwise have destroyed each other by mutual jealousies.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijam. There is a little doubt as to the exact name of this king. The Book of Chronicles calls him Abijah,¶ but in 1 Kings xv. 1, 7, 8, he is called Abijam.¶ As the curious form Abijam seems to be unmeaning, it has been precariously conjectured that dislike to his idolatries led the Jews to alter a name which means “Jehovah is my Father.”** Some doubt also rests on the name of his mother. She is here called “Maacha, the daughter of Abishalom,” but in Chronicles “Michaiah, the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.” Maachah, perhaps the granddaughter of Absalom, whose beautiful daughter Tamar (named after his dishonoured sister) may have been the wife of Uriel. In that case her name, Maachah, was a name given her in reminiscence of her royal descent as a great-granddaughter of the princess of Geshur, who was mother of Absalom. All sorts of secrets, however, sometimes lie behind these changes of names. She was the second, but favourite wife of Rehoboam; and Abijam, who was not the eldest son, owed his throne to his father’s preference for her.††

All that we are here told of Abijam is that “his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God,” and

* *Niq* (Ezek. xl. 7).

† *Ratzim*: comp. “*Celeres*,” Liv., i. 14. We hear no more of Cherethites and Pelathites. The later kings could not afford to keep up these mercenaries.

‡ *Jewish Church*, ii. 385.

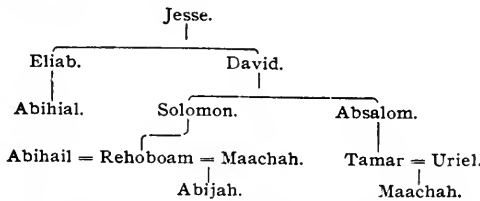
§ Renan.

¶ 2 Chron. xii. 16; comp. Abiel (1 Sam. ix. 1).

¶ Abijam seems to mean “father of the sea”; *vir maritimus*, Gesenius.

** So perhaps, for the same reason, Jehoahaz was shortened into Ahaz. See Canon Rawlinson on 2 Kings xv. 38 (*Speaker’s Commentary*). But Simonis, *Onomasticon*, regards the final *m* as intensive.

†† 2 Chron. xi. 18-23. Rehoboam had eighteen wives, sixty concubines, twenty-eight sons, and sixty daughters. A fragment of the *Stemma Davidis* may make things clearer to the reader:—



Thus on both sides, as a great-grandson and a great-grandson, Abijah was descended from David.

that “he walked in all the sins of his father”; though “for David’s sake his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem”;* and that, after a brief reign of three years—i.e., of one year and parts of two others—he slept with his fathers. For “the rest of his acts and all that he did,” the historian refers us to the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah: he does not trouble himself with military details. The chronicler, referring to the Commentary of Iddo,† adds a great deal more. Jeroboam, he says, went out against him with eight hundred thousand men. Abijam, who had only half the number, stood on Mount Zemaraim in the hill country of Ephraim,‡ and made a speech to Jeroboam and his army. He reproached him with rebellion against his father when he was “young and tender-hearted,” and with his golden calves, and his non-Levitical priests. He vaunted the superiority of the Temple priests with their holocausts and sweet incense and shewbread and golden candlestick, which priests were now with the army. Jeroboam sets an ambushade, but at the shout of the men of Judah is routed with a loss of five hundred thousand men, after which Abijah recovers “Bethel with the towns thereof,” § and Jeshanah and Ephron (or “Ephraim”), completely humbling the northern king until “the Lord smote him and he died.” After this Abijah waxes mighty, has fourteen wives, twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters.

If we had read two accounts so different, and presenting such insuperable difficulties to the harmonist, in secular historians, we should have made no attempt to reconcile them, but merely have endeavoured to find which record was the more trustworthy. If the pious Levitical king of 2 Chron. xiii. be a true picture of the idolater of 1 Kings xv. 3, it is clear that the accounts are difficult to reconcile, unless we resort to incessant and arbitrary hypotheses. But the earlier authority is clearly to be preferred when the two obviously conflict with each other. As it is we can only say that the kings of whom the chronicler approves are, as it were, clericalised, and seen “through a cloud of incense.” all their faults being omitted. The edifying speech of Abijah, and his boast about purity of worship, sounds most strange on the lips of a king who—if he “walked in all the sins of his father”—suffered his people to be guilty of a worship grossly idolatrous, including the toleration of *Bamoth*, *Chammanim*, and *Asherim* on every high hill and under every green tree; and of all the abominations of the neighbouring idolaters,||—a state of things infinitely worse than the symbolic Jehovah-worship which Jeroboam had set up. Yet such was the strange syncretism of religion in Jerusalem, of which Solomon had set the fatal example, that (as we learn quite incidentally) Abijah seems to have dedicated certain vessels—part of his warlike spoils—to the service of the Temple.¶ They were

* The lamp (LXX., *κατάλειμμα*; in xi. 36, *θέσις*) is the sign of home (1 Kings xi. 36; 2 Kings viii. 10. Comp. Psalm xviii. 28, cxxxii. 17). There was, as the chronicler boldly expressed it, “a covenant of salt” between God and the House of David (2 Chron. xiii. 5; comp. Num. xviii. 19).

† 2 Chron. xiii. 22.

‡ Zemaraim was in Benjamin near Bethel (Josh. xviii. 22), apparently Kirbet *el-Szomer* in the Jordan valley, four miles north of Jericho.

§ 2 Chron. xiii. 3-10. So that the golden calf and its chapel and its priests must, if the account be true, have fallen into his power. But it does not seem to have made the least difference. It is certain that “the calf” remained undisturbed till the days of the Assyrian invasion.

¶ How atrocious these “abominations were” may be seen from the Pentateuch (Lev. xviii. 3-25, xx. 1-23; Deut. xviii. 6-12).

¶ 1 Kings xv. 15.

perhaps intended to supply the gaps left by the plundering raid of Shishak.

After this brief and perplexing, but apparently eventful reign, Abijah was succeeded by his son Asa, whose long reign of forty-one years was contemporary with the reigns of no less than seven kings of Israel—Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Tibni, and Ahab.

We are told that—aided perhaps by such prophets as Hanani and Azariah, son of Oded* (or Iddo)—“he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” Of this he gave an early, decisive, and courageous proof.

When he succeeded to the throne at an early age his grandmother Maachah still held the high position of queen-mother.† This great lady inherited the fame and popularity of Absalom, and was a princess both of the line of David and of Tolmai, King of Geshur. She was, and always had been, an open idolatress.‡ Asa began his reign with a reformation. He took away the contemptible idols (*Gilloolim*) which his fathers had made, and suppressed the odious *Kedeshim*; or he at least made a serious, if an unsuccessful, effort to do so.§ As to the high places we have a direct verbal contradiction. Here we are told that “they were not removed,” whereas the chronicler says that “he took them away out of all the cities of Judah,” but afterwards that “the high places were not taken away out of Israel,” in spite of Asa’s heart being perfect all his days. The explanation would seem to be that he made a partial attempt to anticipate the subsequent reformation of Hezekiah, but was defeated by the inveteracy of popular custom. He did, however, take the great step of branding with infamy the impure idolatry of the queen-mother, and he degraded her from her rank. She had made an idol, which is significantly called “a fright” or “a horror” (*Miphletseth*),|| to serve as an emblem of the Nature-goddess. It was probably a phallic symbol which he indignantly cut down, and burnt it, where all pollutions were destroyed, in the dry wady of the Kidron.¶ In the fifteenth year of his reign he dedicated in the Temple “silver and gold and vessels,” consecrated by his father and himself for this purpose. He also restored the great altar in the porch of the Temple, which in the course of more than sixty years had fallen into neglect and disrepair.

For ten years the land had rest under this pious king, though war was always smouldering between him and Baasha. In the eleventh year, however, according to the chronicler, “Zerach the Ethiopian”** attacked him with an army of a million Sushim and Lubim and three hundred chariots, and suffered an immense defeat in the valley of Zephathah, “the watch-tower” at Mareshah.†† It was the sole occasion in sacred his-

tory in which an Israelite army met and defeated one of the great world powers in open battle, and it was deemed so remarkable a proof of Divine interposition that Asa, encouraged by the prophet Azariah, invited his people to renew their covenant with God.

More alarming to Asa was the action of Baasha in fortifying Ramah* in the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign. This was a veritable *ἐπιτειχισμός* of the most dangerous kind, for Ramah, in the heart of Benjamin, was only five miles north of Jerusalem. If Abijah’s signal defeat of Jeroboam and capture of Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron be historical, these towns must not only have been speedily recovered, but Baasha had even pushed towards Jerusalem, five miles south of Bethel. Had Ramah been left undisturbed it would have been a thorn in the side of Judah, as Deceleia was in Attica, and Pylos in Messenia. Asa saw that the demolition of this fortress was a positive necessity. Since he was too weak to effect this, he stripped both his own palace and the Temple of the treasures with which he had himself enriched them, and sent them as a vast bribe to Benhadad I., King of Damascus, begging him to renew the treaty which had existed between their fathers, and to invade the kingdom of Baasha. This step shows to what a depth of weakness Judah had fallen, for Benhadad was a son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion (probably Rezon) of Damascus;† so that here we have the great-grandson of Solomon stripping Solomon’s Temple of its consecrated vessels wherewith to bribe the grandson of the petty rebel freebooter, whose whole present kingdom had once been a part of Solomon’s dominions! The policy was successful. It is easy for us now to condemn it as unpatriotic and short-sighted, but to Asa it seemed a matter of life or death. Benhadad invaded Israel, and mastered its territory in the tribe of Naphtali, from Ijon and Abel-beth-maachah on the waters of Merom‡ down to Chinnereth or the Lake of Gennesareth.§ Baasha in alarm abandoned his attempt to blockade Jerusalem, and retired to Tirzah for the protection of his own kingdom. Thereupon Asa proclaimed a levy of all Judah to seize and dismantle Ramah, and with the ample materials which Baasha had amassed he fortified Geba to the north of Ramah|| and Mizpah (probably Neby Samwyl, to the north of the Mount of Olives), where he also sank a deep well for the use of the garrison.¶ He thus effectually protected the frontier of Benjamin. He built, as Bossuet says, “the fortresses of Judah out of the ruins of those of Samaria,” and thus

Bubastite dynasty (Rawlinson, p. 36), though it continued to reign for two centuries. The “invasion” may have been a mere raid. The Pharaohs always seem to have degenerated from the founders of their dynasty, both in personal beauty and intellectual force.

* Josh. xviii. 25, now Er-Ram. No great importance can be attached to the dates, which are often self-contradictory.

† Ben-Hadad, “son of Hadaad,” the Sun-god (Macrobius, *Saturn.* i. 24). Tabrimmon, “Rimmon is good.” According to Sayce (*Hibbert Lectures*, p. 42), Rimmon—an Accadian name, which became, in Semitic, Rammānu, “the exalted”—was identified by the Syrians with the Sun-god Hadaad, whom Shahmanser called *Dada*. In Assyrian *Dadu* (“dear child”) is akin to David and to Dido.

‡ Ijon is probably Merj Avion, “the meadow of the House of Maachah,” called also, Abel-maim, “the meadow of the waters”; “a city and a mother in Israel” (2 Sam. x. 16); now Abil in the Ardel-Huleh.

§ See Num. xxxiv. 11; Josh. xiii. 27.

¶ Josh. xii. 17; 2 Kings xxiii. 8.

¶ LXX., ἡ σκοπία. Jer. xli. 5-9. Into this well Ishmael flung the corpses of the murdered adherents of Gedaliah.

* Ewald, iv. 40.

† Comp. the *Madame Mère* in the French court.

‡ The LXX. (Vat.) calls her Ana.

§ That it was not perfectly successful we see from 1 Kings xxii. 46.

|| The word is an ἀπαξ λεγόμενον. It is only applied to this grotesque and obscene figure (1 Kings xv. 13; 2 Chron. xv. 16).

¶ 2 Kings xi. 16, xxiii. 4, 6, 12; 2 Chron. xxix. 16, xxx. 14. Vulg., in *Sacris Priapi*. Jerome (*ad. Hos.*, i. 4) calls Maachah’s “horror” a *Simulacrum Priapi* (see Selden, *De Dis Syris Syntagma*, ii. 5).

** 2 Chron. xvi. 8. Zarkh, perhaps Osorkhon I. (O-serekhon, “Ammon’s darling”), was the feeble successor of Shesonk, Maspero, p. 362; Ewald, iii. 470. Shishak’s army also consisted of Sushim and Lubim (2 Chron. xii. 3).

†† The defeat had important consequences. Egypt did not again attack Palestine till three centuries later, under Pharaoh Nechoh (B. C. 609). The defeat weakened the

set us the example of making holy use of hostile and heretical materials. We should have thought that the invitation of Benhadad was, in a worldly point of view, brilliantly successful, and that it saved the kingdom of Judah from utter ruin. It involved, however, a dangerous precedent, and Hanani rebuked Asa for having done foolishly.

After a powerful and useful reign Asa was attacked with gout in his feet two years before his death. The chronicler reproaches him for seeking "not to Jehovah but to the physicians" in his "exceeding great disease." If this was a sin, it is one of which we are unable to estimate the sinfulness from this meagre notice. It has been conjectured that it may have some reference to the name Asa, which, if written Asjah, might mean "whom Jehovah heals."* It belongs, however, to the theocratic standpoint of the chronicler, who condemns everything which bears the aspect of a worldly policy. He slept with his fathers in a tomb which he had built for himself, and was buried with unusual magnificence, amid the burning of many spices.

We are not surprised that the historian should not mention the invasion of Zerah, since he refers us for the wars of Asa to the Judæan annals. It is much more remarkable that he wholly omits all reference to the prophetic activity of which the chronicler speaks as exercised in this reign. He had evidently formed a very high estimate of Asa, with none of the shadows and drawbacks which in the later annalist seemed to point to a marked degeneracy of character in his later days. On the favourable side the historian does not mention the high and eulogistic encouragement which the king received from Azariah, the son of Oded; nor the multitude which joined him out of Israel; nor the cities which he took from the hill country of Ephraim; nor his restoration of the altar. He even passes over the solemn league and covenant which he made with Judah and Benjamin and many members of the Ten Tribes in his fifteenth year, at a festival celebrated with an immense sacrifice, and with shouting and trumpets and cornets and a great exultant oath.† On the unfavourable side he does not tell us that Hanani the Seer rebuked him for summoning the help of the Syrians instead of relying on Jehovah; and that Asa "was in a rage because of this thing, and shut up Hanani in the House of the Stocks," and "oppressed some of the people at the same time," apparently because they took part with the prophet.‡ For none of these events does the chronicler refer us to any ancient authority. They came from separate records, perhaps written in prophetic commentaries and unknown to the compiler of the Kings. But whatever may have been the failings or shortcomings of Asa it is clear that he must be ranked among the more eminent and righteous sovereigns of Judah.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JEHOSHAPHAT.

I KINGS xxii. 41-50.

BEFORE we leave the House of David we must speak of Jehoshaphat, the last king of Judah

* Renan, *Hist. du Peuple Israel*, ii. 248. Comp. Rephaiah.

† 2 Chron. xv. 1-15.

‡ 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 10.

whose reign is narrated in the First Book of Kings. He was abler, more powerful, and more faithful to Jehovah than any of his predecessors, and was alone counted worthy in later ages to rank with Hezekiah and Josiah among the most pious rulers of the Davidic line. The annals of his reign are found chiefly in the Second Book of Chronicles, where his story occupies four long chapters. The First Book of Kings compresses all record of him into nine verses, except so far as his fortunes are commingled with the history of Ahab. But both accounts show us a reign which contributed as greatly to the prosperity of Judah as that of Jeroboam II. contributed to the prosperity of Israel.

He ascended the throne at the age of thirty-five. He was apparently the only son of Asa, by Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi; for Asa, greatly to his credit, seems to have been the first king of Judah who set his face against the monstrous polygamy of his predecessors, and, so far as we know, contented himself with a single wife. He received the high eulogy that "he turned not aside from doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord," with the customary qualification that, nevertheless, the people still burnt incense and offerings at the *Bamoth*, which were not taken away. The chronicler says that he *did* take them away. This stock contradiction between the two authorities must be accounted for either by a contrast between the effort and its failure, or by a distinction between idolatrous *Bamoth* and those dedicated to the worship of Jehovah to which the people clung with the deep affection which local sanctuaries inspire.

To the historians of the Book of Kings the central fact of Jehoshaphat's history is that "he made peace with the King of Israel." As a piece of ordinary statesmanship no step could have been more praiseworthy. The sixty-eight years or more which had elapsed since the divinely-suggested choice of Jeroboam by the Northern Kingdom had tended to soften old exasperations. The kingdom of Israel was now an established fact, and nothing had become more obvious than that the past could not be undone. Meanwhile the threatening spectre of Syria, under the dynasty of Benhadad, was beginning to throw a dark shadow over both kingdoms. It had become certain that, if they continued to destroy each other by internecine warfare, both would succumb to the foreign invader. Wisely, therefore, and kindly Jehoshaphat determined to make peace with Ahab, in about the eighth year after his accession; and this policy he consistently maintained to the close of his twenty-five years' reign.

No one surely could blame him for putting an end to an exhaustive civil war between brethren. Indeed, in so doing he was but carrying out the policy which had been dictated to Rehoboam by the prophet Shemaiah, when he forbade him to attempt the immense expedition which he had prepared to annihilate Jeroboam. Peace was necessary to the development and happiness of both kingdoms, but even more so to the smaller and weaker, threatened as it was not only by the more distant menace of Syria, but by the might of Egypt on the south and the dangerous predatory warfare of Edom and Moab on the east.

But Jehoshaphat went further than this. He cemented the new peace by an alliance between his young son Jehoram and Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who was then perhaps under fifteen years of age.

Later chroniclers formed their moral estimates by a standard which did not exist so many centuries before the date at which they wrote. If we are to judge the conduct of these kings truthfully we must take an unbiased view of their conduct. We adopt this principle when we try to understand the characters of saints and patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or judges and prophets like Gideon, Deborah, and Samuel; and in general we must not sweepingly condemn the holy men of old because they lacked the full illumination of the gospel. We must be guided by a spirit of fairness if we desire to form a true conception of the kings who lived in the ninth century before Christ. It is probable that the religious gulf between the kings of Judah and Israel was not so immense as on a superficial view it might appear to be; indeed, the balance seems to be in favour of Jeroboam as against Abijam, Rehoboam, or even Solomon. The worship of the golden symbols at Dan and Bethel did not appear half so heinous to the people of Judah as it does to us. Even in the Temple they had cherubim and oxen. The *Bamoth* to Chemosh, Milcom, and Astarte glittered before them undisturbed on the summit of Olivet, and abominations which they either tolerated or could not remove sheltered themselves in the very precincts of the Temple, under the shadows of its desecrated trees. To the pious Jehoshaphat the tolerance of Baal-worship by Ahab could hardly appear more deadly than the tolerance of Chemosh-worship by his great-great-grandfather, and the permission of *Asherim* and *Chammanim* by his grandfather, to say nothing of the phallic horror openly patronised by the queen-mother who was a granddaughter of David. That Ahab himself was a worshipper of Jehovah is sufficiently proved by the fact that he had given the name of Athaliah to the young princess whose hand Jehoshaphat sought for his son, and the name of Ahaziah ("Jehovah taketh hold") to the prince who was to be his heir. Jehoshaphat acted from policy; but so has every king done who has ever reigned. He could neither be expected to see these things with the illumination of a prophet, nor to read—as later writers could do in the light of history—the awful issues involved in an alliance which looked to him so necessary and so advantageous.

At the time of the proposed alliance there seems to have been no protest—at any rate, none of which we read. Micaiah alone among the prophets uttered his stern warning when the expedition to Ramoth Gilead was actually on foot, and Jehu, son of Hanani, went out to rebuke Jehoshaphat at the close of that disastrous enterprise. It is to the history attributed to this seer and embodied in the annals of Israel that the chronicler refers. "Shouldst thou help the wicked," asked the bold prophet, "and love them that hate the Lord? For this thing wrath is upon thee from the Lord. Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast put away the Asheroth out of the land, and hast set thy heart to seek God."

The moral principle which Jehu, son of Hanani, here enunciated is profoundly true. It was terribly emphasised by the subsequent events. A just and wise forecast may have sanctioned the restoration of peace, but Jehoshaphat might at least have learnt enough to avoid affinity with a queen who, like Jezebel, had introduced frightful and tyrannous iniquities into the House of Ahab. Faithful as the King of Judah evidently intended to be to the law of Jehovah, he should have hesitated be-

fore forming such close bonds of connection with the cruel daughter of the usurping Tyrian priest. His error hardly diminished the warmth of that glowing eulogy which even the chronicler pronounces upon him; but it brought upon his kingdom, and upon the whole family of his grandchildren, overwhelming misery and all but total extermination. The rules of God's moral government are written large on the story of nations, and the consequences of our actions come upon us not arbitrarily, but in accordance with universal laws. When we err, even though our error be leniently judged and fully pardoned, the human consequences of the deeds which we have done may still come flowing over us with the resistless march of the ocean tides.

"You little fancy what rude shocks apprise us.
We sin: God's intimations rather fall
In clearness than in energy."

Jehoshaphat did not live to see the ultimate issues of massacre and despotism which came in the train of his son Jehoram's marriage.* Perhaps to him it wore the golden aspect which it wears in the forty-fifth Psalm, which, as some have imagined, was composed on this occasion. But he had abundant proof that close relationship for mutual offence and defence with the kings of Israel brought no blessing in its train. In the expedition against Ramoth Gilead when Ahab was slain, he too very nearly lost his life. Even this did not disturb his alliance with Ahab's son Ahaziah, with whom he joined in a maritime enterprise which like its predecessors, turned out to be a total failure.

Jehoshaphat in his successful wars had established the supremacy over Edom which had been all but lost in the days of Solomon. The Edomite Hadad and his successors had not been able to hold their own, and the present kings of Edom were deputies or vassals under the suzerainty of Judaea.† This once more opened the path to Elath and Ezion-Geber on the gulf of Akaba. Jehoshaphat, in his prosperity, felt a desire to revive the old costly commerce of Solomon with Ophir for gold, sandal wood, and curious animals. For this purpose he built "ships of Tarshish," i.e., merchant ships, like those used for the Phœnician trade between Tyre and Tartessus, to go this long voyage. The ships, however, were wrecked on the reefs of Ezion-Geber, for the Jews were timid and inexperienced mariners. Hearing of this disaster, according to the Book of Kings, Ahaziah made an offer to Jehoshaphat to make the enterprise a joint one.—thinking, apparently, that the Israelites, who, perhaps, held Joppa and some of the ports on the coast, would bring more skill and knowledge to bear on the result. But Jehoshaphat had had enough of an attempt which was so dangerous and which offered no solid advantages. He declined Ahaziah's offer. The story of these circumstances in the chronicler is different. He speaks as if from the first it was a joint experiment of the two kings, and says that, after the wreck of the fleet, a prophet of whom we know nothing, "Eliëzer, the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah," ‡ prophesied

* Following the precedent set by Rehoboam, he established his six younger sons in castles and fenced cities. Athaliah must have found it difficult to exterminate their families if she attempted this.

† The Nitzab or Præfect of Edom was allowed the barren title of king.

‡ 2 Chron. xx. 37. His name faintly recalls that of Eleazar, son of Dodo (2 Sam. xxiii. 9). Dodavahu means "friend of God."

against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah hath made a breach in thy works." The passage shows that the word "prophesied" was constantly used in the sense of "preached," and did not necessarily imply any prediction of events yet future. The chronicler, however, apparently makes the mistake of supposing that ships were built at Ezion-Geber on the Red Sea to sail to Tartessus in Spain! * The earlier and better authority says correctly that these merchantmen were built to trade with Ophir, in India, or Arabia. The chronicler seems to have been unaware that "ships of Tarshish," like our "Indiamen," was a general title for vessels of a special build. †

We see enough in the Book of Kings to show the greatness and goodness of Jehoshaphat, and later on we shall hear details of his military expeditions. ‡ The chronicler, glorifying him still more, says that he sent princes and Levites and priests to teach the Book of the Law throughout all the cities of Judah; that he received large presents and tribute from neighbouring peoples; that he built castles and stone cities; and that he had a stupendous army of 160,000 troops under four great generals. He also narrates that when an immense host of Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunim came against him to Hazezon-Tamar or Engedi he took his stand before the people in the Temple in front of the new court and prayed. Thereupon the spirit of the Lord came upon "Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah the Levite, of the sons of Asaph," who told them that the next day they should go against the invader, but that they need not strike a blow. The battle was God's, not theirs. All they had to do was to stand still and see the salvation of Jehovah. On hearing this the king and all his people prostrated themselves, and the Levites stood up to praise God. Next morning Jehoshaphat told his people to believe God and His prophets and they should prosper, and bade them chant the verse, "Give thanks unto the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever," which now forms the refrain of Psalm cxxxvi. § On this Jehovah "set liers in wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir." Intestine struggles arose among the invaders. The inhabitants of Mount Seir were first destroyed, and the rest then turned their swords against each other until they were all "dead bodies fallen to the earth." The soldiers of Jehoshaphat despoiled these corpses for three days, and on the fourth assembled themselves in the

valley of Beracah ("Blessing"), which received its name from their tumultuous rejoicings.* After this they returned to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets, and God gave Jehoshaphat rest from all his enemies round about. Of all this the historian of the Kings tells us nothing. Jehoshaphat died full of years and honours, leaving seven sons, of whom the eldest was Jehoram. † His reign marks a decisive triumph of the prophetic party. The prophets not only felt a fiercely just abhorrence of the abominations of Canaanite idolatry, but wished to establish a theocracy to the exclusion on the one hand of all local and symbolic worship, and on the other of all reliance on worldly policy. Up to this time, as Dean Stanley says in his usual strikingly picturesque manner, "if there was a 'holy city,' there was also an 'unholy city' within the walls of Zion. It was like a seething caldron of blood and froth 'whose scum is therein and whose scum has not gone out of it.' The Temple was hemmed in by dark idolatries on every side. Mount Olivet was covered with heathen sanctuaries, monumental stones, and pillars of Baal. Wooden images of Astarte under the sacred trees, huge images of Molech appeared at every turn in the walks around Jerusalem." ‡ Jehoshaphat introduced a decisive improvement into the conditions which prevailed under Rehoboam and Abijah, but practically the conflict between light and darkness goes on for ever. It was in days when Jerusalem had come to be regarded by herself and by all nations as exceptionally holy, that she, who had been for centuries the murderess of the prophets, became under her priestly religionists the murderess of the Christ, and—far different in God's eyes from what she was in her own—deserved the dreadful stigma of being "the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL FROM ZIMRI TO AHAB.

B.C. 889-877.

I KINGS xvi. 11-34.

As far as we can understand from our meagre authorities—and we have no independent source of information—we infer that Elah, son of the powerful Baasha, was a self-indulgent weakling. The army of Israel was encamped against Gibbethon—originally a Levitical town of the Kohathites, in the territory of Dan—which they hoped to wrest from the Philistines. It was during the interminable and intermittent siege of this town that Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, had been murdered. Whatever may have been his sins, he was in his proper place leading the armies of Israel. Elah was not there, but in his beautiful palace at Tirzah. It was probably contempt for his incapacity and the bad example of Baasha's successful revolt, that tempted Zimri to murder him as he was drinking himself drunk in the house of his chamberlain Arza. Zimri was a com-

* The title "valley of Jehoshaphat" is thought also to have derived its origin from these events. Comp. Joel iii. 2.

† 2 Chron. xxi. 2, 3.

‡ There is a little exaggeration here.

* 2 Chron. xx. 36, 37. It would be monstrous to send ships to circumnavigate Africa in order to reach Tartessus. The last resource of the harmonists (*e.g.*, Keil) to save the accuracy of the chronicler is to suppose that Jehoshaphat meant to drag the whole fleet across the Isthmus of Suez, and so to sail from one of the havens of Palestine!

† "Cette version," says Munk (*Palestine*, p. 314), "a probablement pris naissance dans l'esprit de rigorisme qui animait plus tard les écrivains Juifs." "This," says Dr. Robertson Smith, "is a mere pragmatical inference from the story in Kings." See his further remarks in *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, chap. ii., p. 146. He regards parts of the Books of Chronicles as being, in fact, a Jewish *Midrash*. "It is not History, but *Haggada*, moralising romance. And the chronicler himself gives the name of *Midrash* (R.V., 'story') to two of the sources from which he drew (2 Chron. xiii. 22, xxiv. 27), so that there is really no mystery as to the nature of the work when it departs from the old canonical histories" (p. 148).

‡ We shall have further glimpses of Jehoshaphat in the reigns of Ahab and even of Jehoram.

§ See 1 Chron. xvi. 34; 2 Chron. v. 13, vii. 3, xx. 21; Psalms cvii., cviii., cxviii., etc. The eighty-third Psalm may owe its origin to this deliverance, and Hengstenberg thinks Psalms xlvii. and xlvi., also.

mander of half the chariots, and probably thinking that he could secure the throne by a *coup de main* he slew not only Elah, but every male member of his family. To extinguish any possibility of vengeance, he even massacred all who were known to be friends of the royal house.

It was a consummate crime, and it was followed by swift and condign judgment. Through that sea of blood Zimri only succeeded in wading to one week's royalty, followed by a shameful and agonising death. We are told that he did evil in the sight of the Lord by following the sin of Jeroboam's calf-worship. The phrase must be here something of a formula, for in seven days he could hardly have achieved a religious revolution, and every other king of Israel, some of whom have long and prosperous reigns, maintained the unauthorised worship. But Zimri's atrocious revolt had been so ill-considered that it furnished a proverb of the terrible fate of rebels.* He had not even attempted to secure the assent of the army at Gibbethon. No sooner did the news reach the camp than the soldiers tumultuously refused to accept Zimri as king, and elected Omri, their captain. Omri instantly broke up the camp, and led them to besiege the new king in Tirzah. Zimri saw that his cause was hopeless, and took refuge in the fortress (*birah*) attached to the palace.† When he saw that even there he could not maintain himself, he preferred speedy death to slow starvation or falling into the hands of his rival. He set fire to the palace, and, like Sardanapalus, perished in the flames.‡

The swift suppression of his treason did not save the unhappy kingdom from anarchy and civil war. However popular Omri might be with the army, he was unacceptable to a large part of the people. They chose as their king a certain Tibni, son of Ginath, who was supported by a powerful brother named Joram. For four years the contest was continued. At the end of that time Tibni and Joram were conquered and killed,§ and Omri began his sole reign, which lasted eight years longer.

He founded the most conspicuous dynasty of Israel, and so completely identified his name with the Northern Kingdom that it was known to the Assyrians as Beit-Khumri, or "the House of Omri."¶ They even speak of Jehu the destroyer of Omri's dynasty, as "the son of Omri."

Incidental allusions in the annals of his son show that Omri was engaged in incessant wars against Syria. He was unsuccessful, and Benhadad robbed him of Ramoth Gilead and other cities, enforcing the right of Syrians to have streets of their own even in his new capital of Samaria.‡ On the other hand, he was greatly successful on the south-east against the Moabites and their warrior-king Chemosh-Gad, the father of Mesha.

Few details of either war have come down to us.** We learn, however, from the famous Moabite stone that he began his assault on Moab by

* 2 Kings ix. 31.

† R.V., "the castle of the king's house."

‡ Justin, *Hist.*, i. 3; cf. Herod., i. 176, vii. 107; Liv., xxi. 14. Ewald elaborates out of his own consciousness an extraordinary romance about Zimri and the queen-mother.

§ Josephus (*Antt.*, VIII. xii. 5) says that Tibni was assassinated, as does the Rabbinic *Seder Olam Rabba*, chap. xvii. LXX., καὶ ἀπέθανε Θαβνι καὶ Ἰωρὰμ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ.

‡ Athaliah is called "the daughter of Omri."

¶ The Aramæans have come to be incorrectly called Syrians because the Greeks confused them with the Assyrians.

** 1 Kings xx. 34.

the capture of Mediba, several miles south of Heshbon, overran the country, made the king a vassal, and imposed on Moab the enormous annual tribute of 100,000 sheep and 100,000 rams.* Mesha in his inscription records that Omri "oppressed Moab many days," and attributed this to the fact that Chemosh was angry with his chosen people.

He stamped his impress deep upon his subjects. It must have been to him that the alliance with the Tyrians was due, which in his son's reign produced consequences so momentous. He "did worse we are told than all the kings that were before him."† Although he is only charged with walking in the way of Jeroboam, the indignant manner in which the prophet Micah speaks of "the statutes of Omri" as still being kept,‡ seems to prove that his influence on religion was condemned by the prophetic order on special grounds. It is clear that he was a sovereign of far greater eminence and importance than we might suppose from the meagreness of his annals as here preserved; indeed, for thirty-four years after his accession the history of the Southern Kingdom becomes a mere appendix to that of the Northern.

One conspicuous service he rendered to his subjects by providing them with the city which became their permanent and famous capital. This he did in the sixth year of his reign. The burning of the fortress-palace of Tirzah, and the rapidity with which the town had succumbed to its besiegers, may have led him to look out for a site, which was central, strong, and beautiful. His choice was so prescient that the new royal residence superseded not only Penuel and Tirzah, but even Shechem. It was, says Dean Stanley, "as though Versailles had taken the place of Paris, or Windsor of London." He fixed his eye on an oblong hill, with long flat summit, which rose in the midst of a wide valley encircled with hills, near the edge of the plain of Sharon, and six miles north-west of Shechem. Its beauty is still the admiration of the traveller in Palestine. It gave point to the apostrophe of Isaiah: "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which is on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! . . . The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under foot: and the fading flower of his glorious adornment, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall become as a fading flower and as an early fig."§ All around it the low hills and rich ravines were clothed with fertility. They recall more nearly than any other scene in Palestine the green fields and parks of England.

It commanded a full view of the sea and the plain of Sharon on the one hand, and of the vale of Shechem on the other. The town sloped down from the summit of this hill; a broad wall with a terraced top ran round it. "In front of the gates was a wide open space or threshing floor, where the kings of Samaria sat on great occasions. The inferior houses were built of white brick, with rafters of sycamore, the grandeur of hewn stones and cedar (Isa. ix. 9, 10). Its soft, rounded, oblong platform was, as it were, a vast luxurious couch, in which the nobles securely rested, propped and cushioned up on both sides, as in the cherished corner of a rich divan."¶

* 2 Kings iii. 4.

† 1 Kings xvi. 25.

‡ Micah vi. 16.

§ Isa. xxviii. 1-4.

¶ Stanley, *Lectures*, ii. 242.

Far more important in the eyes of Omri than its beauty was the natural strength of its position. It did not possess the impregnable majesty of Jerusalem, but its height and isolation, permitting of strong fortifications, enabled it to baffle the besieging hosts of the Aramæans in B.C. 901 and in B.C. 892. For three long years it held out against the mighty Assyrians under Sargon and Shalmanezar. Its capture in B.C. 721 involved the ruin of the whole kingdom in its fall.* Nebuchadnezzar took it in B.C. 554, after a siege of thirteen years. In later centuries it partially recovered. Alexander the Great took it, and massacred many of its inhabitants B.C. 332. John Hyrcanus, who took it after a year's siege, tried to demolish it in B.C. 129. After various fortunes it was splendidly rebuilt by Herod the Great, who called it Sebaste, in honour of Augustus. It still exists under the name of Sebastiyeh.†

When Omri chose it for his residence it belonged to a certain Shemer, who, according to Epiphanius, was a descendant of the ancient Perizzites or Gargashites. The king paid for this hill the large sum of two talents of silver,‡ and called it Shomeron. The name means "a watch tower," and was appropriate both from its commanding position and because it echoed the name of its old possessor.§

The new capital marked a new epoch.¶ It superseded as completely as Jerusalem had done the old local shrines endeared by the immemorial sanctity of their traditions; but as its origin was purely political it acted unfavourably on the religion of the people. It became a city of idolatry and of luxurious wealth; a city in which Baal-worship with its ritual pomp threw into the shade the worship of Jehovah; a city in which corrupted nobles, lolling at wine feasts on rich divans in their palaces inlaid with ivory, sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. Of Omri we are told no more. After a reign of twelve years he slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city which was to be for so many centuries a memorial of his fame.

The name of Omri marks a new epoch. He is the first Jewish king whose name is alluded to in Assyrian inscriptions. Assyria had emerged into importance in the twelfth century before Christ under Tiglath-Pileser I., but during the eleventh and down to the middle of the tenth century it had sunk into inactivity. Assurbanipal, the father of Shalmanezar II. (884-860), enlarged his dominions to the Mediterranean westwards and to Lebanon southwards. In 870, when Ahab was king, the Assyrian warriors had exacted tribute from Tyre, Sidon, and Biblos.¶ It is not impossible that Omri also had paid tribute, and it has even been conjectured that it was to Assyrian help that he owed his throne. The Book of Kings only alludes to the valour of this warrior-king in the one word "his might";¶ but it is evident from other indications that he had a stormy and chequered reign.

* I Kings xx. 1; 2 Kings vi. 24.

† Josephus, *Antt.*, XV. vii. 7. One of the few instances in Palestine where the ancient name has been superseded by a more modern one. The early Assyrians call it Beth-Khumri, "House of Omri"; but the name Sammerin occurs in the monument of Tiglath-Pileser II.

‡ About £300 of our money.

§ LXX., Σκοπία; מִצְדָּה, "to watch."

¶ Meyer, *Gesch. d. Alt.*, 331; Kittel, ii. 221; Schrader, *Keilinschr.*, i. 165.

¶ מְצֻדָּה (I Kings xvi. 27).

BOOK IV.

AHAB AND ELIJAH.

B. C. 877-855.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KING AHAB AND QUEEN JEZEBEL.

I KINGS xvi. 29-34.

"Besides what that grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said,"

LYCIDAS.

OMRI was succeeded by his son Ahab, whose eventful reign of upwards of twenty years* occupies so large a space even in these fragmentary records. His name means "brother-father," and has probably some sacred reference. He is stigmatised by the historians as a king more wicked than his father, though Omri had "done worse than all who were before him." That he was a brave warrior, and showed some great qualities during a long and on the whole prosperous career; that he built cities, and added to Israel yet another royal residence; that he advanced the wealth and prosperity of his subjects; that he was highly successful in some of his wars against Syria, and died in battle against those dangerous enemies of his country; that he maintained unbroken, and strengthened by yet closer affinity, the recent alliance with the Southern Kingdom,—all this goes for nothing with the prophetic annalists. They have no word of eulogy for the king who added Baal-worship to the sin of Jeroboam. The prominence of Ahab in their record is only due to the fact that he came into dreadful collision with the prophetic order, and with Elijah, the greatest prophet who had yet arisen. The glory and the sins of the warrior-king interested the young prophets of the schools solely because they were interwoven with the grand and sombre traditions of their mightiest reformer.

The historian traces all his ignominy and ruin to a disastrous alliance. The kings of Judah had followed the bad example of David and had been polygamists. Up to this time the kings of Israel seem to have been contented with a single wife. The wealth and power of Ahab led him to adopt the costly luxury of a harem, and he had seventy sons.† This, however, would have been regarded in those days as a venial offence, or as no offence at all; but just as the growing power of Solomon had been enhanced by marriage with a princess of Egypt, so Ahab was now of sufficient importance to wed a daughter of the King of Tyre. "As though it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Zidonians."

It was an act of policy in which religious considerations went for nothing. There is little doubt that it flattered his pride and the pride of his people, and that Jezebel brought riches with her and pomp and the prestige of luxurious royalty.‡ The

* It is needless in each separate case to enter into the chronological minutiae about which the historian is little solicitous. A table of the chronology so far as it can be ascertained is furnished, *infra*.

† I Kings xx. 5; 2 Kings x. 7.

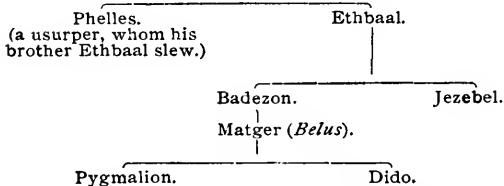
‡ Hitzig thinks that Psalm xlv. was an epithalamium on this occasion, from the mention of "ivory palaces" and "the daughter of Tyre." Had it been composed for the

Phœnicians were of the old race of Canaan, with whom all affinity was so strongly forbidden. Ethbaal—more accurately, perhaps, Itto-baal (Baal is with him)*—though he ruled all Phœnicia, both Tyre and Sidon, was a usurper, and had been the high priest of the great Temple of Ashtoreth in Tyre. Hiram, the friend of Solomon, had now been dead for half a century. The last king of his dynasty was the fratricide Phelles, whom in his turn his brother Ethbaal slew. He reigned for thirty-two years, and founded a dynasty which lasted for sixty-two years more. He was the seventh successor to the throne of Tyre in the fifty years which had elapsed since the death of Hiram. Menander of Ephesus, as quoted by Josephus, shows us that in the history of this family we find an interesting point of contact between sacred and classic history. Jezebel was the aunt of Virgil's Belus, and great-aunt of Pygmalion, and of Dido, the famous foundress of Carthage.†

A king named after Baal, and who had named his daughter after Baal—a king whose descendants down to Maherbal and Hasdrubal and Hannibal bore the name of the Sun-god‡—a king who had himself been at the head of the cult of Ashtoreth, the female deity who was worshipped with Baal—was not likely to rest content until he had founded the worship of his god in the realm of his son-in-law. Ahab, we are told, "went and served Baal and worshipped him." We must discount by recorded facts the impression which might *prima facie* be left by these sweeping denunciations. It is certain that to his death Ahab continued to recognise Jehovah. He enshrined the name of Jehovah in the names of his children.§ He consulted the prophets of Jehovah, and his continuance of the calf-worship met with no remarriage of Solomon, or Jehoram and Athaliah, or any king of Judah, there would surely have been an allusion to Jerusalem. Moreover, the queen is called מלכה, which is a Chaldee (Dan. v. 2) or perhaps a North Palestine word. The word in Judah was Gebira.

* *Ἰθόβαλος*, Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. xiii. 1; *c. Ap.*, I. 18 (quoting the heathen historian Menander of Ephesus). It may, however, be "Man of Baal," like Saul's son Ishbaal (Ishbosheth). In Tyre the high priest was only second to the king in power (Justin, *Hist.*, xviii. 4), and Ethbaal united both dignities. He died aged sixty-eight. Another Ethbaal was on the throne during the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar (Josephus, *Antt.*, X. xi. 1).

† Josephus, *c. Ap.*, I. 18. The genealogy is:—



See Canon Rawlinson, *Speaker's Commentary, ad loc.*
‡ *Plaut.*, *Pœnul.*, V. ii. 6, 7. Phœnician names abound in the element "Baal."

§ Ahaziah ("Jehovah supports"), Jehoram ("Jehovah is exalted") Athaliah (?). The word Baal merely meant "Lord," and perhaps the fact that at one time it had been freely applied to Jehovah Himself may have helped to confuse the religious perceptions of the people. Saul, certainly no idolater, called his son Eshbaal ("the man of Baal"); and it was only the hatred of the name Baal in later times which led the Jews to alter Baal into Bosheth ("shame"), as in Ishbosheth, Mephibosheth. David himself had a son named Beeliada ("known to Baal"), which was altered into Eliada (1 Chron. xiv. 7, iii. 8; 2 Sam. v. 16; comp. 2 Chron. xvii. 17). We even find the name Bealiah ("Baal is Jah") as one of David's men (1 Chron. xii. 5). Hoshea too records that Baali ("my Lord") was used of Jehovah, but changed into Ishi ("my husband") (Hosea, ii. 16, 17). It is used simply for owner ("the baal of an ox") in "the Book of the Covenant" (Exod. xxi. 28). See Robertson Smith, *Rel. of the Semites*, 92.

corded reproof from the many true prophets who were active during his reign. The worship of Baal was due to nothing more than the unwise eclecticism which had induced Solomon to establish the *Bamoth* to heathen deities on the mount of offence. It is exceedingly probable that the permission of Baal-worship had been one of the articles of the treaty between Tyre and Israel, which, as we know from Amos, had been made at this time. It had probably been the condition on which the fanatical Phœnician usurper had conceded to his far less powerful neighbour the hand of his daughter. It was, as we see, alike in sacred and secular history a time of treaties. The menacing spectre of Assyria was beginning to terrify the nations. Hamath, Syria, and the Hittites had formed a league of defence against the northern power, and similar motives induced the kings of Israel to seek alliance with Phœnicia. Perhaps neither Omri nor Ahab grasped all the consequences of their concession to the Sidonian princess.* But such compacts were against the very essence of the religion of Israel, which was "Yahveh Israel's God, and Israel Yahveh's people."

The new queen inherited the fanaticism as she inherited the ferocity of her father. She acquired from the first a paramount sway over the weak and uxorious mind of her husband. Under her influence Ahab built in Samaria a splendid temple and altar to Baal, in which no less than four hundred orgiastic priests served the Phœnician idol in splendid vestments, and with the same pompous ritual as in the shrines at Tyre. In front of this temple, to the disgust and horror of all faithful worshippers of Jehovah, stood an *Asherah* in honour of the Nature-goddess, and *Matstseboth* pillars or obelisks which represented either sun-beams or the reproductive powers of nature. In these ways Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.† When we learn what Baal was, and how he was worshipped, we are not surprised at so stern a condemnation. Half Sun-god, half Bacchus, half Hercules, Baal was worshipped under the image of a bull, "the symbol of the male power of generation." In the wantonness of his rites he was akin to Peor; in their cruel atrocity to the kindred Moloch; in the demand for victims to be sacrificed to the horrible consecration of lust and blood he resembled the Minotaur, the wallowing "infamy of Crete," with its yearly tribute of youths and maidens. What the combined worship of Baal and Asherah was like—and by Jezebel with Ahab's connivance they were now countenanced in Samaria—we may learn from the description of their temple at Apeka.‡ It confirms what we are incidentally told of Jezebel's devotions. It abounded in wealthy gifts, and its multitude of priests, women, and mutilated ministers—of whom Lucian counted three hundred at one sacrifice—were clad in splendid vestments. Children were sacrificed by being put in a leathern bag and flung down from the top of the temple, with the shocking expression that "they were calves, not children." In the forecourt stood two

* Ethbaal is called King of Sidon (1 Kings xvi. 31), and was also King of Tyre (Menander *ap.* Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. xiii. 1).

† 1 Kings xvi. 23; 2 Kings iii. 2, x. 27.

‡ *Asherim* seem to be upright wooden stocks of trees in honour of the Nature-goddess Asheroth. The Temple of Baal at Tyre had no image, only two *Matstseboth*, one of gold given by Hiram, one of "emerald" (Dius and Menander *ap.* Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. v. 3; *c. Ap.*, I. 18; Herod., ii. 66).

gigantic phalli. The *Galli* were maddened into a tumult of excitement by the uproar of drums, shrill pipes, and clanging cymbals, gashed themselves with knives and potsheards, and often ran through the city in women's dress.* Such was the new worship with which the dark murderess insulted the faith in Jehovah. Could any condemnation be too stern for the folly and faithlessness of the king who sanctioned it?

A consequence of this tolerance of polluted forms of worship seems to have shown itself in defiant contempt for sacred traditions. At any rate, it is in this connection that we are told how Hiel of Bethel set at naught an ancient curse. After the fall of Jericho Joshua had pronounced a curse upon the site of the city. It was never to be rebuilt, but to remain under the ban of God. The site, indeed, had not been absolutely uninhabited, for its importance near the fords of Jordan necessitated the existence of some sort of caravanserai in or near the spot.† At this time it belonged to the kingdom of Israel, though it was in the district of Benjamin and afterwards reverted to Judah.‡ Hiel, struck by the opportunities afforded by its position, laughed the old *cherem* to scorn, and determined to rebuild Jericho into a fortified and important city. But men remarked with a shudder that the curse had not been uttered in vain. The laying of the foundation was marked by the death of his firstborn Abiram, the completion of the gates by the death of Segub, his youngest son.§

The shadow of Queen Jezebel falls dark for many years over the history of Israel and Judah. She was one of those masterful, indomitable, implacable women who, when fate places them in exalted power, leave a terrible mark on the annals of nations. What the Empress Irene was in the history of Constantinople, or the "She-wolf of France" in that of England, or Catherine de Medicis in that of France, that Jezebel was in the history of Palestine. The unhappy Juana of Spain left a physical trace upon her descendants in the perpetuation of the huge jaw which had gained her the soubriquet of *Maultasch*; but the trace left by Jezebel was marked in blood in the fortunes of the children born to her. Already three of the six kings of Israel had been murdered, or had come to evil ends; but the fate of Ahab and his house was most disastrous of all, and it became so through the "whoredoms and witchcrafts" of his Sidonian wife. A thousand years later the name of Jezebel was still ominous as that of one who seduced others into fornication and idolatry.¶ If no king so completely "sold himself to work wickedness" as Ahab, it was because "Jezebel his wife stirred him up."¶¶

Yet, however guilty may have been the uxorious apostasies of Ahab, he can hardly be held to be responsible for the marriage itself. The dates and ages recorded for us show decisively that the alliance must have been negotiated by Omri, for it took place in his reign and when Ahab was too young to have much voice in the administration of the kingdom. He is only responsible for abdicating his proper authority over Jezebel, and for permitting her a free hand in the corruption of worship, while he gave himself up to his schemes

of worldly aggrandisement. Absorbed in the strengthening of his cities and the embellishment of his ivory palaces, he became neglectful of the worship of Jehovah, and careless of the more solemn and sacred duties of a theocratic king.

The temple to Baal at Samaria was built; the hateful Asherah in front of it offended the eyes of all whose hearts abhorred an impure idolatry. Its priests and the priests of Astarte were the favourites of the court. Eight hundred and fifty of them fed in splendour at Jezebel's table, and the pomp of their sensuous cult threw wholly into the shade the worship of the God of Israel. Hitherto there had been no protest against, no interference with the course of evil. It had been suffered to reach its meridian unchecked, and it seemed only a question of time that the service of Jehovah would yield to that of Baal, to whose favour the queen probably believed that her priestly father had owed his throne. There are indications that Jezebel had gone further still, and that Ahab, however much he may secretly have disapproved, had not interfered to prevent her. For although we do not know the exact period at which Jezebel began to exercise violence against the worshippers of Jehovah, it is certain that she did so. This crime took place before the great famine which was appointed for its punishment, and which roused from cowardly torpor the supine conscience of the king and of the nation. Jezebel stands out on the page of sacred history as the first supporter of *religious persecution*. We learn from incidental notices that, not content with insulting the religion of the nation by the burdensome magnificence of her idolatrous establishments, she made an attempt to crush Jehovah-worship altogether. Such fanaticism is a frequent concomitant of guilt. She is the authentic authoress of priestly inquisitions.

The Borgian monster, Pope Alexander VI., who founded the Spanish Inquisition, is the lineal inheritor of the traditions of Jezebel. Had Ahab done no more than Solomon had done in Judah, the followers of the true faith in Israel would have been as deeply offended as those of the Southern Kingdom. They would have hated a toleration which they regarded as wicked, because it involved moral corruption as well as the danger of national apostasy. Their feelings would have been even more wrathful than were stirred in the hearts of English Puritans when they heard of the Masses in the chapel of Henrietta Maria, or saw Father Petre gliding about the corridors of Whitehall. But their opposition was crushed with a hand of iron. Jezebel, strong in her *entourage* of no less than eight hundred and fifty priests, to say nothing of her other attendants, audaciously broke down the altars of Jehovah—even the lonely one on Mount Carmel—and endeavoured so completely to extirpate all the prophets of Jehovah that Elijah regarded himself as the sole prophet that was left. Those who escaped her fury had to wander about in destitution, and to hide in dens and caves of the earth.

The apostasy of Churches always creeps on apace, when priests and prophets, afraid of malediction, and afraid of imperilling their worldly interests become cowards, opportunists, and time-servers, and not daring to speak out the truth that is in them, suffer the cause of spirituality and righteousness to go by default. But "when Iniquity hath played her part, Vengeance, leaps upon the stage. The comedy is short, but the tragedy is long. The black guard shall attend upon you: you

* Döllinger, *Judenth. u. Heidenthum* (E. T.), i. 425-29.

† 2 Sam. x. 5; Judg. iii. 28.

‡ Chron. xxviii. 15.

§ Comp. Josh. vi. 26; 2 Sam. x. 5.

¶ Rev. ii. 20.

¶¶ 1 Kings xxv. 25, 26.

shall eat at the table of sorrow, and the crown of death shall be upon your heads, many glittering faces looking upon you.*

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELIJAH.

I KINGS xvii. 1-7.

"And Elias the prophet stood up as fire, and his word was burning as a torch."—ECCLES. xlviii. 1.

"But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."
LYCIDAS.

MANY chapters are now occupied with narratives of the deeds of two great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, remarkable for the blaze and profusion of miracles and for similarity in many details. For thirty-four years we hear but little of Judah, and the kings of Israel are overshadowed by the "men of God." Both narratives, of which the later in sequence seems to be the earlier in date, originated in the Schools of the Prophets. Both are evidently drawn from documentary sources apart from the ordinary annals of the Kings.

Doubtless something of their fragmentariness is due to the abbreviation of the prophetic annals by the historians.

Suddenly, with abrupt impetuosity, the mighty figure of Elijah the Prophet bursts upon the scene like lightning on the midnight. So far as the sacred page is concerned, he, like Melchizedek, is "without father, without mother, without descent." He appears before us unannounced as "Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead." Such a phenomenon as Jezebel explains and necessitates such a phenomenon as Elijah. "The loftiest and sternest spirit of the true faith is raised up," says Dean Stanley, "face to face with the proudest and fiercest spirit of the old Asiatic Paganism."

The name Elijah, or, in its fuller and more sonorous Hebrew form, Elijahu, means "Jehovah is my God." Who he was is entirely unknown. So completely is all previous trace of him lost in mystery that Talmudic legends confounded him with Phinehas, the son of Aaron, the avenging and fiercely zealous priest; and even identified him with the angel or messenger of Jehovah who appeared to Gideon and ascended in the altar flame.

The name "Tishbite" tells us nothing. No town of Tishbi occurs in Scripture, and though a Thisbe in the tribe of Naphtali is mentioned as the birthplace of Tobit, † the existence of such a place is as doubtful as that of "Thesbon of the Gileadite district" to which Josephus assigns his birth. ‡ The Hebrew may mean "the Tishbite from Tishbi of Gilead," or "The sojourner from the sojourners of Gilead"; and we know no more. Elijah's grandeur is in himself alone. Perhaps he was by birth an Ishmaelite. When the wild Highlander in Rob Roy says of himself "I am a man," "A man!" repeated Frank Os-

baldistone; "that is a very brief description." "I will serve," answered the outlaw, "for one who has no other to give. He who is without name without friends, without coin, without country, is still at least a man; and he that has all these is no more." So Elijah stands alone in the towering height of his fearless manhood.

Some clue to the swift mysterious movements, the rough asceticism, the sheepskin robe, the unbending sternness of the Prophet may lie in the notice that he was a Gileadite, or at any rate among the sojourners of Gilead, and therefore akin to them. It might even be conjectured that he was of Kenite origin, like Jonadab, the son of Rechab, in the days of Jehu.* The Gileadites were the Highlanders of Palestine, and the name of their land implies its barren ruggedness. † They, like the modern Druses, were

"Fierce, hardy, proud, in conscious freedom bold."

We catch a glimpse of these characteristics in the notice of the four hundred Gadites who swam the Jordan in Palestine to join the freebooters of David in the cave of Adullam, "whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were as swift as the roes upon the mountains." Though of Israelitic origin they were closely akin to the Bedawin, swift, strong, temperate, fond of the great solitudes of nature, haters of cities, scorners of the softnesses of civilisation. Elijah shared these characteristics. Like the forerunner of Christ, in whom his spirit reappeared nine centuries later, he had lived alone with God in the glowing deserts and the mountain fastnesses. He found Jehovah's presence, not in the

"Gay religions, full of pomp and gold,"

which he misdoubted and despised, but in the barren hills and wild ravines and bleak uplands where only here and there roamed a shepherd with his flock. In such hallowed loneliness he had learnt to fear man little, because he feared God much, and to dwell familiarly on the sterner aspects of religion and morality. The one conscious fact of his mission, the sufficient authentication of his most imperious mandates, was that "he stood before Jehovah." So unexpected were his appearances and disappearances, that in the popular view he only seemed to flash to and fro, or to be swept hither and thither, by the Spirit of the Lord. We may say of him as was said of John the Baptist, that "in his manifestation and agency he was like a burning torch; his public life was quite an earthquake; the whole man was a sermon, the voice of one crying in the wilderness." And, like the Baptist, he had been "in the deserts, till the day of his showing unto Israel."

Somewhere—perhaps at Samaria, perhaps in the lovely summer palace at Jezreel—he suddenly strode into the presence of Ahab. Coming to him as the messenger of the King of kings he does not deign to approach him with the genuflexions and sounding titles which Nathan used to the aged David. With scant courtesy to one whom he does not respect or dread—knowing that he is in God's hands, and has no time to waste over courtly periphrases or personal fears—he comes before Ahab unknown, unannounced. What manner of man was it by whom the king in his crown and Tyrian purple was thus rudely confronted?

* See 1 Chron. ii. 55.

† See Cheyne, *The Hallowing of Criticism*, p. 9.

* Henry Smith *The Trumpet of the Lord sounding to Judgment*.

† Tobit i. 2.

‡ Josephus, *Antt.* VIII. xiii. 2; Vat. (LXX). Θεοβίτης ὁ ἐκ Θεσβῶν. The Alex. LXX. omits Θεοβίτης. An immense amount has been written about Elijah. Among others, see Knobel, *Der Prophetismus*, ii. 73; Köster *Der Thebiter*; Stanley, ii. lect. xxx.; Matricc, *Prophets and Kings*, serm. viii.; F. W. Robertson, ii., serm. vi.; Milligan, *Elijah* (Men of the Bible).

He was, tradition tells us, a man of short stature, of rugged countenance. He was "a lord of hair"—the thick black locks of the Nazarite (for such he probably was) streamed over his shoulders like a lion's mane, giving him a fierce and unimpaired aspect. They that wear soft clothing are in king's houses, and doubtless under a queen who, even in old age, painted her face and tired her head, and was given to Sidonian luxuries, Ahab was accustomed to see men about him in bright apparel. But Elijah had not stooped to alter his ordinary dress, which was the dress of the desert by which he was always known. His brown limbs, otherwise bare, were covered with a heavy mantle, the skin of a camel or a sheep worn with the rough wool outside, and tightened round his loins by a leathern girdle. So unusual was his aspect in the cities east of Jordan, accustomed since the days of Solomon to all the refinements of Egyptian and Phœnician culture, that it impressed and haunted the imagination of his own and of subsequent ages. The dress of Elijah became so normally the dress of prophets who would fain have assumed his authority without one spark of his inspiration, that the later Zechariah has to warn his people against sham prophets who appeared with hairy garments, and who wounded their own hands for no other purpose than to deceive.* The robe of skin, after the long interspace of centuries, was still the natural garb of "the glorious eremite," who in his spirit and power made straight in the deserts a highway for our God.

Such was the man who delivered to Ahab in one sentence his tremendous message: "As Jehovah, God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand"—such was the introductory formula, which became proverbial, and which authenticated the prophecy—"There shall not be dew† nor rain these years but according to my word." The phrase "to stand before Jehovah" was used of priests: it was applicable to a prophet in a far deeper and less external sense.‡ Drought was one of the recognised Divine punishments for idolatrous apostasy. If Israel should fall into disobedience, we read in Deuteronomy, "the Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust; from heaven shall it come down upon thee—until thou be destroyed"; and in Leviticus we read, "If ye will not hearken, I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass." The threat was too significant to need any explanation. The conscience of Ahab could interpret only too readily that prophetic menace.

The message of Elijah marked the beginning of a three, or three and a half years' famine. This historic drought is also mentioned by Menander of Tyre, who says that after a year, at the prayer of Ethbaal, the priest and king, there came abundant thunder showers. St. James represents the famine as well as its termination as having been caused by Elijah's prayer.§ But the expression of the historian is general. Elijah might pray for rain, but no prophet could *proprio motu*, have offered up a prayer for so awful a curse upon an entire country as a famine, in which thousands of the innocent would suffer no less severely than the guilty. Three years' famine was a recognised penalty for apostasy. It was one of the sore

plagues of God. It had befallen Judah "because of Saul and his bloody house,"* and had been offered to guilty David as an alternative for three days' pestilence, or three years' flight before his enemies.† We are not here told that Elijah prayed for it, but that he announced its commencement, and declared that only in accordance with his announcement should it close.

He delivered his message, and what followed we do not know. Ahab's tolerance was great; and, however fierce may have been his displeasure, he seems in most cases to have personally respected the sacredness and dignity of the prophets. The king's wrath might provoke an outburst of sullenness, but he contented himself with menacing and reproachful words. It was otherwise with Jezebel. A genuine idolatress, she hated the servants of Jehovah with implacable hatred, and did her utmost to suppress them by violence. It was probably to save Elijah from her fury that he was bidden to fly into safe hiding, while her foiled rage expended itself in the endeavour to extirpate the whole body of the prophets of the Lord. But, just as the child Christ was saved when Herod massacred the infants of Bethlehem, so Elijah, at whom Jezebel's blow was chiefly aimed, had escaped beyond her reach. A hundred other imperilled prophets were hidden in a cave by the faithfulness of Obadiah, the king's vizier.

The word of the Lord bade Elijah to fly eastward and hide himself "in the brook Cherith,‡ that is before Jordan." The site of this ravine—which Josephus only calls "a certain torrent bed"—has not been identified. It was doubtless one of the many wadies which run into the deep Ghôr or cleft of the Jordan on its eastern side. If it belonged to his native Gilead, Elijah would be in little fear of being discovered by the emissaries whom Ahab sent in every direction to seek for him. Whether it was the Wady Kelt,§ or the Wady el Jabis,|| or the Ain Fusail,¶ we know the exact characteristics of the scene. On either side, deep, winding and precipitous, rise the steep walls of rock, full of tropic foliage, among which are conspicuous the small dark green leaves and stiff thorns of the nubk. Far below the summit of the ravine, marking its almost imperceptible thread of water by the brighter green of the herbage, and protected by masses of dewy leaves from the fierce power of evaporation, the hidden torrent preserves its life in all but the most long-continued periods of drought. In such a scene Elijah was absolutely safe. Whenever danger approached he could hide himself in some fissure or cavern of the beetling crags where the wild birds have their nest, or sit motionless under the dense screen of interlacing boughs. The wildness and almost terror of his surroundings harmonised with his stern and fearless spirit. A spirit like his would rejoice in the unapproachable solitude, communing with God alike when the sun flamed in the zenith and when the midnight hung over him with all its stars.

The needs of an Oriental—particularly of an ascetic Bedawy prophet—are small as those of the simplest hermit. Water and a few dates often

* 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

† 2 Sam. xxiv. 13. "Three," not "seven," is probably here the true reading.

‡ Not "by," as in the A. V. Cherith means "cut off" (1 Kings xvii. 3). "The Lord hid him" (Jer. xxxvi. 26). "In famine he shall redeem thee from death. . . . At famine and destruction thou shalt laugh" (Job v. 20-22).

§ Robinson.

|| Benjamin of Tudela.

¶ Marinus Sanutus (1322).

* Zech. xiii. 4.

† The word also means "sea-mist" (Cheyne, p. 15).

‡ Lev. xxvii. 10; Psalm cxxiv. 1; Heb. x. 11.

§ So too Eclus. xlviii. 2. "He brought a sore famine upon them, and by his zeal he diminished their number"; the writer adds, "By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens." Deut. xxviii. 12; Amos iv. 7.

suffice him for days together. Elijah drank of the brook, and God "had commanded the ravens to feed him there." The shy, wild, unclean birds* "brought him"—so the old prophetic narrative tells us—"bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." We may remark in passing, that flesh twice a day or even once a day, if with Josephus we read "bread in the morning and flesh in the evening," is no part of an Arab's ordinary food. It is regarded by him as wholly needless, and indeed as an exceptional indulgence. The double meal of flesh does not resemble the simple diet of bread and water on which the Prophet lived afterwards at Sarepta. Are we or are we not to take this as a literal fact? Here we are face to face with a plain question to which I should deem it infamous to give a false or a prevaricating answer.

Before giving it, let us clear the ground. First of all, it is a question which can only be answered by serious criticism. Assertion can add nothing to it, and is not worth the breath with which it is uttered. The anathemas of obsolete and *a priori* dogmatism against those who cannot take the statement as simple fact do not weigh so much as a dead autumn leaf in the minds of any thoughtful men.

Some holy but uninstructed soul may say, "It stands on the sacred page: why should you not understand it literally?" It might be sufficient to answer, Because there are many utterances on the sacred page which are purely poetic or metaphorical. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the brook shall pick it out, and the young vultures shall eat it."† The statement looks prosaic and positive enough, but what human being ever took it literally? "Curse not the king—for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." Who does not see at once that the words are poetic and metaphorical? "Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." How many educated Christians can assert that they believe that the unredeemed will be eaten for ever by literal worms in endless flames? The man who pretends that he is obliged to understand literally the countless Scriptural metaphors involved in an Eastern language of which nearly every word is a pictorial metaphor, only shows himself incompetent to pronounce an opinion on subjects connected with history, literature, or religious criticism.

Is it then out of dislike to the supernatural, or disbelief in its occurrence, that the best critics decline to take the statement literally?

Not at all. Most Christians have not the smallest difficulty in accepting the supernatural. If they believe in the stupendous miracles of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, what possible difficulty could they have in accepting any other event merely on the ground that it is miraculous? To many Christians all life seems to be one incessant miracle. Disbelieving that any force less than the fiat of God could have thrilled into inorganic matter the germs of vegetable and still more of animal life; believing that their own life is supernatural, and that they are preserved as they were created by endless cycles of ever-recurrent miracles; believing that the whole spiritual life is supernatural in its every characteristic; they have not the slightest unwillingness to be-

lieve a miracle when any real evidence can be adduced for it. They accept, without the smallest misgiving, the miracles of Jesus Christ our Lord, radiating as ordinary works from His Divine nature, performed in the full blaze of history, attested by hundredfold contemporary evidence, leading to results of world-wide and eternal significance—miracles which were, so to speak, natural, normal, and necessary, and of which each revealed some deep moral or spiritual truth. But if miracles can only rest on evidence, the dullest and least instructed mind can see that the evidence for this and for some other miracles in this narrative stands on a wholly different footing. Taken apart from dogmatic assertions which are themselves unproven or disproved, the evidence that ravens daily fed Elijah is wholly inadequate to sustain the burden laid upon it.

In the first place, the story occurs in a book compiled some centuries after the event which it attests; in a book solemn indeed and sacred, but composite, and in some of its details not exempt from the accidents which have always affected all human literature.

And this incident is unattested by any other evidence. It is, so to speak, isolated. It is quite separable from the historic features of the narrative, and is out of accordance with what is truly called the Divine economy of miracles. No miracle was wrought to supply Elijah with water; and if a miracle was needed to supply him with bread and flesh, it is easy to imagine hundreds of forms of such direct interposition which would be more normal and more in accordance with all other Scripture miracles than the continuous overruling of the natural instincts of ravenous birds. It has been said that this particular form of miracle was needed for its evidential value; but there is nothing in the narrative to imply that it had the smallest evidential value for any one of Elijah's contemporaries, or even that they knew of it at all.

Further, we find it, not in a plain prose narrative, but in a narrative differing entirely from the prosaic setting in which it occurs—a narrative which rises in many parts to the height of poetic and imaginative splendour. There is nothing to show that it was not intended to be a touch of imaginative poetry and nothing more. Part of the greatness of Hebrew literature lies in its power of conveying eternal truth, as, for instance, in the Book of Job and in many passages of the prophets, in the form of imaginative narration. The stories of Elijah and Elisha come from the Schools of the Prophets. If room was left in them for the touch of poetic fiction, or for the embellishment of history with moral truth, conveyed in the form of parable or apologue, we can at once account for the sudden multitude of miracles. They were founded no doubt in many instances on actual events, but in the form into which the narrative is thrown they were recorded to enhance the greatness of the heroic chiefs of the Schools of the Prophets. It is therefore uncertain whether the original narrator believed, or meant his readers literally to believe, such a statement as that Elijah was fed morning and evening by actual ravens. It cannot be proved that he intended more than a touch of poetry, by which he could convey the lesson that the prophet was maintained by marked interventions of that providence of God which is itself in all its workings supernatural. God's feeding of the ravens in their nest was often alluded to in Hebrew poetry; and if the marvellous sup-

* The ravens were unclean birds (Deut. xiv. 14), and this naturally startled and offended the Rabbis.

† Prov. xxx. 17.

port of the Prophet in his lonely hiding-place was to be represented in an imaginative form, this way of representing it would naturally occur to the writer's thoughts. Similarly, when Jerome wrote the purely fictitious life of Paul the Hermit, which was taken for fact even by his contemporaries, he thinks it quite natural to say that Paul and Antony saw a raven sitting on a tree, who flew gently down to them and placed a loaf on the table before them. Ravens haunt the lonely, inaccessible cliffs among which Elijah found his place of refuge. It needed but a touch of metaphor to transform them into ministers of Heaven's beneficence.

But besides all this, the word rendered ravens (*Orebim*, עֲרֵבִים) only has that meaning if it be written with the vowel points. But the vowel points are confessedly not "inspired" in any sense, but are a late Masoretic invention. Without the change of a letter the word may equally well mean people of the city Orbo,* or of the rock Oreb (as was suggested even in the Bereshith Rabba by Rabbi Judah); or "merchants," as in Ezek. xxvii. 27; or Arabians. No doubt difficulties might be suggested about any of these interpretations; but which would be most reasonable, the acceptance of such small difficulties, or the literal acceptance of a stupendous miracle, unlike any other in the Bible, by which we are to believe on the isolated authority of a nameless and long subsequent writer, that, for months or weeks together, voracious and unclean birds brought bread and flesh to the Prophet twice a day? The old naturalistic attempts to explain the miracle are on the face of them absurd; but it is as perfectly open to any one who chooses to say that "Arabians," or "Orbites," or "merchants," or "people of the rock Oreb" fed Elijah, as to say that the "ravens" did so. The explanation now universally accepted by the Higher Criticism is different. It is to accept the meaning "ravens," but not with wooden literalness to interpret didactic and poetic symbolism as though it were bald and matter-of-fact prose. The imagery of a grand religious *Haggada* is not to be understood, nor was it ever meant to be understood, like the page of a dull annalist. Analogous stories are found abundantly alike in early pagan and early Christian literature and in mediæval hagiology. They are true in essence though not in fact, and the intention of them is often analogous to this; but no story is found so noble as this in its pure and quiet simplicity.

Let this then suffice and render it needless to recur to similar discussions. If any think themselves bound to interpret this and all the other facts in these narratives in their most literal sense; if they hold that the mere mention of such things by unknown writers in unknown time—possibly centuries afterwards, when the event may have become magnified by the refraction of tradition—is sufficient to substantiate them, let them hold their own opinion as long as it can satisfy them. But *proof* of such an opinion they neither have nor can have; and let them beware of priding themselves on the vaunt of their "faith," when such "faith" may haply prove to be no more than a distortion of the truer faith which proves all things and only holds fast that which will stand the test. A belief based on some *a priori* opinion about "verbal dictation" is not necessarily meritorious. It may be quite the reverse.

* Orbo was a small town near the Jordan and Bethshan,

Such a dogma has never been laid down by the Church in general. It has very rarely been insisted upon by any branch of the Church in any age. A belief which prides itself on ignorance of the vast horizon opened to us by the study of many forms of literature, by the advance of criticism, by the science of comparative religion—so far from being religious or spiritual may only be a sign of ignorance, or of a defective love of truth. A dogmatism which heaps upon intelligent faith burdens at once needless and intolerable may spring from sources which should tend to self-humiliation rather than to spiritual pride. * *Abundet quisque in sensu suo*. But such beliefs have not the smallest connection with true faith or sincere Christianity. God is a God of truth, and he who tries to force himself into a view which history and literature, no less than the faithful following of the Divine light within him, convince him to be untenable, does not rise into faith, but sins and does mischief by feebleness and *lack of faith*. †

CHAPTER XXXV.

ELIJAH AT SAREPTA.

1 KINGS xvii. 7, xviii. 19.

"The rain is God's compassion."—MOHAMMED.

THE fierce drought continued, and "at the end of days" † even the thin trickling of the stream in the clefts of Cherith was dried up. In the language of Job it felt the glare and vanished. § No miracle was wrought to supply the Prophet with water, but once more the providence of God intervened to save his life for the mighty work which still awaited him. He was sent to the region where, nearly a millennium later, the feet of his Lord followed him on a mission of mercy to those other sheep of His flock who were not of the Judæan fold.

The word of the Lord bade him make his way to the Sidonian city of Zarephath. Zarephath, the Sarepta of St. Luke, the modern Surafend, lay

* On the other side, Bunsen (*Bibelwerk*, v. 2, 540) speaks too strongly when he says that "nothing but boundless ignorance, or, where historical criticism has not died out, an hierarchical dilettanti reaction, foolhardy hypocrisy, and weak-hearted fanaticism would wish to demand the faith of a Christian community in the historic truths of these miracles as if they had actually taken place." He regards the whole narrative as a "popular epic—the fruit of an inspiration, which he, as it were, some superhuman being, awakened in his disciples."

† I append the remarks of Professor Milligan, a theologian of unimpeachable orthodoxy. "The miracle," he says, "is so remarkable, so much out of keeping with most of the other miracles of Scripture, that even pious and devout minds may well be perplexed by it, and we can feel no surprise at the attempts made to explain it. Such attempts are not inconsistent with the most devout reverence for the word of God. They are rather, not unfrequently, the result of a just persuasion that the Eastern mind did not express itself in forms similar to those of the West" (*Elijah*, p. 22). He proceeds to protest against the harsh condemnation of those who thus only try to interpret the real ideas present in the mind of the writer. He regards it as perhaps a highly poetic and figurative representation of the truth that the God of Nature was with Elijah. "The value of the Prophet's experience is neither heightened by a literal, nor diminished by a figurative, interpretation of what passed" (p. 24).

‡ 1 Kings xvii. 7. Perhaps years (Lev. xxv. 29; 1 Sam. xxvii. 7).

§ Job vi. 17.

between Tyre and Sidon, and there the waters would not be wholly dried up, for the fountains of Lebanon were not yet exhausted. The drought had extended to Phœnicia,* but Elijah was told that there a widow woman would sustain him. The Baal-worshipping queen who had hunted for his life would be least of all likely to search for him in a city of Baal-worshippers in the midst of her own people. He is sent among these Baal-worshippers to do them kindness, to receive kindness from them—perhaps to learn a wider tolerance, and to find that idolaters also are human beings, children, like the orthodox, of the same heavenly Father. He had been taught the lesson of "dependence upon God"; he was now to learn the lesson of "fellowship with man." Travelling probably by night both for coolness and for safety, Elijah went that long journey to the heathen district. He arrived there faint with hunger and thirst. Seeing a woman gathering sticks near the city gate he asked her for some water, and as she was going to fetch it he called to her and asked her also to bring him a morsel of bread. The answer revealed the condition of extreme want to which she was reduced. Recognising that Elijah was an Israelite, and therefore a worshipper of Jehovah, she said, "As Jehovah thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but (only) a handful of meal in the barrel, and a little oil in the cruse." She was gathering a couple of sticks to make one last meal for herself and her son, and then to lie down and die.† For drought did not only mean universal anguish, but much actual starvation. It meant, as Joel says, speaking of the desolation caused by locusts, that the cattle groan and perish, and the corn withers, and the seeds rot under their clods.

Strong in faith Elijah told her not to fear, but first to supply his own more urgent needs, and then to make a meal for herself and her son. Till Jehovah sent rain, the barrel of meal should not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail. She believed the promise, and for many days, perhaps for two whole years, the Prophet continued to be her guest.

But after a time her boy fell grievously sick, and at last died, or seemed to die.‡ So dread a calamity—the smiting of the stay of her home, and the son of her widowhood—filled the woman with terror. She longed to get rid of the presence of this terrible "man of God."§ He must have come, she thought, to bring her sin to remembrance before God, and so to cause Him to slay her son. The Prophet was touched by the pathos of her appeal, and could not bear that she should look upon him as the cause of her bereavement. "Give me thy son," he said. Taking the dead boy from her arms, he carried him to the chamber which she had set apart for him, and laid him on his own bed. Then, after an earnest cry to God, he stretched himself three times over the body of the youth, as though to breathe into

his lungs and restore his vital warmth, at the same time praying intensely that "his soul might come into him again."* His prayer was heard; the boy revived. Carrying him down from the chamber, Elijah had the happiness of restoring him to his widowed mother with the words, "See, thy son liveth." So remarkable an event not only convinced the woman that Elijah was indeed what she had called him, "a man of God," but also that Jehovah was the true God. It was not unnatural that tradition should interest itself in the boy thus strangely snatched from the jaws of death. The Jews fancied that he grew up to be servant of Elijah, and afterwards to be the prophet Jonah. The tradition at least shows an insight into the fact that Elijah was the first missionary sent from among the Jews to the heathen, and that Jonah became the second.

We are not to suppose that during his stay at Zarephath Elijah remained immured in his chamber. Safe and unsuspected, he might, at least by night, make his way to other places, and it is reasonable to believe that he then began to haunt the glades and heights of beautiful and deserted Carmel, which was at no great distance, and where he could mourn over the ruined altar of Jehovah and take refuge in any of its "more than two thousand tortuous caves." But what was the object of his being sent to Zarephath? That it was not for his own sake alone, that it had in it a purpose of conversion, is distinctly implied by our Lord when He says that in those days there were many widows in Israel, yet Elijah was not sent to them, but to this Sidonian idolatress. The prophets and saints of God do not always understand the meaning of Providence or the lessons of their Divine training. Francis of Assisi at first entirely misunderstood the real drift and meaning of the Divine intimations that he was to rebuild the ruined Church of God, which he afterwards so gloriously fulfilled. The thoughts of God are not as man's thoughts, nor His ways as man's ways, nor does He make all His servants as it were "fusile apostles," as He made St. Paul. The education of Elijah was far from complete even long afterwards. To the very last, if we are to accept the records of him as historically literal, amid the revelations vouchsafed to him he had not grasped the truth that the Elijah-spirit, however needful it may seem to be, differs very widely from the Spirit of the Lord of Life. Yet may it not have been that Elijah was sent to learn from the kind ministrations of a Sidonian widow, to whose care his life was due, some inkling of those truths which Christ revealed so many centuries afterwards, when He visited the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and extended His mercy to the great faith of the Syro-Phœnician woman? May not Elijah have been meant to learn what had to be taught by experience to the two great Apostles of the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision, that not every Baal-worshipper was necessarily corrupt or wholly insincere? St. Peter was thus taught that God is no respecter of persons, and that whether their religious belief be false or true, in every nation he that feareth Him and doeth righteousness is accepted of Him. St. Paul learnt at Damascus and taught at Athens that God made of one every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, that they should seek God if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.

* Compare the similar revivals of life wrought by Elisha (2 Kings iv. 34), and by St. Paul (Acts xx. 10).

* Menander, quoted by Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. xiii. 2. He says it lasted for a year.

† LXX., "My sons"—perhaps with reference to "her house" in verse 15.

‡ Perhaps the language of the Hebrew is not actually decisive. Josephus says, *την ψυχην ἀφείναι καὶ δόξαι νεκρόν*. In any case his recovery was due to Elijah's prayer.

§ The phrase "man of God" is characteristic of the Book of Kings, in which it occurs fifty-three times. It became a normal description of Elijah and Elisha. "What have I to do with thee?" Comp. 2 Sam. xvi. 10; Luke v. 8. It was a common superstition that death always followed the appearance of superhuman beings.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ELIJAH AND AHAB.

I KINGS xviii. 1-19.

"Return, oh backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art Jehovah our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the tumult (of votaries) upon the mountains. Truly in Jehovah our God is the salvation of Israel. And the Shame (*i.e.*, Baal) hath devoured the labour of our fathers."—*JER.* iii. 22-24.

ELIJAH stayed long with the Sidonian widow, safe in that obscure concealment, and with his simple wants supplied. But at last the word of the Lord came to him with the conviction that the drought had accomplished its appointed end in impressing the souls of king and people, and that the time was come for some immense and decisive demonstration against the prevalent apostasy. All his sudden movements, all his stern incisive utterances were swayed by his allegiance to Jehovah before whom he stood, and he now received the command, "Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth."

To obey such a mandate showed the strength of his faith. It is clear that even before the menace of the drought he had been known, and unfavourably known, to Ahab. The king saw in him a prophet who fearlessly opposed all the idolatrous tendencies into which he had led his easy and faithless people. How terribly must Ahab's hatred have been now intensified! We see from all the books of the prophets that they were personally identified with their predictions; that they were held responsible for them, were even regarded in popular apprehension as having actually brought about the things which they predicted. "See," says Jehovah to the timid boy Jeremiah, "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." The Prophet is addressed as though he personally effected the ruin he denounced. Elijah, then, would be regarded by Ahab as in one sense the author of the three years' famine. It would be held—not indeed with perfect accuracy, yet with a not unnatural confusion—that it was *he* who had shut up the windows of heaven and caused the misery and starvation of the suffering multitudes. With what wrath would a great and powerful king like Ahab look on this bold intruder, this skin-clad alien of Gilead, who had frustrated his policy, defied his power, and stamped the reign with so overwhelming a disaster. Yet he is bidden. "Go, show thyself unto Ahab"; and perhaps his immediate safety was only secured by the additional message, "and I will send rain upon the earth."

Things had, indeed, come to their worst. The "sore famine" in Samaria had reached a point which, if it had not been alleviated, would have led to the utter ruin of the miserable kingdom.

In this crisis Ahab did all that a king could do. Most of the cattle had perished, but it was essential to save if possible some of the horses and mules. No grass was left on the scorched plains and bare brown hills except where there were fountains and brooks which had not entirely vanished under that copper sky. To these places it was necessary to drive such a remnant of the cattle as it might be still possible to preserve alive. But who could be trusted to rise entirely superior to individual selfishness in such a search? Ahab

thought it best to trust no one but himself and his vizier Obadiah. The very name of this high official, Obadjahu, like the common Mohammedan names Abdallah, Abderrahnan, and others, implied that he was "a servant of Jehovah." His conduct answered to his name, for on Jezebel's persecuting attempt to exterminate Jehovah's prophets in their schools or communities, he, "the Sebastian of the Jewish Diocletian," had, at the peril of his own life, taken a hundred of them, concealed them in two of the great limestone caves of Palestine—perhaps in the recesses of Mount Carmel,* and fed them with bread and water. It is to Ahab's credit that he retained such a man in office, though the touch of timidity which we trace in Obadiah may have concealed the full faithfulness of his personal allegiance to the old worship. Yet that such a man should still hold the post of chamberlain (*al-hab-baith*) furnishes a fresh proof that Ahab was not himself a worshipper of Baal.

The king and his vizier went in opposite directions, each of them unaccompanied, and Obadiah was on his way when he was startled by the sudden appearance of Elijah. He had not previously seen him, but recognising him by his shaggy locks, his robe of skin, and the awful sternness of his swarthy countenance, he was almost abjectly terrified. Apart from the awe-inspiring aspect and manner of the Prophet, this seemed no mere man who stood before him, but the representative of the Eternal, and the wielder of His power. To his contemporaries he appeared like the incarnate vengeance of Jehovah against guilty times, a flash as it were of God's consuming fire. To the Moslim of to-day he is still *El Khudr*, "the eternal wanderer." Springing from his chariot, Obadiah fell flat on his face and cried, "Is it thou, my lord Elijah?" "It is I," answered the Prophet, not wasting words over his terror and astonishment. "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here."

The message enhanced the vizier's alarm. Why had not Elijah showed himself at once to Ahab? Did some terrible vindictive purpose lurk behind his message? Did Elijah confuse the aims and deeds of the minister with those of the king? Why did he despatch him on an errand which might move Ahab to kill him? Was not Elijah aware, he asks, with Eastern hyperbole, that Ahab had sent "to every nation and kingdom" to ask if Elijah was there, and when told that he was not there he made them confirm the statement by an oath?† What would come of such a message if Obadiah conveyed it? No sooner would it be delivered than the wind of the Lord would sweep Elijah away into some new and unknown solitude,‡ and Ahab, thinking that he had only been

* Amos ix. 3: "And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence." The phrase shows the security and seclusion of these caves and thickets, the haunt once of lions and bears, and still of leopards and hyenas.

† The LXX. adds that he inflicted vengeance because Elijah was not found: "*Καὶ ἐνέπρησε τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὰς χώρας αὐτῆς ὅτι οὐχ εὗρηκε θεῶν*" (1 Kings xviii. 10).

‡ Obadiah seems to have believed in miraculous transference of the Prophet from place to place. Comp. Ezek. iii. 12-14 (where "the spirit" may be rendered "a spirit," or "a wind"), viii. 3; 2 Kings ii. 16; Acts viii. 39; and the Ebionite Gospel of St. Matthew. "My mother, the Holy Ghost, took me by a hair of the head, and carried me to Mount Tabor" (Orig. in *Joann.*, ii. § 6; and Jer. in *Mic.* vii. 6). So in Bel and the Dragon 33-36 (Abarbanel, *Comm. in Habakkuk*) the prophet Habakkuk is said to have been taken invisibly to supply food to Daniel in the den of lions. "Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown and bare him by the hair of his head, and through the vehemency of his spirit" (*Midr. Roshik Rabba*, "in the might of the Holy Ghost") "set him in Babylon."

befooled, would in his angry disappointment, put Obadiah to death. Had he deserved such a fate? Had not Elijah heard of his reverence for Jehovah from his youth, and of his saving the hundred prophets at the peril of his life? Why then send him on so dangerous a mission? To these agitated appeals Elijah answered by his customary oath, "As Jehovah of hosts liveth, before whom I stand,* I will show myself unto him to-day." Then Obadiah went and told Ahab, and Ahab with impetuous haste hastened to meet Elijah, knowing that on him depended the fate of his kingdom.

Yet when they met he could not check the burst of anger which sprang to his lips.

"Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" he fiercely exclaimed. † Elijah was not the man to quail before the *vultus instantis tyranni*. "I have not troubled Israel," was the undaunted answer, "but thou and thy father's house." The cause of the drought was not the menace of Elijah, but the apostasy to Baalim. It was time that the fatal controversy should be decided. There must be an appeal to the people. Elijah was in a position to dictate, and he did dictate. "Let all Israel," he said, "be summoned to Mount Carmel;" and there he would singly meet in their presence the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, all of whom ate at Jezebel's table. ‡ Then and there a great challenge should take place, and the question should be settled for ever, whether Baal or Jehovah was to be the national god of Israel. What challenge could be fairer, seeing that Baal was the Sun-god, the god of fire?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL.

I KINGS xviii. 20-40.

"O for a sculptor's hand,
That thou might'st take thy stand,
Thy wild hair floating in the eastern breeze!"
KEBLE.

IT never occurred to Ahab to refuse the challenge, or to arrest the hated messenger. The hermit and the dervish are sacrosanct; they stand before kings and are not ashamed. Having nothing to desire, they have nothing to fear. So Antony stalked into the streets of Alexandria to denounce its prefect; so Athanasius fearlessly seized the bridle of Constantine in his new city; so a ragged and dwarfish old man—Macedonius the Barley-eater—descended from his mountain cave at Antioch to stop the horses of the avenging commissioners of Theodosius, and bade them go back and rebuke the fury of their Emperor,—and so far from punishing him they alighted, and fell on their knees, and begged his blessing.

The vast assembly was gathered by royal proclamation. There could have been no scene in the land of Israel more strikingly suitable for the purpose than Mount Carmel. It is a ridge of upper oolite, or Jura limestone, which at the eastern ex-

* I Kings xviii. 15, LXX., "The Lord God of Israel" has now become to him more prominently "the Lord God of Hosts."

† The phrase had already been applied to Achan (Josh. vii. 25).

‡ *I.e.*, were maintained at Jezebel's expense. The subsequent narration is silent as to the presence of the prophets of the Asherah, and Wellhausen thinks that the words here are an interpolation.

trinity rises more than sixteen hundred feet above the sea, sinking down to six hundred feet at the western extremity. The "excellency of Carmel" of which the prophet speaks* consists in the fruitfulness which to this day makes it rich in flowers of all hues, and clothes it with the impenetrable foliage of oak, pine, walnut, olive, laurel, dense brushwood, and evergreen shrubberies thicker than in any other part in Central Palestine. The name means "Garden of God," and travellers, delighted with the rocky dells and blossoming glades, describe Carmel as "still the fragrant lovely mountain that it was of old." † It "forms the southern extremity of the Gulf of Khaifa, and separates the great western plain of Philistia from the plain of Esdraelon, and the plain of Phœnicia." "It is difficult," says Sir G. Grove, "to find another site in which every particular is so minutely fulfilled as in this." The whole mountain is now called *Mar Elias* from the Prophet's name.

The actual spot of the range near which took place this most memorable event in the history of Israel was almost undoubtedly a little below the eastern summit of the ridge. It is "a terrace of natural rock," which commands a fine view of the plains and lakes and the hills of Galilee, and the windings of the Kishon, with Jezreel glimmering in the far distance under the heights of Gilboa. The remains of an old and massive square structure are here visible, called *El-Muhrakkah*, "the burning," or "the sacrifice," perhaps the site of Elijah's altar. Under the ancient olives still remains the round well of perennial water from which, even in the drought, the Prophet could fill the barrels which he poured over his sacrifice. Elijah's grotto is pointed out in the Church of the Convent, and another near the sea. In the region known as "the garden of Elijah" are found the *geodes* and *septaria*—stones and fossils which assume the aspect, sometimes of loaves of bread, sometimes of water-melons and olives, and are still known as "Elijah's fruits." The whole mountain murmurs with his name. ‡ He became in local legend the oracular god Carmelus, whose "altar and devotion" drew visitors no less illustrious than Pythagoras and Vespasian to visit the sacred hill. §

Here, then, at early dawn the Prophet of Jehovah, in his solitary grandeur, met the four hundred and fifty idolatrous priests and their rabble of attendant fanatics in the presence of the half-curious king and the half-apostate people. He presented the oft-repeated type of God's servant alone against the world. ¶ Most rarely is it otherwise. They who speak smooth things and prophesy deceits may always live at ease in amicable compromise with the world, the flesh, and the devil. But the Prophet has ever to set his face as a flint against tyrants, and mobs and false prophets, and intriguing priests, and all who daub tottering walls with untempered mortar, and all who, in days smooth and perilous, softly murmur, "Peace.

* Isa. xxxiii. 9, xxxv. 2; Micah vii. 14. Its beauty and fruitfulness are alluded to in Jer. xlvi. 18, l. 19; Amos. i. 2, ix. 3; Nahum i. 4; Cant. vii. 5.

† Sir George Grove, to whose excellent article in Smith's *Dict. of Bible* (i. 270) I am indebted, quotes Martineau (i. 317), Porter's *Handbook*, Van de Velde, etc. See, too, Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, pp. 353-56.

‡ On these *Lapides judaici*, see my *Life of Christ*, i. 120. Illustrations are given in the illustrated edition.

§ Jambl., *Vit. Pythag.*, iii.; Suet., *Vesp.*, 5; Tac., *Hist.*, ii. 78; Reland, *Palest.*, pp. 327-30.

¶ Megiddo lies in the plain below, and this scene of conflict between good and the powers of evil was an anticipated Armageddon.

peace, when there is no peace." So it was with Noah in the days of the deluge; so with Amos and Hosea and the later Zechariah; so with Micaiah, the son of Inlah; so with Isaiah, mocked as a babbler by the priests at Jerusalem, and at last sawn asunder; so with Jeremiah, struck in the face by the priest Pashur, and thrust into the miry dungeon, and at last murdered in exile; so with Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, whom they slew between the porch and the altar. Nor has it been less so since the earliest dawn of the New Dispensation. Of John the Baptist the priests and Pharisees said, "He has a devil," and Herod slew him in prison. All, perhaps, of the twelve Apostles were martyred. Paul, like the rest, was intrigued against, thwarted, hated, mobbed, imprisoned, hunted from place to place by the world, the Jews, and the false Christians. Treated as the offscouring of all things, he was at last contemptuously beheaded in utter obscurity. Similar fates befell many of the best and greatest of the Fathers. Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, were slain by wild beasts and by fire. Origen's life was one long martyrdom, mostly at the hands of his fellow-Christians. Did not Athanasius stand against the world? What needs it to summon from the prison or the stake the mighty shades of Savonarola, of Huss, of Jerome of Prague, of the Albigenses and Waldenses, of the myriad victims of the inquisition, of those who were burnt at Smithfield and Oxford, of Luther, of Whitfield? Did Christ mean nothing when He said, among His first beatitudes, "Blessed are ye when all men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake and the gospel's"? Was it mere accident and metaphor when He said, "Ye are of the world, and therefore the world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth"; and, "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more them of His household"? Which of His best and purest sons, from the first Good Friday down to this day, has ever passed through life unpersecuted of slanderous tongues? Has the nominal Church ever shown any more mercy to saints than the sneering and furious world? What has sustained Christ's hated ones? What but that confidence towards God which lives among those whose heart condemns them not? What but the fact that "they could turn from the storm without to the approving sunshine within"? "See," it has been said, "he who builds on the general esteem of the world builds, not on the sand, but, which is worse, upon the wind, and writes the title-deeds of his hope upon the face of a river." But when a man knows that "one with God is always in a majority," then his loneliness is changed into the confidence that all the ten thousand times ten thousand of Heaven are with him. "His banishment becomes his preferment, his rags his trophies, his nakedness his ornament; and so long as his innocence is his repast, he feasts and banquets upon bread and water."

And so,

"Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,"

Elijah fearlessly stood alone, while all the world confronted him with frowning menace. The coward sympathies of the neutrals who face both ways may have been with him, but the multitude of such Laodiceans wink at wrong, and from love of their own ease do not, and dare not, speak.

God only was the protector of Elijah, and in himself alone was all his state, as in his garment of hair he approached the people and confronted the idolatrous priests in all the gorgeousness of Baal's vestry. He, like his great predecessor Moses, was the champion of moral purity, of the national faith, of religious freedom, and simplicity, of the immediate access of man to God; they were the champions of fanatical and unhallowed religionism, of usurping priestcraft, of unnatural self-abasements, of persecuting despotism, of licentious and cruel rites. Elijah was the deliverer of his people from a hideous and polluted apostasy which, had he not prevailed that day would have obliterated their name and their memory from the annals of the nations. That he was a genuine historic character—a prophet of Divine commission and marvellous power—cannot for a moment be doubted, however impossible it may now be in every incident to disentangle the literal historic facts from the poetic and legendary embellishment which those facts not unnaturally received in the ordinary recollection of the prophetic schools. Throughout the great scene which followed, his spirit was that of the Psalmist: "Though an host of men should encamp against me, yet will not my heart be afraid"; that of the "servant of the Lord" in Isaiah: "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, and in his quiver hath He hid me."*

His first challenge was to the people. "How long," he asked, "do ye totter between two opinions? † If Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

Awestruck and ashamed the multitude kept unbroken silence. Doubtless it was, in part, the silence of guilt. They knew that they had followed Jezebel into the cruelties of Baal-worship, and the forbidden lusts which polluted the temples of the Asherah. Puritanism, simplicity, spirituality of worship involves a strain too great and too lofty for the multitude. Like all Orientals, like the negroes of America, like most weak minds, they loved to rely on a pompous ritual and a sensuous worship. It is so easy to let these stand for the deeper requirements which lie in the truth that "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Receiving no answer to his stern question, Elijah laid down the conditions of the contest. "The prophets of Baal," he said, "are four hundred and fifty: I stand alone as a prophet of Jehovah. Let two bullocks be provided for us; they shall slay and dress one, and lay it on wood, but—for there shall be no priestly trickeries to-day—they shall put no fire under. I, though I be no priest, will slay and dress the other, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. Then let all of you, Baal-priests and people if you will, cry to your idols; I will call on the name of Jehovah. The God that answereth by fire let him be God."

No challenge could be fairer, for Baal was the Sun-god: and what god could be more likely to answer by fire from that blazing sky? The deep murmur of the people expressed their assent. The Baal priests were caught as in a snare. Their

* Isa. xlix. 2; Cheyne, p. 16.

† LXX., 1 Kings xviii. 21, ἕως ποτε ὑμεῖς χωλανεῖτε ἐπ' ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς ἰγνύσιν. Vulg., *usquequo claudicatis in duas partes?* Cheyne renders it: "How long will ye go lame upon tottering knees?" In Psalm cxix. 113, *דִּבְּלִים*, are "the double-minded." In Ezek. xxxi. 6, *פְּצֵצִים*, "diverging branches." In Isa. ii. 21, *פְּצֵצִים*, "clefts of Rocks" (Bähr).

hearts must have sunk within them; his did not. Perhaps some of them believed sufficiently in their idol to hope that, were he demon or deity, he might save himself and his votaries from humiliation and defeat; but most of them must have been seized with terrible misgiving, as they saw the assembled people prepared to wait with Oriental patience, seated on their abbas on the sides of that natural amphitheatre, till the descending flame should prove that Baal had heard the weird invocation of his worshippers. But since they could not escape the proposed ordeal, they chose, and slew, and dressed their victim. From morning till noon—many of them with wildly waving arms, others with their foreheads in the dust—they upraised the wild chant of their monotonous invocation, "Baal, hear us! Baal, hear us!" In vain the cry rose and fell, now uttered in soft appealing murmurs, now rising into passionate entreaties. All was silent. There lay the dead bullock putrescing under the burning orb which was at once their deity and the visible sign of his presence. No consuming lightning fell, even when the sun flamed in the zenith of that cloudless sky. There was no voice nor any that answered.

Then they tried still more potent incantations. They began to circle round the altar they had made in one of their solemn dances to the shrill strains of pipe and flute. The rhythmic movements ended in giddy whirls and orgiastic leaping which were a common feature of sensuous heathen worship; dances in which like modern dervishes, they bounded and yelled and spun round and round till they fell foaming and senseless to the ground.* The people looked on expectant, but it was all in vain.

Hitherto the Prophet had remained silent, but now when noon came, and still no fire descended, he mocked them. Now, surely, if ever, was their time! They had been crying for six long hours in their vain repetitions and incantations. Surely they had not shouted loud enough! Baal was a god; some strange accident must have prevented him from hearing the prayer of his miserable priests. Perhaps he was in deep meditation, so that he did not notice those frantic appeals; perhaps he was too busy talking to some one else,† or was on a journey somewhere; or was asleep and must be awakened; or, he added with yet more mordant sarcasm, and in a gibe which would have sounded coarse to modern ears, perhaps he had gone aside for a private purpose. He must be called, he must be aroused; he must be made to hear.‡

* Herodian (*Hist.*, v. 3) describes the dance of Helio-gabalus round the altar of the Emesene Sun-god, and Apuleius describes at length the fanatic leaping and gashings of the execrable *Galli*—the eunuch-mendicant priests of the Syrian goddess. From these sources and from allusions in Seneca, Suetonius, Statius, Arnobius, etc., Movers (*Phöniz.*, i. 632) derives his description (quoted by Keil, *ad loc.*, E. T., p. 283): "A discordant howling opens the scene. Now they fly wildly through one another, with the head sunk down to the ground, but turning round in circles, so that the loose flowing hair drags through the mire. Thereupon they first bite themselves on the arm, and at last cut themselves with two-edged swords, which they are wont to carry. Then begins a new scene. One of them who surpasses all the rest in frenzy, begins to prophesy with sighs and groans, openly accuses himself of past sins, which he now wishes to punish by the mortifying of the flesh, takes the knotted whip which the *Galli* are wont to bear, lashes his back, cuts himself with swords, till the blood trickles down from his mangled body."

† Verse 27. Others render it "meditating" (De Wette Thénius) or "peevish" (Bähr). Comp. Hom. *Il.* i. 423; *Od.*, i. 22, etc.

‡ This instance of "grim sarcastic humour" is almost unique in Scripture. It was made more mordant by the paronomasia *קרישׁיג לׁ קרישׁיג* (2 Sam. i. 22).

Such taunts addressed to this multitude of priests in the hearing of the people, whom they desired to dupe or to convince, drove them to fiercer frenzy. Already the westering sun began to warn them that their hour was past, and failure imminent. They would not succumb without trying the darker sorceries of blood and self-mutilation, which were only resorted to at the most dread extremities. With renewed and redoubled yells they offered on their altar the blood of human sacrifice, stabbing and gashing themselves with swords and lances, till they presented a horrid spectacle. Their vestments and their naked bodies were besmeared with gore* as they whirled round and round with shriller and more frenzied screams.† They raved in vain. The shadows began to lengthen. The hour for the evening *Minchah*, the evening meal-offering, and oblation of flour and meal, salt and frankincense, drew near. ‡ It was already "between the two evenings." They had continued their weird invocations all through the burning day, but there was not any that regarded. There lay the dead bullock on the still fireless altar; and now their Tyrian Sun-god, like the fabled "Hercules," was but burning himself to death on the flaming pyre of sunset amid the unavailing agony of his worshippers.

Then Elijah bade the sullen and baffled fanatics to stand aside, and summoned the people to throng round him. There was nothing tumultuous or orgiastic in his proceedings. In striking contrast with the four hundred and fifty frantic sun-worshippers, he proceeded in the calmest and most deliberate way. First, in the name of Jehovah, he repaired the old *bamah*—the mountain-altar, which probably Jezebel had broken down. This he did with twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Then he dug a broad trench.§ Then, when he had prepared his bullock, in order to show the people the impossibility of any deception, such as are common among priests, he bade them drench it three times over with four barrels of water.|| from the still-existent spring, and, not content with that, he filled the trench also with water.¶ Lastly at the time of the evening obla-

* Plutarch (*De Superstit.*, p. 170) says: "The priests of Bellona offered their own blood, which was deemed powerful to move their gods." Comp. Herod., ii. 6r, Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 50; Apul., *Metam.*, viii. 28.

† ער לעילתא *על* "till towards" (Num. xxviii. 4) the offering of the *Minchah*. LXX., *θυσία*; Vulg., *sacrificium* and *holocaustum*. In verse 30 it is omitted in the LXX. "There is a great concurrence of evidence that the evening sacrifice of the first Temple was not a holocaust, but a cereal oblation" (Robertson Smith, p. 143, quoting 1 Kings xviii. 34; 2 Kings xvi. 15; Ezek. ix. 4, Heb.).

‡ Heb., *קרישׁיג*; LXX., *διετρεχον*; Vulg., *transiliebant*. Literally, they acted like frantic prophets (1 Sam. xviii. 10; Jer. xxix. 26).

§ LXX., *θαλάσσαν*, or "sea"—the name given to Solomon's molten laver; but the description, "as great as would contain two *seahs* of seed," is curious, for a *seah* was only the third of an ephah.

¶ Plut. (*Undesigned Coincidences*, II. xxxii.) thinks that as the drought had been so intense the water must have been sea-water. But Josephus says it was drawn *ἀπο τῆς κρήνης* (*Antt.*, VIII. xiii. 5); and the well still exists.

¶ Priests, both pagan and mediæval, have been adepts at deception. At the Reformation the mechanism of winking Madonnas, etc., was exposed to the people. At Pompeii may still be seen the secret staircase behind the altar, and the pipes let into the head of Isis from behind, through which the priests spoke her pretended oracles. St. Chrysostom (*Orat. in Petr. et Eliam*, which is of uncertain genuineness) tells us that he had himself seen (*θεάτης αὐτὸς γενομένος*) altars with concealed hollows in the middle, into which the unsuspected operator crept, and blew up a fire which the people were assured

tion he briefly offered up one prayer that Jehovah would make it known this day to His backsliding people that He, not Baal, was the Elohim of Israel. He used no "much speaking"; he did not adopt the dervish yells and dances and gashings which were abhorrent to God, though they appealed so powerfully to the sensuous imaginations of the multitude. He only raised his eyes to heaven,* and cried aloud in the hush of expectant stillness:—

"Jehovah, God of Abraham, of 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.
Hear me, Jehovah, hear me.
That this people may know that Thou, Jehovah, art God,
And that Thou hast turned their heart back again."

The prayer, with its triple invocation of Jehovah's name, and its seven rhythmic lines, was no sooner ended than down streamed the lightning, and consumed the bullock and the wood, and shattered the stones, and burnt up the dust, and licked up the water in the trenches;† and, with one terror-stricken impulse, the people all prostrated themselves on their faces with the cry, "Yahweh—hoo—ha—Elohim. Yahweh—hoo—ha—Elohim!" "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God"—a cry which was almost identical with the name of the victorious prophet Elijah—"Yah, He is my God."‡

The magnificent narrative in which the interest has been wound up to so high a pitch, and expressed in so lofty a strain of imaginative and dramatic force, ends in a deed of blood. According to Josephus, the people, by a spontaneous movement, "seized and slew the prophets of Baal, Elijah exhorting them to do so." According to the earlier narrative, Elijah said to the people: "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there with the sword."§ It is not necessarily meant that he slew them with his own hand, though indeed he may have done so, as Phinehas sacrificed Jephthah's daughter, and Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord. His moral responsibility was precisely the same in either case. We are not told that he had any commission from Jehovah to do this, or was bidden thereto by any voice of the Lord. Yet in those wild days—days of ungovernable passions and imperfect laws, days of ignorance which God winked at—it is not only perfectly probable that Elijah would have acted thus, but most unlikely that his conscience reproached him for doing so, or that it otherwise than approved the sanguinary vengeance. It was

self-kindled (see Keil, p. 282). One legend says that on this occasion a man was suffocated, who had been concealed by the Baal priests inside their altar.

* 1 Kings xviii. 39.
† Comp. Lev. ix. 24. Analogous stories existed among pagans (Hom., *Il.*, ii. 305; *Od.*, ii. 143; Verg., *Ecl.*, viii. 105). Pliny says that annals recorded the eliciting of lightning by prayers and incantations (*H. N.*, ii. 54; Winer, *Realwörterb.* 377).

‡ It is after Elijah's time, and probably from his influence, that from this time proper names compounded with Jehovah became almost the rule—as in Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, Pekahiah, etc.

§ 1 Kings xix. 1. **יְהוָה**; LXX., *ἐν βομφαίᾳ*.

the frightful *lex talionis*, which was spoken "to them of old time," and which inflicted on the defeated what they would certainly have inflicted on Elijah had he not been the conqueror. The prophets of Baal indirectly, if not directly, had been the cause of Jezebel's persecution of the prophets of the Lord. The thought of pity would not occur to Elijah any more than it did to the writer, or writers, of Deuteronomy, perhaps, long afterwards, who commanded the stoning of idolaters, whether men or women (Deut. xiii. 6-9, xvii. 2-4). The massacre of the priests accorded with the whole spirit of those half-anarchic times. It accords with that Elijah-spirit of orthodox fanaticism, which, as Christ Himself had to teach to the sons of thunder, is not His spirit, but utterly alien from it. If, perhaps two centuries later, the savage deed could be recorded, and recorded with approval, by this narrator from the School of the Prophets in these superb eulogies of his hero; if so many centuries later the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the first martyr-apostle could deem it an exemplary deed; if, centuries later, it could be appealed to as a precedent by Inquisitors with hearts made hard as the nether millstone by bigoted and hateful superstition; if even Puritans could be animated by the same false hallowing of ferocity; how can we judge Elijah, if, in dark unilluminated early days, he had not learnt to rise to a purer standpoint? To this day the names about Carmel shudder, as it were, with reminiscence of this religious massacre. There is *El-Muhrakkah*, "the place of burning"; there is *Tel-el-Kusis*, "the hill of the priests"; and that ancient river, the river Kishon, which had once been choked with the corpses of the host of Sisera, and has since then been incarnadined by the slain of many a battle, is—perhaps in memory of this bloodshed most of all—still known as the *Nahr-el-Mokatta*, or "the stream of slaughter." What wonder that the Eastern Christians in their pictures of Elijah still surround him with the decapitated heads of these his enemies? To this day the Moslim regard him as one who terrifies and slays.*

But though the deed of vengeance stands recorded, and recorded with no censure, in the sacred history, we must—without condemning Elijah, and without measuring his days by the meting-rod of Christian mercy—still unhesitatingly hold fast the sound principle of early and as yet uncontaminated Christianity, and say, as said the early Fathers. *Βία ἐχθρὸν Θεῷ*. Violence is a thing hateful to the God of love.

Even Christians, and that down to our own day, have abused the example of Elijah, and asked, "Did not Elijah slaughter the priests of Baal?" as a proof that it is always the duty of States to suppress false religion by violence. Stahl asked that question when he preached before the Prussian court at the Evangelical Conference at Berlin in 1855, adding the dreadful misrepresentation that "Christianity is the religion of intolerance, and its kernel is exclusiveness." Did these hard spirits never consider Christ's own warning? Did they wholly forget the prophecy that "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall His voice be heard in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory, and in His name shall the Gentiles hope" † Calvin reproved René, Duchess of Ferrara, for not approv-

* Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, 100.

† Matt. xii. 19, 20; Isa. xlii. 2, 3; Ezek. xxxiv. 16.

ing of the spirit of the imprecatory psalms. He said that this was "to set ourselves up as superior to Christ in sweetness and humility"; and that "David even in his hatreds is an example and type of Christ." When Cartwright argued for the execution of the heretics he said: "If this be thought savage and intolerant, I am content to be so with the Holy Ghost." Far wiser is the humble minister in *Old Mortality*, when he withstood Balfour of Burleigh, in the decision to put to the sword all the inhabitants of Tillietudlem Castle. "By what law," asks Henry Morton, "would you justify the atrocity you would commit?" "If thou art ignorant of it," said Balfour, "thy companion is well aware of the law which gave the men of Jericho to the sword of Joshua, the son of Nun." "Yes," answered the divine, "but we live under a better dispensation, which instructeth us to return good for evil, and to pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RAIN.

I KINGS xviii. 41-46.

"Are there any of the vanities of the nations that can cause rain?"—JER. xiv. 22.

But the terrible excitement of the day was not yet over, nor was the victory completely won. The fire had flashed from heaven, but the long desired rain on which depended the salvation of land and people still showed no signs of falling. And Elijah was pledged to this result. Not until the drought ended could he reach the culmination of his victory over the sun-god of Jezebel's worship.

But his faith did not fail him. "Get thee up," he said to Ahab, "eat and drink, for there is a sound of the feet of the rain-storm."* Doubtless through all that day of feverish anxiety, neither king nor people, nor prophet had eaten. As for the Prophet, but little sufficed him at any time, and the slaughter of the defeated priests would not prevent either king or people from breaking their long fast. Doubtless the king's tent was pitched on one of the slopes over the plain. But Elijah did not join him. He heard, indeed, with prophetic ear the rush of the coming rain, but he had still to wrestle in prayer with Jehovah for the fulfilment of His promise. So he ascended towards the summit of the promontory where the purple peak of Carmel—still called *Jebel Mar Elias* ("the hill of Lord Elijah")—overlooks the sea, and there he crouched low on the ground in intense prayer, putting his face between his knees. After his first intensity of supplication had spent itself, he said to his boy attendant,† traditionally believed to have been the son of the widow of Zarephath whom he had plucked from death:—

"Go up now, look towards the sea."

The youth went up, and gazed out long and intently, for he well knew that if rain came it would sweep inland from the waters of the Mediterranean, and to an experienced eye the signals of coming storm are patent long before they are noticed by others. But all was as it had been for

* LXX., ὅτι φωνὴ τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ὕετοῦ. Perhaps, with reference to this reading, Josephus afterwards describes "the little cloud" as "no bigger than a human footstep" (οὐ πλεον ἴχνους ἀνθρώπινου.)

† LXX., τῷ παιδαριῷ αὐτοῦ.

so many weary and dreadful months. The sea a sheet of unruffled gold glared under the setting sun, which still sank through an unclouded sky. Can we not imagine the accent of misgiving and disappointment with which he brought back the one word:—

"Nothing."

Once more the Prophet bowed his face between his knees in prayer, and sent the youth; and again, and yet again, seven times. And each time had come to him the chilling answer, "Nothing." But the seventh time he called out from the mountain summit his joyous cry: "Behold, there ariseth a cloud out of the sea, as small as a man's hand."

And now, indeed, Elijah knew that his triumph was completed. He bade his servant fly with winged speed to Ahab, and tell him to make ready his chariot at once, lest the burst of the coming rain should flood the river and the road, and prevent him from getting over the rough ground which lay between him and his palace at Jezreel.

Then the blessed storm burst on the parched soil with a sense of infinite refreshfulness which only an Eastern in a thirsty land can fully comprehend. And Ahab mounted his chariot. He had not driven far before the heaven, which had for so long been like brass over an iron globe, was one black mass of clouds driven by the wind, and the drenching rain poured down in sheets. And through the storm the chariot swept, and Elijah girded up his loins, and, filled with a Divine impulse of exultation, ran before it, keeping pace with the king's steeds for all those fifteen miles, even after the overwhelming strain of all he had gone through, apparently without food, that day. And as through the rifts of rain the king saw his wild dark figure outrunning his swift steeds, and seeming "to dilate and conspire" with the rushing storm, can we wonder that the tears of remorse and gratitude streamed down his face?*

The chariot reached Jezreel, and at the city gate Elijah stopped. Like his antitype, the great fore-runner, Elijah was a voice in the wilderness; like his Lord that was to be, he loved not cities. The instinct of the Bedawin kept him far from the abodes of men, and his home was never among them. He needed no roof to shelter him, nor change of raiment. The hollows of Mount Gilboa were his sufficient resting-place, and he could find a sleeping-place in the caves near its abundant Eastern spring. Nor was he secure of safety. He knew in spite of his superhuman victory, that a dark hour awaited Ahab when he would have to tell Jezebel that the people had repudiated her idol, and that Elijah had slain her four hundred and fifty priests. He knew "that axe-like edge unturnable" which always smote and feared not. Ahab was but as plastic clay in the strong hands of his queen, and for her there existed neither mystery nor miracle except in the worship of the insulted Baal. Was not Baal, she said, the real sender of the rain, on whose priests this fanatic from rude Gilead had wrought his dreadful sacrifice? Oh that she could have been for one hour on Carmel in the place of her vacillating and easily daunted husband! For was she not convinced, and did not the pagan historian afterwards relate, that the ending of the drought was due to the prayers and sacrifices, not of Elijah, but of her own father who was Baal's priest and king?†

* LXX., ἰ Kings xviii. 45, Καὶ ἔκλασε καὶ ἐπορεύετο Ἀχαάβ ἕως Ἰεζρέελ.

† Menander of Ephesus (Josephus, *Antt.* VIII. xiii. 3).

Yet, for all her spirit of defiance, we can hardly doubt that the feelings of Jezebel towards Elijah had much of dread mingled with her hatred. She must have felt towards him much as Mary Queen of Scots felt towards John Knox—of whom she said that she feared his prayers more than an army of one hundred thousand men.*

"May we really venture," asks Canon Cheyne, "to look out for answer to prayer? Did not Elijah live in the heroic ages of faith? No; God still works miracles. Take an instance from the early history of Christian Europe. You know the terror excited by the Huns, who in the sixth century after Christ penetrated into the very heart of Christian France. Already they had occupied the suburbs of Orleans, and the people who were incapable of bearing arms lay prostrate in prayer. The governor sent a messenger to observe from the ramparts. Twice he looked in vain, but the third time he reported a small cloud on the horizon.

"It is the aid of God," cried the Bishop of Orleans. It was the dust raised by the advancing squadrons of Christian troops." †

A much nearer parallel, and that a very remarkable one, may be quoted. ‡ It records—and the fact itself, explain it how men will, seems to be unquestionable—how a storm of rain came to answer the prayer of a good leader of the Evangelical Revival—Grimshaw, rector of Haworth. Distressed at the horrible immoralities introduced among his parishoners by some local races, and wholly failing to get them stopped, he went to the racecourse, and, flinging himself on his knees in an agony of supplication, entreated God to interpose and save his people from their moral danger. He had scarcely ceased his prayer when down rushed a storm of rain so violent as to turn the racecourse into a swamp, and render the projected races a matter of impossibility.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ELIJAH'S FLIGHT.

I KINGS XIX. 1-4.

"A still small voice comes through the wild,
Like a father consoling his fretful child,
Which banisheth bitterness, wrath and fear,
Saying, 'Man is distant, but God is near.'"

TEMPLE.

THE misgiving which, joined to his ascetic dislike of cities, made Elijah stop his swift race at the entrance of Jezreel was more than justified. Ahab's narrative of the splendid contest at Carmel produced no effect upon Jezebel whatever, and we can imagine the bitter oburgations which she poured upon her cowering husband for having stood quietly by while her prophets and Baal's prophets were being massacred by this dark fanatic, aided by a rebellious people. Had she been there all should have been otherwise! In contemptuous defiance of Ahab's fears or wishes, she then and there—and it must now have been after nightfall—despatched a messenger to find Elijah, wherever he might be hiding himself, and say to him in her name: "As sure as thou art Elijah, and I am Jezebel, may my gods avenge it upon me if on the morrow by this time I have not made thy life like the life of one of my own murdered

priests." In the furious impetuosity of the message we see the determination of the sorceress-queen. In her way she was as much in deadly earnest as Elijah was. Whether Baal had been defeated or not, she was not defeated, and Elijah should not escape her vengeance. The oath shows the intensity of her rage, like that of the forty Jews who bound themselves by the *cherem* that they would not eat or drink till they had slain Paul; and the fixity of her purpose as when Richard III. declared that he would not dine till the head of Buckingham had fallen on the block. We cannot but notice the insignificance to which she reduced her husband, and the contempt with which she treated the voice of her people. She presents the spectacle, so often reproduced in history and reflected in literature, of a strong fierce woman—a Clytemnestra, a Brunhault, a lady Macbeth, an Isabella of France, a Margaret of Anjou, a Joan of Naples, a Catherine de Medicis—completely dominating a feebler consort.

The burst of rage which led her to send the message defeated her own object. The awfulness which invested Elijah, and the supernatural powers on which he relied, when he was engaged in the battles of the Lord, belonged to him only in his public and prophetic capacity. As a man he was but a poor, feeble, lonely subject, whose blood might be shed at any moment. He knew that God works no miracles for the supersession of ordinary human precautions. It was no part of his duty to throw away his life, and give a counter triumph to the Baal-worshippers whom he had so signally humiliated. He fled, and went for his life.

Swift flight was easy to that hardy frame and that trained endurance, even after the fearful day on Carmel and the wild race of fifteen miles from Carmel to Jezreel. It was still night, and cool, and the haunts and byways of the land were known to the solitary and hunted wanderer. "He feared, and he rose, and he went for his life," ninety-five miles to Beersheba, once a town of Simeon, now the southern limit of the kingdom of Judah, thirty-one miles south of Hebron.* But in the tumult of his feelings and the peril of his position he could not stay in any town. At Beersheba he left his servant—perhaps, as legend says, the boy of Zarephath, who became the prophet Jonah—but, in any case, not so much a servant as a youth in training for the prophetic office. It was necessary for him to spend his dark hour alone; for, if there are hours in which human sympathy is all but indispensable, there are also hours in which the soul can tolerate no communion save that with God. † So, leaving all civilisation behind him, he plunged a day's journey into that great and terrible wilderness of Paran, where he too was alone with the wild beasts. And, then utterly worn out, he slung himself down under the woody stem of a solitary rhotem plant. ‡ The plant is the wild broom with "its cloud of pink blossoms" which often afford the only shadow under the glaring sun in the waste and weary

* The touch "which belongeth to Judah" shows that the Elijah-narrative emanated from some prophet in the northern schools. In later days it was much visited by pilgrims from the Northern Kingdom (Amos v. 5, viii. 14).

† Matt. xxvi. 36.

‡ 1 Kings xix. 4, 5. *רְתֵם*; Vulg., *subter unam juniperum*. The plant is the *Genista monosperma*, with papilionaceous flowers. Not "juniper," as in Luther (*Wachholder*) and the A. V. LXX., *ῥαβδὴν φύρον*. See Robinson, *Researches*, i. 203, 205. It gave its name to the station Rithmah (Num. xxxiii. 18) and the Wadies Retemit and Retamah.

* Eisenlohr, *Das Volk Israel*, p. 162.

† He refers to Gibbon, iv. 232.

‡ See Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brönte*.

§ LXX., 1 Kings xix. 2.

land, and beneath the slight but grateful shade of which the Arab to this day is glad to pitch his tent. And there the pent-up emotions of his spirit, which had gone through so tremendous a strain, broke up as in one terrible sob, when the strong man, like a tired child, "requested for himself that he might die."*

Of what use was life any longer? He had fought for Jehovah, and won, and after all been humiliatingly defeated. He had prophesied the drought, and it had withered and scorched up the erring, afflicted land. He had prayed for the rain, and it had come in a rush of blessing on the reviving fields. In the Wady Cherith, in the house of the Phœnician widow, he had been divinely supported and sheltered from hot pursuit. He had snatched her boy from death. He had stood before kings, and not been ashamed. He had stretched forth his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, and not in vain. He had confounded the rich-vested and royally maintained band of Baal's priests, and in spite of their orgiastic leavings and self-mutilations had put to shame their Sun-god under his own burning sun. He had kept pace with Ahab's chariot-steeds as he conducted him, as it were in triumph, through the streaming downpour of that sweeping storm, to his summer capital. Of what use was it all? Was it anything but a splendid and deplorable failure? And he said: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" He could have cried with the poet:—

"Let the heavens burst, and drown with deluging rain
The feeble vassals of lust, and anger, and wine,
The little hearts that know not how to forgive;
Arise, O God, and strike, for we count Thee just—
We are not worthy to live."

Who does not know something of this feeling of utter overwhelming despondency, of bitter disillusionment concerning life and our fellow-men? Some great writer has said, with truth, "that there is probably no man with a soul above that of the brutes that perish, to whom a time has not come in his life, when, were you to tell him that he would not wake to see another day, he would receive the message with something like gladness." There are some whose lives have been so saddened by some special calamity that for long years together they have not valued them. F. W. Robertson, troubled by various sorrows, and worried (as the best men are sure to be) by the petty ecclesiastical persecutions of priests and formalists, wrote in a letter on a friend's death: "How often have I thought of the evening when he left Tours, when, in our boyish friendship, we set our little silver watches exactly together, and made a compact to look at the moon exactly at the same moment that night and think of each other. *I do not remember a single hour in life since then which I would have arrested, and said, 'Let this stay.'*" Melancholy so deep as this is morbid and unnatural, and he himself wrote in a brighter mood: "Positively I will not walk with any one in these tenebrous avenues of cypress and yew. I like sunny rooms and sunny truth. When I had more of spring and warmth I could afford to be prodigal of happiness; but now I want sunlight and sunshine. I desire to enter into those regions where cheerfulness and truth and health of heart and mind reside." Life has its real happiness for those who have deserved, and taken

the right method to attain it; but it can never escape its hours of impenetrable gloom; and they sometimes seem to be darkest for the noblest souls. Petty souls are irritated by little annoyances, and the purely selfish disappointments which avenge the exaggerated claims of our "shivering egotism." But while little mean spirits are tormented by the insect-swarm of little mean worries, great souls are liable to be beaten down by the waves and storms of immense calamities—the calamities which affect nations and churches, the "desperate currents" of whose sins and miseries seem to be sometimes driven through the channels of their single hearts. Only such a man as an Elijah can measure the colossal despondency of an Elijah's heart. In the apparently absolute failure, the seemingly final frustration of such men as these there is something nobler than in the highest personal exaltations of ignobler souls.

"Now, O Lord, take away my life!" The prayer, however natural, however excusable, is never right. It is a sign of insufficient faith, of human imperfection; but it is breathed by different persons in a spirit so different that in some it almost rises to nobleness, as in others it sinks quite beneath contempt.

Scripture gives us several specimens of both moods. If Jonah was, indeed, the servant-pupil of Elijah, the legendary story of that meanest-minded of all the prophets—the meanest-minded and paltriest, not perhaps as he was in reality—for of him, historically, we know scarcely anything—but as he is represented in the profound and noble allegory which bears his name—might almost seem to have been written in tacit antithesis to the story of Elijah. Elijah flies only when he has done the mighty work of God, and only when the life is in deadly peril which he would fain save for future emergencies of service; Jonah flies that he may escape, out of timid selfishness, the work of God. Elijah wishes himself dead because he thinks that the glorious purpose of his life has been thwarted, and that the effort undertaken for the deliverance of his people has failed; Jonah wishes himself dead, first, because he repines at God's mercy, and would prefer that his personal credit should be saved and his personal importance secured than that God should spare the mighty city of Nineveh with its one hundred and twenty thousand little children; and then because the poor little castor-oil plant has withered, which gave him shelter from the noon. Considering the traditional connection between them, it seems to me impossible to overlook an allusive contrast between the noble and mighty Elijah under his solitary rhotem plant in the wilderness wishing for death in the anguish of a heart "which nobly loathing strongly broke," and the selfish splenetic Jonah wishing himself dead in pettish vexation under his *palma Christi* because Nineveh is forgiven and the sun is hot.

There are indeed times when humanity is tried beyond its capacity, when the cry for restful death is wrung from souls crushed under accumulations of quite intolerable anguish and calamity. In the fret of long-continued sleeplessness, in sick and desolate and half-starved age, in attacks of disease incurable, long-continued, and full of torture, God will surely look with pardoning tenderness on those whose faith is unequal to so terrible a strain. It was pardonable surely of Job to curse the day of his birth when—smitten with elephantiasis, a horror, a hissing, an

* Comp. Moses (Num. xi. 15), Jonah (Jonah iv. 3).

astonishment, bereaved of all his children, and vexed by the obtrusive orthodoxies of his petty Pharisaic friends; unconscious, too, that it was God's hand which was all the while leading him through the valley of the shadow into the land of righteousness—he cried: "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?" In those who have no hope and are without God in the world, this mood—not when expressed in passing passion as by the saintly man of Uz, but when brooded on and indulged—leads to suicide, and in the one instance recorded in each Testament, an Ahithophel and a Judas, the despairing souls of the guilty:—

"Into the presence of their God
Rushed in with insult rude."

But Elijah's mood, little as it was justifiable in this its extreme form, was but the last infirmity of a noble mind. It has often recurred among those grandest of the servants of God who may sink into the deepest dejection from contrast with the spiritual attitudes to which they have soared. It is with them as with the lark which floods the blue air with its passion of almost delirious rapture, yet suddenly, as though exhausted, drops down silent into its lowly nest in the brown furrows. There is but one man in the Old Testament who, as a prophet, stands on the same level as Elijah,—he who stood with Elijah on the snowy heights of Hermon when their Lord was transfigured into celestial brightness, and they spake together of His decease at Jerusalem. And Moses had passed through the same dark hour as that through which Elijah was passing now, when he saw the tears and heard the murmurs of the greedy, selfish, ungrateful people, who hated their heavenly manna, and lusted for the leeks and fleshpots of their Egyptian bondage. Revolted by this obtrusion upon him of human nature in its lowest meanness, he cried to God under his intolerable burden: "Have I conceived all this people? . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone. . . . And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand; and let me not see my wretchedness." In Moses, as doubtless in Elijah, so far from being the clamour of whining selfishness, his anguish was part of the same mood which made him offer his life for the redemption of the people; which made St. Paul ready to wish himself anathema from Jesus Christ if thereby he could save his brethren after the flesh. Danton rose into heroism when he exclaimed, "*Que mon nom soit flétri, pourvu que la France soit libre*"; and Whitefield, when he cried, "Perish George Whitefield, so God's work be done"; and the Duke of Wellington when—remonstrated with for joining in the last charge at Waterloo, with the shot whistling round his head—he said, "Never mind; the victory is won, and now my life is of no consequence." In great souls the thought of others, completely dominating the base man's concentration in self, may create a despondency which makes them ready to give up their life, not because it is a burden to themselves, but because it seems to them as if their work was over, and it was beyond their power to do more for others.

Tender natures as well as strong natures are liable to this inrush of hopelessness; and if it sometimes kills them by its violence, this is only a part of God's training of them into perfection.

Heaven, as its purest gold, by tortures tried:—
The saint sustained it, but the woman died."!*

The cherubim of the sanctuary had to be made of the gold of Uplaz, the finest and purest gold. It was only the purest gold which could be tortured by workmanship into forms of exquisite beauty. The mind of Jeremiah was as unlike that of Elijah as can possibly be conceived. He was a man of shrinking and delicate temperament, and his life is the most pathetic tragedy among the biographies of Scripture. The mind of Elijah, like those of Dante or Luther or Milton, was all ardour and battle brunt; the mind of Jeremiah, like that of Melancthon, was timid as that of a gentle boy. A man like Dante or Milton, when he stands alone, hated by princes and priests and people, retorts scorn for scorn, and refuses to change his voice to hoarse or mute. Yet even Dante died of a broken heart, and in Milton's mighty autobiographical wail of Samson Agonistes, amid all its trumpet-blast of stern defiance, we read the sad notes:—

"Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition, speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and the balm."

When the insolent priest Pashur smote Jeremiah in the face, and put him for a night and a day in the common stocks, the prophet—after telling Pashur that, for this awful insult to God's messenger, his name, which meant "joy far and wide," should be changed into Magormissa-bib, "terror on every side"—utterly broke down, and passionately cursed the day of his birth.† And yet his trials were very far from ended then. Homeless, wifeless, childless, slandered, intrigued against, undermined—protesting apparently in vain against the hollow shams of a self-vaunting reformation—the object of special hatred to all the self-satisfied religionists of his day, the lonely persecuted servant of the Lord ended only in exile and martyrdom the long trouble of his eternally blessed but seemingly unfruitful life.

I dwell on this incident in the life of Elijah because it is full of instructiveness. Scripture is not all on a dead level. There are many pages of it which belong indeed to the connected history, and therefore carry on the general lessons of the history, but which are, in themselves, almost empty of any spiritual profit. Only a fantastic and artificial method of sermonising can extract from them, taken alone, any Divine lessons. In these Books of Kings many of the records are simply historical, and in themselves, apart from their place in the whole, have no more religious significance than any other historic facts; but because these annals are the annals of a chosen people, and because these books are written for our learning, we find in them again and again, and particularly in their more connected and elevated narratives, facts and incidents which place Scripture incomparably above all secular literature, and are rich in eternal truth for all time, and for a life beyond life.

It is with such an experience that we are dealing here, and therefore it is worth while, if we can, to see something of its meaning. We may, therefore, be permitted to linger for a brief space over the causes of Elijah's despair, and the method in which God dealt with it.

* Pope's epitaph on Mrs. Elizabeth Corbet, in St. Margaret's Westminster.

† Jer. xx. 1-18.

"So unaffected, so composed a mind,
So firm, yet soft, so strong, yet so refined,

CHAPER XL.

ELIJAH'S DESPAIR.

I KINGS xix. 4-8.

"So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
In all her functions weary of herself,
My race of glory run, and race of shame,
And I shall shortly be with them that rest."
Samson Agonistes.

WHAT are the causes which may drive even a saint of God into a mood of momentary despair as he is forced to face the semblance of final failure?

1. Even the lowest element of such despair has its instructiveness. It was due in part, doubtless, to mere physical exhaustion. Elijah had just gone through the most tremendous conflict of his life. During all that long and most exhausting day at Carmel he had had little or no food, and at the close of it he had run across all the plain with the king's chariot. In the dead of that night, with his life in his hand, he had fled towards Beersheba, and now he had wandered for a whole day in the glare of the famishing wilderness. It does not do to despise the body. If we *are* spirits, yet we *have* bodies; and the body wreaks a stern and humiliating vengeance on those who neglect or despise it. The body reacts upon the mind. "If you rumple the jerkin, you rumple the jerkin's lining." If we weaken the body too much, we do not make it the slave of the spirit, but rather make the spirit its slave. Even moderate fasting, as a simple physiological fact—if it be *fasting* at all, as distinguished from healthful moderation and wise temperance—tends to increase, and not by any means to decrease, the temptations which come to us from the appetites of the body. Extreme self-maceration—as all ascetics have found from the days of St. Jerome to those of Cardinal Newman—only adds new fury to the lusts of the flesh. Many a hermit and stylite and fasting monk, many half-dazed hysterical, high-wrought men have found, sometimes without knowing the reason of it, that by wilful and artificial devices of self-chosen saintliness, they have made the path of purity and holiness not easier, but more hard. The body is a temple, not a tomb. It is not permitted us to think ourselves wiser than God who made it, nor to fancy that we can mend His purposes by torturing and crushing it. By violating the laws of physical righteousness we only make moral and spiritual righteousness more difficult to attain.

2. Elijah's dejection was also due to forced inactivity. "What *doest* thou here, Elijah?" said the voice of God to him in the heart of man. Alas! he was doing nothing; there was nothing left for him to do! It was different when he hid by the brook Cherith, or in Zarephath, or in the glades of Carmel. Then a glorious endeavour lay before him, and there was hope. But

"Life without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object cannot live."

The mighty vindication of Jehovah in which all the struggle of his life culminated, had been crowned with triumph, and had failed. It had blazed up like fire, and had sunk back into ashes. To such a spirit as his nothing is so fatal as to have nothing to do and nothing to hope for. "What did the *Maréchal* die of?" asked a distinguished Frenchman of one of his comrades. "He died of having nothing to do." "Ah!"

was the reply; "that is enough to kill the best General of us all."

3. Again, Elijah was suffering from mental reaction. The bow had been bent too long, and was somewhat strained; the tense string needed to have been relaxed before. It is a common experience that some great duty or mastering emotion uplifts us for a time above ourselves, makes us even forget the body and its needs. We remember Jeremy Taylor's description of what he had noticed in the Civil Wars,—that a wounded soldier, amid the heat and fury of the fight, was wholly unconscious of his wounds, and only began to feel the smart of them when the battle had ended and its fierce passion was entirely spent.

Men, even strong men, after hours of terrible excitement, have been known to break down and weep like children. Macaulay, in describing the emotions which succeeded the announcement that the Reform Bill had passed, says that not a few, after the first outburst of wild enthusiasm, were bathed in tears.

And any one who has seen some great orator after a supreme effort of eloquence, when his strength seems drained away, and the passion is exhausted, and the flame has sunk down into its embers, is aware how painful a reaction often follows, and how differently the man looks and feels if you see him when he has passed into his retirement, pale and weak, and often very sad. After a time the mind can do no more.

4. Further, Elijah felt his loneliness. At that moment indeed he could not bear the presence of any one, but none the less his sense that none sympathised with him, that all hated him, that no voice was raised to cheer him, that no finger was uplifted to help him, weighed like lead upon his spirit. "I only am left." There was awful desolation in that thought. He was alone among an apostatising people. It is the same kind of cry which we hear so often in the life of God's saints. It is the Psalmist crying: "I am become like a pelican in the wilderness, and like an owl that is in the desert. Mine enemies reproach me all the day long, and they that are mad upon me are sworn together against me";* or, "My lovers and my neighbours did stand looking upon my trouble, and my kinsmen stood afar off. They also that sought after my life laid snares for me."† It is Job so smitten and afflicted that he is half tempted for the moment to curse God and die. It is Isaiah saying of the hopeless wickedness of his people, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." It is Jeremiah complaining, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"‡ It is St. Paul wailing so sadly, "All they of Asia have turned from me. Only Luke is with me." It is the pathos of desolation which breathes through the sad sentence of the Gospels, "Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled." The anticipation of desertion had wrung from the Lord Jesus the sad prophecy, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, when ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."§ And this heart-anguish of loneliness is, to this day, a common experience of the best men. Any man whose duty has ever called him to strike out against the stream of

* Psalm cii. 6, 8.

† Psalm xxxviii. 11, 12.

‡ Jer. v. 31, xxix. 9.

§ John xvi. 32.

popular opinion, to rebuke the pleasant vices of the world, to plead for causes too righteous to be popular, to deny the existence of vested interests in the causes of human ruin, to tell a corrupt society that it is corrupt, and a lying Church that it lies;—any man who has had to defy mere plausible conventions of veiled wrong-doing, to give bold utterance to forgotten truths, to awake sodden and slumbering consciences, to annul agreements with death and covenants with hell; every man who rises above the trimmers and the facing-both-ways, and those who try to serve two masters—they who swept away the rotting superstitions of a tyrannous ecclesiasticism, they who purified prisons, they who struck the fetters off the slave—every saint, reformer, philanthropist, and faithful preacher in the past, and those now living saints, who, walking in the shining steps of these, endeavour to rescue the miserable out of the gutter, and to preach the gospel to the poor, know the anguish of isolation, when, because they have been benefactors, they are cursed as though they were felons, and when, for the efforts of their noble self-sacrifice, the contempt of the world, and its pedantry, and its malice can find for them no words too contemptuous or too bitterly false.

5. But there was even a deeper sorrow than these which made Elijah long for death. It was the sense of utter and seemingly irretrievable failure. It happens often to the worldling as well as to the saint. Many a man, weary of life's inexorable emptiness, has exclaimed in different ways:—

"Know that whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be."

That sentiment is not in the least peculiar to Byron. We find it again and again in the Greek tragedians. We find it alike in the legendary revelation of the god Pan, and in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and in Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann. No true Christian, no believer in the mercy and justice of God, can share that sentiment, but will to the last thank God for His creation and preservation and all the blessings of this life, as well as for the inestimable gift of His redemption, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. Nevertheless, it is part of God's discipline that He often requires His saints as well as His sinners to face what looks like hopeless discomfiture, and to perish, as it were,

"In the lost battle
Borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle
With the groans of the dying."

Such was the fate of all the Prophets. They were tortured; they had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, they hid in caves and dens of the earth, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, though of them the world was not worthy. Such, too was the fate of all the Apostles—set forth last of all as men doomed to death; made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. They were hungry, thirsty, naked, buffeted; they had no certain dwelling-place; they were treated as fools and weak, were dishonoured, defamed, treated as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things. Such was conspicuously the case of St. Paul in that death, so lonely and

forsaken, that the French sceptic thinks he must have awakened with infinite regret from the disillusionment of a futile life. Nay, it was the earthly lot of Him who was the prototype, and consolation, known or unknown, of all these:—it was the lot of Him who, from that which seemed the infinite collapse and immeasurable abandonment of His cross of shame, cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He warned His true followers that they, too, would have to face the same finality of earthly catastrophes, to die without the knowledge, without even the probable hope, that they have accomplished anything, in utter forsakenment, in a monotony of execration, often in dejection and apparent hiding of God's countenance. The olden saints who prepared the way for Christ, and those who since His coming have followed His footsteps, have had to learn that true life involves a bearing of the cross.

Take but one or two out of countless instances. Look at that humble brown figure, kneeling drowned with tears to think of the disorders which had already begun to creep into the holy order which he had designed. It is sweet St. Francis of Assisi, to whom God said in visions: "Poor little man: thinkest thou that I, who rule the universe, cannot direct in My own way thy little order?" Look at that monk in his friars' dress, racked, tortured, gibbeted in fetters over the flaming pyre in the great square at Florence, stripped of guilty priests of his priestly robe, degraded from a guilty Church by its guilty representatives, pelted by wanton boys, dying amid a roar of execration from the brutal and fickle multitude whose hearts he once had moved. It is Savonarola, the prophet of Florence. Look at that poor preacher dragged from his dungeon to the stake at Basle, wearing the yellow cap and sanbenito painted with flames and devils. It is John Huss, the preacher of Bohemia. Look at the lion-hearted reformer feeling how much he had striven, not knowing as yet how much he had achieved, appealing to God to govern His world, saying that he was but a powerless man, and would be "the veriest ass alive" if he thought that he could meddle with the intricacies of Divine Providence. It is Luther. Look at the youth, starving in an ink-stained garret, hunted through the streets by an infuriated mob, thrust into the city prison as the only way to save his life from those who hated his exposure of their iniquities. It is William Lloyd Garrison. Look at that missionary, deserted, starving, fever-stricken, in the midst of savages, dying on his knees, in daily sufferings, amid frustrated hopes. It is David Livingstone, the pioneer of Africa. They, and thousands like them, have borne squalors and shames and tragedies, while they looked not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Might not they all have said with the disappointed Apostles, "Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing"? Might not their lives and deaths—the lives which fools thought madness, and their end to be without honour—be described as one poet has described that of his disenchanting king:—

"He walked with dreams and darkness, and he found
A doom that ever poised itself to fall,
An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
Death in all life, and lying in all love,
The meanest having power upon the highest,
And the high purpose broken by the worm."

"Yes; the smelter of Israel had now to go down himself into the crucible." *

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW GOD DEALS WITH DESPONDENCY.

I KINGS xix. 5-8.

"Why art thou so vexed, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God; for I will yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God."—PSALM xlii. 11.

"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

The despondency was deeper than personal. It was despair of the world; despair of the fate of the true worship; despair about the future of faith and righteousness; despair of everything. Elijah, in his condition of pitiable weariness, felt himself reduced to entire uncertainty about all God's dealings with him and with mankind. "I am not better than my fathers": they failed one by one, and died, and entered the darkness; and I have failed likewise. To what end did Moses lead this people through the wilderness? Why did the Judges fight and deliver them? Of what use was the wise guidance of Samuel? What has come of David's harp, and Solomon's temple and magnificence, and Jeroboam's heaven-directed rebellion? It ends, and my work ends, in the despotism of Jezebel, and a nation of apostates!

God pitied His poor suffering servant, and gently led him back to hope and happiness, and restored him to his true self, and to the natural elasticity of his free spirit.

1. First, he gave His beloved sleep. Elijah lay down and slept. Perhaps this was what he needed most of all. When we lose that dear oblivion of "nature's soft nurse, and sweet restorer, balmy sleep," then nerve and brain give way. So God sent him

"The innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast."

And doubtless, while he slept, "his sleeping mind," as the Greek tragedian says, "was bright with eyes," and He, who had thus "steeped his senses in forgetfulness," spoke peace to his troubled heart, or breathed into it the rest over which hope might brood with her halcyon wings.

2. Next, God provided him with food. When he awoke he saw that at his head, under the rhotem-plant, God had spread him a table in the wilderness. It was a provision, simple indeed, but for his moderate wants more than sufficient—a cake baked on the coals † and a cruse of water. A *Maleakh*—a "messenger"—"some one," as the Septuagint and as Josephus both render it, ‡ some one who was, to him at any rate, an angel of God—touched him, and said, "Arise and eat." He ate and drank, and thus refreshed lay down again to make up, perhaps, for long arrears of unrest. And again God's messenger, human or angelic, touched him, and bade him rise and eat once more, or his strength would fail in the journey

* Krummacher.

† The *coals* (*reshaphim*) for the cake (LXX., ἔγκρυφίας ὀλυβίτης; Vulg., *subcinericius panis*) were the dry twigs of the broom plant, still sold for that purpose in the markets of Cairo. Comp. Psalm cxx. 4; "coals of juniper."

‡ I Kings xix. 5. מַלְאָךְ means "a messenger," and in verse 2 is used of the messenger of Jezebel.

which lay before him. For he meant to plunge yet farther into the wilderness. In the language of the narrator, "He arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights."

3. Next God sent him on a hallowed pilgrimage to bathe his weary spirit in the memories of a brighter past.

It does not require forty days and forty nights, nor anything like so long a period, to get from one day's journey in the wilderness to Horeb, the Mount of God, which was Elijah's destination. The distance does not exceed one hundred and eighty miles even from Beersheba. But, as in the case of Moses and of our Lord, "forty days"—a number connected by many associations with the idea of penance and temptation—symbolises the period of Elijah's retirement and wanderings. No doubt, too, the number has an allusive significance, pointing back to the forty years' wanderings of Israel in the wilderness. The Septuagint omits the words "of God," but there can be little doubt that Sinai was selected for the goal of Elijah's pilgrimage with reference to the awful scenes connected with the promulgation of the law. It is well known that the Mount of the Commandments is as a rule called Sinai in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, though the name Horeb occurs in Exod. iii. 1, xxxiii. 6. To account for the double usage there have been, since the Middle Ages, two theories: (1) that Horeb is the name of the range, and Sinai of the mountain; (2) that Horeb properly means the northern part of the range, and Sinai the southern, especially Jebel Mousa. Horeb is the prevalent name for the mountain in Deuteronomy; Sinai is the ordinary name, and occurs thirty-one times in the Old Testament.

After his wanderings Elijah reached Mount Sinai, and came to "the cave," and took shelter there. The use of the article shows that a particular cave is meant, and there can be little reason to discredit the almost immemorial tradition that it is the hollow still pointed out to hundreds of pilgrims as the scene of the theophany which was here granted to Elijah. Perhaps in the same cave the vision had been granted to Moses, in the scene to which this narrative looks back. It is not so much a cave as, what it is called in Exodus, a "cleft of the rock." * From the foot of the mountain, the level space on which now stands the monastery of Saint Katherine, a steep and narrow pathway through the rocks leads up to Jebel Mousa, the southernmost peak of Sinai, which is seven thousand feet high. Half-way up this mountain is a little secluded plain in the inmost heart of the granite precipice, in which is an enclosed garden, and a solitary cypress, and a spring and pool of water, and a little chapel. Inside the chapel is shown a hole, barely large enough to contain the body of a man. "It is," says Dr. Allon, "a temple not made with hands, into which, through a stupendous granite screen, which shuts out even the Bedouin world, God's priests may enter to commune with Him." †

If, indeed, Elijah had heard by tradition the vision of Moses of which this was the scene, he must have been filled with awful thoughts as he rested in the same narrow fissure, and recalled what had been handed down respecting the manifestation of Jehovah to his mighty predecessor.

* Exod. xxxiii. 22.

† *Bible Educator*, iii. 135.

4. And as God had pointed out to him the way to restore his bodily strength by sleep and food, so now He opened before the Prophet the remedy of renewed activity. The question of the Lord came to him—it was re-echoed by the voice of his own conscience—"What doest thou here, Elijah?"

"What doest thou?" He was *nothing!* He had, indeed, fled for his life; but was all the rest of his life to be so different from its beginning? Was there, indeed, no more work to be done in Israel or in Judah, and was he tamely to allow Jezebel to be the final mistress of the situation? Was one alien and idolatrous woman to overawe God's people Israel, and to snatch from God's prophet all the fruits of his righteous labours? "What doest *thou* here, Elijah?" Is not the very significance of thy name "Jehovah, He is my God"? Is He to be the God but of one fugitive? "What doest thou *here*?" This is the wilderness. There are no idolaters or murderers, or breakers of God's commandments here; but are there not multitudes in the crowded cities where Baal's temple towers over Samaria, and his sun-pillars cast their offensive shadows? Are there not multitudes in Jezreel, where the queen's Asherah-shrine amid its guilt-shrouding trees flings its dark protection over unhallowed orgies committed in the name of religion? Should there not have been inspiration as well as reproof in the mere question? Should it not mean to him, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy trust in God, for I will yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God"?

5. The question stirred the heart of Elijah, but did not yet dispel his sense of hopelessness and frustration, nor did it restore his confidence that God would govern the world aright. As yet it only called forth the heavy murmur of his grief. "I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of Hosts": I, alone, among my people; "for the children of Israel"—not the wicked queen only, with her abominations and witchcrafts, but the renegade people with her—"have forsaken Thy covenant," which forbids them to have any God but Thee, and have "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." It was as it were an appeal to Jehovah before whom he stood, if not almost a reproach to Him. It was as though he said, "I have done my utmost; I have failed: wilt not Thou put forth Thy power and reign? I am but one poor hunted prophet alone against the world. There is no prophet more: not one is there among them that understandeth any more. I can do no more. Of what use is my life? Carest Thou not that Thy people have revolted from Thee? Behold they perish: they perish, they all perish! Of what use is my life? My work has failed: let me die!"

6. God dealt with this mood as He has done in all ages, as He had done before to Jacob, as He did afterwards to David and to Hezekiah, and to Isaiah and Jeremiah; and as the Son of God did to the antitype of Elijah—the great forerunner—when his faith failed him. He let the conviction steal into his mind that the ways of God are wider than men's, and His thoughts greater than men's. He unteaches His prophet the delusion that every-

* The use of the plural, and the absence of any objections to an uncentralised worship, are proofs of the northern origin of the Elijah-episode.

thing depends on *him*. He shows him that, though He works for men by men, and though

"God cannot make best man's best
Without best men to help him,"

still no living man is necessary, nor can any man, however great, either hasten or understand the purposes of God.

Elijah had need to be taught that man is nothing—that God is all in all. Instead of answering his complaint, the voice said to him: "Go forth to-morrow, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. Behold, the Lord is passing by."*

CHAPTER XLII.

THE THEOPHANY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

I KINGS xix. 9-15.

"Who hearest the rebuke of the Lord in Sinai, and in Horeb the judgment of vengeance."—ECLUS. xlviii. 7.

THROUGHOUT the Scriptures infinite care is taken to preclude every notion that the Most High God can be represented in visible form. He manifested Himself at Sinai to the children of Israel, but though the mount burned with fire, and there were clouds and thick darkness, and the voice of a trumpet speaking long and loud, the people were reminded with the utmost solemnity that "they saw no manner of similitude."† Indeed, in later times, when there was a keener jealousy of every anthropomorphic expression, the giving of the law is rather represented as a part of the ministry of angels. The word *Makom*, or "Place," is substituted for Jehovah, so that Moses and the elders and the Israelites do not see God but only His *Makom*, the space which He fills;‡ the delivery of the law is ascribed to angelic ministers. At times the angels are almost identified with the careering flames and rushing winds which a modern theologian describes to us as being "the skirts of their garments, the waving of their robes"; for is it not written, "He that maketh the winds His angels and the flaming fires His ministers"?§ And in the daring description of Jehovah's visible manifestation of Himself to Moses, when He hid him in that fissure of the rock with the hollow of His hand, Moses only observes as it were the fringe and evanishment of His glory, "dark with excessive light."

It was natural that Jehovah should reveal Himself to Elijah under the aspect of those awful elemental forces with which his solitary life had

* LXX., *αὔριον*; Josephus, *Antt.*, VIII. xiii. 7; Comp. Exod. xxxiv. 2. It is hardly likely that the stupendous vision would follow instantly and without a moment's preparation.

† Deut. iv. 12, 15, (comp. v. 4, 22, 23). Of Moses, on the other hand, it is said, "the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. xii. 8; Exod. xxxiii. 11; Deut. xxxiv. 10).

‡ *Μῆκος, τόπος*, "place," was a sort of recognised euphemism for God in Rabbinic and Alexandrian exegesis. Thus, in Exod. xxiv. 10, for "they saw the God of Israel," the LXX. have *εἶδον τὸν τόπον οὐ εἰσὶν ὁ θεός*. Philo says, "God Himself is called Place" (*De Somn.*, i. 525). Rabbi Isaac says, "God is not in Makom, but Makom is in God." See my Bampton Lectures on *Hist. of Interpretation*, p. 120; *Early Days of Christianity*, i. 261.

§ Psalm civ. 4; Heb. i. 7. This intermediacy of angels is prominently alluded to in Acts vii. 53; Gal. iii. 19; Heb. ii. 2, 3; Deut. xxxiii. 2; Psalm lxviii. 17.

made him familiar. No spot in the world is more suitable for those powers in all their fire and magnificence than the knot of mountains which crowd the Sinaitic peninsula with their entangled cliffs. Travellers have borne witness to the overwhelming violence and majesty of the storms which rush and reverberate through the granite gorges of those everlasting hills. It was in such surroundings that Jehovah spoke to the heart of his servant.

First "a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks, before the Lord."* The winds of God, which blow where they list, and we know not whence they come nor whither they go, have in them so awful and irresistible a strength, that man and the works of man, are reduced to impotence before them. And when they rush and roar through the gullies of innumerable hills in tropic lands where the intense heat has rarefied the air, the sound of them is beyond all comparison weird and terrific. We cannot wonder that this roar of the hurricane was regarded as the trump of the archangel and the voice of God at Sinai; or that the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind;† and appeared to Ezekiel in a great cloud and a whirlwind out of the north;‡ or that Jeremiah compared His anger to a whirling and sweeping storm;§ or that the Psalmist describes Him as bowing the heavens and coming down and casting darkness under His feet, and flying upon a cherub, and walking upon the wings of the wind;|| or that Nahum says, "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet, . . . and the mountains quake at Him."¶

And Elijah felt the terror of the scene, as the storm dislodged huge masses of the mountain granite, and sent them rolling and crashing down the hills. But it did not speak to his inmost heart: for

"The Lord was not in the wind."

And after the wind an earthquake shook the solid bases of the Sinaitic range. The mountain saw God and trembled. The Lord, in the language of the Psalmist, shook the wilderness of Kadesh, the mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like young sheep.** And man never feels so abjectly helpless, he is never refused to such absolute insignificance, as when the solid earth beneath him, the very emblem of stability, trembles as with a palsy, and cleaves beneath his feet; and shakes his towers to the earth, and swallows up his cities. Once more the soul of Elijah shuddered at the terrific impression of this sign of Jehovah's power. But it had no message for his inmost heart: for

"The Lord was not in the earthquake."

And after the earthquake a fire. Jehovah overwhelmed the Prophet's senses with the dread magnificence of one of those lurid thunderstorms of which the terrors are never so tremendous as in such mountain scenes, where travellers tell us

* The anthropomorphism which the Targumists disliked vanishes in the Chaldee; "And before Him was a host of angels of the wind rending the mountains, and breaking the rocks, before the Lord, but the Shechinah was not in the hosts of the angels of the wind, and after the hosts of the angels of the wind was the host of the angel of the earthquake, etc."

† Job xxxviii. 1, xl. 6.

‡ Ezek. i. 4.

§ Jer. xxiii. 19, 20, xxv. 32, xxx. 23.

|| Psalms xviii. 10, civ. 3, 5.

¶ Nahum i. 3, 5.

** Sam. xviii. 7, lxxvii. 18, xcvi. 4; Judg. v. 4; 2 Sam. xxii. 8.

that the burning air seems transfused into sheets of flame. In that awful muttering and roar of the lurid clouds, that millionfold reverberation of what the Psalmist calls "the voice of the Lord," when the lightnings "light the world, and run along the ground," and, in the language of Habakkuk, "God sends abroad His arrows, and the light of His glittering spear, and burning coals go forth under His feet, the lips of man quiver at the voice, and his heart sinks, and he trembles where he stands." And this, too, Elijah must have felt as "the hiding-place of God's power":* and yet it did not speak to his inmost heart; for "The Lord was not in the fire."

"And after the fire a still small voice."

However the rendering may be altered into "a gentle murmuring sound," or, as in the Revised Version, "a sound of gentle stillness," no expression is more full of the awe and mystery of the original than the phrase "a still small voice."† It was the shock of awful stillness which succeeded the sudden cessation of the earthquake and hurricane and thunderstorm, and instantly, in its appalling hush and gentleness, Elijah felt that God was there; and he no sooner heard that voiceful silence speaking within him than he was filled with fear and self-abasement. He wrapped his face in his mantle, even as Moses "was afraid to look upon God." He came from the hollow of the rock which had sheltered him amidst that turbulence of material forces, and stood in the entering in of the cave.

At once the silence became articulate to his conscience, and repeated to him the reproachful question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Amazed and overwhelmed as he is, he has not yet grasped the meaning of the vision. Something of it perhaps he saw and felt. It breathed something of peace into the despair and tumult of his heart, but he still can only answer as before:—

"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, I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Whatever that theophany had taught him, it had not yet fully removed his perplexity. But now God, in tender forbearance, unfolds at any rate the practical issue of the vision. Elijah is to be inactive no longer. He is to find in faithfulness and work the removal of all doubts, and is to learn that man may not abandon his duties, even when they are irksome, even when they seem hopeless, even when they have become intolerable and full of peril. He has to learn that it is only when men have finished their day's work that God sends them sleep, and that his own day's work was as yet unfinished. He is no longer to linger in the wilderness apart from the ways of guilty and suffering men. He is one with them: he may not separate his destiny from theirs; he has to feel that God has no favourites and is no respecter of persons, but that all men are His children, and that each child of His must work for all. "Go," the Lord said unto him, "return on thy way by the wilderness to Damascus." Did the return involve unknown dangers? Still he must commit his way unto the Lord, and simply be doing good, regardless of all consequences. The saints of the Old Dispensation no less than of the New had to

* Hab. iii. 3-16.

† 1 Kings xix. 12; LXX., φωνὴ αἰθρᾶς λεπτῆς; Vulg. *Sibilus auræ tenuis*; Chaldee, "a voice of angels singing in silence."

go forth bearing their cross, and on their way to Golgotha.

Three missions still awaited him.

First, he is to supersede the old dynasty of Benhadad, King of Syria, founded by Solomon's enemy, and to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.

Next, he is to abolish the dynasty of Omri, and to anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king over Israel.*

Thirdly—and there was deep significance in this behest, and one which must have humiliated to the dust the risings of pride and the half-reproach, so to speak, for inadequate support which had underlain his appeal to Jehovah—he is to anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, to be prophet in his room.

Elijah had thought himself necessary—an indispensable agent for the task of delivering Israel from the guilty and demoralising apostasy of Baal-worship. God teaches him that there is no such thing as a necessary man; that man at his best estate is altogether vanity; that God is all in all; that "God buries His workmen, but continues His work."

And something of the meaning of these tasks is explained to him. The people of Israel are not yet converted. They still needed the hand of chastisement. The three years' drought had been ineffectual to wean them from their backslidings, and turn their hearts again to the Lord. On the royal house and on the worshippers of Baal should fall the remorseless sword of Jehu. On the whole nation the ruthless invasions of Hazael should press with terrible penalty. And him that escaped from their avenging missions should Elisha slay. The last clause is enigmatical. Elisha can hardly be said directly to have slain any. He lived, on the whole, in friendship with the kings both of Israel and of Aram, and in peace and honour in the cities. But the general idea seems to be that he would carry on the mission of Elijah alike for the guidance and the heaven-directed punishments of kings and nations, and that the famines, raids, and humiliations which rendered his nation miserable under the sons of Ahab should be elements of his sacred mission.†

One more revelation remained to lift the Prophet above his lower self. His cry had been, again and again: "I, I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." He must not indulge the mistaken fancy that the worship of the true God would die with him or that God needed his advice, or that God was slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. He was not the only faithful person left, nor would truth perish when he was called away. Nor is he to judge only by outward appearances, nor to suppose that the arm of God can be measured by the finger of man. A new prophet is soon to take his place, but God has not been so neglectful as he supposes.—"Yet," in spite of all thy murmurings of failure and a frustrated purpose—"yet will I leave Me"—not *thee*, *thee only*—"but *seven thousand* in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him."‡

* Jehu was the grandson of Nimshi, and was the son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings ix. 2).

† Isa. xi. 4, xlix. 2; comp. Jer. i. 10, xviii. 7.

‡ Comp. Rom. xiii. 5. Kissing images was a sign of idolatry then as it is now. The foot of the statue of St. Peter in Rome is worn away with kisses. Hosea xiii. 2 tells us of the custom of kissing the calves. Comp. Psalm ii. 12. Cicero tells us that the lovely brazen statue of Hercules at Agrigentum had the mouth and chin partly worn away by the kisses of the devout (in *Verr.*, iv. 43).

It has been regarded as a difficulty that Elijah fulfilled but one of the three behests. But Scripture does not narrate events with the finical and pragmatic accuracy of modern annals. Elisha, directly or indirectly, caused both Jehu to be anointed and Hazael to ascend the throne of Syria, and we are left to infer that in these deeds he carried out the instructions of his Master.

It is a more serious question, What was the exact meaning of the theophany granted to Elijah on the Mount of God?

Here, too, we are left to large and liberal applications. The greatest utterances of men, the loftiest works of human genius, often admit of manifold interpretations, and lend themselves to "springing and germinal developments." Far more is this the case in the revelations of God to the spirit of man. We can see the main truths which were involved in that mighty scene, even if the narrator of it leaves unexplained its central significance.

It is usually interpreted as a reproof to the spirit which led Elijah to regard the tempestuous manifestations of wrath and vengeance as the normal methods of the interposition of God. He was fresh from the stern challenge of Carmel; his hands were yet red with the blood of those four hundred and fifty priests. It was perhaps needful for him to learn that God's gentler agencies are more effectual and more expressive of His inmost nature, and that God is Love even though He can by no means clear the guilty. Something of this lesson has been at all times learnt from the narrative.*

"The raging fire, the roaring wind,
Thy boundless power display;
But in the gentler breeze we find
Thy Spirit's viewless way.

"The dew of heaven is like Thy grace,
It steals in silence down;
But where it lights, the favoured place
By richest fruits is known."

Quite naturally men have always seen in the storm, the earthquake, and the fire, the presence of God as manifested in His wrath. "Then the earth shook and trembled," says the Psalmist; "the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth. There went up a smoke in His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals burnt forth from it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and swooped down: yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind."† "I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, at the wrath of the Lord."‡ "Thou shalt be visited," says Isaiah, "with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devour-

* Herder, who was a devout poet, and therefore a true imaginative interpreter of devout poetry, says: "The vision was to show the fiery zeal of the Prophet that would amend everything by the storm, the mild process of God, and proclaim his long-suffering tender nature as previously the voice did to Moses: hence the scene was so beautifully changed." Long before him the wise Theodoret had said: "Διὰ δὲ τούτων ἔδειξεν ὅτι μακροθυμία καὶ φιλανθρωπία μόνῃ φίλῃ Θεῷ." Irenæus, still earlier (*c. Har.*, iv. 27), saw in the vision an emblem of the difference between the law and the gospel; and Grotius, following him, says, "Evangelii figuratio, quod non venit cum vento, terræ moto, et fulminibus ut lex," Exod. xix. 16 (see *Kel ad loc.*, whose illustrations are often valuable when his exegesis is false and obsolete).

† Psalm xviii. 7-9; comp. 2 Sam. xxii. 8-11.

‡ Isa. xiii. 12.

ing fire."* On the other hand, in His mercy God "maketh the storm a calm." When He reveals Himself in a vision of the night to Eliphaz the Temanite "a wind passed before my face, so that the hair of my head stood up, and there was silence, and I heard a voice saying, Shall mortal man be great before God? shall a man be pure before his Maker?" These passages in no small measure explain the symbolism of Elijah's vision, and point to its essential significance. Who can measure (asks Mr. Ruskin) the total effect produced upon the minds of men by the phenomenon of a single thunderstorm?—"the questioning of the forest leaves together in their terrified stillness which way the wind shall come—the murmuring together of the Angels of Destruction as they draw in the distance their swords of flame—the rattling of the dome of heaven under the chariot wheels of death?" Yet it is not the thunderstorms nor the hurricanes that have been most powerful in altering the face or moulding the structure of the world, but rather the long continuance of Nature's most gentle influences.

Viewing the vision thus, we may say that it pointed forward to that transcendently greater than Elijah who did not strive, nor cry, nor was His voice heard in the streets. "There is already a gospel of Elijah. He, the farthest removed of all the Prophets from the evangelical spirit and character, had yet enshrined in the heart of his story the most forcible of all protests against the hardness of Judaism, the noblest anticipation of the breadth and depth of Christianity." This view of the passage is taken, with slight modifications, by many, from Irenæus down to Grotius and Calvin, and modern commentators.

Similarly it is a universal law of history that while some mighty and tumultuous energy may be needed to initiate the first movement or upheaval, the greatest work is done by gentler agencies. As in the old fable, the quiet shining of the sun effects more than the bluster of the storm. Love is stronger than force, and persuasion than compulsion. Mr. J. S. Mill treats it not only as a platitude but as a falsity to assert that truth cannot be suppressed by violence. He says that (for instance) the truths brought into prominence by the Reformation had been again and again suppressed by the brutal tyrannies of the Papacy. But in all these instances has not the truth ultimately prevailed? Is it not a fact of experience that

"Truth, pressed to earth, shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers;
But error, wounded, writhes in pain
And dies among her worshippers" ?

The truth prevails and the error dies under the slow light of knowledge and by the long results of time.

Nor is it any answer to this view of the revelation to Elijah on the Mount of God that there is not the slightest proof of his having learnt any such lesson, or of such a lesson having been deduced from it by the narrator himself. Neither Elijah, it has been said, nor the writer of the Book of Kings, felt the smallest regret for the avenging deed of Carmel. Their consciences approved of it. They looked on it with pride, not with compunction. This is shown by the subsequently recorded story of Elijah's calling down fire from heaven on the unfortunate captains and soldiers of Ahaziah, in whatever light we regard

that story which was evidently current in the Schools of the Prophets. If the massacre of the priests cannot be regarded as morally excusable, the destruction of these royal emissaries by consuming fire was certainly much less so. The vision may have had a deeper significance than Elijah or the Schools of the Prophets understood, just as the words of Jesus often had a deeper significance than was dreamt of even by the Apostles when they heard them. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Neither Elijah nor the sacred historian may have grasped all that was meant by the wind, and earthquake, and fire, and still small voice.

"As little children sleep and dream of heaven,
So thoughts beyond their thoughts to those high bards
were given."

It is scarcely more than another aspect of the many-sided truth that love is more potent and more Divine than violence, if we also see in this incident a foreshadowing of the truth, so necessary for the impatient souls of men, that God neither hasteth nor resteth; that He is patient because Eternal; that a thousand years in His sight are but as yesterday, seeing that it is past as a dream in the night. Something of this we learn from the study of nature. It used to be thought that the upheaval of the continents and the rearing of the great mountains was due to cataclysms and conflagrations and vast explosions of volcanic force. It has long been known that they are due, on the contrary, to the inconceivably slow modifications produced by the most insignificant causes. It is the age-long accumulation of mica-flakes which has built up the mighty bastions of the Alps. It is the toil of the ephemeral coral insect which has reared whole leagues of the American Continent and filled the Pacific Ocean with those unnumbered isles

"Which, like to rich and various gems, inlay
The unadorned bosom of the deep."

It is the slow silting up of the rivers which has created vast deltas for the home of man. It has required the calcareous deposit of millions of animalculæ to produce even one inch of the height of the white cliffs along the shores. Even so the thoughts of man have been made more merciful in the slow course of ages, and quiet, incommensurable influences have caused all those advances in civilisation and humanity which elevate our race. The "bright invisible air" has produced effects incomparably more stupendous than the wild tornadoes. "That air, so gentle, so imperceptible, is more powerful, not only than all the creatures that breathe and live by it, not only than all the oaks of the forest which it rears in an age and shatters in a moment, not only than the monsters of the sea, but than the sea itself, which it tosses up with foam and breaks upon every rock in its vast circumference; for it carries in its bosom all perfect calm, and compresses the incontrollable ocean and the peopled earth, like an atom of a feather."*

"Thus regarded," says Professor Van Oort, "the picture of Elijah at Mount Horeb is full of consolation to all lovers of the truth. Sometimes they cry, All is lost! and are ready to despair. But God answers, Never lose heart. Storms in which God is not, in which the power of darkness seems

* Isa. xxix. 6; comp. Ecclus. xxxix. 28.

* W. S. Landor.

to sweep unbridled and unconquered o'er the earth, come before the whispering of the cooling breeze, but the kingdom of peace and blessedness is ever drawing nigh. Let all who love God truly, work for its 'approach.'"

Let us then cling to the lesson that mercy is better than sacrifice, and is transcendently to be preferred to holocausts of human sacrifice, even when the victims are polluted and cruel idolaters. Scripture never hides from us the imperfections of its heroes, and St. James tells us that Elijah was but a man of like passions with ourselves. The progress of the generations, the slow shining of the light of God, has not been in vain, and we can see truths and read the meaning of theophanies by the experience of three subsequent millenniums, of which two have followed the incarnation of the Son of God.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CALL OF ELISHA.

I KINGS xix. 19-21.

* The one remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light alone remains, earth's shadows flee."
SHELLEY.

WHETHER Elijah saw or saw not all that God had meant by the revelation at Horeb, much at any rate was abundantly clear to him, and the path of new duties lay straight before him.

The first of those duties—the only one immediately possible—was to anoint Elisha as prophet in his room, and so prepare for the continuation of the task which he had been chosen to inaugurate. He had been bidden to return across the wilderness in the direction of Damascus. Whether he traversed the eastern side of Jordan among his own familiar hills of Gilead, and then crossed over at Bethshean, where there was a ford, or whether, braving all danger from Jezebel and her emissaries, he passed through the territories of the western tribes, it is certain that we find him next at Abel-meholah, "the meadow of the dance," which was not far from Bethshean.* This, as he knew, was the home of Elisha, his future successor.

The position of Elisha was wholly unlike his own. He himself was a homeless Bedawy, bound to earth by no ties of family, coming like the wind and vanishing like the lightning. Elisha, on the other hand, whose history was to be so different and so far less stormy—Elisha, whose work and whose residence was mainly to be in cities—was a child of civilisation. But the civilisation was still that of a society in which anarchic forces were by no means tamed. Dean Stanley, in his sketch of Elisha, seems to dwell too much on his gentleness of spirit. He, too, had to carry out the anointing of Hazael and Jehu. "He was still less capable than Elijah," says Ewald, "of inaugurating a purely benign and constructive mode of action, since at that time the whole spirit of the ancient religion was still unprepared for it."

Elijah found him in the heritage of his fathers, ploughing the rich level land with twelve yoke of oxen. Eleven were with his servants, and he himself guided the twelfth.† Elijah must have

felt that the youth would have to make a great earthly sacrifice, if he left all this—father and mother and home and lands—to become the disciple and attendant of a wild, wandering, and persecuted prophet. He would say nothing to him. He merely left the high road, and "passed over unto him," as he plowed his fields.* Reaching him he took off his shaggy garment of skin, which, in imitation of him, became in after years the normal garb of prophets, and flung it over Elisha's shoulders. This apparently was all the "anointing" requisite, save such as came from the Spirit of God. The act had a twofold symbolism: it meant the adoption of Elisha by Elijah to be his "mantelkind" his spiritual son; and it meant a distinct call to the prophetic office.

At first Elisha seems to have stood still—amazed, almost stupefied, by the sudden necessity for so tremendous a decision. The thought of resigning all the hopes and comforts of ordinary life and of severing so many dear and lifelong ties, could not be unmixed with anguish. Again and again we see in the call of the prophets this natural shrinking, the human reluctance born of humility, frailty, and misgiving. It was so that Moses at the burning bush had at first fought to the utmost against the conviction of his destiny. It was so that Gideon had pleaded that he was but the least of the children of Abiezer. It was thus that, in later days, Jonah fled from the face of the Lord to Tarshish; and Isaiah cried, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips"; and Jeremiah wailed, "Ah Lord God! behold I cannot speak, for I am a child!" And if we may allude to modern instances we know the shrinking hesitations of Luther; and how Cromwell affirmed that he had prayed to God not to put him to his terrible work; and how Wesley hesitated long before he "made himself vile" by preaching in the open air to the Kingswood colliers; and how Father Matthew shrank from his great temperance efforts, till one day, rising from long prayer, and at last convinced of his destined task, he uttered the homely resolve, "In the name of God here goes!"

Elisha did not hesitate long. The mysterious Prophet of Carmel—he whose voice was believed to have shut up the heavens, he who had confounded king and priest and people at Carmel—had spoken no word. He had only flung over Elisha the garment of hair, and then stridden back to the road, and gone on his way without once looking back. Soon he would have vanished beyond recall. Elisha decided that he would obey the call of God; that he would not make "the great refusal." He ran after Elijah, and overtook him, and, accepting the position to which he had been elevated, made but the one human natural request that he might be suffered first to kiss—that is, to bid final farewell to—his father and mother, and then he would follow Elijah.

The request has often been compared to that of the young scribe who said to Jesus, "Lord, suffer me first to bury my father"; to whom Jesus replied, "Let the dead bury their dead: follow thou Me." But the two petitions are not really analogous. The scribe practically asked that he might stay at home till his father died; and as that was an uncertain term, and the ministry of Christ was very brief, the delay was incompatible with such

* I Kings iv. 12. It was in the north part of the Jordan valley.

† I Kings xix. 19.

* The Hebrew can hardly bear the meaning that he was finishing the twelfth furrow in his field, ploughed by his single yoke of oxen.

discipleship, as Christ then required. There was no such indefinite postponement in Elisha's petition. It showed in him a tender heart, not a reluctant purpose or a wavering will.

"Go back again," answered Elijah; "for what have I done to thee?"

The words are often explained as a veiled yet severe rebuke, as though Elijah had meant to say with scorn, "Go back; perhaps you are not fit for the high call; you do not understand the significance of what I have done;" or, at any rate, "Go back; yet beware of being softly led away from the path of duty; for consider how deep is the meaning of what I have done to thee."

The words involve no such disapprobation, nor does the context agree with that view of them. I can detect no accent of reproach in the words. Elijah, as is shown by several incidents in his career, had room for tenderness and human affection in his rugged lonely heart. I understand his reply to mean, "Go back; it is right, it is natural that thou shouldst thus bid a last farewell before leaving thy home. Thy coming to me must be purely voluntary; I have but cast my mantle over thee, nothing more. Thine own conscience alone can interpret the full meaning of the act, and God will make thy way clear before thy face."

Such, I believe, was Elijah's free permission. He was no hard Stoic, unnaturally trampling on the sweet affections of the soul. He was no despotic spiritual guide full of gloomy superstition, like the grim Spaniard, Ignatius Loyola, who seemed to hold that God liked even our needless anguish, and our voluntary self-tortures as an acceptable sacrifice to Himself. When St. Francis Xavier, on the journey of the first Jesuits to Rome, passed quite near the castle of his parents and ancestors, the teachings of Loyola would not suffer the young noble to turn aside to print one last kiss upon his mother's cheek. Such hard exactions belong to that sphere of will-worship and voluntary humility which St. Paul condemns. Excessive violence needlessly inflicted on our innocent affections finds no sanction either in ancient Judaism or genuine Christianity.

And it was thus that Elisha understood the Prophet. He went back, and kissed his father and mother, and, like Matthew when he left his toll-booth to follow Christ, he made a great feast to his dependents, kinsfolk, and friends. To mark his complete severance from the happy past he unyoked his pair of oxen, slew them, used the plough and goad and wooden yokes as fuel, boiled the flesh of the oxen, and invited the people to his farewell feast. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him. He was thenceforth recognised as a son of the prophetic schools, and as their future head. For the present he became known as "Elisha who poured water on the hands of Elijah." His subsequent career belongs entirely to the Second Book of Kings.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AHAB AND BENHADAD.

I KINGS xx. 1-30.

In the Septuagint and in Josephus the events narrated in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Kings are placed after the meeting of Elijah with Ahab at the door of Naboth's vineyard, which oc-

cupies the twenty-first chapter in our version. This order of events seems the more probable, but no chronological data are given us in the long but fragmentary details of Ahab's reign. They are, in fact, composed of different sets of records, partly historical, partly prophetic, and partly taken from some special monograph on the career of Elijah. Here, too, we may observe that some most important details are altogether omitted, and that we only learn them, (1) from the inscription of King Mesha, and (2) from the clay tablets of Assyria.

1. As regards King Mesha, the monument containing his very interesting annals is generally known as The Moabite Stone. It is a stele of black basalt, 3 feet 10 inches high, 2 feet broad, 14 1-2 inches thick, rounded at the top and bottom almost into a semicircle. The Phœnician inscription is of capital importance both for philology and history. It was first discovered by Mr. Klein, the German missionary of an English society at Dibon, east of the Dead Sea, and it is now at the Louvre. Dibon is now Dibbān.

Mr. Klein in 1868, at Jerusalem, informed Professor Petermann of Berlin of the existence of this ancient relic, and from a few letters of the thirty-four lines which he had copied the Professor at once pronounced that the language employed was Phœnician. When M. Clermont Ganneau, the French consul at Jerusalem, endeavoured to get possession of it, the Bedawin discovered that it was regarded with deep interest by European scholars. They immediately began to quarrel over its possession, and the Arab who had been sent to copy it barely escaped with his life. In their greed and jealousy these modern Moabites "sooner than give it up, put a fire under it, and threw cold water on it, and so broke it, and then distributed the bits among the different families to be placed in the granaries and to serve as blessings upon the corn; for they said that without the stone (or its equivalent in hard cash) a blight would fall upon their crops." Squeezes had been previously taken from it by M. Ganneau and Captain Warren, from which the text has been restored.*

It records three great events in the reign of Mesha.

(1) Lines 1-21. Wars of Mesha with Omri and his successors.

(2) Lines 21-31. Public works of Mesha after his deliverance from his Jewish oppressors.

(3) Lines 31-34. His successful wars against the Edomites (or a people of Horonaim), undertaken by command of his god Chemosh. The date of the erection of the monolith is about B.C. 890.

It begins thus:—

"(1) I, Mesha, am son of Chemosh-Gad, † King of Moab, (2) the Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reigned (3) after my father. And I erected this Stone to Chemosh (a stone of salvation), ‡ (4) for he saved me from all despoilers, and let me see my desire upon all my enemies. (5) Now Omri, King of Israel, he oppressed Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his (6) land. His son

* For these particulars, and the following translations, see Dr. Ginsburg in *Records of the Past*, xi. 163; and Dr. Neubauer, *id.*, New Series, ii. 194; *The Moabite Stone*, Second Edition (Reeves & Turner), 1871; Dr. Schlottmann, *Die Siegestäule Mesas*, 1870; Nöldeke, *Die Inschrift der König Mesa*, 1870; Stade, i. 534; Kittel, ii. 108, etc.

† Chemosh-Gad perhaps came to the throne in the fourth year of Omri, about B.C. 926, and reigned till the close of Ahaziah's reign (B.C. 866).

‡ Comp. 1 Sam. vii. 12.

succeeded him, and he also said, I will oppress Moab. In my days he said (Let us go) (7) and I will see my desire on him and his house, and Israel said, I shall destroy it for ever. Now Omri took the land (8) Medeba, and (the enemy) occupied it (in his days and in) the days of his sons, forty years. And Chemosh (had mercy) (9) on it in my days.*

He goes on to tell how he built Bael Meon and Kirjathaim; captured Ataroth, and killed all its warriors, and devoted its spoil to Chemosh. "And Chemosh said to me, Go take Nebo against Israel." He took it, slew seven thousand men, devoted the women and maidens to Ashtar-Chemosh, and offered Jehovah's vessels to Chemosh. Then he took Jahas which the king of Israel had fortified, and annexed it to Dibon; built Korcha, its palaces, prisons, etc., Aroer, Bethbamothe, and other towns which he colonised with poor Moabites; and took Horonaim by assault.

There the inscription ends, but not until it has given us some details of a series of bloody wars about which the Scripture narrative is almost entirely silent, though in 2 Kings iii. 4-27 it narrates Meshah's desperate resistance of Israel, Judah, and Edom (B.C. 896).

On this inscription we may briefly remark that for Chemosh-Gad, Dr. Neubauer reads Chemosh-melech, and makes various other changes and suggestions.

2. From the annals of Assyria we learn the altogether unexpected fact that *Ahabu Sirlai*, i.e., "Ahab of Israel," was acting as one of the allies, or more probably as one of the vassals, of Syria in the great battle fought at Karkar, B.C. 854, against Shalmanezar II., by Hittites, Hamathites, and Syrians. Whether this was before the invasion of Benhadad, or after his defeat, is uncertain.

The twentieth chapter of the Book of Kings tells us that Benhadad, the Aramean king, accompanied by thirty-two feudatory princes of Hittites, Hamathites, and others, gathered together all his host with his horses and chariots, and proclaimed war against Israel. Unable to meet this vast army in the field, Ahab shut himself up in Samaria, and Benhadad went up and besieged it. We do not know which Benhadad this was. It could not have been the grandson of Rezon, whom, fourteen years earlier, King Asa had bribed to attack Baasha in order to divert him from building Ramah.* It may have been his son or grandson bearing the same religious dynastic name. In any case the policy of attacking Israel was suicidal. If the kings had possessed the prescient glance of the prophets they could not have failed to see on the northern horizon the cloud of Assyrian power, which menaced them all with cruel extinction at the hands of that atrocious people. Their true policy would have been to form an offensive and defensive league, instead of coveting one another's dominions. Although Assyria had not yet risen to the zenith of her empire, she was already formidable enough to convince the King of Damascus that he would never be able single-handed to prevent Syria from being crushed before her. Instead of inflicting ruinous losses and humiliations on the tribes of Israel, the dynasty of Rezon, if it had been wise in its day, would have insured their friendly aid against the horrible common enemy of the nations.

* For it is indirectly mentioned that "*his father*" had taken cities from Omri.

When Benhadad had succeeded in reducing Ahab to hopeless straits, he sent him a herald to demand the admission of ambassadors. Their ultimatum was couched in language of the deadliest insult. Benhadad laid insolent claim to everything which Ahab possessed—his silver, his gold, his wives, and the fairest of his children. To save his people from ruin, Ahab—it is strange that throughout the narrative we do not hear one word either about Jezebel or Elijah—sent an answer of the humblest submission. Tyre gave him no help, nor did Judah. He seems at this time to have been entirely isolated and to have sunk to the nadir of his degradation. "It is true," he said, "my lord, and king; I, and all that I possess, is thine." The depth of humiliation involved in such a concession is the measure of the utter straits to which Ahab was reduced. When an Eastern king had to give up to his conqueror even his seraglio—yes, even his queen—all his power must have been humbled to the very dust. And at the head of Ahab's seraglio was Jezebel. How frenzied must have been the thoughts of that terrible woman, when she saw that her Baal, and the Astarte to whom her father was a priest, in spite of the temple which she had built, and her eight hundred and fifty priests of Baal and Asherah with all their vestments and pompous ceremonies and blood-stained invocations, had wholly failed to save her—a great king's daughter and a great king's wife—from drinking to the very dregs this cup of shame!

Encouraged by this abject demeanour into yet more outrageous insolence, Benhadad sent back his ambassadors with the further menace that he would himself send his messengers next day into Samaria, who should search and rifle not only the palace of Ahab, but the houses of all his servants, from which they should take away everything that was pleasant in their eyes.

The merciless demand kindled in the breast of the wretched king one last spark of the courage of despair. Nothing could be worse than such a pillage. Death itself seemed preferable. He summoned together all the elders of the land to a great council, to which the people also were invited, and he set the state of things before them. The fact gives us an interesting glimpse into the constitution of the kingdom of Israel. It greatly resembled that of the little Greek states in the days of the *Iliad*. Under ordinary circumstances of prosperity the king was within certain limits despotic; but he might easily be reduced to the necessity of consulting a sort of senate (*γερονσία*), composed of his greatest subjects,* and at these open-air deliberations the people were present as assessors on whose will depended the ultimate decision.

Ahab put before his council the desperate condition to which he had been reduced by the Syrian leaguer. He recounted the cruel terms to which he had submitted in order to save his people from destruction. From the second embassy of Benhadad it was clear that the first demand had only been made in the hope that its refusal would give the Syrians an excuse for pressing on the siege, and delivering the city to ravage and slaughter. Was it their will that the insolent foreign tyrant should have his way, and be permitted without let or hindrance to rifle their houses, and carry away their goodliest sons as eunuchs and their fairest wives as concubines? He asked their advice how to overcome this dire calamity;

* LXX., Exod. iii. 16.

"What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not what resolution from despair."

The elders saw that even massacre and pillage could hardly be worse than a tame submission to such demands. They plucked up courage and said to Ahab, "Hearken not to him, nor consent"; and the people shouted their applause to the heroic refusal.* The king seems in this instance to have been more despondent than his subjects, perhaps because he was better able than they to gauge the immense military superiority of his invader. Even his second message, though it rejected Benhadad's demand was almost pusillanimous in its submission. With bated breath and whispering humbleness Ahab said to the Syrian ambassadors, quite in the tone of a vassal: "Tell my lord the king, I *will* submit to his first demands; I *may* not consent to his final ones."

The ambassadors went to Benhadad, and returned with the fierce menace that in the name of his god† their king would shatter Samaria into dust, of which the handfuls would not suffice for each of his soldiers.‡ Ahab replied firmly in a happy proverb, "Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off."§

The warning proverb was reported to the Aramæan king, whilst in the insolent confidence of victory he was drinking himself drunk in his war-booths.¶ It nettled him to fury. "Plant the engines," he exclaimed. The catapults and battering-rams, ¶ with all the engines which constituted the siege-train of the day, were at once set in motion, the scaling ladders brought up, and the archers set in position, just as we see in the Assyrian Kouyunjik sculptures of the siege of Lachish and other cities by Sennacherib.**

Ahab's heart must have sunk within him, for he knew his impotence, and he knew also the horrors which befell a city taken after desperate resistance. But he was not left unencouraged. The characteristic of the prophets was that dauntless confidence in Jehovah which so often made a prophet the Tyrtæus of his native land, unless the land had sunk into utter apostasy. In this extreme of peril a nameless prophet—the Rabbis, who always guess at a name when they can, say it was Micaiah ben Imlah—came to Ahab. As though to emphasise the supernatural character of his communication, he pointed to the chariots and archers and the Syrian host—which, if the

* Comp. Josh. ix. 18; Judg. xi. 11.

† 1 Kings xx. 10. Elohim here, doubtless, means the false gods of Benhadad. Vat. LXX., ὁ Θεός; but Chaldee, "the terrors."

** Fanfaronnade, qui veut dire; je réduirai cette bicoque en poussière; j'ai avec moi plus de monde qu'il ne faudra pour l'emporter tout entière" (Reuss). Comp. Herod., viii. 226, where Dieneses answers the braggart vaunt of the Medes.

§ Reuss renders it, "Ceignant n'est pas encore gaignant." The proverb resembles in different aspects the precept of Solon, τέρμα ὄρᾶν βιότοιο, and "Praise a fair day at night"; and the Italian, "Capo ha cosa fatta"; and the Latin, "Ne triumphum canas ante victoriam"; and the French, "Il ne faut pas vendre le peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué."

¶ A.V., "pavilions"; but the word (*sukkoth*) implies that they were temporary booths rather than tents. They resembled the birchwood pavilions made for the Turkish pachas in campaigns (Keil).

¶ A.V., "Set yourselves in array." LXX., *οἰκοδομησαστε χάρακα*; Vulg., *circumdate civitatem*.

** Now in the British Museum.

subsequent numbers be accurate, must have reached the astounding total of one hundred and thirty thousand men—and said, in the name of Jehovah:—

"Hast thou seen all this great multitude?

Lo! I will deliver it into thine hand to-day:

And thou shalt know that I am the Lord."

"By whom?" was the astonished and half-despairing question of the king; and the strange answer was:—

"By the young servants* of the provincial governors."

It was to be made clear that this was a victory due to the intervention of God, and not won by the power nor the might of man, lest the warriors of Israel should be able to boast of the arm of flesh.

"Who shall lead the assault?" asked the king.

"Thou!" answered the prophet.

Nothing could be wiser than this counsel, now that the nation was brought to the extreme edge of hazard. The veterans, perhaps, were intimidated. They would see more clearly the hopelessness of attempting to cope with that colossal host under its five-and-thirty kings. But now the nation, whose veterans had been driven back, evoked the battle-brunt of its youths. The two hundred and thirty-two pages of the district governors were ready to obey orders, ready, like an army of Decii to devote their lives to the cause of their country. They were put in the forefront of the battle, and so pitiable was the depression of the capital that Ahab could only number a paltry army of seven thousand soldiers to stand behind their desperate undertaking.†

Their plan was well laid. They went out at noon. At that burning hour, under the intolerable glare and heat of the Syrian sun—and campaigns were only undertaken in spring and summer—it is almost impossible to bear the weight of armour, or to sit on horseback, or to endure the fierce heat of iron chariots. The first little army which issued from the gates of Samaria might rely on the effects of a surprise. Thousands of the Syrian soldiers expecting nothing less than a battle would be unarmed, and taking their siesta. Their chariots and war steeds would be unharnessed and unprepared.

Benhadad was still continuing his heavy drinking bout with his vassal princes, and not one of them was in a condition to give coherent commands. A messenger announced to the band of royal drunkards that "men" were come out of Samaria. They were too few to call them "an army," and the notion of an attack from that poor handful seemed ridiculous. Benhadad thought they were coming to sue for peace, but whether peace or war were their object he gave the contemptuous order to "take them alive."

It was easier said than done. Led by the king at the head of his valorous youths the little host clashed into the midst of the unwieldy, unprepared, ill-handled Syrian host, and by their first slaughter created one of those fearful panics which have often been the destruction of Eastern hosts. The Syrians, whose army was made up of heterogeneous forces, and which could not be managed by thirty-four half-intoxicated feudatories of differing interests and insecure allegiance, was doubtless afraid that internal treachery must have

* 1 Kings xx. 14 (עֲבָדָיו).

† Jarchi—*more Rabbinico*—says that these were the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

been at work. Like the Midianites, like Zerah's Ethiopian host, like the Edomites in the Valley of Salt, like the Ammonites and Moabites in the wilderness of Tekoa, like the army of Sennacherib, like the enormous and motley hosts of Persia at Marathon, at Plataea, and at Arbela, they were instantly flung into irremediable confusion which tended every moment to be more fatal to itself. The little band of the youths and horses of Israel had nothing to do but to slay, and slay, and slay.* No effective resistance was even attempted. Long before evening the hundred and thirty thousand Syrians, with the entangled mass of their chariots and horsemen, were in headlong flight, while Ahab and the people of Israel slaughtered their flying rear. The defeat became an absolute rout. Benhadad himself had a most narrow escape. He could not even wait for his war chariot. He had to fly with a few of his horsemen, and apparently, so the words may imply, on an inferior horse.†

What effect was produced on the national mind and on the social religion by this immense deliverance we are not told. Never, certainly, had any nation deeper cause for gratitude to its religious teachers, who alone had not despaired of the commonwealth when everything seemed lost. We would fain know where was Elijah at this crisis, and whether he took any part in it. We cannot tell, but we know that as a rule the sons of the prophets acted together under their chiefs, and that individual impulses were rarely encouraged. The very meaning of the "Schools of the Prophets" was that they were all trained to adopt the same principles and to move together as one body.

The service rendered by this prophet, whose very name has been buried in undeserved oblivion, did not end here. Perhaps he saw signs of carelessness and undue exultation. He went again to the king, and warned him that his victory, immense as it had been, was not final. It was no time for him to settle on his lees. The Syrians would assuredly return the following year,‡ probably with increased resources, and with the burning determination to avenge their defeat. Let Ahab look well to his army and his fortresses, and prepare himself for the coming shock!

CHAPTER XLV.

AHAB'S INFATUATION.

1 KINGS xx. 31-43.

"Quem vult Deus perire demetat prius."

THE courtiers of Benhadad found it easy to flatter his pride by furnishing reasons to account for such an alarming overthrow. They had attacked the Israelites on their hills, and the gods of

* 1 Kings xx. 20, LXX., καὶ ἐδευτέρωσεν ἑκα-
στος τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ.

† Or, "pell-mell." The Hebrew in 1 Kings xx. 20 is, עָלֵי-סוּדִים וּפְרָשִׁים, "on a horse with (some) horsemen." Klostermann would supply הוּאָ. Jonathan takes וּפְרָשִׁים as a dual—"and two riders with him"; LXX., ἐφ' ἵππων ἰππέων; Vulg., in equo cum equitibus suis; Luther, "sammelt Rossen und Reitern."

‡ See 2 Sam. xi. 1. The custom of all countries in the ancient world was to devote the summer months only to campaigns. There were few or no standing armies, and

Israel were hill-gods. Next time they would take Israel at a disadvantage by fighting only on the plain. Further, the vassal kings were only an element of dissension and weakness. They prevented the handling of the army as one strong machine worked by a single supreme will. Let Benhadad depose from command these incapable weaklings, and put in their place dependent civil officers (*pachoth*) who would have no thought but to obey orders.* And so, with good heart, let the king collect a fresh army with horses and chariots as powerful as the last. The issue would be certain conquest and dear revenge.

Benhadad followed this advice. The next year he went with his new host and encamped near Aphek. There is an Aphek (now Fik) which lay on the road between Damascus on the east of Jordan on a little plain south-east of the Sea of Galilee. This may have been the town of Issachar, in the valley of Jezreel, where Saul was defeated by the Philistines (1 Sam. xxix. 1). Israel went out to meet them duly provisioned.† The Syrian host spread over the whole country; the Israelite army looked only like two little flocks of kids.‡

To strengthen the misgivings of the anxious king of Israel, another nameless prophet—probably, like Elijah, a Gileadite—came to promise him the victory. Jehovah would convince the Syrians that He was something more than a mere local god of the hills as they had blasphemously said, and Israel would once more be shown that He was indeed the Lord.

For seven days the vast army and the little band of patriots gazed at each other, as the Israelites and Philistines had done in the days of Saul and Goliath. On the seventh day they joined battle. In what special way the aid of Jehovah seconded the desperate valour of His people who were fighting for their all we do not know, but the result was, once more, their stupendous victory. The army of the Syrians was not only defeated, but practically annihilated. In round numbers 100,000 Syrians fell in the slaughter of that day, and when the remnant took refuge in Aphek, which they had captured, they perished in a sudden crash—perhaps of earthquake—which buried them in the ruins of its fortifications.§ Rescued, we know not how, from this disaster, Benhadad fled from chamber to chamber|| to hide himself from the victors in some innermost recess.

But it was impossible that he should not be dis-

the citizen-conscripts had to look after their farms, or the nation would have starved. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians introduced a gradual revolution in these respects.

* 1 Kings xx. 24. LXX., σαράπας.
† R. V., "and were victualled," not, as in A. V., "and were all present." Alex. LXX., διοικήθησαν; Vulg., *acceptis cibariis*.

‡ Why two? No explanation is given. It has been conjectured that Judah had sent a separate contingent to help them in their distress.

§ Some have supposed that an earthquake occurred, and Canon Rawlinson mentions (*Speaker's Commentary*) that the earthquake of Lisbon is said to have destroyed sixty thousand persons in five minutes.

|| חֶרֶב חֶרֶב. Comp. for similar phrases (Heb.), Lev. xxv. 53; Deut. xv. 20; 1 Kings xxii. 25; 2 Chron. xxviii. 26. Klostermann, with one of his amazing conjectures, reads "by the spring Harod in Harod"! LXX., εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ κοτιῶνος, εἰς τὸ ταμεῖον; Vulg., *in cubiculum quod erat intra cubiculum*. Josephus makes it a cellar (εἰς ὑπόγειον οἶκον ἐκρύβη), "like the modern *serdaubs* in which the inhabitants of many Eastern cities live in the summer" (Rawlinson).

covered, and therefore his servants persuaded him to throw himself on the mercy of his conqueror. "The kings of Israel," they said, "are, as we have heard, compassionate kings; let us go before the king with sackcloth on our loins, and ropes round our necks, and ask if he will save thy life."

So they went, as the burghers of Calais went before Edward I.; and then Ahab heard from the ambassadors of the king who had once dictated terms to him with such infinite contempt, the message: "Thy slave Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live."

The incident that followed is eminently characteristic of Eastern customs. In *rencontres* between Orientals everything depends on the first words which are exchanged. It is believed that superior powers wield the utterances of the tongue amid the chances which are really destiny, so that the most casual expression is caught up superstitiously as a sort of Bath Kol, or "the daughter of a voice," which not only indicates but even helps to bring about the purposes of Heaven. A chance friendly greeting may become the termination of a blood feud, because something more than chance is supposed to lie behind it! * Once when a group of doomed gladiators gathered themselves under the Imperial *podium* of the amphitheatre with their sublimely monotonous chant, "*Ave Cæsar, morituri te salutamus*," the half-dazed emperor inadvertently answered, "*Averte vos!*" "He has hidden us, 'Hail!'" shouted the gladiators: "the contest is remitted; we are free!" Had the Romans been Orientals the twenty thousand assembled spectators would have felt the force of the appeal. Even as it was the significance of the omen was felt to be so great that the gladiators threw down their arms, and it was only by whips and violence that they were finally driven to the combat in which they perished. †

So with intense eagerness the ambassadors, in their sackcloth and their halters, awaited the Bath Kol. It came far more favourably than they had dared to hope. Surprised, and perhaps half-touched with pity for so immense a reverse of misfortune, "Is he yet alive?" exclaimed the careless king: "he is my brother!"

The Syrians snatched at the expression as a decisive omen ‡. It constituted an absolute end of the feud. It became an implicit promise of that sacred *dakheel*, that "protection" to which the slightest and most accidental expression constitutes a recognised claim. § "Thy brother Benhadad," they earnestly and emphatically repeated. In accordance with Eastern custom and augury their whole end was gained. As far as Benhadad was concerned he was now safe; as far as Ahab was concerned, the mischief, if mischief it were, was irreparably done.

Ahab could hardly have drawn back even if he wished to do so, but perhaps he was swayed by a fellow feeling for a king. This strange uxorious monarch, with his easily swayed impulses, his fits of schoolboy sullenness and swift repentance, his want of insight into existing conditions, his—if the expression may be excused—happy-go-

lucky way of letting questions settle themselves, was, no doubt, a brave warrior, but he was a most incapable statesman. His conduct was perfectly infatuated. Pity is one thing, but the security of a nation has also to be considered. It would have been a worse than insensate piece of pseudo-chivalry if the Congress of Vienna had not sent Napoleon to Elba, and if England had not confined him in St. Helena. To set free a man endowed with passionate hatred, with immense ambitions, with boundless capacities for mischief—or only to bind him with the packthread of insecure promises—was the conduct of a fool.* If it was compassion which induced Ahab to give Benhadad his life, it showed either gross incapacity or treachery against his own nation not to clip his wings, and hamper him from the future injuries which the burden of gratitude was little likely to prevent. The sequel shows that Benhadad's resentment against his royal "brother" only became more hopelessly implacable, and in all probability it was largely mingled with contempt.

And Ahab's conduct, besides being foolish, was guilty. It showed a frivolous non-recognition of his duties as a theocratic king. It flung away the national advantages, and even the national security, which had not been vouchsafed to any power or worth of his, but only to Jehovah's direct interposition to save the destinies of his people from premature extinction.

When Benhadad came out of his hiding-place, Ahab, not content with sparing the life of this furious and merciless aggressor, took him up into his chariot, which was the highest honour he could have paid him, and accepted the excessively easy terms which Benhadad himself proposed. The Syrians were not required to pay any indemnity for the immense expenditure and unutterable misery which their wanton invasions had inflicted upon Israel! They simply proposed to restore the cities which Benhadad's father had taken from Omri, and to allow the Israelites to have a protected bazaar in Damascus similar to the one which the Syrians enjoyed in Samaria. † On this covenant Benhadad was sent home scatheless, and with a supineness which was not so much magnanimous as fatuous, Ahab neglected to take hostages of any kind to secure the fulfilment even of these ridiculously inadequate terms of peace.

Benhadad was not likely to throw away the chance which gave him such an easy-going and improvident adversary. It is certain that he did not keep the covenant. He probably never even intended to keep it. If he condescended to any excuse for breaking it, he would probably have affected to regard it as extorted by violence, and therefore invalid, as Francis I. defended the forfeiture of his parole after the battle of Pavia. The recklessness with which Ahab had reposed in Benhadad a confidence, not only undeserved, but rendered reckless by all the antecedents of the Syrian king, cost him very dear. He had to pay the penalty of his demetation three years later in a new and disastrous war, in the loss of his life, and the overthrow of his dynasty. The fact that, after so many exertions, and so much success in war, in commerce, and in worldly policy, he and his house fell unpitied, and no one raised a finger in his defence, was doubtless due in part to the alienation

* The accidental sigh of the engineer was sufficient to prevent the colossal Egyptian statue of a Pharaoh from being moved to its destination. Even Rome shared the immemorial superstition.

† Suet., *Claud.*

‡ xx. 33. *שׁוֹמֵר*, from *שׁוֹמֵר*, "an augury"; LXX., *ἀνελέξαντο τὸν λόγον (ὁλωνίθαντο)*; Vulg., *quod acciperunt viri pro omine*.

§ Layard, *Nineveh*, 317-19.

* The compact is vainly dignified with the name of a *ῥηθρη* or "covenant."

† *שׁוֹמֵר*. Compare the *Lombard Streets*, and the *Jewries* in London and Paris.

of his army by a carelessness which flung away in a moment all the fruits of their hard-won victories.*

There was one aspect in which Ahab's conduct assumed an aspect more supremely culpable. To whom had he owed the courage and inspiration which had rescued him from ruin, and led to the triumphs which had delivered him and his people from the depths of despair? Not in the least to himself, or to Jezebel, or to Baal's priests, or to any of his captains or counsellors. In both instances the heroism had been inspired and the success promised by a prophet of Jehovah. What would convince him, if this would not, that in God only was his strength? Did not the most ordinary gratitude as well as the most ordinary wisdom require that he should recognise the source of these un hoped-for blessings? There is not the least trace that he did so. We read of no word of gratitude to Jehovah, no desire to follow the guidance of the prophets to whom he was so deeply indebted, and who had proved their right to be regarded as interpreters of God's will. Had he done this he would not have suffered the clannishness of royalty to plunge him into a step which was the chief cause of his final destruction.

He might ignore guidance, but he could not escape reproof. Again an unknown monitor from the sons of the prophets was commissioned to bring home to him his error. He did so by an acted parable, which gave concrete force and vividness to the lesson which he desired to convey. Speaking "by the word of the Lord"—*i. e.*, as a part of the prophetic inspiration which dictated his acts—he went to one of his fellows in the school of which the members are here first called "the sons of the prophets," and bade him to wound him. His comrade, not unnaturally, shrank from obeying so strange a command. It must be borne in mind that the mere appeal to an inspiration from Jehovah did not always authenticate itself. Over and over again in the prophetic books, and in these histories which the Jews call "the earlier prophets," we find that men could profess to act in Jehovah's name, and even perhaps to be sincere in so doing, who were mere dupes of their own wills and fancies. It was, in fact, possible for them to become false prophets, without always meaning to be so; and these chances of hallucination—of being misled by a lying spirit—led to fierce contentions in the prophetic communities. "Since you have not obeyed Jehovah's voice," said the man, "the lion shall immediately slay you." "And as soon as he was departed from him the lion found him and slew him." There is nothing impossible in the incident, for in those days lions were common in Palestine, and they multiplied when the country had been depopulated by war. But we can never feel certain how far the ethical and didactic and parabolic elements were allowed, for purposes of edification, to play a part in these ancient yet not contemporaneous *Acta Prophetarum*, and at any rate to dictate the interpretation of things which may have actually occurred.

The prophet then bade another comrade to smite him, and he did so effectually, inflicting a serious wound.† This was a part of the intended

* Clericus says, rightly: "Factum Ahab, quamvis clementia speciem præ se ferret, non erat veræ clementiæ, quæ non est erga latrones exercenda; qui si dimittantur multo magis nocentur."

† The object and necessity of this for his purpose is by no means apparent. Perhaps it was to figure the wound which Ahab had by his conduct willfully inflicted on himself or on Israel.

scene in which the prophet meant for a moment to play the rôle of a soldier who had been wounded in the Syrian war. So he bound up his head with a bandage,* and waited for the king to pass by. An Eastern king is liable at any time to be appealed to by the humblest of his subjects, and the prophet stopped Ahab and stated his imaginary case. "A captain," he said, "brought me one of his war captives,† and ordered me to keep him safe. If I failed to do so, I was to pay the forfeit of my life, or to pay as a fine a silver talent.‡ But as I was looking here and there the captive escaped." "Be it so," answered Ahab; "you are bound by your own bargain." Thus Ahab, like David, was led to condemn himself out of his own mouth. Then the prophet tore the bandage from his face, and said to Ahab: "Thou art the man! Thus saith Jehovah, I entrusted to thee the man under my ban (*cherem*),§ and thou hast let him escape. Thou shalt pay the forfeit. Thy life shall go for his life, thy people for his people."

Anger and indignation filled the heart of the king; he went to his house "heavy and displeased." The phrase, twice applied to him and never used of another, shows that he was liable to characteristic moods of overwhelming sullenness, the result of an uneasy conscience, and of a rage which was compelled to remain impotent. It is evident that he did not dare to chastise the audacious offender, though the Jews say that the prophet was Micaiah, the son of Imlah, and that he was imprisoned for this offence.¶ As a rule the prophets—like Samuel and Nathan, and Gad and Shemaiah, and Jehu the son of Hanani—were protected by their sacrosanct position. Now and then an Urijah, a Jeremiah, a Zechariah son of Berechiah, paid the penalty of bold denunciation, not only by hatred and persecution, but with his life. This, however, was the exception. As a rule the prophets felt themselves safe under the wing of a Divine protector. Not only Elijah in his sheepskin mantle, but even the humblest of his imitators in the prophetic schools might fearlessly stride up to a king, seize his steed by the bridle, as Athanasius did to Constantine, and compel him to listen to his rebuke or his appeal.

CHAPTER XLVI.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

I KINGS xxi. 1-29.

"The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless is but for a moment."—JOB xx. 5.

"If weakness may excuse,
What murderer, what traitor, parricide,
Incestuous, sacrilegious, but may plead it?
All wickedness is weakness."

Samson Agonistes.

THE chief glory of the institution of prophecy was that it rightly estimated the supremacy of the

* Verse 38. This, and not "with ashes upon his face," is the meaning of the Hebrew עָרַב. LXX., *τελαμών*, "a headband"; Vulg., *aspersione pulveris*; and so, too, Peshito, Aquila, and Symmachus.

† 1 Kings xx. 39. עָרַב in the sense of עָרַב according to Ewald's reading.

‡ About £350. Evidently, therefore, the captive is supposed to be a very important person.

§ אִישׁ חֵרֵם.

¶ עָרַב; עָרַב; Vulg., *indignans, et frendens*, a phrase only used of Ahab (xxi. 4-5). Josephus (*Antt.* XIII. xv. 5) says that Ahab imprisoned and punished the prophet, whom with the Rabbis, he identifies with Micaiah.

moral law. The prophets saw that the enforcement of one precept of righteousness involved more true religion than hundreds of pages of Levitic ritual. It is the temptation of priests and Pharisees to sink into formalism; to warp the conceptions of the Almighty into that of a Deity who is jealous about inconceivable pettinesses of ceremonial; to think that the Eternal cares about niceties of rubric, rules of ablutions, varieties of nomenclature or organisation. In their solicitude about these nullities they often forget, as they did in the days of Christ, the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and truth. When religion has been dwarfed into these inanities the men who deem themselves its only orthodox votaries, and scorn all others as "lax" and "latitudinarian," are not only ready to persecute every genuine teacher of righteousness, but even to murder the Christ Himself. They come to think that falsehood and cruelty cease to be criminal when practised in the cause of religious intolerance.

Again all such dwarfing perversion of the conceptions of the essential service which man owes to God the prophets were called forth to be in age after age the energetic remonstrants. It is true that they also had their own special temptations; they, too, might become the slaves of shibboleths; they might sink into a sort of automatic or mechanical form of prophecy which contented itself with the wearing of garbs and the repetition of formulæ long after they had become evacuated of their meaning.* They might distort the message "Thus saith Jehovah" to serve their own ends.† They might yield to the temptations both of individual and of corporate ambition. They might assume the hairy garb and rough locks of Elijah for the sake of the awe they inspired while their heart "was not but for their own covetousness."‡ They might abuse their prestige to promote their own party or their own interests. They were assailed by the same perils to which in after days so many monks, hermits, and religious societies succumbed. Many a man became a nominal prophet, as many a man became a monk, because the office secured to him a maintenance—

" 'Twas not for nothing the good belly-ful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day long blessed idleness besides; "

and also because it surrounded him with a halo of imaginary sanctity. The monks, we know, by their turbulence and partisanship, became the terror of the fourth century after Christ, and no men more emphatically denounce their mendicancy and their impostures than the very fathers who, like St. Jerome and St. Augustine, were most enamoured of their ideal.§ As for the hermits, if one of them securely established a reputation for abnormal austerities he became in his way as powerful as a king. In the stories even of such a man as St. Martin of Tours we detect now and then a gleam of hauteur, of which traces are not lacking in the stories of these nameless or famous prophets in the Book of Kings.

* Zech. xliii. 4.

† On this defection and imposture of prophets, see Jer. xxiii. 21-40; Isa. xxx. 9, 10; Ezek. xliii. 7-9; Micah ii. 11; Deut. xviii. 20.

‡ Jer. xxii. 17.

§ *De Gubernat. Dei.*, viii. : Ambrose, *Ep.*, xli. ; Cassian, *De Instit. Monastic. passim.* See chap. xvi. of my *Lives of the Fathers* (St. Jerome), and Zöckler, *Gesch. der Askese*, for many authorities.

¶ See my *Lives of the Fathers*, vol. i. (St. Martin of Tours).

No human institution, even if it be avowedly religious, is safe from the perilous seductions of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Perpetually

"The old order changeth, giving place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Mendicant brotherhoods and ascetic communities were soon able, by legal fictions, to revel in opulence, to steep themselves in luxury, and yet to wield a religious authority which princes envied. When we read what the Benedictines and the Minorites and the Carthusians often became we are the less surprised to find that even the Schools of the Prophets, while Elijah and Elisha yet lived, could abdicate as a body their best functions, and deceiving and deceived could learn to answer erring kings according to their idols.

But the greatest and truest prophets rose superior to the influences which tended to debase the vulgar herd of their followers, in days when prophecy grew into an institution and the world became content to side with a church which gave it no trouble and mainly spoke in its own tones. True prophecy cannot be made a matter of education or "tamed out of its splendid passion." The greatest prophets, like Amos and Isaiah, did not come out of the Schools of the Prophets. Inspiration cannot be cultivated, or trained to grow up a wall. "Much learning," says Heraclitus very profoundly, "does not teach; but the Sibyl with maddening lips, uttering things unbeautiful, unperfumed, and unadorned, reaches through myriads of years because of God." The man whom God has summoned forth to speak the true word or do the heroic deed, at the cost of all hatred, or of death itself, has normally to protest not only against priests, but against his fellow-prophets also when they immorally acquiesced in oppression and wrong which custom sanctioned.* It was by such true prophets that the Hebrews and through them the world were taught the ideal of righteousness. Their greatest service was to uphold against idolatry, formalism, and worldliness, the simple standard of the moral law.

It was owing to such teaching that the Israelites formed a true judgment of Ahab's culpability. The act which was held to have outweighed all his other crimes, and to have precipitated his final doom, was an isolated act of high-handed injustice to an ordinary citizen.

Ahab was a builder. He had built cities and palaces, and was specially attached to his palace at Jezreel, which he wished to make the most delightful of summer residences. It was unique in its splendour as the first palace inlaid with ivory. The nation had heard of Solomon's ivory throne, but never till this time of an "ivory palace." But a palace is nothing without pleasant gardens. The neighbourhood of Jezreel, as is still shown by the ancient winepresses cut out of the rock in the neighbourhood of its ruins, was enriched by vineyards, and one of these vineyards adjoining the palace belonged to a citizen named Naboth.† It happened that no other ground would so well have served the purpose of Ahab to make a garden near his palace, and he made Naboth a fair offer for it. "I will give you," he said, "a better vineyard for

* See Jer. xxiii. 20-40.

† The Alex. LXX. throughout calls Naboth "an Israelite," not "a Jezreelite."

it, or I will pay you its full value in ingots of silver."*

Naboth, however, was perfectly within his rights † in rejecting the offer. It was the inheritance of his fathers, and considerations nothing short of sacred—considerations which then or afterwards found a place in the written statutes of the nation—made it wrong in his judgment to sell it. He sturdily refused the offer of the king. His case was different from that of the Jebusite prince Araunah, who had sold his threshing-floor to David, and that of Shemer, who sold the Hill of Samaria to Omri. ‡

A sensible man would have accepted the inevitable, and done the best he could to find a garden elsewhere. But Ahab, who could not bear to be thwarted, came into his house "heavy and displeased." Like an overgrown, sullen boy he flung himself on his divan, turned his face to the wall, and would not eat.

News came to Jezebel in her seraglio of her lord's ill-humour, and she came to ask him, "What mutiny in his spirit made him decline to take food?" §

He told her the sturdy refusal of Naboth, and she broke into a scornful laugh. "Are you King of Israel?" she asked. "Why this is playing at kinghood! ¶ It is not the way we do things in Tyre. Arise, eat bread, be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." ††

Did he admire the mannish spirit of the Syrian princess, or did he secretly shrink from it? At any rate he let Jezebel take her own course. With intrepid insolence she at once wrote a letter in Ahab's name from Samaria, and sent it sealed with his signet to the elders of Jezreel. ¶ She ordered them to proclaim a fast as though to avert some public calamity, and—with a touch of dreadful malice as though to aggravate the horror of his ruin—to exalt Naboth to a conspicuous position in the assembly. ** They were to get hold of two "sons of worthlessness," professional perjurers, and to accuse Naboth of blasphemy against God and the king. †† His mode of refusing the vineyard might give some colourable pretext to the charge. On the testimony of those two false witnesses Naboth must be condemned, and then they must drag him outside the city to the pool or tank with his sons and stone them all.

* Both the Hebrew text of 1 Kings xxi. 1 and Josephus (*Antt.* XIII. xv. 6) locate the vineyard of Naboth at Jezreel. The LXX., however, place it apparently near the threshing-floor of Ahab in Samaria (*παρά τῆ ἀλω Ἀχαὰβ βασιλεως Σαμαρειας*), which is the same as the "void place" of 1 Kings xxii. 10. At both cities Ahab's palace was on the city wall, and on either supposition Naboth's vineyard was close by the palace.

† Lev. xxv. 23. "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine." Num. xxxvi. 7; Ezek. xlvii. 18.

‡ 2 Sam. xxiv. 24; 1 Kings xvi. 24.

§ The word rendered "sad" is rendered "mutinous" by Theinus.

¶ LXX., 1 Kings xxi. 7, *Σὺ νῦν οὕτως ποιεῖς βασιλέα ἐπὶ Ἰσραὴλ*;

¶ The signet was carved with the king's name. Rawlinson aptly compares Lady Macbeth's "Infirm of purpose give me the daggers!"

** Josephus calls it an *ἐκκλησία*, "Set Naboth on high" (Heb.), "at the head of the people"; LXX., *ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ λαοῦ*; Vulg., *inter primos populi*.

†† The charge was that "he cursed God and the king," LXX. (by euphemism), *εὐλόγησε*; Vulg., *Benedixit*. The Hebrew word has both meanings (comp. Exod. xxii. 28, where some would render *Elohim* not "God," but "the judges." See marg. of R. V.) Stoning was the punishment of blasphemy (Lev. xxiv. 16), and took place outside the city (Acts vii. 58).

Everything was done by the subservient elders of Jezreel exactly as she had directed. Their fawning readiness to carry out her vile commands is the deadliest incidental proof of the corruption which she and her crew of alien idolaters had wrought in Israel. On that very evening Jezebel received the message, "Naboth is stoned and is dead." By the savage law of those days his innocent sons were involved in his overthrow,* and his property, left without heirs, reverted by confiscation to the crown. † "Arise," said the triumphant sorceress, "and take possession of the vineyard you wished for. I have given it to you as I promised. Its owner and his sons have died the deaths of blasphemers, and lie crushed under the stones outside Jezreel." ††

Caring only for the gratification of his wish, heedless of the means employed, hastily and joyously at early dawn the king arose to seize the coveted vineyard. The dark deed had been done at night, the king was alert with the morning light. ‡ He rode in his chariot from Samaria to Jezreel, which is but seven miles distant, and he rode in something of military state, for in separate chariots, or else riding in the same chariot, behind him were two war-like youths, Jehu and Bidkar, who were destined to remember the events of that day, and to refer to them four years afterwards, when one had become king and the other his chief commander. §

But the king's joy was short-lived!

News of the black crime had come to Elijah, probably in his lonely retreat in some cave at Carmel. He was a man who, though he flamed out on great occasions like a meteor portending ruin to the guilty, yet lived in general a hidden life. Six years had elapsed since the calling of Elisha, and we have not once been reminded of his existence. But now he was instantly inspired to protest against the atrocious act of robbery and oppression, and to denounce upon it an awful retribution which not even Baal-worship had called forth.

Ahab was at the summit of his hopes. He was about to complete his summer palace and to grasp the fruits of the crime which he had allowed the *ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ* wife to commit. But at the gate of Naboth's vineyard stood the swart figure of the Prophet in his hairy garb. We can imagine the revulsion of feeling which drove the blood to the king's heart as he instantly felt that he had sinned in vain. The advantage of his crime was snatched from him at the instant of fruition. Half in anger, half in anguish, he cried, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

"I have found thee," said the Prophet, speaking in Jehovah's name. "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil before me, and I will requite it and extinguish thee before me. Surely the Lord saw yesternight the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons. ¶ Thy dynasty shall be cut off to the last man, like that of Jeroboam, like that of Baasha. Where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick thine. The harlots shall wash themselves in the water which thy blood has stained. Him that dieth of thee in the

* 2 Kings ix. 26.

† 2 Sam. xvi. 4.

‡ In 1 Kings xxi. 16 the LXX. curiously says, that "when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead he rent his garments, and clothed himself in sackcloth; and after this he also arose," etc. This mourning for the *means* but acceptance of the *fact* would not be in disaccord with Ahab's moral weakness.

§ 2 Kings ix. 25, 36.

¶ LXX.

city the dogs shall eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the vultures rend, and the dogs shall eat Jezebel also in the moat of Jezreel.*

It is the duty of prophets to stand before kings and not be ashamed. So had Abraham stood before Nimrod, and Moses before Pharaoh, and Samuel before Saul, and Nathan before David, and Iddo before Jeroboam. So was Isaiah to stand hereafter before Ahaz, and Jeremiah before Jehoiachin, and John the Baptist before Herod, and Paul before Nero. Nor has it been at all otherwise in modern days. So did St. Ignatius confront Trajan, and St. Ambrose brave the Empress Justina, and St. Martin the Usurper Maximus, and St. Chrysostom the fierce Eudoxia, and St. Basil the heretic Valens, and St. Columban the savage Thierry, and St. Dunstan our half-barbarous Edgar. So, too, in later days, Savonarola could speak the bare bold truth to Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Knox to Mary Queen of Scots, and Bishop Ken to Charles II. But never was any king confronted by so awful a denunciation of doom. Probably the moment that Elijah had uttered it he disappeared; but could not a swift arrow have reached him from Jehu's or Bidkar's bow? We know how they remembered two reigns later the thunder of those awful words, but they would hardly have disobeyed the mandate of their king had he bidden them to seize or slay the Prophet. Nothing was further from their thoughts. Elijah had become to Ahab the incarnation of his own awakened conscience, and it spoke to him in the thunders of Sinai. He quailed before the tremendous imprecation. We may well doubt whether he even so much as entered again the vineyard of Naboth; never certainly could he have enjoyed it. He had indeed sold himself to do evil, and, as always happens to such colossal criminals, he had sold himself for naught—as Achan did for a buried robe and a useless ingot, and Judas for the thirty pieces of silver which he could only dash down on the Temple floor. Ahab turned away from the vineyard, which might well seem to him haunted by the ghosts of his murdered victims and its clusters full of blood. He rent his clothes, and clad himself in sackcloth and slept in sackcloth, and went about barefooted with slow steps† and bent brow, a stricken man. Thenceforward as long as he lived he kept in penitence and humiliation the anniversary of Naboth's death,† as James IV of Scotland kept the anniversary of the death of the father against whom he had rebelled.

This penitence, though it does not seem to have been lasting, was not wholly in vain. Elijah received a Divine intimation that, because the king troubled himself, the threatened evil should in part be postponed to the days of his sons. The sun of the unfortunate and miserable dynasty set in blood. But though it is recorded that, incited by his Tyrian wife, he did very abominably in worshipping "idol-blocks," and following the ways of the old Canaanite inhabitants of the land, none of his crimes left a deeper brand upon his memory than the judicial seizure of the vineyard

* 2 Kings ix. 36. LXX., *ἐν τῷ προτειχίσματι*. The π of an Eastern city is the desert space outside the walls where the "pariah dogs prowled on the mounds."

† $\beta\delta$. LXX., *κλαίων*; Josephus, Chaldee, and Pesh-ito, "shoeless."

‡ 1 Kings xxi. 27. *καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἣ ἐπάταξε Ναβουθαί*.

which he had coveted and the judicial murder of Naboth and his sons.

How adamant, how irreversible is the law of retribution! With what normal and natural development, apart from every arbitrary infliction, is the irrevocable prophecy fulfilled: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

"Yea, he loved cursing, and it came unto him; Yea, he delighted not in blessing, and it is far from him; Yea, he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, And it came into his bowels like water, like oil into his bones."*

Ahab had to be taught by adversity since he refused the lesson of prosperity.

"Daughter of Jove, relentless power,
Thou tamer of the human breast,
Whose iron scourge and torturing hour
The bad affright, afflict the best,
Bound in thine adamant chain
The proud are taught to taste of pain,
And purple tyrants vainly groan
With woes unfelt before, unpitied and alone."

But as for Elijah himself, he once more vanished into the solitude of his own life, and we do not hear of him again till four years later, when he sent to Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, the message of his doom.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ALONE AGAINST THE WORLD.

I KINGS xxii. 1-40.

"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. . . . I have heard what the prophets said, who prophesied lies in My name."—JER. xxii. 21-25.

"Μάντι κακῶν οὐ πάποτε μοι τὸ κρήγυον εἶπας
Αλεῖ τοι τὰ κάκ' ἐστὶ φίλα φρεσὶ μαντεύ-
εσθαι
Ἐσθλὸν δ' οὐδε τί πω εἶπας ἔπος οὐδ' ἐτέλεσ-
σας." HOM., *Iliad*, i. 106.

WE now come to the last scene of Ahab's troubled and eventful life. His two immense victories over the Syrians had secured for his harassed kingdom three years of peace, but at the end of that time he began to be convinced that the insecure conditions upon which he had weakly set Benhadad free would never be ratified. The town of Ramoth in Gilead, which was one of great importance as a frontier town of Israel, had, in express defiance of the covenant, been retained by the Syrians, who still refused to give it up. A favourable opportunity he thought, had now occurred to demand its cession.

This was the friendly visit of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. It was the first time that a king of Judah had visited the capital of the kings who had revolted from the dynasty of David. It was the first acknowledged close of the old blood-feuds, and the beginning of a friendship and affinity which policy seemed to dictate. After all Ephraim and Judah were brothers, though Ephraim had vexed Judah, and Judah hated Ephraim. Jehoshaphat was rich, prosperous, successful in war. No king since Solomon had attained to anything like his greatness—the reward, it was believed, of his piety and faithfulness. Ahab, too, had proved himself a successful warrior, and the valour of the

* Psalm cix. 17, 18.

Israel's hosts had, with Jehovah's blessing, extricated their afflicted land from the terrible aggressions of Syria. But how could the little kingdom of Israel hope to hold out against Syria, and to keep Moab in subjection? How could the still smaller and weaker kingdom of Judah keep itself from vassalage to Egypt and from the encroachments of Philistines on the west and Moabites on the east? Could anything but ruin be imminent, if these two nations of Israel and Judah—one in land, one in blood, one in language, in tradition, and in interests—were perpetually to destroy each other with internecine strife? The kings determined to make a league with one another, and to bind it by mutual affinity. It was proposed that Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, should marry Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat.

The dates are uncertain, but it was probably in connection with the marriage contract that Jehoshaphat now paid a ceremonial visit to Ahab. The King of Israel received him with splendid entertainments to all the people.* Ahab had already broached to his captains the subject of recovering Ramoth Gilead, and he now took occasion of the King of Judah's visit to invite his co-operation. What advantages and compensations he offered are not stated. It may have been enough to point out that, if Syria once succeeded in crushing Israel, the fate of Judah would not be long postponed. Jehoshaphat, who seems to have been too ready to yield to pressure, answered in a sort of set phrase: "I am as thou art; my people as thy people; my horses as thy horses."†

But it is probable that his heart misgave him. He was a truly pious king. He had swept the Asherahs out of Judah, and endeavoured to train his people in the principles of righteousness and the worship of Jehovah. In joining Ahab there must have been in his conscience some unformulated murmur of the reproof which on his return to Jerusalem was addressed to him by Jehu, the son of Hanani, "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from the Lord." But at the beginning of a momentous undertaking he would not be likely to imitate the godless indifference which had led Ahab to take the most fatal steps without seeking the guidance of God. He therefore said to Ahab, "Inquire, I pray thee, of the word of the Lord to-day."

Ahab could not refuse, and apparently the professional prophets of the schools had been pretty well cajoled or drilled into accordance with his wishes. A great and solemn assembly was summoned. The kings had clothed themselves in their royal robes striped with laticlaves of Tyrian purple,‡ and sat on thrones in an open space before the gate of Samaria. No less than four hundred prophets of Jehovah were summoned to prophesy before them. Ahab propounded for their decision the formal and important question, "Shall I go up to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?"

With one voice the prophets "philippised." They answered the king according to his idols. Had the gold of Ahab or of Jezebel been at work among them? Had they been in king's houses, and succumbed to courtly influences? Or were they carried away by the interested enthusiasm of

one or two of their leaders who saw their own account in the matter? Certain it is that on this occasion they became false prophets. They used their formula "Thus saith Jehovah" without authority and promised Jehovah's aid in vain.* Conspicuous in his evil ardour was one of them named Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah. To illustrate and emphasise his jubilant prophecies he had made and affixed to his head a pair of iron horns; and as though to symbolise the bull of the House of Ephraim, he said to Ahab, "Thus saith Jehovah. With these shalt thou push the Assyrians until thou have consumed them."† And all the prophets prophesied so.

What could be more encouraging? Here was a patriot-king, the hero victor in great battles, bound by fresh ties of kinship and league with the pious descendant of David, meditating a just raid against a dangerous enemy to recover a frontier-fortress which was his by right; and here were four hundred prophets—not Asherah-prophets or Baal-prophets, but genuine prophets of Jehovah—unanimous, and even enthusiastic, in approving his design and promising him the victory! The Church and the world were—as they so often have been—delightfully at one.

"One with God" is the better majority. These loud-voiced majorities and unanimities are rarely to be trusted. Truth and righteousness are far more often to be found in the causes which they denounce and at which they sneer. They silence opposition, but they produce no conviction. They can torture, but they cannot refute. There is something unmistakable in the accent of sincerity, and it was lacking in the voice of these prophets on the popular side. If Ahab was deceived and even carried away by the unwonted approval of so many messengers of Jehovah, Jehoshaphat was not. These four hundred prophets who seemed superfluously sufficient to Ahab by no means satisfied the King of Judah.

"Is there not," he asked with uneasy misgiving, "one prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?"

One prophet of the Lord besides? ‡ Were not, then, *four hundred* prophets of the Lord enough? They must have felt themselves cruelly slighted when they heard the pious king's inquiry, and doubtless a murmur of disapproval arose amongst them.

And the King of Israel said, "There is yet one man." Had Jehoshaphat been secretly thinking of Elijah? Where was Elijah? He was living, certainly, for he survived even into the reign (apparently) of Jehoram. But where was Elijah? If Jehoshaphat had thought of him, Ahab at any rate did not care to mention him. Perhaps he was inaccessible, in some lonely unknown retreat of Carmel or of Gilead. Since his fearful message to Ahab he had not been heard of; but why did he not appear at a national crisis so tremendous as this?

"There is yet one man," said Ahab. "Micaiah,

* The LXX. has, "The Lord shall deliver into thy hands *even the king of Syria*." At first they all said, "Adonai shall deliver it"; but afterwards, perhaps stung by the doubts of Jehoshaphat, or encouraged by the audacity of Zedekiah, they said "Jehovah shall deliver it."

† Deut. xxxiii. 17. "His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people altogether to the ends of the earth."

‡ The LXX., omitting "besides," implies Jehoshaphat's opinion that these were not true prophets of Jehovah. So, too, the Vulg., "Non est hic propheta Domini quispiam?"

* 2 Chron. xviii. 2.

† 2 Kings iii. 7.

‡ 1 Kings xxii. 10 (Peshito).

the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but"—such was the king's most singular comment—"I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."*

It was a weak confession that he was aware of one man who was indisputably a true prophet of Jehovah, but whom he had purposely excluded from this gathering because he knew that his was an undaunted spirit which would not consent to shout with the many in favour of the king. Indeed, it seems probable that he was, at this moment, in prison. Jewish legend says that he had been put there because he was the prophet who had reproved Ahab for his folly in suffering Benhadad to escape with the mere breath of a general promise. Till then he had been unknown. He was not like Elijah, and might safely be suppressed. And Ahab, as was universally the case in ancient days, thought that the prophet could practically prophesy as he liked, and not merely prophesy, but bring about his own vaticinations. Hence, if a prophet said anything which he disliked, he regarded him as a personal enemy, and, if he dared, he punished him—just as Agamemnon punished Calchas.

Jehoshaphat, however, was still dissatisfied; he wanted further confirmation. "Let not the king say so," he said. If he is a genuine prophet, the king should not hate him, or fancy that he prophesies evil out of malice prepense. Would it not be more satisfactory to hear what he might have to say?

However reluctantly, Ahab saw that he should have to send for Micaiah, and he despatched a eunuch to hurry him to the scene with all speed.†

The mention of a eunuch as the messenger is significant. Ahab had become the first polygamist among the kings of Israel, and a seraglio so large as his‡ could never be maintained without the presence of these degraded and odious officials who here first appear in the hardier annals of the Northern Kingdom.

This eunuch, however, seems to have had a kindly disposition. He was good-naturedly anxious that Micaiah should not get into trouble. He advised him, with prudential regard for his own interest, to swim with the stream. "See, now," he said, "all the prophets with one mouth are prophesying good to the king. Pray agree with them. Do not spoil everything."

How often has the same base advice been given! How often has it been followed! How certain is its rejection to lead to bitter animosity! One of the most difficult lessons of life is to learn to stand alone when all the prophets are prophesying falsely to please the rulers of the world. Micaiah rose superior to the eunuch's temptation. "By Jehovah," he said, "I will speak only what He bids me speak."

He stood before the kings, the eager multitude, the unanimous and passionate prophets; and there was deep silence when Ahab put to him the question to which the four hundred had already shouted an affirmative.

His answer was precisely the same as theirs: "Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king!"

* Compare Agamemnon's bitter complaint of Calchas.

† 1 Kings xxii. 9. LXX., εὐνούχον ἕνα. And this is probably the meaning of 𐤀𐤓𐤓𐤑, not "officer," as in A. V.

‡ For he had seventy sons, besides daughters (2 Kings x. 7).

Every one must have been astonished. But Ahab detected the tone of scorn which rang through the assenting words, and angrily adjured Micaiah to give a true answer in Jehovah's name. "How many times," he cried, "shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in Jehovah's name." The "how many times" shows how faithfully Micaiah must have fulfilled his duty of speaking messages of God to his erring king.

So adjured, Micaiah could not be silent, however much the answer might cost him, or however useless it might be.

"I saw all Israel,* he said, "scattered on the mountain like sheep without a shepherd. And Jehovah said, These have no master, let every man return to his house in peace."

The vision seemed to hint at the death of the king, and Ahab turned triumphantly to his ally, "Did I not tell you that he would prophesy evil?"

Micaiah justified himself by a daringly anthropomorphic apologue which startles us, but would not at all have startled those who regarded everything as coming from the immediate action of God, and who could ask, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?† The prophets were self-deceived, but this would be expressed by saying that Jehovah deceived them. Pharaoh hardens his heart, and God is said to have done it.

He had seen Jehovah on His throne, he said, surrounded by the host of heaven, and asking who would entice Ahab to his fall at Ramoth Gilead. After various answers the spirit‡ said, "I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets, and will entice him." Then Jehovah sent him, so that they all spoke good to the king though Jehovah had spoken evil. God had sent to them all—king, people, prophets—strong delusion that they should believe a lie.

This stern reproof to all the prophets was more than their coryphæus Zedekiah could endure. Having recourse to "the syllogism of violence" he strode up to Micaiah and smote the defenceless, isolated, hated man on the cheek,§ with the contemptuous question, "Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me, to speak unto thee?"

"Behold thou shalt know," was the answer, "on the day when thou shalt flee from chamber to chamber to hide thyself." If the hands of the prophet were bound as he came from the prison, there would have been an infinite dignity in that calm rebuke.

But as though the case was self-evident, and Micaiah's opposition to the four hundred prophets proved his guilt, Ahab sent him back to prison. "Issue orders," he said, "to Amon, governor of

* The words implied that the king would fall, though the army would escape (1 Kings xxii. 17, מַלְאֲכֵי). Comp. Numb. xxvii. 16, 17, "Let the Lord . . . set a man over the congregation . . . who may lead them out and in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd."

† Theodoret explains it as anthropomorphism, and condescension to human modes of speech (προσωποποιία τίς ἐστι διδάσκουσα τὴν θεῖαν συγχώρησιν).

‡ 1 Kings xxii. 21. It is "the," not "a" spirit, i. e., the unclean spirit of deception (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης, 1 John iv. 6). Comp. Zech. xiii. 2, "Also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land." St. Paul says in 2 Thess. ii. 11: "God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe the lie."

§ The worst of insults (Job xvi. 10; Lam. iii. 30).

the city, and Joash, the king's son, to feed him scantily on bread and water till the king's return in peace."

"If thou return at all in peace," said Micaiah, "Jehovah hath not spoken by me."*

It is a sign of the extreme fragmentariness of the narrative that of Micaiah and Zedekiah we hear nothing further, though the sequel respecting them must have been told in the original record. But the prophecy of Micaiah came true, and the unanimous four hundred had prophesied lies. There are times when "the Catholic Church" dwindles down to the one man and the small handful of those who speak the truth. The expedition was altogether disastrous. Ahab, perhaps knowing by spies, how bitterly the Syrians were incensed against him, told Jehoshaphat that he would disguise himself and go into the battle, but begged his ally to wear his robes as was usual with kings.† Benhadad, with the implacable hatred of one who had received a benefit, was so eager to be avenged on Ahab that he had told his thirty-two captains to make his capture their special aim.‡ Seeing a king in his robes they made a fierce onset on Jehoshaphat and surrounded his chariot. His cries for rescue showed them that he was not Ahab, and they turned away.§ But Ahab's disguise did not save him. A Syrian—the Jews say that it was Naaman||—drew a bow with no particular aim,¶ and the arrow smote Ahab in the place between the upper and lower armour.** Feeling that the wound was deadly he ordered his charioteer to turn his hands and drive him out of the increasing roar of the *mêlée*. But he would not wholly leave the fight, and with heroic fortitude remained standing in his chariot in spite of agony. All day the blood kept flowing down into the hollow of the chariot. At evening the Syrians had to retire in defeat, but Ahab died. The news of the king's death was proclaimed at sunset by the herald, and the cry was raised which bade the host disband and return home.††

They carried the king's body back to Samaria, and they buried it. They washed the blood-stained chariot in the pool outside the city, and there the dogs licked the king's blood, and the harlot-votaries of Asherah bathed in the blood-dyed waters, as Elijah had prophesied.‡‡

So ended the reign of a king who built cities and ivory palaces, §§ and fought like a hero against the foes of his country, but who had never known how to rule his own house. He had winked at the atrocities committed in his name by his Tyrian queen, had connived at her idolatrous innovations, and put no obstacle in the way of her

* The words (verse 28) "And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you," are believed by Nöldeke, Klostermann, and others to be an interpolation from Micah i. 2, by some one who confused Micaiah with Micah. They are omitted in the LXX.

† We have no reason to accuse Ahab of any bad or selfish motives here. No doubt Micaiah's prophecy of his approaching death had made him anxious. If the LXX. reading, "but put thou on *my* robes," were right, the case would be different.

‡ We see in this order a trace of the single combats which mark the Homeric battles.

§ 2 Chron. xviii. 31. "And the Lord helped him, and God moved them from him."

|| So Jarchi. Josephus calls him Aman.

¶ 1 Kings xxii. 34. "At a venture"; marg., "in his simplicity"; comp. 2 Sam. xv. 11.

** What the French call *le défaut de la cuirasse* (Keil). Luther has, *zwischen den Panzer und Hengel*.

†† Josephus, *Antt.* VIII. xv. 6.

‡‡ Köster thinks that there may be reference to the fact that the name "dog" was given to the unchaste.

§§ Amos iii. 15; Psalm xlv. 8; Hom., *Od.*, iv. 72.

persecutions. The people who might have forgotten or condoned all else never forgot the stoning and spoliation of Naboth and his sons, and his death was regarded as a retribution on this crime.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

It will have been seen that there are two main heroes of the First Book of Kings—Solomon and Elijah. How vast is the gulf which separates those two ideals! In Solomon we see man in all the adventitious splendour which he can derive from magnificent surroundings and from exaltation to a dizzy height above his fellows. Everything that the earth can give him he possesses from earliest youth, yet all turns to dust and ashes under his touch. Wealth, rank, power, splendour cannot ever, or under any circumstances, satisfy the soul. The soul can only be sustained by heavenly food, by the manna which God sends it from heaven in the wilderness. Its divineness can only be maintained by feeding on the Divine. If we think of Solomon, even in his most dazzling hour, we see no element of happiness or of reality in his lonely splendour or loveless home. It is nothing but a miserable pageant. The Book of Ecclesiastes, though written centuries after he had passed away, yet shows sufficiently, as the Eastern legends also show, that mankind was not misled by the glamour which surrounded him into the supposition that he was to be envied. It was felt, whether he uttered it or not, that "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is the real echo of his weariness. In the famous fiction the Khaliph sees him with the other giant shades on his golden throne at the banquet; but each and all have on their faces an expression of solemn agony, and under the folds of their purple a little flame is ever burning at their hearts.

How different is the rough Prophet of Gilead, the ascetic, in his sheepskin mantle and leathern girdle, who can live for months on a little water and meal baked with oil!* In him we see the grandeur of manhood reduced to its simplest elements; we see the dignity of man as simply man towering over all the adventitious circumstances of royalty. One who, like Elijah, has no earthly desires, has no real fears. If he flies from Jezebel to save his life, it is only because he is not justified in flinging it away; otherwise he is as dauntless before the *vultus instantis tyranni* as before the *civium ardor prava jubentium*. Hence, Elijah in his absolute poverty, in his despised isolation—Elijah, hunted and persecuted, and living in dens and caves of the earth—is immeasurably greater than Solomon, because he is the messenger of the living God before whom he stands. And his work is immeasurably more permanent and more valuable for humanity than that of all the kings and great men among whom he moved. He believed in God, he fought for righteousness, and therefore he left behind him an unperishable memorial, showing that he who would live for eternity rather than for time is he who best achieves the high ends of his destiny. He may err

* It is supposed that Mohammed alludes to Elijah in the Qur'an, *Sura*, xxi. 85. "And Ishmael, and Idris, and *Dhu'l-Kifl* ("he of the portion")—all these were of the patient; and we made them enter into our mercy; verily they were among the righteous" (Palmer's Qur'an, ii. 53).

as Elijah erred, but with the blessing of the Lord he shall not miscarry. Though he go forth weeping, he shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him. Solomon, after his death, almost vanished from the history of Israel into the legends of Arabia. In the New Testament he is but barely mentioned. But Elijah still lives in, and haunts, the memory of his nation. A chair is placed for his invisible presence at every circumcision. A cup is set aside for him at sacred banquets, and all dubious questions are postponed for solution "until the day when Elijah comes." He shone with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration; and St. James, the Lord's brother, appeals to him as the most striking example of the power of that prayer which

"Moves the arm of Him who moves the world."

NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

I HAVE not thought it worth while to trouble the reader with conjectures or corrections of the text, intended to remove the numerous and obvious discrepancies which the redactor of the Book of Kings leaves uncorrected in his references to the synchronism of the reigns.* Many of them are removed or modified when we bear in mind that, e. g., Nadab and Elah and Ahaziah are described as reigning "two years" each (xv. 25, xvi. 8, xxii. 51), whereas the reign of each may not have exceeded a year, or even a few months, if these months came at the end of one year and the beginning of another. Periods of anarchic interregnum, or of association of a son with his father on the throne, may account for other confusions and contradictions; but they are purely conjectural, and in some cases far from probable. Jerome, as is well known, gave up all attempts to harmonize the chronological data as a hopeless problem. "Relege," he says, "omnes et veteris et novi Testamenti libros, et tantam annorum reperies dissonantiam ut hujuscemodi *hærare questionibus non tam studiosi quam otiosi hominis esse videatur.*"

The Assyrians were, for the most part (though, as Schrader shows, not *always*), as scrupulously exact in their chronological details as the Jews were careless in theirs. The cuneiform inscriptions give us the following data, which may be regarded as *points de repère*, and which are not reconcilable with the received dates:—

	B. C.
Battle of Karkar, in which Ahab and Benhadad were defeated	854
Jehu pays tribute to Shalmanezzer II.	842
Menahem tributary to Assyria	738
Fall of Samaria	722
Sennacherib's Invasion	701

These dates do not accord with those which we should derive from the Book of Kings in the ordinary system of chronology, which seem to fix the Fall of Samaria in 737.

The dates of the later Kings of Assyria seem to be as follows:—

	B. C.
Rimmon-Nirari III.	810
Shalmanezzer III.	781

* See W. Robertson Smith, *Journ. of Philology*, x. 20.

	B. C.
Assur-dân IV.	771
Tiglath-Pileser III. (Pul, a usurper)	745
Shalmanezzer IV.	727
Sargon	722
Sennacherib	705
Esar-haddon I.	681
Assur-bani-pal	668

* * * *

Destruction of Nineveh	606
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Adding up the separate data of this book for the kings of Israel we have from Jeroboam to the death of Joram ninety-eight years seven days; and for the same period of the kings of Judah from Rehoboam to Ahaziah we have ninety-five years. Supposing that some such errors as we have indicated have crept into the computation, the dates of the reigns may be, as reckoned by Kittel:—

	B. C.
Saul	1037-1017
David	1017-977
Solomon	977-937
Jeroboam I.	937-915
Nadab	915-914
Baasha	914-890
Elah	890-889
Zimri	889
Omri	889-877
Ahab	877-855
Ahaziah	855-854
Jehoram	854-842

Rehoboam	937-920
Abijah	920-917
Asa	917-876
Jehoshaphat	876-851
Joram	851-843
Ahaziah	843-842

From Phœnician inscriptions (recorded in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*) little of historical importance has hitherto been reaped.

In the Egyptian monuments there is nothing which illustrates the period of the Kings except the inscription of Sheshonk, recording his invasion in the days of Rehoboam, of which I have given some account p. 290.

The Assyrian inscriptions, to which allusion is made in their place, are of extreme importance and interest, and from the lists of kings we have good details of chronology. The best book on their bearing upon Hebrew history is that of Schrader, *die Keilinschriften und d. Alte Testament*, 1883.

On the datum of four hundred and eighty years from the Exodus to the building of the Temple, I have already touched. It does not agree with Acts xiii. 20, nor with the Book of Judges. The LXX. reads "four hundred and forty." It is almost certainly a late and erroneous chronological gloss derived in very simple fashion, thus:—The wanderings forty years, Joshua forty years, Othniel forty years, Ehud eighty years, Jabin twenty years, Barak forty years, Gideon forty years, the Philistines forty years, Samson twenty

years, Samuel forty years, Saul forty years, David forty years=four hundred and eighty, or twelve generations of forty years.

But the same result was arrived at with equal empiricism by omitting the episodes of heathen dominations (Jabin and the Philistines), and only adding up the years assigned to the Judges, and the four years of Solomon's reign before he began to build the Temple, thus:—Othniel forty years, Ehud eighty years, Barak forty years, Gideon forty years, Tola twenty-three years, Jair twenty-two years, Jephthah six years, Ibzan seven years,

Elom ten years, Abdon eight years, Samson twenty years=two hundred and ninety-six.

Eli forty years, Samuel twenty years (1 Sam. vii. 15), David forty years, Solomon four=one hundred and four. Add to the four hundred the two generations of the wanderings and Joshua, and we again have four hundred and eighty; but quite as arbitrarily, for the period of Saul is omitted.*

The problems of early Hebrew chronology cannot yet be regarded as even approximately solved.

* See Reuss, *Hist. d'Israel*, i. 101-103.

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS.

Theories of inspiration which impaginate the Everlasting Spirit, and make each verse a cluster of objectless and mechanical miracles, are not seriously believed by any one: the Bible itself abides in its endless power and unexhausted truth. All that is not of asbestos is being burned away by the restless fires of thought and criticism. That which remains is enough, and it is indestructible."—BISHOP OF DERRY.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		CHAPTER XVII.	
Ahaziah Ben Alrab of Israel (B. C. 855-854),	341	The Dynasty of Jehu (continued)—Jeroboam II. (B. C. 781-740),	386
CHAPTER II.		CHAPTER XVIII.	
The Ascension of Elijah,	345	Amos and Hosea—Zachariah Ben-Jeroboam (B. C. 740),	388
CHAPTER III.		CHAPTER XIX.	
Elisha,	346	Uzziah of Judah (B. C. 783 [?]-737)—Jotham (B. C. 737-735),	392
CHAPTER IV.		CHAPTER XX.	
The Invasion of Moab,	347	The Agony of the Northern Kingdom—Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah (B. C. 740-734),	394
CHAPTER V.		CHAPTER XXI.	
Elisha's Miracles,	350	King Hoshea and the Fall of the Northern Kingdom (B. C. 734-725),	398
CHAPTER VI.		CHAPTER XXII.	
The Story of Naaman,	352	The Reign of Ahaz (B. C. 735-715),	404
CHAPTER VII.		CHAPTER XXIII.	
Elisha and the Syrians,	356	Isaiah and Ahaz,	405
CHAPTER VIII.		CHAPTER XXIV.	
The Famine and the Siege,	359	The Apostasies of Ahaz,	407
CHAPTER IX.		CHAPTER XXV.	
The Shunammite and Hazael,	362	Hezekiah (B. C. 715-686),	411
CHAPTER X.		CHAPTER XXVI.	
Two Sons of Jehoshaphat,	365	Hezekiah's Sickness—The Babylonian Embassy,	415
CHAPTER XI.		CHAPTER XXVII.	
The Revolt of Jehu (B. C. 842),	366	Hezekiah and Assyria (B. C. 701),	419
CHAPTER XII.		CHAPTER XXVIII.	
Jehu Established on the Throne (B. C. 842-814),	371	The Great Deliverance (B. C. 701),	422
CHAPTER XIII.		CHAPTER XXIX.	
Fresh Murders—The Extirpation of Baal-worship (B. C. 842)	373	Manasseh (B. C. 686-641),	427
CHAPTER XIV.		CHAPTER XXX.	
Athaliah (B. C. 842-836)—Joash of Judah (B. C. 836-796)	376	Josiah (B. C. 639-608),	433
CHAPTER XV.		CHAPTER XXXI.	
Amaziah of Judah (B. C. 796-783 [?]),	381	Josiah's Reformation,	435
CHAPTER XVI.		CHAPTER XXXII.	
The Dynasty of Jehu—Jehoahaz (B. C. 814-797)—Joash (B. C. 797-781),	383	The Death of Josiah (B. C. 608),	439

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER XXXIII.		CHAPTER XXXIX.	
Jehoahaz (B. C. 608),	442	Gedaliah (B. C. 586),	455
CHAPTER XXXIV.		Epilogue,	458
Jehoiakim (B. C. 608-597),	443	APPENDIX I.	
CHAPTER XXXV.		The Kings of Assyria, and Some of Their In-	
Jehoiachin (B. C. 597),	446	scriptions,	460
CHAPTER XXXVI.		APPENDIX II.	
Zedekiah, the Last King of Judah (B. C. 597-586)	448	Inscription in the Tunnel of the Pool of Siloam, .	462
CHAPTER XXXVII.		APPENDIX III.	
Jeremiah and His Prophecies,	451	Was There a Golden Calf at Dan?	463
CHAPTER XXXVIII.		APPENDIX IV.	
The Fall of Jerusalem (B. C. 586),	453	Dates of the Kings of Israel and Judah, as Given	
		by Kittel and Other Modern Critics,	463

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS.

BY THE REV. F. W. FARRAR, D. D., F. R. S.

CHAPTER I.

AHAZIAH BEN-AHAB OF ISRAEL.

B. C. 855-854.

2 KINGS i. 1-18.

"Ye know not of what spirit are ye."—LUKE ix. 55.
"He is the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises."—HEB. viii. 6.

AHAZIAH, the eldest son and successor of Ahab, has been called "the most shadowy of the Israelitish kings."* He seems to have been in all respects one of the most weak, faithless, and deplorably miserable. He did but reign two years—perhaps in reality little more than one; but this brief space was crowded with intolerable disasters. Everything that he touched seemed to be marked out for ruin or failure, and in character he showed himself a true son of Jezebel and Ahab.

What results followed the defeat of Ahab and Jehoshaphat at Ramoth-Gilead we are not told. The war must have ended in terms of peace of some kind—perhaps in the cession of Ramoth-Gilead; for Ahaziah does not seem to have been disturbed during this brief reign by any Syrian invasion. Nor were there any troubles on the side of Judah. Ahaziah's sister was the wife of Jehoshaphat's heir, and the good understanding between the two kingdoms was so closely cemented, that in both royal houses there was an identity of names—two Ahaziahs and two Jehorams.

But even the Judæan alliance was marked with misfortune. Jehoshaphat's prosperity and ambition, together with his firm dominance over Edom—in which country he had appointed a vassal, who was sometimes allowed the courtesy title of king†—led him to emulate Solomon by an attempt to revive the old maritime enterprise which had astonished Jerusalem with ivory, and apes, and peacocks imported from India. He therefore built "ships of Tarshish" at Ezion-Geber to sail to Ophir. They were called "Tarshish-ships," because they were of the same build as those which sailed to Tartessus, in Spain, from Joppa. Ahaziah was to some extent associated with him in the enterprise. But it turned out even more disastrously than it had done in former times. So unskilled was the seamanship of those days among all nations except the Phœnicians, that the whole fleet was wrecked and shattered to pieces in the very harbour of Ezion-Geber before it had set sail.

Ahaziah, whose affinity with the King of Tyre and possession of some of the western ports had given his subjects more knowledge of ships and voyages, then proposed to Jehoshaphat that the

vessels should be manned with sailors from Israel as well as Judah. But Jehoshaphat was tired of a futile and expensive effort. He refused a partnership which might easily lead to complications, and on which the prophets of Jehovah frowned. It was the last attempt made by the Israelites to become merchants by sea as well as by land.

Ahaziah's brief reign was marked by one immense humiliation. David, who extended the dominion of the Hebrews in all directions, had smitten the Moabites, and inflicted on them one of the horrible atrocities against which the ill-instructed conscience of men in those days of ignorance did not revolt.* He had made the male warriors lie on the ground, and then, measuring them by lines, he put every two lines to death and kept one alive. After this the Moabites had continued to be tributaries. They had fallen to the share of the Northern Kingdom, and yearly acknowledged the suzerainty of Israel by paying a heavy tribute of the fleeces of a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams. But now that the warrior Ahab was dead, and Israel had been crushed by the catastrophe at Ramoth-Gilead, Mesha, the energetic viceroy of Moab, seized his opportunity to revolt and to break from the neck of his people the odious yoke. The revolt was entirely successful. The sacred historian gives us no details, but one of the most priceless of modern archæological discoveries has confirmed the Scriptural reference by securing and translating a fragment of Mesha's own account of the annals of his reign. We have, in what is called "The Moabite Stone," the memorial written in glorification of himself and of his god Chemosh, "the abomination of the children of Ammon," by a contemporary of Ahab and Jehoshaphat.† It is the oldest specimen which we possess of Hebrew writing; perhaps the only specimen, except the Siloam inscription, which has come down to us from before the date of the Exile. It was discovered in 1878 by the German missionary Klein, amid the ruins of the royal city of Daibon (Dibon, Num. xxi. 30), and was purchased for the Berlin Museum in 1879. Owing to all kinds of errors and intrigues, it did not remain in the hands of its purchaser, but was broken into fragments by the nomad tribe of Beni Hamide, from whom it was in some way obtained by M. Clermont-Ganneau. There is no ground for questioning its perfect genuineness, though the discovery of its value led to the forgery of a number of spurious and often indecent inscriptions. There can be no reasonable doubt that when we look at it we see before us the identical memorial of triumph which the Moabite emir erected in the days of Ahaziah on the *bamah* of Chemosh at Dibon, one of his chief towns.

* Rawlinson, "Kings of Israel and Judah," p. 86. "The name of Ahaziah ('the Lord taketh hold'), like that of all Ahab's sons, testifies to the fact that the husband of Jezebel still worshipped Jehovah. Among the names of the judges and kings before Ahab in Israel, and Asa in Judah, scarcely a single instance occurs of names compounded with Jehovah; thenceforward they became the rule" (Wellhausen, "Israel and Judah," Es. 1, p. 66).

† 1 Kings xxii. 47; 2 Kings iii. 9; comp. viii. 20.

* 2 Sam. viii. 2. On the ethics of these wars of extermination, such as are commanded in the Pentateuch, and were practised by Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, and others, see Josh. vi. 17; 1 Sam. xv. 3, 33; 2 Sam. viii. 2, etc., and Mozley's "Lectures on the Old Testament," pp. 83-103.

† See Stade, i. 86. He gives a photograph and translation of it at p. 534.

This document is supremely interesting, not only for its historical allusions, but also as an illustration of customs and modes of thought which have left their traces in the records of the people of Jehovah, as well as in those of the people of Chemosh.* Mesha tells us that his father reigned in Dibon for thirty years, and that he succeeded. He reared this stone to Chemosh in the town of Karcha, as a memorial of gratitude for the assistance which had resulted in the overthrow of all his enemies. Omri, King of Israel, had oppressed Moab many days, because Chemosh was wroth with his people. Ahaziah wished to oppress Moab as his father had done. But Chemosh enabled Mesha to recover Medeba, and afterwards Baal-Meon, Kirjatan, Ataroth, Nebo, and Jahaz, which he reoccupied and rebuilt. Perhaps they had been practically abandoned by all effective Israelite garrisons. In some of these towns he put the inhabitants under a ban, and sacrificed them to Moloch in a great slaughter. In Nebo alone he slew seven thousand men. Having turned many towns into fortresses, he was enabled to defy Israel altogether, to refuse the old burdensome tribute, and to re-establish a strong Moabite kingdom east of the Dead Sea; for Israel was wholly unable to meet his forces in the open field. Month after month of the reign of the miserable son of Ahab must have been marked by tidings of shame, defeat, and massacre.

Added to these public calamities, there came to Ahaziah a terrible personal misfortune. As he was coming down from the roof of his palace, he seems to have stopped to lean against the lattice of some window or balcony in his upper chamber in Samaria.† It gave way under his weight, and he was hurled down into the courtyard or street below. He was so seriously hurt that he spent the rest of his reign on a sick-bed in pain and weakness, and ultimately died of the injuries he had received.

A succession of woes so grievous might well have awakened the wretched king to serious thought. But he had been trained under the idolatrous influences of his mother. As though it were not enough for him to walk in the steps of Ahab, of Jezebel, and of Jeroboam, he had the fatuity to go out of his way to patronise another and yet more odious superstition. Ekron was the nearest town to him of the Philistine Pentapolis, and at Ekron was established the local cult of a particular Baal known as Baal-Zebub ("the lord of flies").‡ Flies, which in temperate countries are sometimes an intense annoyance, become in tropical climates an intolerable plague. Even the Greeks had their Zeus Apomiios ("Zeus the averter of flies"), and some Greek tribes worshipped Zeus Ipektonos ("Zeus the slayer of vermin"), and Zeus Muiaeros and Apomiios, and Apollo Smintheus ("the destroyer of mice").§ The Romans, too, among the numberless quaint heroes of their Pantheon, had a certain Myiaerus and Myiodes, whose function it was to keep flies at a distance.||

* See "Records of the Past," xi. 166, 167.

† 2 Kings i. 2; Heb., *be'ad hass'bakah*; LXX., *διὰ τοῦ δακτυλοῦ*; Vulg., *per cancellos* (comp. 1 Kings vii. 18; 2 Chron. iv. 12).

‡ LXX., *Βαάλ μύϊαν θεὸν Ἀκκραίων*. So, too, Jos., *Antt.*, IX. ii. 1. It is possible that the god was represented holding a fly as the type of pestilence, just as the statue of Pthah held in its hands a mouse (Herod., ii. 141). Flies convey all kinds of contagion (Plin., "H. N.," x. 28).

§ Pausan., v. 14 § 2.

|| The name, or a derisive modification of it, was given

This fly-god, Baal-Zebub of Ekron, had an oracle, to whose lying responses the young and superstitious prince attached implicit credence. That a king of Israel professing any sort of allegiance to Jehovah, and having hundreds of prophets in his own kingdom, should send an embassy to the shrine of an abominable local divinity in a town of the Philistines—whose chief object of worship was

"That twice-battered god of Palestine,
Who mourned in earnest when the captive ark
Maimed his brute image on the grunsel edge
Where he fell flat, and shamed his worshippers"—

was, it must be admitted, an act of apostasy more outrageously insulting than had ever yet been perpetrated by any Hebrew king. Nothing can more clearly illustrate the callous indifference shown by the race of Jezebel to the lessons which God had so decisively taught them by Elijah and by Micaiah.

But

Quem vult Deus perdere, dementat prius:

and in this "dementation preceding doom" Ahaziah sent to ask the fly-god's oracle whether he should recover of his injury. His infatuated perversity became known to Elijah, who was bidden by "the angel," or messenger, "of the Lord"—which may only be the recognised phrase in the prophetic schools, putting in a concrete and vivid form the voice of inward inspiration—to go up apparently on the road towards Samaria, and meet the messengers of Ahaziah on their way to Ekron. Where Elijah was at the time we do not know. Ten years had elapsed since the calling of Elisha, and four since Elijah had confronted Ahab at the door of Naboth's vineyard. In the interval he has not once been mentioned, nor can we conjecture with the least certainty whether he had been living in congenial solitude or had been helping to train the Sons of the Prophets in the high duties of their calling. Why he had not appeared to support Micaiah we cannot tell. Now, at any rate, the son of Ahab was drawing upon himself an ancient curse by going a-whoring after wizards and familiar spirits, and it was high time for Elijah to interfere.*

The messengers had not proceeded far on their way when the prophet met them, and sternly bade them go back to their king, with the denunciation, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Now, therefore, thus saith Jehovah, 'Thou shalt not descend from that bed on which thou art gone up, but dying thou shalt die.'"

He spoke, and after his manner vanished with no less suddenness.

The messengers, overawed by that startling apparition, did not dream of daring to disobey. They at once went back to the king, who, as-

by the Jews in the days of Christ to the prince of the devils. In Matt. xii. 24 the true reading is *Βεελζεβούβ*, which perhaps means (in contempt) "the lord of dung"; but might mean "the lord of the [celestial] habitation"; (*οἰκοδόμησόντην*). Comp. Matt. x. 25; Eph. ii. 2; "Baal Shamaim," the Belsamen of Augustine (Gesén., "Monum. Phœnic.," 387; Movers, "Phönizier," i. 176). For "opprobrious puns" applied to idols, see Lightfoot, "Exercitationes ad Matt.," xii. 24. The common word for idols, *gillolim*, is perhaps connected with *galal*, "dung." Hitzig thinks that the god was represented under the symbol of the *Scarabeus pillularius*, or dung-beetle.

* Lev. xx. 6.

tonished at their reappearance before they could possibly have reached the oracle, asked them why they had returned.

They told him of the apparition by which they had been confronted. That it was a prophet who had spoken to them they knew; but the appearances of Elijah had been so few, and at such long intervals, that they knew not who he was.

"What sort of man was he that spoke to you?" asked the king.

"He was," they answered, "a lord of hair,* and girded about his loins with a girdle of skin."†

Too well did Ahaziah recognise from this description the enemy of his guilty race! If he had not been present on Carmel, or at Jezreel, on the occasions when that swart and shaggy figure of the awful Wanderer had confronted his father, he must have often heard descriptions of this strange Bedawy ascetic who "feared man so little because he feared God so much."

"It is Elijah the Tishbite!" he exclaimed, with a bitterness which was succeeded by fierce wrath; and with something of his mother's indomitable rage he sent a captain with fifty soldiers to arrest him.

The captain found Elijah sitting at the top of "the hill," perhaps of Carmel; and what followed is thus described:—

"Thou man of God," he cried, "the king hath said, Come down."

There was something strangely incongruous in this rude address. The title "man of God" seems first to have been currently given to Elijah, and it recognises his inspired mission as well as the supernatural power which he was believed to wield. How preposterous, then, was it to bid a man of God to obey a king's order and to give himself up to imprisonment or death!

"If I be a man of God," said Elijah, "then let fire come down from heaven, to consume thee and thy fifty."‡

The fire fell and reduced them all to ashes.§

Undeterred by so tremendous a consummation, the king sent another captain with his fifty, who repeated the order in terms yet more imperative.||

Again Elijah called down the fire from heaven, and the second captain with his fifty soldiers was reduced to ashes.

For the third time the obstinate king, whose infatuation must indeed have been transcendent, despatched a captain with his fifty. But he, warned by the fate of his predecessors, went up to Elijah and fell on his knees, and implored him to spare the life of himself and his fifty innocent soldiers.

Then "the angel of the Lord" bade Elijah go down to the king with him and not be afraid.

What are we to think of this narrative?

Of course, if we are to judge it on such moral grounds as we learn from the spirit of the gospel, Christ Himself has taught us to condemn it. There have been men who so hideously misunderstood the true lessons of revelation as to applaud such deeds, and hold them up for

modern imitation. The dark persecutors of the Spanish Inquisition, nay, even men like Calvin and Beza, argued from this scene that "fire is the proper instrument for the punishment of heretics." To all who have been thus misled by a false and superstitious theory of inspiration, Christ Himself says, with unmistakable plainness, as He said to the Sons of Thunder at Engannim, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of. I am not come to destroy men's lives, but to save."* In the abstract, and judged by Christian standards, the calling down of lightning to consume more than a hundred soldiers, who were but obeying the orders of a king—the protection of personal safety by the miraculous destruction of a king's messengers—could only be regarded as a deed of horror. "There are few tracks of Elijah that are ordinary and fit for common feet," says Bishop Hall; and he adds, "Not in his own defence would the prophet have been the death of so many, if God had not, by a peculiar instinct, made him an instrument of His just vengeance."†

For myself, I more than doubt whether we have any right to appeal to those "peculiar instincts" and unrecorded inspirations; and it is so important that we should not form utterly false views of what Scripture does and does not teach, that we must once more deal with this narrative quite plainly, and not beat about the bush with the untenable devices and effeminate euphemisms of commentators, who give us the "to-and-fro-conflicting" apologies of *a priori* theory instead of the clear judgments of inflexible morality.

"It is impossible not to feel," says Professor Milligan,‡ "that the events thus presented to us are of a very startling kind, and that it is not easy to reconcile them either with the conception that we form of an honoured servant of God, or with our ideas of eternal justice. Elijah rather appears to us at first sight as a proud, arrogant, and merciless wielder of the power committed to him: we wonder that an answer should have been given to his prayer; we are shocked at the destruction of so many men, who listened only to the command of their captain and their king; and we cannot help contrasting Elijah's conduct, as a whole, with the beneficent and loving tenderness of the New Testament dispensation."

Professor Milligan proceeds rightly to set aside the attempts which have been made to represent the first two captains and their fifties as especially guilty—which is a most flimsy hypothesis, and would not in any case touch the heart of the matter. He says that the event stands on exactly the same footing as the slaughter of the 450 prophets of Baal at Kishon, and of the 3000 idolaters by order of Moses at Sinai; the swallowing up of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; the ban of total extirpation on Jericho and on Canaan; the sweeping massacre of the Amalekites by Saul; and many similar instances of recorded savagery. But the reference to analogous acts furnishes no justification for those acts.

* בְּאֵל יָעָר (LXX., *δαρύς*), whether in reference to his long, shaggy locks, or his sheepskin *addereth*, *μηλωτή* (Zech. xiii. 4; Heb. xii. 37).

† *ὡς ἄνθρωπος* (Matt. iii. 4).

‡ There is perhaps an intentional play of words between "man (אִישׁ) of God" and "fire (אֵשׁ) of God" (Klostertmann).

§ Hebrew.

|| "Come down quickly" (2 Kings i. 9).

* Luke ix. 51-56. This is a more than sufficient answer to the censure of Theodoret, that "they who condemn the prophet are wagging their tongues against God." The remark is based on utter misapprehension; and if we are to form no judgment on the morality of Scripture examples, they would be of no help for us. Compare the striking remark of the minister to Balfour of Burleigh in Scott's "Old Mortality."

† Quoted by Rev. Professor Lumby, *ad loc.*

‡ "Elijah," p. 146.

What, then, is their justification, if any can be found?

Some would defend them on the grounds that the potter may do what he likes with the clay. That analogy, though perfectly admissible when used for the purpose to which it is applied by St. Paul, is grossly inapplicable to such cases as this. St. Paul uses it simply to prove that we cannot judge or understand the purposes of God, in which, as he shows, mercy often lies behind apparent severity. But, when urged to maintain the rectitude of sweeping judgments in which a man arms his own feebleness with the omnipotence of Heaven, they amount to no more than the tyrant's plea that "might makes right." "Man is a reed," said Pascal, "but he is a *thinking* reed." He may not therefore be indiscriminately crushed. He was made by God in His image, after His likeness, and therefore his rights have a Divine and indefeasible sanction.

All that can be said is that these deeds of wholesale severity were not in disaccord with the conscience even of many of the best Old Testament saints. They did not feel the least compunction in inflicting judgments on whole populations in a way which would argue in us an infamous callousness. Nay, their consciences approved of those deeds; they were but acting up to the standard of their times, and they regarded themselves as righteous instruments of divinely directed vengeance.* Take, for instance, the frightful Eastern law which among the Jews no less than among Babylonians and Persians thought nothing of overwhelming the innocent with the guilty in the same catastrophe; which required the stoning, not only of Achan, but of all Achan's innocent family, as an expiation for his theft; and the stoning, not only of Naboth, but also of Naboth's sons, in requital for his asserted blasphemy. Two reasons may be assigned for the chasm between their moral sense and ours on such subjects—one was their amazing indifference to the sacredness of human life, and the other their invariable habit of regarding men in their corporate relations rather than in their individual capacity. Our conscience teaches us that to slay the innocent with the guilty is an action of monstrous injustice;† but they, regarding each person as indissolubly mixed up with all his family and tribe, magnified the conception of *corporate responsibility*, and merged the individual in the mass.

It is clear that, if we take the narrative literally, Elijah would not have felt the least remorse in calling fire from heaven to consume these scores of soldiers, because the prophetic narrator who recorded the story, perhaps two centuries later, must have understood the spirit of those days, and certainly felt no shame for the prophet's act of vengeance. On the contrary, he relates it with entire approval for the glorification of his hero. We cannot blame him for not rising above the moral standard of his age. He held that the natural manifestation of an angry Jehovah was, literally or metaphorically, in consuming fire. Considering the slow education of mankind

in the most elementary principles of mercy and righteousness, we must not judge the views of prophets who lived so many ages before Christ by those of religious teachers who enjoy the inherited experience of two millenniums of Christianity. Thus much is plainly taught us by Christ Himself, and there perhaps we might be content to leave the question. But we are compelled to ask, Do we not too much form all our judgments of the Scripture narratives on *a priori* traditions and unreasoned prejudices? Can we with adequate knowledge and honest conviction declare our certainty that this scene of destruction ever occurred as a literal fact? If we turn to any of the great students and critics of Germany, to whom we are indebted for the floods of light which their researches have thrown on the sacred page, they with almost consentient voice regard these details of this story as legendary. There is indeed every reason to believe the account of Ahaziah's accident, of his sending to consult the oracle of Baal-Zebub, of the turning back of his messengers by Elijah, and of the menace which he heard from the prophet's lips. But the calling down of lightning to consume his captains and soldiers to ashes belongs to the cycle of Elijah-traditions preserved in the schools of the prophets; and in the case of miracles so startling and to our moral sense so repellent—miracles which assume the most insensate folly on the part of the king, and the most callous ruthlessness on the part of the prophet—the question may be fairly asked, Is there any proof, is there anything beyond dogmatic assertion, to convince us that we were intended to accept them *au pied de la lettre*? May they not be the formal vehicle chosen for the illustration of the undoubted powers and righteous mission of Elijah as the upholder of the worship of Jehovah? In a literature which abounds, as all Eastern literature abounds, in vivid and concrete methods of indicating abstract truths, have we any cogent proof that the supernatural details, of which some may have been introduced into these narratives by the scribes in the schools of the prophets, were not, in some instances, *meant* to be regarded as imaginative apologies? The most orthodox divines, both Jewish and Christian, have not hesitated to treat the Book of Jonah as an instance of the use of fiction for purposes of moral and spiritual edification. Were any critic to maintain that the story of the destruction of Ahaziah's emissaries belongs to the same class of narratives, I do not know how he could be refuted, however much he might be denounced by stereotyped prejudice and ignorance. I do not, however, myself regard the story as a mere parable composed to show how awful was the power of the prophets, and how fearfully it might be exercised. I look upon it rather as possibly the narrative of some event which has been imaginatively embellished, and intermingled with details which we call supernatural.* Circumstances which we consider natural would be regarded as directly miraculous by an Eastern enthusiast, who saw in every event the immediate act of Jehovah to the exclusion of all secondary causes, and who attributed every occurrence of life to the intervention of those "millions of spiritual creatures," who

"walk the earth
Unseen both when we wake and when we sleep."

*For the *idea* involved see Num. xi. 1; Deut. iv. 24; Psalm xxi. 9; Isa. xxvi. 11; Heb. x. 27, etc.

* This is practically the sum-total of the answer given again and again by Canon Mozley in his "Lectures on the Old Testament," 2d edition, 1878. For instance, he says that "the Jewish idea of justice gives us the reason why the Divine commands (of exterminating wars, etc.) were then adapted to man as the agent for executing them, and are not adapted now" (p. 102).

† Comp. Ezek. xviii. 2-30.

If such a supposition be correct and admissible—and assuredly it is based on all that we increasingly learn of the methods of Eastern literature, and of the forms in which religious ideas were inculcated in early ages—then all difficulties are removed. We are not dealing with the mercilessness of a prophet, or the wielding of Divine powers in a manner which higher revelation condemns, but only with the well-known fact that the Elijah-spirit was not the Christ-spirit, and that the scribes of Ramah or Gilgal, and “the men of the tradition” and the “men of letters” who lived at Jabez, when they used the methods of Targum and Haggadah in handing down the stories of the prophets, had not received that full measure of enlightenment which came only when the Light of the World had shone.*

CHAPTER II.

THE ASCENSION OF ELIJAH.

2 KINGS ii. 1-18.

Ἡλίας ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἠφανίσθη, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἔγνω μεχρὶς τῆς σήμερον αὐτοῦ τῆν τελευτήν.—JOS., “Antl.,” IX. ii. 2.
 Τεγόνασιν ἀφανείς, θάνατον δὲ αὐτῶν οὐδεὶς οἶδεν.—ST. EPH-
 RÆM SYRUS.

THE date of the assumption of Elijah is wholly uncertain, and it becomes still more so because of the confusion of chronological order which results from the composite character of the records here collected. It appears from various scattered notices that Elijah lived on till the reign of Jehoram of Judah, whereas the narrative in this chapter is placed before the death of Jehoshaphat.

When the time came that “Jehovah would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven,” the prophet had a prevision of his approaching end, and determined for the last time to visit the hills of his native Gilead. The story of his end, though not written in rhythm, is told in a style of the loftiest poetry, resembling other ancient poems in its simple and solemn repetitions. On his way to Gilead, Elijah desires to visit ancient sanctuaries where schools of the prophets were now established, and accompanied by Elisha, whose faithful ministrations he had enjoyed for ten almost silent years, he went to Gilgal. This was not the Gilgal in the Jordan valley so famous in the days of Joshua,† but *Jiljilia* in the hills of Ephraim,‡ where many young prophets were in course of training.§

Knowing that he was on his way to death, Elijah felt the imperious instinct which leads the soul to seek solitude at the supreme crises of life. He would have preferred that even Elisha should leave him, and he bade him stop at Gilgal, because the Lord had sent him as far as Bethel. But Elisha was determined to see the end, and exclaimed with strong asseveration, “As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

So they went on to Bethel, where there was another school of prophets, under the immediate shadow of Jeroboam’s golden calf, though we

* 1 Chron. ii. 55, where “Shimeathites” means “men of the tradition,” and “scribes,” “men of letters.”

† Josh. iv. 19; v. 9, 10.

‡ Deut. xi. 30. It is on a hill southwest of Shiloh (*Seilun*), near the road to Jericho (Hos. iv. 15; Amos iv. 4). The name means “a circle,” and there may have been an ancient circle of sacred stones there.

§ 2 Kings iv. 38.

are not told whether they continued the protest of the old nameless seer from Judah, or not.* Here the youths of the college came respectfully to Elisha—for they were prevented by a sense of awe from addressing Elijah—and asked him “whether he knew that that day God would take away his master.” “Yes, I know it,” he answers; but—for this is no subject for idle talk—“hold ye your peace.”

Once more Elijah tries to shake off the attendance of his friend and disciple. He bids him stay at Bethel, since Jehovah has sent him on to Jericho. Once more Elisha repeats his oath that he will not leave him, and once more the sons of the prophets at Jericho, who warn him of what is coming, are told to say no more.

But little of the journey now remains. In vain Elijah urges Elisha to stay at Jericho; they proceed to Jordan. Conscious that some great event is impending, and that Elijah is leaving these scenes for ever, fifty of the sons of the prophets watch the two as they descend the valley to the river. Here they saw Elijah take off his mantle of hair, roll it up, and smite the waters with it. The waters part asunder, and the prophets pass over dry-shod.† As they cross over Elijah asks Elisha what he should do for him, and Elisha entreats that a double portion of Elijah’s spirit may rest upon him. By this he does not mean to ask for twice Elijah’s power and inspiration, but only for an elder son’s portion, which was twice what was inherited by the younger sons.‡ “Thou hast asked a hard thing,” said Elijah; “but if thou seest me when I am taken hence, it shall be so.”

The sequel can be only told in the words of the text: “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. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, ‘My father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!’¶ And he saw him no more.”

Respecting the manner in which Elijah ended his earthly career, we know nothing beyond what is conveyed by this splendid narrative. His death, like that of Moses, was surrounded by mystery and miracles, and we can say nothing further about it. The question must still remain unanswered for many minds whether it was intended by the prophetic annalists for literal history, for spiritual allegory, or for actual events bathed in the colourings of an imagination to which the providential assumed the aspect of the supernatural.¶ We are twice told that “Elijah

* 1 Kings xiii.

† As there are fords at Jericho, the object of this miracle, as of the one subsequently ascribed to Elisha, is not self-evident. Nothing is more certain than that there is a Divine economy in the exercise of supernatural powers. The pomp and prodigality of superfluous portents belong, not to Scripture, but to the *Acta sanctorum*, and the saint-stories of Arabia and India.

‡ Deut. xxi. 17. The Hebrew is מִן־פִּי, “a mouthful, or ration of two.” Comp. Gen. xliii. 34. Even Ewald’s “Nur Zweidrittel und auch diese kaum” is too strong (“Gesch.,” iii. 517). In no sense was Elisha greater than Elijah: he wrought more wonders, but he left little of his teaching, and produced on the mind of his nation a far less strong impression.

§ In 2 Kings vi. 17 the stormblast (*sā’ārāh*) and chariots and horses of fire are part of a vision of the Divine protection. Comp. Isa. lxxvi. 15; Job xxxviii. 1; Nah. i. 3; Psalms xviii. 6-15, civ. 3.

¶ That is, the protection and defence of Israel by thy prayers.

¶ Even the Church-father St. Ephræm Syrus evidently

went up by a whirlwind into heaven,"* and in that storm—which would have seemed a fit scene for the close of a career of storm—God, in the high poetry of the Psalmist, may have made the winds His angels, and the flames of fire His ministers. For us it must suffice to say of Elijah, as the Book of Genesis says of Enoch, that "he was not, for God took him."

Elisha signalled the removal of his master by a burst of natural grief. He seized his garments and rent them in twain. Elijah had dropped his mantle of skin, and his grieving disciple took it with him as a priceless relic.† The legendary St. Antony bequeathed to St. Athanasius the only thing which he had, his sheepskin mantle; and in the mantle of Elijah his successor inherited his most characteristic and almost his sole possession. He returned to Jordan, and with this mantle he smote the waters as Elijah had done. At first they did not divide;‡ but when he exclaimed, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah, even He?" they parted hither and thither. Seeing the portent, the sons of the prophets came with humble prostrations, and acknowledged him as their new leader.

They were not, however, satisfied with what they had seen, or had heard from Elisha, of the departure of the great prophet, and begged leave to send fifty strong men to search whether the wind of the Lord had not swept him away to some mountain or valley. Elisha at first refused, but afterwards yielded to their persistent importunity. They searched for three days among the hills of Gilead, but found him not, either living or dead, as Elisha had warned them would be the case.

From that time forward Elijah has taken his place in all Jewish and Mohammedan legends as the mysterious and deathless wanderer. Malachi spoke of him as destined to appear again to herald the coming of the Messiah,§ and Christ taught His disciples that John the Baptist had come in the spirit and power of Elijah. In Jewish legend he often appears and disappears. A chair is set for him at the circumcision of every Jewish child. At the Paschal feast the door is set open for him to enter. All doubtful questions are left for decision until he comes again. To the Mohammedans he is known as the wonder-working and awful El Khudr.¶

Elisha is mentioned but once in all the later books of Scripture; but Elijah is mentioned many times, and the son of Sirac sums up his

felt some misgivings. He says: "Suddenly there came from the height a storm of fire, and in the midst of the flame the form of a chariot and horses, and parted them both asunder; the one of them it left on the earth, the other it carried to the height; but whether the wind carried him, or in what place it left him, the Scripture has not informed us, but it says that after some years, a terrifying letter from him, full of menaces, was delivered to King Jehoram of Judah" (quoted by Keil *ad loc.*). See 2 Chron. xxi. 12. The letter is called "a writing" (*niktāb*).

* 2 Kings ii. 11; Ecclus. xlviii. 12. The LXX curiously says *ἐν σφοδραῖς ὡς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν*. So too the Rabbis, "Sukah," f. 5.

† The circumstance has left its trace in the proverbs of nations, and in the German word *Mantelkind* for a spiritual successor.

‡ 2 Kings ii. 14. LXX., *καὶ οὐ διερρήθη*; Vulg., *Percussit aquas, et non sunt divise*.

§ Mel. iv. 4-6.

¶ "Bava Metzta," f. 37, 2, etc. His name is used for incantations in the Kabbala. "Kitsur Sh'lh," f. 71, 1 (Hershon, "Talmudic Miscellany," p. 340). The chair set for him is called "the throne of Elijah." For many Rabbinic legends see Hershon, "Treasures of the Talmud," pp. 172-178. The Persians regard him as the teacher of Zoroaster.

greatness when he says: "Then stood up Elias as fire, and his word burned like a torch. O Elias, how wast thou honoured in thy wondrous deeds! and who may glory like unto thee—who anointed kings to take revenge, and prophets to succeed after him—who wast ordained for reproof in their times, to pacify the wrath of the Lord's judgment before it broke forth into fury, and to turn the heart of the father unto the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob! Blessed are they that saw thee and slept in love; for we shall surely live!"

CHAPTER III.

ELISHA.

2 KINGS ii. 1-25.

"He did wonders in his life, and at death even his works were marvellous. For all this the people repented not."—ECCLUS. xlviii. 14, 15.

At this point we enter into the cycle of supernatural stories, which gathered round the name of Elisha in the prophetic communities. Some of them are full of charm and tenderness; but in some cases it is difficult to point out their intrinsic superiority over the ecclesiastical miracles with which monkish historians have embellished the lives of the saints. We can but narrate them as they stand, for we possess none of the means for critical or historical analysis which might enable us to discriminate between essential facts and accidental elements.

We see at once that the figure of Elisha* is far less impressive than that of Elijah. He inspires less of awe and terror. He lives far more in cities and amid the ordinary surroundings of civilised life. The honour with which he was treated was the honour of respect and admiration for his kindness. He plays his part in no stupendous scenes like those at Carmel and at Horeb, and nearly all his miracles were miracles of mercy. Other remarkable differences are observable in the records of Elijah and Elisha. In the case of the former his main work was the opposition to Baal-worship; but although Baal-worship still prevailed (2 Kings x. 18-27) we read of no protests raised by Elisha against it. "With him"—perhaps it should be more accurately said, in the narrative which tells us of him—"the miracles are everything, the prophetic work nothing." The conception of a prophet's mission in these stories of him differs widely from that which dominates the splendid *midrash* of Elijah.

His separate career began with an act of beneficence. He had stopped for a time at Jericho. The curse of the rebuilding of the town upon a site which Joshua had devoted to the ban had expended itself on Hiel, its builder. It was now a flourishing city, and the home of a large school of prophets. But though the situation was pleasant as "a garden of the Lord,"† the water was bad, and the land "miscarried." In other words, the deleterious springs caused diseases among the inhabitants, and caused the trees to cast their fruit. So the men of the city came to Elisha, and humbly addressing him as "my lord," implored his help. He told them to bring him a new cruse full of salt, and going with it to the

* The name Elisha means "My God is salvation."

† Gen. xiii. 10. "The city of palms" (Deut. xxxiv. 3).

fountain cast it into the springs, proclaiming in Jehovah's name that they were healed, and that there should be no more death or miscarrying land. The gushing waters of the Ain-es-Sultân, fed by the spring of Quarantania, are to this day pointed out as the Fountains of Elisha, as they have been since the days of Josephus.*

The anecdote of this beautiful interposition to help a troubled city is followed by one of the stories which naturally repel us more than any other in the Old Testament. Elisha, on leaving Jericho, returned to Bethel, and as he climbed through the forest up the ascent leading to the town through what is now called the Wady Suweinit, a number of young lads—with the rudeness which in boys is often a venial characteristic of their gay spirits or want of proper training, and which to this day is common among boys in the East—laughed at him, and mocked him with the cry "Go up, round-head! go up, round-head!" † What struck these ill-bred and irreverent youngsters was the contrast between the rough hair-skin garb and unkempt shaggy locks of Elijah, "the lord of hair," and the smooth civilised aspect and shorter hair of his disciple. If the word *quereach* means "bald," ‡ we see an additional reason for their ill-mannered jeers, since baldness was a cause of reproach and suspicion in the East, where it is comparatively rare. No doubt, too, the conduct of these young scoffers was the more offensive, and even the more wicked, because of the deeper reverence for age which prevails in Eastern countries, and above all because Elisha was known as a prophet. Perhaps, too, if some other reading lies behind the *ἐκβαλον* of one MS. of the Septuagint, they pelted him with stones. § That Elisha should have rebuked them, and that seriously—that he should even have inflicted some punishment upon them to reform their manners—would have been natural; but we cannot repress the shudder with which we read the verse, "And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty-and-two children of them." Surely the punishment was disproportionate to the offence! Who could doom so much as a single rude boy, not to speak of forty-two, to a horrible and agonising death for shouting after any one? It is the chief exception to the general course of Elisha's compassionate interpositions. Here, too, we must leave the narrative where it is; but we hold it quite admissible to conjecture that the incident, in some form or other, really occurred—that the boys were insolent, and that some of them may have been killed by the wild beasts which at that time abounded in Palestine—and yet that the

* Jos., "B. J.," IV. viii. 3; Robinson, "Bibl. Researches,"

l. 554.
† Abarbanel's notion that they meant "Ascend to heaven as Elijah did" is absurd.

‡ קָרְעַח . This means bald at the back of the head,

as קָרְעַח (*gibbeach*), means "forehead-bald" (Ewald, iii. 512). Elisha could not have been bald from old age, since he lived on for nearly sixty years, and must have been a young man. Baldness involved a suspicion of leprosy, and was disliked by Easterns (Lev. xxi. 5, xiii. 43; Isa. iii. 17, 24, xv. 2), as much as by the Romans (Suet., "Jul. Cæs.," 45; "Domit.," 13). Elisha's prophetic activity lasted through the reigns of Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash (*l. c.*, 12 + 23 + 17 + 2 years).

§ The *κατέβαλον* of the Vat. LXX. implies persistent and vehement insult. The Post-Mishnic Rabbis, however, say that Elisha was punished with sickness for this deed ("Bava-Metzia," f. 37. 1).

nuances of the story which cause deepest offence to us may have suffered from some corruption of the tradition in the original records, and may admit of being represented in a slightly different form.

After this Elisha went for a time to the ancient haunts of his master on Mount Carmel, and thence returned to Samaria, the capital of his country, which he seems to have chosen for his most permanent dwelling-place.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVASION OF MOAB.

2 KINGS iii. 4-27.

"What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not, what resolution from despair,"

MILTON, "*Paradise Lost*," i. 190.

AHAZIAH, as Elijah had warned him, never recovered from the injuries received in his fall through the lattice, and after his brief and luckless reign died without a child. He was succeeded by his brother Jehoram ("Jehovah is exalted"), who reigned for twelve years.*

Jehoram began well. Though it is said that he did "that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," we are told that he was not so guilty as his father or his mother. He did not, of course, abolish the worship of Jehovah under the cherubic symbol of the calves; no king of Israel thought of doing that, and so far as we know neither Elijah, nor Elisha, nor Jonah, nor Micaiah, nor any genuine prophet of Israel before Hosea, ever protested against that worship, which was chiefly disparaged by prophets of Judah like Amos and the nameless seer. † But Jehoram at least removed the *Matstsebah* or stone obelisk which had been reared in Baal's honour in front of his temple by Ahab, or by Jezebel in his name. ‡ In this direction, however, his reformation must have been exceedingly partial, for until the sweeping measures taken by Jehu the temple and images of Baal still continued to exist in Samaria under his very eyes, and must have been connived at if not approved.

The first great measure which occupied the thoughts of Jehoram was to subdue the kingdom of Moab, which had been restored to independence by the bravery of the great pastoral-king Mesha; § or at any rate to avenge the series of

* There are great difficulties in the statement (2 Kings iii. 1) that he began to reign in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. I have not entered, nor shall I enter, into the minute and precarious conjectures necessitated by the uncertainties and contradictions of this synchronism introduced into the narrative by some editor. Suffice it that with the aid of the Assyrian records we have certain *points de repère*, from which we can, with the assistance of the historian, conjecturally restore the main data. In the dates given at the head of the chapters I follow Kittel, as a careful inquirer. Some of the approximately fixed dates are (see Appendix I.) :—

854. Battle of Karkar (Ahab and Benhadad against Shalmaneser II.)

738. Tribute of Menahem to Tiglath-Pileser II.

732. Fall of Damascus.

722. Capture of Samaria by Sargon.

720. Defeat of Sabaco by Sargon in battle of Raphia.

705. Accession of Sennacherib.

701. Campaign against Hezekiah.

608. Death of Josiah.

† But neither the man of God from Judah nor Amos directly denounces the calf-worship, so much as its concomitant sins and irregularities.

‡ Perhaps the true reading is "pillars" (LXX., Vulg., Arab.).

§ He is called "a sheep-master," *nokeḏ*; LXX., *νοκηδ*.

humiliating defeats which Mesha had inflicted on his brother Ahaziah. A war of forty years' duration* had ended in the complete success of Moab. The loss of a tribute of the fleeces of one hundred thousand lambs and one hundred thousand rams was too serious to be lightly faced.† Jehoram laid his plans well. First he ordered a muster of all the men of war throughout his kingdom, and then appealed for the co-operation of Jehoshaphat and his vassal-king of Edom. Both kings consented to join him. Jehoshaphat had already been the victim of a powerful and wanton aggression on the part of King Mesha,‡ from which he had been delivered by the panic of his foes in the Valley of Salt. Though the king of Edom had, on that occasion, been an ally of Mesha, the forces of Edom had fallen the first victims of that internecine panic. Both Judah and Edom, therefore, had grave wrongs to avenge, and eagerly seized the opportunity to humble the growing pride of the people of Chemos. The attack was wisely arranged. It was determined to advance against Moab from the south, through the territory of Edom, by a rough and mountainous track, and, as far as possible, to take the nation by surprise. The combined host took a seven days' circuit round the south of the Dead Sea, hoping to find an abundant supply of water in the stream which flows through the Wady-el-Ahsa, which separates Edom from Moab.§ But owing to recent droughts the wady was waterless, and the armies, with their horses, suffered all the agonies of thirst. Jehoram gave way to despair, bewailing that Jehovah should have brought together these three kings to deliver them a helpless prey into the hands of Moab. But the pious Jehoshaphat at once thinks of "inquiring of the Lord" by some true prophet, and one of Jehoram's courtiers informs him that no less a person than Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who had been the attendant of Elijah, is with the host.¶ We are surprised to find that his presence in the camp had excited so little attention as to be unknown to the king;¶ but Jehoshaphat, on hearing his name, instantly acknowledged his prophetic inspiration. So urgent was the need, and so deep the sense of Elisha's greatness, that the three kings in person went on an embassy "to the servant of him who ran before the chariot of Ahab." Their humble appeal to him produced

so little elation in his mind that, addressing Jehoram, who was the most powerful, he exclaimed, with rough indignation: "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father,"—nominal prophets of Jehovah who will say to thee smooth things and prophesy deceptions, as four hundred of them did to Ahab—"and to the Baal-prophets of thy mother." Instead of resenting this scant respect Jehoram, in utmost distress, deprecated the prophet's anger, and appealed to his pity for the peril of the three armies. But Elisha is not mollified. He tells Jehoram that but for the presence of Jehoshaphat he would not so much as look at him: so completely was the destiny of the people mixed up with the character of their kings! Out of respect for Jehoshaphat Elisha will do what he can. But all his soul is in a tumult of emotion. For the moment he can do nothing. He needs to be calmed from his agitation by the spell of music, and bids them send a minstrel to him. The harper came, and as Elisha listened his soul was composed, and "the hand of the Lord came upon him" to illuminate and inspire his thoughts.* The result was that he bade them dig trenches in the dry wady, and promised that, though they should see neither wind nor rain, the valley should be filled with water to quench the thirst of the fainting armies, their horses and their cattle. After this God would also deliver the Moabites into their hand; and they were bidden to smite the cities, fell the trees, stop the wells, and mar the smiling pasture-lands, which constituted the wealth of Moab, with stones. That the hosts of Judah and Israel and jealous Edom should be prone to afflict this awfully devastating vengeance on a power by which they had been so severely defeated on past occasions, and on which they had so many wrongs and blood-fends to avenge, was natural; but it is surprising to find a prophet of the Lord giving the commission to ruin the gifts of God and spoil the innocent labours of man, and thus to inflict misery on generations yet unborn. The behest is directly contrary to rules of international war which have prevailed even between non-Christian nations, among whom the stopping or poisoning of wells and the cutting down of fruit trees has been expressly forbidden. It is also against the rules of war laid down in Deuteronomy.† Such, however, was the command attributed to Elisha; and, as we shall see, it was fulfilled, and seems to have led to disastrous consequences.

Cheered by the promise of Divine aid which the prophet had given them, the host retired to rest. The next morning at day-dawn, when the *minchah* of fine flour, oil, and frankincense was offered,‡ water, which, according to the tradition of Josephus, had fallen at three days' distance on the hills of Edom, came flowing from the south and filled the wady with its refreshing streams.

The incident itself is highly instructive. It throws light both upon the general accuracy of the ancient narrative, and on the fact that events to which a directly supernatural colouring is given are, in many instances, not so much supernatural as providential. The deliverance of Is-

* Comp. 1 Sam. x. 5; 1 Chron. xxv. 1; Ezek. i. 3, xxxii. 22. *Menaggên* is one who plays on a stringed instrument, *ἡ γῆνη*. The Pythagoreans used music in the same way (Cic., "Tusc. Disp.," iv. 2).

† Deut. xx. 10, 20.

‡ Lev. ii. 1. Comp. 1 Kings xviii. 36.

Elsewhere the word occurs only in Amos i. 1. The Alex. LXX. has ἡν φέρων φόρον.

* According to the Moabite Stone.

† It is not clear whether the lambs and rams were sent with the fleeces. The A. V. says "lambs and rams with their wool," in accordance with Josephus—*μυριάδας εἰκοσι προβάτων σὺν τοῖς πόκοις*. The LXX. has the vague *ἐπὶ πόκων*, and implies that this was a special fine after a defeat in the revolt (*ἐν τῇ ἐπαναστάσει*): but comp. Isa. xvi. 1.

‡ 2 Chron. xx. 1-30.

§ Robinson ("Bibl. Res.," ii. 157) identifies it with the brook *Zered*. Deut. ii. 13; Num. xxi. 12. The name means "valley of water-pits." W. R. Smith quotes Doughty, "Travels," i. 26.

¶ Comp. 1 Kings xxii. 7. The phrase "who poured water on the hands of Elijah" is a touch of Oriental custom which the traveller in remote parts of Palestine may still often see. Once, when driven by a storm into the house of the Sheykh of a tribe which had a rather bad reputation for brigandage, I was most hospitably entertained; and the old white-haired Sheykh, his son, and ourselves were waited on by the grandson, a magnificent youth, who immediately after the meal brought out an old richly chased ewer and basin, and poured water over our hands, soiled by eating out of the common dish, of course without spoons or forks.

¶ This seems to have struck Josephus ("Ant.," IX. iii. 1), who says that "he *chanced* to be in a tent (*ἐν τῷ κατεσκηνηκῶς*) outside the host."

rael was due, not to a portent wrought by Elisha, but to the pure wisdom which he derived from the inspiration of God. When the counsels of princes were of none effect, and for lack of the spirit of counsel the people were perishing, his mind alone, illuminated by a wisdom from on high, saw what was the right step to take. He bade the soldiers dig trenches in the dry torrent bed,—which was the very step most likely to ensure their deliverance from the torment of thirst, and which would be done under similar circumstances to this day. They saw neither wind nor rain; but there had been a storm among the farther hills, and the swollen watercourses discharged their overflow into the trenches of the wady which were ready prepared for them, and offered the path of least resistance.

Moab, meanwhile, had heard of the advance of the three kings through the territories of Edom. The whole military population had mustered in arms, and stood on the frontier, on the other side of the dry wady, to oppose the invasion. For they knew this would be a struggle of life and death, and that if defeated they would have no mercy to expect. When the sun rose, and its first rays burned on the wady, which had been dry on the previous evening, the water which, unknown to the Moabites, had filled the trenches in the night looked red as blood. Doubtless it may have been stained, as Ewald says, by the red soil which gave its name to the red land of the "red king, Edom"; but as it gleamed under the dawn the Moabites thought that those seemingly crimson pools had been filled with the blood of their enemies, who had fallen by each other's swords. Their own recent experience when Jehoshaphat met them in the Valley of Salt showed them how easy it was for temporary allies to be seized by panic, and to fight among themselves.*

The army of their invaders was composed of heterogeneous and mutually conflicting elements. Between Israel and Judah there had been nearly a century of war,† and only a brief reunion; and Edom, recently the willing and natural ally of Moab, was not likely to fight very zealously for Judah, which had reduced her to vassalage. So the Moabites said to one another, as they pointed to the unexpected apparition of those red pools: "This is blood. The kings are surely destroyed, and they have smitten each man his fellow. Moab to the spoil!" They rushed down tumultuously on the camp of Israel, and found the soldiers of Jehoram ready to receive them. Taken by surprise, for they had expected no resistance, they were hurled back in utter confusion and with immense slaughter. The three kings pushed their advantage to the utmost. They went forward into the land, driving and smiting the Moabites before them, and ruthlessly carrying out the command attributed to Elisha. They beat down the cities—most of which in a land of flocks and herds were little more than pastoral villages; they rendered the green fields useless with stones; they filled up all the wells with earth; they felled every fruit-bearing tree of any value. At last only one stronghold, Kirharaseth, the chief fenced town of Moab, held out against them.‡ Even this fortress was sore

* This dreadful result crippled the revolt of Vindex against Nero.

† Jeroboam I., B. C. 937; Joram, 854.

‡ Isa. xv. 1, Kir of Moab; Jer. xlviii. 31, Kir-heres. It is built on a steep calcareous rock, surrounded by a deep, narrow glen, which thence descends westward to the Dead Sea, under the name of the Wady Kerak. We know

bested. The slingers, for which Israel, and specially the tribe of Benjamin, was so famous, advanced to drive its defenders from the battlements. King Mesha fought with undaunted heroism. He decided to take the seven hundred warriors who were left to him, and cut his way through the besieging host to the king of Edom. He thought that even now he might persuade the Edomites to abandon this new and unnatural alliance, and turn the battle against their common enemies. But the numbers against him were too strong, and he found the plan impossible. Then he formed a dreadful resolution, dictated to him by the extremity of his despair. His inscription at Karcha shows that he was a profound and even fanatical believer in Chemosh, his god. Chemosh could still deliver him. If Chemosh was, as Mesha says in his inscription, "angry with his land"—if, even for a time, he allowed his faithful people and his devoted king to be afflicted—it could not be for any lack of power on his part, but only because they had in some way offended him, so that he was wroth, or because he had gone on a journey, or was asleep, or deaf.* How could he be appeased? Only by the offering of the most precious of all the king's possessions; only by the self-devotion of the crown-prince, on whom were centred all the nation's hopes. Mesha would force Chemosh to help him for very shame. He would offer to Chemosh a human sacrifice, the sacrifice of his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead. Doubtless the young prince gave himself up as a willing offering, for that was essential to the holocaust being valid and acceptable.†

So upon the wall of Kirharaseth, in the sight of all the Moabites, and of the three invading armies, the brave and desperate hero of a hundred fights, who had inflicted so many reverses upon these enemies, and received so many at their hands, but who, having liberated his country, now saw all the efforts of his life ruined at one blow—took his eldest son, kindled the sacrificial fire, and then and there solemnly offered that horrible burnt-offering.‡

And it proved effectual, though far otherwise than Mesha had expected. He was delivered; and, doubtless, if ever he reared, at Kirharaseth or elsewhere, another memorial stone, he would have attributed his deliverance to his national god. But here, in the annals of Elisha, the result is hurried over, and a veil is, so to speak, dropped upon the dreadful scene with the one ambiguous expression, "And there was great wrath against Israel; and they departed from him, and returned to their own land."

The phrase awakens but does not satisfy our curiosity. We are not certain of the translation, or of the meaning. It may be, as in the margin of the Revised Version, "there came great wrath upon Israel."§ But wrath from whom? and on what account? The word "wrath" all but invariably denotes divine wrath; but we cannot imitate the armies of Nineveh habitually practised these brutal modes of devastation in the districts which they conquered. See Layard, *passim*; Rawlinson, "Ancient Monarchies," ii. 84.

* 1 Kings xviii. 27. Comp. Psalm xxxv. 23, xlii. 23, lxxxiii. 1, etc.

† Comp. Micah vi. 7. This is an entirely different incident from that alluded to in Amos. ii. 1.

‡ Eusebius ("Præp. Evang.," iv. 16) quotes from Philo's Phœnician history a reference to human sacrifices (τοῖς θυμωτοῖς δαίμοσιν) at moments of desperation.

§ The rendering is doubtful. LXX., καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ μέλος μέγας ἐπὶ Ἰσραὴλ; Vulg., indignatio in Israel; Luther, *Da ward Israel sehr zornig*.

agine (as some critics do) that any Israelite of the schools of the prophets would sanction the notion that the chosen people were allowed to suffer from the kindled wrath of Chemosh. Can we then suppose that the desperate act of King Mesha was a proof that Israel, who was no doubt the most interested and the most remorseless of the invaders, had pressed the Moabites too hard, and carried his vengeance much too far? That is by no means impossible. The prophet Amos denounces upon Moab in after years the doom that fire should devour the palaces of Kirioth, and that Moab should perish with shoutings, and all his royal line be cut off, for the far less offence of having burned into lime the bones of the king of Edom.* The command of Elisha did not exempt the Israelites from their share of moral responsibility. Jehu was commissioned to be an executioner of vengeance upon the house of Ahab. Yet Jehu is expressly condemned by the prophet Hosea for the tiger-like ferocity and horrible thoroughness with which he had carried out his destined work.† Only one other explanation is possible. If "wrath" here has the unusual sense of human indignation, the clause can only imply that the armies of Judah and Edom were roused to anger by the un pitying spirit which Israel had displayed. The horrible tragedy enacted upon the wall of Kirharaseth awoke their consciences to the sense of human compassion. These, after all, were fellow-men—fellow-men of kindred blood to their own—whom they had driven to straits so frightful as to cause a king to burn his own heir alive as a mute appeal to his god in the hour of overwhelming ruin. They had done enough:

"Sunt lacrimæ rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt."

They hastily broke up the league, dissolved the alliance, returned horror-stricken to their own land. They left Moab indeed in possession of his last fortress, but they had reduced his territory to a wilderness before they retired and called it peace.

CHAPTER V.

ELISHA'S MIRACLES.

2 KINGS iv. 1-44.

WE are now in the full tide of Elisha's miracles, and as regards many of them we can do little more than illustrate the text as it stands. The record of them clearly comes from some account prevalent in the schools of the prophets, which is however only fragmentary, and has been unchronologically pieced into the annals of the kings of Israel.

The story of Elisha abounds far more in the supernatural than that of Elijah, and is believed by most critics to be of earlier date. Yet the scenes and portents of his life are almost wholly lacking in the element of grandeur which belong to those of the elder seer. His personality, if on the whole softer and more beneficent, inspires less of awe, and the whole tone of the biography which recorded these isolated incidents is lacking in the poetic and impassioned elevation which marks the episodes of Elijah's his-

* Amos ii. 1-8.
† Hos. i. 4: "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu."

tory. We see in the records of Elisha, as in the biographies—so rich in prodigies—of fourth-century hermits and mediæval saints, how little impressive in itself is the exercise of abnormal powers; how it derives its sole grandeur from the accompaniment of great moral lessons and spiritual revelations. John the Baptist "did no miracle," yet our Lord placed him not only far above Elisha, but even above Moses and Samuel and Elijah, when He said of him, "Verily I say unto you, of them that have been born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

It is impossible not to be struck with the singular parallelism between the powers exercised by Elisha and those which are attributed to his predecessor. "How true an heir is Elisha of his master," says Bishop Hall, "not in his graces only, but in his actions! Both of them divided the waters of Jordan, the one as his last act, the other as his first. Elijah's curse was the death of the captains and their troops; Elisha's curse was the death of the children. Elijah rebuked Ahab to his face; Elisha, Jehoram. Elijah supplied the drought of Israel by rain from heaven; Elisha supplied the drought of the three kings by waters gushing out of the earth; Elijah increased the oil of the Sareptan. Elisha increased the oil of the prophet's widow; Elijah raised from death the Sareptan's son, Elisha the Shunammite's; both of them had one mantle, one spirit; both of them climbed up one Carmel, one heaven." The resemblance, however, is not at all in character, but only in external and miraculous circumstances. In all other respects Elisha furnishes a contrast to Elijah which startles us quite as much as any superficial resemblances. Elijah was a free, wild Bedawy prophet, hating and shunning as his ordinary residence the abodes of men, making his home in the rocky wady or in the mountain glades, appearing and disappearing suddenly as the wind. He asserted his power most often in ministries of retribution. Clad in the sheepskin of a Gadite shepherd or mountaineer, he was not one of those who wear soft clothing or are found in kings' houses. He usually met monarchs as their enemy and their reprover, but for the most part avoided them. He never intervened for years together even in national events of the utmost importance, whether military or religious, unless he received the direct call of God, or there appeared to him to be a "*dignus Vindice nodus*." Elisha, on the other hand, makes his home in cities, and chiefly in Samaria. He is familiar with kings and moves about with armies, and has no long retirements into unknown solitudes; and though he could speak roughly to Jehoram, he is often on the friendliest terms with him and with other sovereigns.

The stories of Elisha give us many interesting glimpses into the social life of Israel in his day. As to their literal historic accuracy, those must make positive affirmation who feel that they can do so in accordance alike with adequate authority and with the sacredness of truth. Many will be unable to escape the opinion that they bear some resemblance to other Jewish haggadoth, written for edification, with every innocent intention, in the schools of the Prophets, but no more intended for perfectly literal acceptance in all their details than the Life of St. Paul the Hermit, by St. Jerome; or that of St. Anthony, attributed erroneously to St. Athanasius; or that of St. Francis in the Fioretti; or the lives of humble

saints of the people called *Kisar-el-anbiah*, which are so popular among poor Mohammedans. Into that question there is no need to enter further. *Abundet quisque in sensu suo.*

I. On one occasion a widow of one of the Sons of the Prophets—for these communities, though cœnobitic, were not celibate—came to him in deep distress. Her husband—the Jews, with their usual guesswork, most improbably identified him with Obadiah, the chamberlain of Ahab*—had died insolvent. As she had nothing to pay, her creditor under the grim provision of the law was about to exercise his right of selling her two sons into slavery to recoup himself for the debt.† Would Elisha help her?

Prophets were never men of wealth, so that he could not pay her debt. He asked her what she possessed to satisfy the demand. "Nothing," she said, "but a pot of the common oil, used for anointing the body after a bath."

Elisha bade her go and borrow from her neighbours all the empty vessels she could, then to return home, shut the door, and pour the oil into the vessels.

She did so. They were all filled, and she asked her son to bring yet another. But there was not another to be had, so she went out and told the Man of God. He bade her sell the miraculously multiplied oil to pay the debt, and live with her sons on the proceeds of what was over.

II. We next find Elisha at Shunem, famous as the abode of the fair maiden—probably Abishag, the nurse of David's decrepitude—who is the heroine of the Song of Songs. It is a village, now called Solam, on the slopes of Little Hermon (Jebel-el-Duhy), three miles north of Jezreel. At this place there lived a lady of wealth and influence, whose husband owned the surrounding land. There were but few khans in Palestine, and even where they now exist the traveller has in most cases to supply his own food. Elisha, in his journeys to and fro among the schools of the Prophets, had often enjoyed the welcome hospitality eagerly pressed upon him by the lady of Shunem. Struck with his sacred character, she persuaded her husband to take a step unusual even to the boundless hospitality of the East. She begged him to do honour to this holy Man of God by building for him a little chamber (*aliyah*) on the flat roof of the house, to which he might have easy and private access by the outside staircase.‡ The chamber was built, and furnished, like any other simple Eastern room, with a bed, a divan to sit on, a table, and a lamp; and there the weary prophet on his journeys often found a peaceful, simple, and delightful resting-place.

Grateful for the reverence with which she treated him, and the kind care with which she had supplied his needs, Elisha was anxious to recompense her in whatever way might be possible. The thought of money payment was of course out of the question; merely to hint at it would have been a breach of manners. But perhaps he might be of use to her in some other way. At this time, and for years afterwards during his long ministry of perhaps fifty-six years, he was attended by a servant named Gehazi, who stood to him in the same sort of relation which he had

held to Elijah. He told Gehazi to summon the Shunammite lady. In the deep humility of Eastern womanhood she came and stood in his presence. Even then he did not address her. So downtrodden was the position of women in the East that any dignified person, much more a great prophet, could not converse with a woman without compromising his dignity. The more scrupulous Pharisees in the days of Christ always carefully gathered up their garments in the streets, lest they should so much as touch a woman with their skirts in passing by, as the modern Chakams in Jerusalem do to this day.* The disciples themselves, sophisticated by familiarity with such teachers, were astonished that Jesus at the well of Shechem should talk with a woman.† So, though the lady stood there, Elisha, instead of speaking to her directly, told Gehazi to thank her for all the devout respect and care, all "the modesty of fearful duty,"‡ which she had displayed towards them, and to ask her if he should say a good word for her to the King or the Captain of the Host. This is just the sort of favour which an Eastern would be likely to value most.§ The Shunammite, however, was well provided for; she had nothing to complain of, and nothing to request. She thanked Elisha for his kindly proposal, but declined it, and went away.

"Is there, then, nothing which we can do for her?" asked Elisha of Gehazi.||

There was. Gehazi had learnt that the sorrow of her life—a sorrow and a source of reproach to any Eastern household, but most of all to that of a wealthy householder—was her childlessness.

"Call her," he said.

She came back, and stood reverently in the doorway.

"When the time comes round," he said to her, "you shall embrace a son."

The promise raised in her heart a thrill of joy. It was too precious to be believed. "Nay," she said, "my lord, thou Man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid."

But the promise was fulfilled, and the lady of Shunem became the happy mother of a son.

III. The charming episode then passes over some years. The child had grown into a little boy, old enough now to go out alone to see his father in the harvest fields and to run about among the reapers. But as he played about in the heat he had a sunstroke, and cried to his father, "O my head, my head!" Not knowing how serious the matter was, his father simply ordered one of his lads to carry the child home to his mother. The fond mother nursed him tenderly upon her knees, but at noon he died.

Then the lady of Shunem showed all the faith and strength and wisdom of her character. "The good Shunammite," says Bishop Hall, "had lost her son; her faith she lost not." Overwhelming as was this calamity—the loss of an only child—she suppressed all her emotions, and, instead of bursting into the wild helpless wail of Eastern

* Frankl., "Jews in the East."

† John iv. 27: "Then came his disciples, and marvelled that He was talking (*μετὰ γυναίκος*) with a woman."

‡ 2 Kings iv. 13: "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care" (LXX., *πάσαν τὴν ἐκτασίαν ταύτην*).

§ The Sheykh with whom I stayed at Blint es Jebel could think of no return which I could offer for his hospitality so acceptable as if I would say a good word for him to the authorities at Beyrout.

|| Gehazi is usually called the *na'ar* or "lad" of Elisha—a term implying lower service than Elisha's "ministry" to Elijah.

* Jos., "Antt.," IX. iv. 2. This perhaps is only suggested by the reminiscences of 1 Kings xviii. 2, 3, 12.

† Lev. xxv. 30-41; Matt. xviii. 25.

‡ 2 Kings iv. 10. Not "a little chamber on the wall" (A. V.), but "an *aliyah* with walls" (margin, R. V.).

mourners, or rushing to her husband with the agonising news, she took the little boy's body in her arms, carried it up to the chamber which had been built for Elisha, and laid it upon his bed. Then, shutting the door, she called to her husband to send to her one of his reapers and one of the asses, for she was going quickly to the Man of God and would return in the cool of the evening. "Why should you go to-day particularly?" he asked. "It is neither new moon, nor sabbath." "It is all right," she said; * and with perfect confidence in the rectitude of all her purposes, he sent her the she-ass, and a servant to drive it and to run beside it for her protection on the journey of sixteen miles.

"Drive on the ass," she said. "Slacken me not the riding unless I tell you." So with all possible speed she made her way—a journey of several hours—from Shunem to Mount Carmel.

Elisha, from his retreat on the hill, marked her coming from a distance, and it rendered him anxious. "Here comes the Shunammite," he said to Gehazi. "Run to meet her, and ask Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?"

"All well," she answered, for her message was not to Gehazi, and she could not trust her voice to speak; but pressing on up-hillwards she flung herself before Elisha and grasped his feet. Displeased at the familiarity which dared thus to clasp the feet of his master, Gehazi ran up to thrust her away by force, but Elisha interfered. "Let her alone," he cried; "she is in deep affliction, and Jehovah has not revealed to me the cause." Then her long pent-up emotion burst forth. "Did I desire a son of my lord?" she cried. "Did I not say do not deceive me?"

It was enough—though she seemed unable to bring out the dreadful words that her boy was dead. Catching her meaning, Elisha said to Gehazi, "Gird up thy loins, take my staff, and without so much as stopping to salute any one, or to return a salutation,† lay my staff on the dead child's face." But the broken-hearted mother refused to leave Elisha. She imagined that the servant, the staff, might be severed from Elisha; but she knew that wherever the prophet was, there was power. So Elisha arose and followed her, and on the way Gehazi met them with the news that the child lay still and dead, with the fruitless staff upon his face.

Then Elisha in deep anguish went up to the chamber and shut the door, and saw the boy's body lying pale upon his bed. After earnest prayer he outstretched himself over the little corpse, as Elijah had done at Zarephath. Soon it began to grow warm with returning life, and Elisha, after pacing up and down the room, once more stretched himself over him. Then the child opened his eyes and sneezed seven times, and Elisha called to Gehazi to summon the mother.

"Take up thy son," he said. She prostrated herself at his feet in speechless gratitude, and took up her recovered child, and went.

IV. We next find Elisha at Gilgal, in the time of the famine of which we read his prediction in a later chapter.‡ The sons of the prophets were seated round him, listening to his instructions; the hour came for their simple meal, and he or-

dered the great pot to be put on the fire for the vegetable soup, on which, with bread, they chiefly lived. One of them went out for herbs, and carelessly brought his outer garment (the *abeyah*)* full of wild poisonous colicoquints,† which, by ignorance or inadvertence, were shred into the pottage. But when it was cooked and poured out they perceived the poisonous taste, and cried out, "O Man of God, death in the pot!"

"Bring meal," he said, for he seems always to have been a man of the fewest words.

They cast in some meal, and were all able to eat of the now harmless pottage. It has been noticed that in this, as in other incidents of the story, there is no invocation of the name of Jehovah.

V. Not far from Gilgal was the little village of Baalshalisha,‡ at which lived a farmer who wished to bring an offering of firstfruits and *karmel* (bruised grain) in his wallet to Elisha as a Man of God.§ It was a poor gift enough—only twenty of the coarse barley loaves which were eaten by the common people, and a sack ¶ full of fresh ears of corn.¶ Elisha told his servant**—perhaps Gehazi—to set them before the people present. "What?" he asked, "this trifle of food before a hundred men!" But Elisha told him in the Lord's name that it should more than suffice; and so it did.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF NAAMAN.

2 KINGS v. 1-27.

MATT. viii. 3: Θέλω, καθαρίσθητι

AFTER these shorter anecdotes we have the longer episode of Naaman.††

A part of the misery inflicted by the Syrians on Israel was caused by the forays in which their light-armed bands, very much like the borderers on the marches of Wales or Scotland, descended upon the country and carried off plunder and captives before they could be pursued.

In one of these raids they had seized a little Israelitish girl and sold her to be a slave. She had been purchased for the household of Naaman, the captain of the Syrian host, who had helped his king and nation to win important victories either against Israel or against Assyria. Ancient Jewish tradition identified him with the man who had "drawn his bow at a venture" and slain King Ahab. But all Naaman's valour and rank and fame, and the honour felt for him by his king, were valueless to him, for he was

* Not "lap," as in A. V. (Heb., *begeg*); LXX. συνέλεξε πλῆρες τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ; Vulg., *implevit vestem suam* (both correctly).

† Heb., *paquoth*; LXX., *τολίμηνη ἀγρίαν*; Vulg., *colocynthis agri*. Hence the name *cucumis prophetarum*.

‡ Lord of the Chain and "Three lands." Three wadies meet at this spot, a little west of Bethel.

§ 2 Kings iv. 42. Karmel, Lev. ii. 14. Perhaps a sort of frumenty.

¶ The word for "wallet" (*tsiglon*; Vulg., *pera*) occurs here only. Peshito, "garment." The Vatican LXX. omits it. The Greek version has *ἐν κυρῶνι αὐτοῦ*.

¶ See Lev. ii. 14, xxiii. 14.

** 2 Kings iv. 43. The word for "his servant" (*m'chartho*) is used also of Joshua. It does not mean a mere ordinary attendant. LXX., *λεσιπρόβος*; Vulg., *minister*.

†† It is curiously omitted by Josephus, though he mentions him (*Ἀμανός*) as the slayer of Ahab ("Ant." VIII. xv. 5). The name is an old Hebrew name (Num. xxvi. 40).

* 2 Kings iv. 23. Hebrew "Peace"; A. V., "It shall be well."

† Salutations occupy some time in the formally courteous East. Comp. Luke x. 4.

‡ 2 Kings viii, 1.

suffering from the horrible affliction of leprosy. Lepers do not seem to have been segregated in other countries so strictly as they were in Israel, or at any rate Naaman's leprosy was not of so severe a form as to incapacitate him from his public functions.

But it was evident that he was a man who had won the affection of all who knew him; and the little slave girl who waited on his wife breathed to her a passionate wish that Naaman could visit the Man of God in Samaria, for he would recover him from his leprosy. The saying was repeated, and one of Naaman's friends mentioned it to the King of Syria. Benhadad was so much struck by it that he instantly determined to send a letter, with a truly royal gift to the king of Israel, who could, he supposed, as a matter of course, command the services of the prophet. The letter came to Jehoram with a stupendous present of ingots of silver to the value of ten talents, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.* After the ordinary salutations, and a mention of the gifts, the letter continued "And now, when this letter is come to thee, behold I have sent Naaman my servant, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy."

Jehoram lived in perpetual terror of his powerful and encroaching neighbour. Nothing was said in the letter about the Man of God; and the king rent his clothes, exclaiming that he was not God to kill and to make alive, and that this must be a base pretext for a quarrel. It never so much as occurred to him, as it certainly would have done to Jehoshaphat, that the prophet, who was so widely known and honoured, and whose mission had been so clearly attested in the invasion of Moab, might at least help him to face this problem. Otherwise the difficulty might indeed seem insuperable, for leprosy was universally regarded as an incurable disease.

But Elisha was not afraid: he boldly told Jehoram to send the Syrian captain to him. Naaman, with his horses and his chariots, in all the splendour of a royal ambassador, drove up to the humble house of the prophet. Being so great a man, he expected a deferential reception, and looked for the performance of his cure in some striking and dramatic manner. "The prophet," so he said to himself, "will come out, and solemnly invoke the name of his God Jehovah, and wave his hand over the leprous limbs, and so work the miracle." †

But the servant of the King of kings was not exultantly impressed, as false prophets so often are, by earthly greatness. Elisha did not even pay him the compliment of coming out of the house to meet him. He wished to efface himself completely, and to fix the leper's thoughts on the one truth that if healing was granted to him, it was due to the gift of God, not to the thaumaturgy or arts of man. He simply sent out his servant to the Syrian commander-in-chief with the brief message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and be thou clean."

Naaman, accustomed to the extreme deference of many dependants, was not only offended, but enraged, by what he regarded as the scant courtesy and procrastinated boon of the prophet. Why was he not received as a man of the highest distinction? What necessity could there be for

sending him all the way to the Jordan? And why was he bidden to wash in that wretched, useless, tortuous stream, rather than in the pure and flowing waters of his own native Abanah and Pharpar? * How was he to tell that this "Man of God" did not design to mock him by sending him on a fool's errand, so that he would come back as a laughing-stock both to the Israelites and to his own people? Perhaps he had not felt any great faith in the prophet, to begin with; but whatever he once felt had now vanished. He turned and went away in a rage.

But in this crisis the affection of his friends and servants stood him in good stead. Addressing him, in their love and pity, by the unusual term of honour "my father," they urged upon him that, as he certainly would not have refused some great test, there was no reason why he should refuse this simple and humble one.

He was won over by their reasonings, and descending the hot steep valley of the Jordan, bathed himself in the river seven times. God healed him, and, as Elisha had promised, "his flesh," corroded by leprosy, "came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

This healing of Naaman is alluded to by our Lord to illustrate the truth that the love of God extended farther than the limits of the chosen race; that His Fatherhood is co-extensive with the whole family of man.

It is difficult to conceive the transport of a man cured of this most loathsome and humiliating of all earthly afflictions. Naaman, who seems to have possessed "a mind naturally Christian," was filled with gratitude. Unlike the thankless Jewish lepers whom Christ cured as He left Engannim, this alien returned to give glory to God. Once more the whole imposing cavalcade rode through the streets of Samaria, and stopped at Elisha's door. This time Naaman was admitted into his presence. He saw, and no doubt Elisha had strongly impressed on him the truth, that his healing was the work not of man but of God; and as he had found no help in the deities of Syria, he confessed that the God of Israel was the only true God among those of the nations. In token of his thankfulness he presses Elisha, as God's instrument in the unspeakable mercy which has been granted to him, to accept "a blessing" (*i. e.*, a present) from him—"from thy servant," as he humbly styled himself.

Elisha was no greedy Balaam. It was essential that Naaman and the Syrians should not look on him as on some vulgar sorcerer who wrought wonders for "the rewards of divination." His wants were so simple that he stood above temptation. His desires and treasures were not on earth. To put an end to all impurity, he appealed to Jehovah with his usual solemn formula—"As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, I will receive no present." †

Still more deeply impressed by the prophet's incorruptible superiority to so much as a suspicion of low motives, Naaman asked that he might receive two mules' burden of earth wherewith to build an altar to the God of Israel of His own sacred soil. ‡ The very soil ruled by such a

* Now the *Burāda* ("cold") and the *Nahr-el-Awāj*.

† Compare the answer of Abraham to the King of Sodom (Gen. xiv. 23.)

‡ The feeling which influenced Naaman is the same which led the Jews to build Nahardea in Persia of stones from Jerusalem. Altars were to be of earth (Exod. xx. 24), but no altar is mentioned in 2 Kings v. 17, and the LXX. does not even specify *earth* (*γῆμος ζεύγους ἡμιόνων*).

* The word *I'boosh* means a gala dress. Comp. v. 5; Gen. xlv. 22. χιτῶνες ἐπιμοιβοί (Hom., "Od.," xiv. 514). Comp. viii. 240.

† Elisha would not be likely to *touch* the place.

God must, he thought, be holier than other soil; and he wished to take it back to Syria, just as the people of Pisa rejoiced to fill their Campo Santo with mould from the Holy Land, and just as mothers like to baptise their children in water brought home from the Jordan. Henceforth, said Naaman, I will offer burnt-offering and sacrifice to no God but unto Jehovah. Yet there was one difficulty in the way. When the King of Syria went to worship in the temple of his god Rimmon it was the duty of Naaman to accompany him.* The king leaned on his hand, and when he bowed before the idol it was Naaman's duty to bow also. He begged that for this concession God would pardon him.

Elisha's answer was perhaps different from what Elijah might have given. He practically allowed Naaman to give this sign of outward compliance with idolatry, by saying to him, "Go in peace." It is from this circumstance that the phrase "to bow in the house of Rimmon" has become proverbial to indicate a dangerous and dishonest compromise. But Elisha's permission must not be misunderstood. He did but hand over this semi-heathen convert to the grace of God. It must be remembered that he lived in days long preceding the conviction that proselytism is a part of true religion; in days when the thought of missions to heathen lands was utterly unknown. The position of Naaman was wholly different from that of any Israelite. He was only the convert, or the half-convert of a day, and though he acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah as alone worthy of his worship, he probably shared in the belief—common even in Israel—that there were other gods, local gods, gods of the nations, to whom Jehovah might have divided the limits of their power.† To demand of one who, like Naaman, had been an idolater all his days, the sudden abandonment of every custom and tradition of his life, would have been to demand from him an unreasonable, and, in his circumstances, useless and all but impossible self-sacrifice. The best way was to let him feel and see for himself the futility of Rimmon-worship. If he were not frightened back from his sudden faith in Jehovah, the scruple of conscience which he already felt in making his request might naturally grow within him and lead him to all that was best and highest. The temporary condonation of an imperfection might be a wise step towards the ultimate realisation of a truth. We cannot at all blame Elisha, if, with such knowledge as he then possessed, he took a mercifully tolerant view of the exigencies of Naaman's position. The bowing in the house of Rimmon under such conditions probably seemed to him no more than an act of outward respect to the king and to the national religion in a case where no evil results could follow from Naaman's example.‡

* This is the only place in Scripture where Rimmon is mentioned, though we have the name Tab-Rimmon ("Rimmon is good"), 1 Kings xv. 18, and Hadad-Rimmon (Zech. xii. 11). He was the god of the thunder. The word means "pomegranate," and some have fancied that this was one of his symbols. But the resemblance may be accidental, and the name was properly *Ramman*.

† See Deut. xxxii. 8, where the LXX. has *κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων*.

‡ The moral difficulty must have been early felt, for the Alexandrian LXX. reads *καὶ προσκυνήσω ἅμα αὐτῷ ἐγὼ Κυρίῳ τῷ Θεῷ μου*. But he would still be bowing in the house of Rimmon, though he might in his heart worship God. "Elisha, like Elijah" (says Dean Stanley), "made no effort to set right what had gone so wrong. Their mission was to make the best of what they found; not to bring

But the general principle that *we* must *not* bow in the house of Rimmon remains unchanged. The light and knowledge vouchsafed to us far transcend those which existed in times when men had not seen the days of the Son of Man. The only rule which sincere Christians can follow is to have no truce with Canaan, no halting between two opinions, no tampering, no compliance, no connivance, no complicity with evil,—even no tolerance of evil as far as their own conduct is concerned. No good man, in the light of the Gospel dispensation, could condone himself in seeming to sanction—still less in doing—anything which in his opinion ought not to be done, or in saying anything which implied his own acquiescence in things which he knows to be evil. "Sir," said a parishioner to one of the non-juring clergy: "there is many a man who has made a great gash in his conscience; cannot you make a little nick in yours?" No! a *little* nick is, in one sense, as fatal as a great gash. It is an abandonment of the *principle*; it is a violation of the Law. The wrong of it consists in this—that all evil begins, not in the commission of great crimes, but in the slight divergence from right rules. The angle made by two lines may be infinitesimally small, but produce the lines and it may require infinitude to span the separation between the lines which inclose so tiny an angle. The wise man gave the only true rule about wrong-doing, when he said, "Enter not into the path of the wicked and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away."* And the reason for his rule is that the beginning of sin—like the beginning of strife—"is as when one letteth out water."†

The proper answer to all abuses of any supposed concession to the lawfulness of bowing in the house of Rimmon—if that be interpreted to mean the doing of anything which our consciences cannot wholly approve—is *Obsta principiis*—avoid the beginnings of evil.

"We are not worst at once; the course of evil Begins so slowly, and from such slight source, An infant's hand might stem the breach with clay; But let the stream grow wider, and philosophy, Age, and religion too, may strive in vain To stem the headstrong current."

The mean cupidity of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, gives a deplorable sequel to the story of the prophet's magnanimity. This man's wretched greed did its utmost to nullify the good influence of his master's example. There may be more wicked acts recorded in Scripture than that of Gehazi, but there is scarcely one which shows so paltry a disposition.

He had heard the conversation between his master and the Syrian marshal, and his cunning heart despised as a futile sentimentality the magnanimity which had refused an eagerly proffered reward. Naaman was rich; he had received a priceless boon; it would be rather a pleasure to him than otherwise to return for it some acknowledgment which he would not miss. Had he not even seemed a little hurt by Elisha's

back a rule of religion which had passed away, but to dwell on the Moral Law which could be fulfilled everywhere, not on the Ceremonial Law which circumstances seemed to have put out of their reach: 'not sending the Shunammite to Jerusalem' (says Cardinal Newman), 'not eager for a proselyte in Naaman, yet making the heathen fear the Name of God, and proving to them that there was a prophet in Israel' (Stanley, "Lectures," ii. 377; Newman, "Sermons," viii. 415).

* Prov. iv. 14, 15.

† Prov. xvii. 14.

refusal to receive it? What possible harm could there be in taking what he was anxious to give? And how useful those magnificent presents would be, and to what excellent uses could they be put! He could not approve of the fantastic and unpractical scrupulosity which had led Elisha to refuse the "blessing" which he had so richly earned. Such attitudes of unworldliness seemed entirely foolish to Gehazi.

So pleaded the Judas-spirit within the man. By such specious delusions he inflamed his own covetousness, and fostered the evil temptation which had taken sudden and powerful hold upon his heart, until it took shape in a wicked resolve.

The mischief of Elisha's quixotic refusal was done, but it could be speedily undone, and no one would be the worse. The evil spirit was whispering to Gehazi:

"Be mine and Sin's for one short hour; and then
Be all thy life the happiest man of men."

"Behold," he said, with some contempt both for Elisha and for Naaman, "my master hath let off this Naaman the Syrian; but as the Lord liveth I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."

"As the Lord liveth!" It had been a favourable appeal of Elijah and Elisha, and the use of it by Gehazi shows how utterly meaningless and how very dangerous such solemn words become when they are degraded into formulæ.* It is thus that the habit of swearing begins. The light use of holy words very soon leads to their utter degradation. How keen is the satire in Cowper's little story:—

"A Persian, humble servant of the sun,
Who, though devout, yet bigotry had none,
Hearing a lawyer, grave in his address,
With adjurations every word impress,—
Supposed the man a bishop, or, at least,
God's Name so often on his lips—a priest.
Bowed at the close with all his gracious airs,
And begged an interest in his frequent prayers!"

Had Gehazi felt their true meaning—had he realised that on Elisha's lips they meant something infinitely more real than on his own, he would not have forgotten that in Elisha's answer to Naaman they had all the validity of an oath, and that he was inflicting on his master a shameful wrong, when he led Naaman to believe that, after so sacred an adjuration, the prophet had frivolously changed his mind.

Gehazi had not very far to run,† for in a country full of hills, and of which the roads are rough, horses and chariots advance but slowly. Naaman, chancing to glance backwards, saw the prophet's attendant running after him. Anticipating that he must be the bearer of some message from Elisha, he not only halted the cavalcade, but sprang down from his chariot,‡ and went to meet him with the anxious question, "Is all well?"

"Well," answered Gehazi; and then had ready his cunning lie. "Two youths," he said, "of the prophetic schools had just unexpectedly come to his master from the hill country of Ephraim; and though he would accept nothing for himself, Elisha would be glad if Naaman would

spare him two changes of garments, and one talent of silver for these poor members of a sacred calling."*

Naaman must have been a little more or a little less than human if he did not feel a touch of disappointment on hearing this message. The gift was nothing to him. It was a delight to him to give it, if only to lighten a little the burden of gratitude which he felt towards his benefactor. But if he had felt elevated by the magnanimous example of Elisha's disinterestedness, he must have thought that this hasty request pointed to a little regret on the prophet's part for his noble self-denial. After all, then, even prophets were but men, and gold after all was gold! The change of mind about the gift brought Elisha a little nearer the ordinary level of humanity, and, so far, it acted as a sort of disenchantment from the high ideal exhibited by his former refusal. And so Naaman said, with alacrity, "Be content: take two talents."

The fact that Gehazi's conduct thus inevitably compromised his master, and undid the effects of his example, is part of the measure of the man's apostasy. It showed how false and hypocritical was his position, how unworthy he was to be the ministering servant of a prophet. Elisha was evidently deceived in the man altogether. The heinousness of his guilt lies in the words *Corruptio optimi pessima*. When religion is used for a cloak of covetousness, of usurping ambition, of secret immorality, it becomes deadlier than infidelity. Men raze the sanctuary, and build their idol temples on the hallowed ground. They cover their base encroachments and impure designs with the "cloke of profession, doubly lined with the fox-fur of hypocrisy," and hide the leprosy which is breaking out upon their foreheads with the golden *petalon* on which is inscribed the title of "holiness to the Lord."

At first Gehazi did not like to take so large a sum as two talents; but the crime was already committed, and there was not much more harm done in taking two talents than in taking one. Naaman urged him, and it is very improbable that, unless the chances of detection weighed with him, he needed much urging. So the Syrian weighed out silver ingots to the amount of two talents, and putting them in two satchels laid them on two of his servants and told them to carry the money before Gehazi to Elisha's house. But Gehazi had to keep a look-out lest his nefarious dealings should be observed, and when they came to Ophel—the word means the foot of the hill of Samaria, or some part of the fortifications†—he took the bags from the two Syrians, dismissed them, and carried the money to some place where he could conceal it in the house. Then, as though nothing had happened, with his usual smooth face of sanctimonious integrity, the pious Jesuit went and stood before his master.

He had not been unnoticed! His heart must have sunk within him when there smote upon his ear Elisha's question,—

"Whence comest thou, Gehazi?"

But one lie is as easy as another, and Gehazi was doubtless an adept at lying.

* On Gehazi's lips it meant no more than the incessant *Wallah*, "by God," of Mohammedans.

† 2 Kings v. 19. Heb., *kib'rath aretz*. "a little way"—literally, "a space of country." (The Vatican LXX. follows another reading, *eis Δεβραθά της γης*; Vulg., *electo terra tempore* [?].)

‡ LXX., *κατενήθησεν*.

* A talent of silver was worth about £400—an enormous sum for two half-naked youths.

† 2 Kings v. 24. The LXX. (*εις τὸ σκοτεινὸν*) seems to have read *ἔσθη* (*ophel*); "darkness," a treasury or secret place, for *ἔσθη* and so the Vulgate *jam vesperi*.

"Thy servant went no whither," he replied, with an air of innocent surprise.

"Went not my beloved one?"* said Elisha—and he must have said it with a groan, as he thought how utterly unworthy the youth, whom he thus called "my loving heart" or "my dear friend,"—"when the man turned from his chariot to meet thee?" It may be that from the hill of Samaria Elisha had seen it all, or that he had been told by one who had seen it. If not, he had been rightly led to read the secret of his servant's guilt. "Is it a time," he asked, "to act thus?" Did not my example show thee that there was a high object in refusing this Syrian's gifts, and in leading him to feel that the servants of Jehovah do His bidding with no afterthought of sordid considerations? Are there not enough troubles about us actual and impending to show that this is no time for the accumulation of earthly treasures? Is it a time to receive money—and all that money will procure? to receive garments, and olive-yards and vineyards, and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants? Has a prophet no higher aim than the accumulation of earthly goods, and are his needs such as earthly goods can supply? And hast thou, the daily friend and attendant of a prophet, learnt so little from his precepts and his example?

Then followed the tremendous penalty for so grievous a transgression—a transgression made up of meanness, irreverence, greed, cheating, treachery, and lies.

"The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever!" "Oh heavy talents of Gehazi!" exclaims Bishop Hall: "Oh the horror of the one unchangeable suit! How much better had been a light purse and a homely coat, with a sound body and a clean soul!"

"And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."†

It is the characteristic of the leprous taint in the system to be thus suddenly developed, and apparently in crises of sudden and overpowering emotion it might affect the whole blood. And one of the many morals which lie in Gehazi's story is again that moral to which the world's whole experience sets its seal—that though the guilty soul may sell itself for a desired price, the sum-total of that price is naught. It is Achan's ingots buried under the sod in which stood his tent. It is Naboth's vineyard made abhorrent to Ahab on the day he entered it. It is the thirty pieces of silver which Judas dashed with a shriek upon the Temple floor. It is Gehazi's leprosy for which no silver talents or changes of raiment could atone.

The story of Gehazi—of the son of the prophets who would naturally have succeeded Elisha as Elisha had succeeded Elijah—must have had a tremendous significance to warn the members of the prophetic schools from the peril of covetousness. That peril, as all history proves to us, is one from which popes and priests, monks, and even nominally ascetic and nominally pauper communities, have never been exempt;—to which, it may even be said that they have been peculiarly liable. Mercenariness and falsity, displayed under the pretence of religion, were never more overwhelmingly rebuked. Yet,

* Kings v. 26. The verse is so interpreted by some critics, especially Ewald, followed by Stanley. Margin, R. V.: "Mine heart went not from me, when," etc.
† Exod. iv. 6; Num. xii. 10.

as the Rabbis said, it would have been better if Elisha, in repelling with the left hand, had also drawn with the right.*

The fine story of Elisha and Naaman, and the fall and punishment of Gehazi, is followed by one of the anecdotes of the prophet's life which appears to our unsophisticated, perhaps to our imperfectly enlightened judgment, to rise but little above the ecclesiastical portents related in mediæval hagiologies.

At some unnamed place—perhaps Jericho—the house of the Sons of the Prophets had become too small for their numbers and requirements, and they asked Elisha's leave to go down to the Jordan and cut beams to make a new residence. Elisha gave them leave, and at their request consented to go with them. While they were hewing, the axe-head of one of them fell into the water, and he cried out, "Alas! master, it was borrowed!" Elisha ascertained where it had fallen. He then cut down a stick,‡ and cast it on the spot, and the iron swam and the man recovered it.

The story is perhaps an imaginative reproduction of some unwonted incident. At any rate, we have no sufficient evidence to prove that it may not be so. It is wholly unlike the economy invariably shown in the Scripture narratives which tell us of the exercise of supernatural power. All the eternal laws of nature are here superseded at a word, as though it were an everyday matter, without even any recorded invocation of Jehovah, to restore an axe-head, which could obviously have been recovered or resupplied in some much less stupendous way than by making iron swim on the surface of a swift-flowing river. It is easy to invent conventional and *a priori* apologies to show that religion demands the unquestioning acceptance of this prodigy, and that a man must be shockingly wicked who does not feel certain that it happened exactly in the literal sense; but whether the doubt or the defence be morally worthier, is a thing which God alone can judge.‡

CHAPTER VII.

ELISHA AND THE SYRIANS.

2 KINGS vi. 1-23.

"Now there was found in the city a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city."—ECCLES. ix. 15.

ELISHA, unlike his master Elijah, was, during a great part of his long career, intimately mixed up with the political and military fortunes of his country. The king of Israel who occurs in the following narratives is left nameless—always the sign of later and more vague tradition; but he has usually been identified with Jehoram ben-Ahab, and, though not without some misgivings, we shall assume that the identification is correct.

* The later Rabbis thought that Elisha was too severe with Gehazi, and was punished with sickness because "he repelled him with both his hands" ("Bava-Metzia," f. 87, r, and "Yalkut Jeremiah.")

† The Hebrew word for "cut off" (*qatsab*) is very rare. LXX., ἀπέκτισε ξύλον; Vulg., præcidit lignum.

‡ It must be further borne in mind that "the iron did swim" (A. V.) is less accurate than "made the iron to swim" (R. V.). The LXX. has ἐπεβάλαε, "brought to the surface." Von Gerlach says, "He thrust the stick into the water, and raised the iron to the surface."

His dealings with Elisha never seem to have been very cordial, though on one occasion he calls him "my father." The relations between them at times became strained and even stormy.

His reign was rendered miserable by the incessant infestation of Syrian marauders. In these difficulties he was greatly helped by Elisha. The prophet repeatedly frustrated the designs of the Syrian king by revealing to Jeroboam the places of Benhadad's ambuscades, so that Jeroboam could change the destination of his hunting parties or other movements, and escape the plots laid to seize his person. Benhadad, finding himself thus frustrated, and suspecting that it was due to treachery, called his servants together in grief and indignation, and asked who was the traitor among them. His officers assured him that they were all faithful, but that the secrets whispered in his bed-chamber were revealed to Jehoram by Elisha the prophet in Israel, whose fame had spread into Syria, perhaps because of the cure of Naaman. The king, unable to take any step while his counsels were thus published to his enemies, thought—not very consistently—that he could surprise and seize Elisha himself, and sent to find out where he was. At that time he was living in Dothan, about twelve miles northeast of Samaria,* and Benhadad sent a contingent with horses and chariots by night to surround the city, and prevent any escape from its gates. That he could thus besiege a town so near the capital shows the helplessness to which Israel had been now reduced.

When Elisha's servitor rose in the morning he was terrified to see the Syrians encamped round the city, and cried to Elisha, "Alas! my master, what shall we do?"

"Fear not," said the prophet: "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." He prayed God to grant the youth the same open eyes, the same spiritual vision which he himself enjoyed; and the youth saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

This incident has been full of comfort to millions, as a beautiful illustration of the truth that—

"The hosts of God encamp around
The dwellings of the just;
Deliverance He affords to all
Who on His promise trust.

"Oh, make but trial of His love,
Experience will decide,
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in His truth confide."

The youth's affectionate alarm had not been shared by his master. He knew that to every true servant of God the promise will be fulfilled, "He shall defend thee under His wings; thou shalt be safe under His feathers; His righteousness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler." †

Were our eyes similarly opened, we too should see the reality of the Divine protection and providence, whether under the visible form of angelic ministrants or not. Scripture in general, and the Psalms in particular, are full of the serenity inspired by this conviction. The story of Elisha is a picture-commentary on the Psalmist's words: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round them that fear Him, and delivereth them." ‡ "He shall give His angels charge

over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."* "And I will encamp about Mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with Mine eyes." † "The angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." ‡

But what is the exact meaning of all these lovely promises? They do not mean that God's children and saints will always be shielded from anguish or defeat, from the triumph of their enemies, or even from apparently hopeless and final failure, or miserable death. The lesson is not that their persons shall be inviolable, or that the enemies who advance against them to eat up their flesh shall always stumble and fall. The experiences of tens of thousands of troubled lives and martyred ends instantly prove the futility of any such reading of these assurances. The saints of God, the prophets of God, have died in exile and in prison, have been tortured on the rack and broken on the wheel, and burnt to ashes at innumerable stakes; they have been destitute, afflicted, tormented, in their lives—stoned, beheaded, sawn asunder, in every form of hideous death; they have rotted in miry dungeons, have starved on desolate shores, have sighed out their souls into the agonising flame. The Cross of Christ stands as the emblem and the explanation of their lives, which fools count to be madness, and their end without honour. On earth they have, far more often than not, been crushed by the hatred and been delivered over to the will of their enemies. Where, then, have been those horses and chariots of fire?

They have been there no less than around Elisha at Dothan. The eyes spiritually opened have seen them, even when the sword flashed, or the flames wrapped them in indescribable torment. The sense of God's protection has least deserted His saints when to the world's eyes they seemed to have been most utterly abandoned. There has been a joy in prisons and at stakes, far exceeding the joy of harvest. "Pray for me," said a poor boy of fifteen, who was being burned at Smithfield in the fierce days of Mary Tudor. "I would as soon pray for a dog as for a heretic like thee," answered one of the spectators. "Then, Son of God, shine Thou upon me!" cried the boy-martyr; and instantly, upon a dull and cloudy day, the sun shone out, and bathed his young face in glory; whereat, says the martyrologist, men greatly marvelled. But is there one death-bed of a saint on which that glory has not shone?

The presence of those horses and chariots of fire, unseen by the carnal eye—the promises which, if they be taken literally, all experience seems to frustrate—mean two things, which they who are the heirs of such promises, and who would without them be of all men most miserable, have clearly understood.

They mean, first, that as long as a child of God is on the path of duty, and until that duty has been fulfilled, he is inviolable and invulnerable. He shall tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shall he trample under his feet. He shall take up the serpent in his hands; and if he drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt him. He shall not be

* Gen. xxxvii. 17, "Dothain," "two wells" (?).

† Psalm xci. 4.

‡ Psalm xxxiv. 7.

* Psalm xci. 11.

† Isa. lxiii. 9.

† Zech. ix. 8.

afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flieth by day; of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor of the demon that destroyeth in the noonday. A thousand shall fall at his right hand, and ten thousand beside him; but it shall not come nigh him. The histories and the legends of numberless marvellous deliverances all confirm the truth that, when a man fears the Lord, He will keep him in all his ways, and give His angels charge over him, lest at any time he dash his foot against a stone. God will not permit any mortal force, or any combination of forces, to hinder the accomplishment of the task entrusted to His servant. It is the sense of this truth which, under circumstances however menacing, should enable us to

"bate no jot
Of heart or hope, but still bear up, and steer
Uphillward."

It is this conviction which has nerved men to face insuperable difficulties, and achieve impossible and unhopèd-for ends. It works in the spirit of the cry, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel be thou changed into a plain!" It inspires the faith as a grain of mustard seed which is able to say to this mountain, "Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea,"—and it shall obey. It stands unmoved upon the pinnacle of the Temple whereon it has been placed, while the enemy and the tempter, smitten by amazement, falls. In the hour of difficulty it can cry,—

"Rescue me, O Lord, in this mine evil hour,
As of old so many by Thy mighty power,—
Enoch and Elias from the common doom;
Noe from the waters in a saving home;
Abraham from the abounding guilt of heathenesse;
Job from all his multiform and fell distress;
Isaac when his father's knife was raised to slay;
Lot from burning Sodom on the judgment day;
Moses from the land of bondage and despair;
Daniel from the hungry lions in their lair;
And the children three amid the furnace flame;
Chaste Susanna from the slander and the shame;
David from Golia, and the wrath of Saul;
And the two Apostles from their prison-thrall."

The strangeness, the unexpectedness, the apparently inadequate source of the deliverance, have deepened the trust that it has not been due to accident. Once, when Felix of Nola was flying from his enemies, he took refuge in a cave, and he had scarcely entered it before a spider began to spin its web over the fissure. The pursuer, passing by, saw the spider's web, and did not look into the cave; and the saint, as he came out into safety, remarked: "*Ubi Deus est, ibi aranea murus, ubi non est ibi murus aranea*" ("Where God is, a spider's web is as a wall; where He is not, a wall is but as a spider's web").

This is one lesson conveyed in the words of Christ when the Pharisees told Him that Herod desired to kill Him. He knew that Herod could not kill Him till He had done His Father's will and finished His work. "Go ye," He said "and tell this fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following."

But had all this been otherwise—had Felix been seized by his pursuers and perished, as has been the common lot of God's prophets and heroes—he would not therefore have felt himself mocked by these exceeding great and precious promises. The chariots and horses of

fire are still there, and are there to work a deliverance yet greater and more eternal. Their office is not to deliver the perishing body, but to carry into God's glory the immortal soul. This is indicated in the death-scene of Elijah. This was the vision of the dying Stephen. This was what Christian legend meant when it embellished with beautiful incidents such scenes as the death of Polycarp. This was what led Bunyan to write, when he describes the death of Christian, that "all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side." When poor Captain Allan Gardiner lay starving to death in that Antarctic isle with his wretched companions, he yet painted on the entrance of the cave which had sheltered them, and near to which his remains were found, a hand pointing downward at the words, "Though He slay me, yet will I put my trust in Him."

There was a touch of almost joyful humour in the way in which Elisha proceeded to use, in the present emergency, the power of Divine deliverance. He seems to have gone out of the town and down the hill to the Syrian captains,* and prayed God to send them illusion (*ἀβλεψία*), so that they might be misled.†. Then he boldly said to them, "You are being deceived: you have come the wrong way, and to the wrong city. I will take you to the man whom ye seek." The incident reminds us of the story of Athanasius, who, when he was being pursued on the Nile, took the opportunity of a bend of the river boldly to turn back his boat towards Alexandria. "Do you know where Athanasius is?" shouted the pursuers. "He is not far off!" answered the disguised Archbishop; and the emissaries of Constantius went on in the opposite direction from that in which he made his escape.

Elisha led the Syrians in their delusion straight into the city of Samaria, where they suddenly found themselves at the mercy of the king and his troops. Delighted at so great a chance of vengeance, Jehoram eagerly exclaimed, "My father, shall I smite, shall I smite?"

Certainly the request cannot be regarded as unnatural, when we remember that in the Book of Deuteronomy, which did not come to light till after this period, we read the rule that, when the Israelites had taken a besieged city, "thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword";‡ and that when Israel defeated the Midianites§ they slew all the males, and Moses was wroth with the officers of the host because they had not also slain all the women. He then (as we are told) ordered them to slay all except the virgins, and also—horrible to relate—"every male among the little ones." The spirit of Elisha on this occasion was larger and more merciful. It almost rose to the spirit of Him who said, "It was said to them of old time. Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies; forgive them that hate you; do good unto them that despitefully use you and persecute you." He asked Jehoram reproachfully whether he would even have smitten those whom he had taken captive with sword

* Adopting the reading of the Syriac version: "And when they [Elisha and his servant] came down to them [the Syrians]." The ordinary reading is "to him," which makes the narrative less clear.

† 2 Kings vi. 19. סַנְרִים, ἀσπασία, only found in Gen.

xix. 11.

‡ Deut. xx. 13.

§ Num. xxxi. 7.

and bow.* He not only bade the king to spare them, but to set food before them, and send them home. Jehoram did so at great expense, and the narrative ends by telling us that the example of such merciful generosity produced so favourable an impression that "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

It is difficult, however, to see where this statement can be chronologically fitted in. The very next chapter—so loosely is the compilation put together, so completely is the sequence of events here neglected—begins with telling us that Benhadad with all his host went up and besieged Samaria. Any peace or respite gained by Elisha's compassionate magnanimity must, in any case, have been exceedingly short-lived. Josephus tries to get over the difficulty by drawing a sufficiently futile distinction between marauding bands and a direct invasion,† and he says that King Benhadad gave up his forays through fear of Elisha. But, in the first place, the encompassing of Dothan had been carried out by "a great host with horses and chariots," which is hardly consistent with the notion of a foray, though it creates new difficulties as to the numbers whom Elisha led to Samaria; secondly, the substitution of a direct invasion for predatory incursions would have been no gain to Israel, but a more deadly peril; and, thirdly, if it was fear of Elisha which stopped the king's raids, it is strange that it had no effect in preventing his invasions. We have, however, no data for any final solution of these problems, and it is useless to meet them with a network of idle conjectures. Such difficulties naturally occur in narratives so vague and unchronological as those presented to us in the documents from the story of Elisha which the compiler wove into his history of Israel and Judah.‡

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FAMINE AND THE SIEGE.

2 KINGS vi. 24-vii. 20.

"Tis truly no good plan when princes play
The vulture among carrion; but when
They play the carrion among vultures—that
Is ten times worse."

—LESSING, "*Nathan the Wise*," Act I., Sc. 3.

If the Benhadad, King of Syria, who reduced Samaria to the horrible straits recorded in this chapter (2 Kings vi.), was the same Benhadad whom Ahab had treated with such impolitic confidence, his hatred against Israel must indeed have burned hotly. Besides the affair at Dothan, he had already been twice routed with enormous slaughter, and against those disasters he could only set the death of Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead. It is obvious from the preceding narrative that he could advance at any time at his will and pleasure into the heart of his enemy's country, and shut him up in his capital almost without resistance. The siege-trains of ancient days were

* Vulg., *Non percussit; neque enim cepisti eos . . . ut percussas.*

† Jos. "Antt.," IX. iv. 4, *Κρῖθα μὲν οὐκ ἐπέε . . . φανερώς δέ.*

‡ Kittel, following Kuenen, surmises that this story has got misplaced; that it does not belong to the days of Jehoram ben-Ahab and Benhadad II., but to the days of Jehoahaz ben-Jehu and Benhadad III., the son of Hazael ("Gesch. der Hebr.," 249). In a very uncertain question I have followed the conclusion arrived at by the majority of scholars, ancient and modern.

very inefficient, and any strong fortress could hold out for years, if only it was well provisioned. Such was not the case with Samaria, and it was reduced to a condition of sore famine. Food so loathsome as an ass's head, which at other times the poorest would have spurned, was now sold for eighty shekels' weight of silver (about £8); and the fourth part of a *restes* or *kab*—which was itself the smallest dry-measure, the sixth part of a *seah*—of the coarse, common pulse, or roasted chick-peas, vulgarly known as "dove's dung," fetched five shekels (about 12s. 6d.).*

While things were at this awful pass, "the King of Israel," as he is vaguely called throughout this story, went his rounds upon the wall to visit the sentries and encourage the soldiers in their defence. As he passed, a woman cried, "Help, my lord, O king!" In Eastern monarchies the king is a judge of the humblest; a suppliant, however mean, may cry to him. Jehoram thought that this was but one of the appeals which sprang from the clamorous mendicinity of famine with which he had grown so painfully familiar. "The Lord curse you!" he exclaimed impatiently,† "How can I help you? Every barn-floor is bare, every wine-press drained." And he passed on.

But the woman continued her wild clamour, and turning round at her importunity, he asked, "What aileth thee?"

He heard in reply a narrative as appalling as ever smote the ear of a king in a besieged city. Among the curses denounced upon apostate Israel in the Pentateuch, we read, "Ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat";‡ or, as it is expressed more fully in the Book of Deuteronomy, "He shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land. . . And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: so that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil towards his brother, and towards the wife of his bosom, and towards the remnant of his children which he shall leave; so that he shall not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat, because he hath nothing left him in the siege. . . The tender and delicate woman, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil towards the husband of her bosom, and towards her son, and towards her daughter, and towards her children: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and the straitness, if thou wilt not observe to do all the words of the law, . . . that thou mayest fear the glorious and fearful name, *The Lord thy God.*" § We find almost the same words in the prophet Jeremiah;|| and in Lamentations we read: "The hands of the pitiful women have

* So *asafætida* is called "devil's dung" in Germany; and the *Herba alcali*, "sparrow's dung" by Arabs. The *Qri*, however, supports the *literal* meaning; and compare 2 Kings xviii. 27; Jos., "B. J.," V. xiii. 7. Analogies for these prices are quoted from classic authors. Plutarch ("Artax.," xxiv.) mentions a siege in which an ass's head could hardly be got for sixty drachmas (£2 10s.), though usually the whole animal only cost £1. Pliny ("H. N.," viii. 57) says that during Hannibal's siege of Casilinum a mouse sold for £6 5s.

† So Clericus. Comp. Jos. ἐπιπάσατο αὐτῆ.

‡ Lev. xxvi. 29.

§ Deut. xxviii. 52-58.

|| Jer. xix. 9.

sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of My people.*

Isaiah asks, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Alas! it has always been so in those awful scenes of famine, whether after shipwreck or in beleaguered cities, when man becomes degraded to an animal, with all an animal's primitive instincts, and when the wild beast appears under the thin veneer of civilisation. So it was at the siege of Jerusalem, and at the siege of Magdeburg, and at the wreck of the *Medusa*, and on many another occasion when the pangs of hunger have corroded away every vestige of the tender affections and of the moral sense.

And this had occurred at Samaria: her women had become cannibals and devoured their own little ones.

"This woman," screamed the suppliant, pointing her lean finger at a wretch like herself—"this woman said unto me, 'Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will afterwards eat my son.' I yielded to her suggestion. We killed my little son, and ate his flesh when we had sodden it. Next day I said to her, 'Now give thy son, that we may eat him'; and she hath hid her son!"

How could the king answer such a horrible appeal? Injustice had been done; but was he to order and to sanction by way of redress fresh cannibalism, and the murder by its mother of another babe? In that foul obliteration of every natural instinct, what could he do, what could any man do? Can there be equity among raging wild beasts, when they roar for their prey and are unfed?

All that the miserable king could do was to rend his clothes in horror and to pass on, and as his starving subjects passed by him on the wall they saw that he wore sackcloth beneath his purple, in sign, if not of repentance, yet of anguish, if not of prayer, yet of uttermost humiliation.†

But if indeed he had, in his misery, donned that sackcloth in order that at least the semblance of self-mortification might move Jehovah to pity, as it had done in the case of his father Ahab, the external sign of his humility had done nothing to change his heart. The gruesome appeal to which he had just been forced to listen only kindled him to a burst of fury.‡ The man who had warned, who had prophesied, who so far during this siege had not raised his finger to help—the man who was believed to be able to wield the powers of heaven, and had wrought no deliverance for his people, but suffered them to sink unaided into these depths of abjectness—should he be permitted to live? If Jehovah would not help, of what use was Elisha? "God do so to me, and more also," exclaimed Jehoram—using his mother's oath to Elijah§—"if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day."

Was this the king who had come to Elisha with such humble entreaty, when three armies were perishing of thirst before the eyes of Moab? Was this the king who had called Elisha "my

* Lam. iv. 10: comp. ii. 20; Ezek. v. 10; Jos., "B. J.," VI. iii. 4.

† 1 Kings xxi. 27; Isa. xx. 2, 3.

‡ Compare the wrath of Pashur the priest in consequence of the denunciation of Jeremiah (Jer. xx. 2).

§ Kings xix. 2.

father," when the prophet had led the deluded host of Syrians into Samaria, and bidden Jehoram to set large provision before them? It was the same king, but now transported with fury and reduced to despair. His threat against God's prophet was in reality a defiance of God, as when our unhappy Plantagenet, Henry II., maddened by the loss of Le Mans, exclaimed that, since God had robbed him of the town he loved, he would pay God out by robbing Him of that which He most loved in him—his soul.

Jehoram's threat was meant in grim earnest, and he sent an executioner to carry it out. Elisha was sitting in his house with the elders of the city, who had come to him for counsel at this hour of supreme need. He knew what was intended for him, and it had also been revealed to him that the king would follow his messenger to cancel his sanguinary threat. "See ye," he said to the elders, "how this son of a murderer"—for again he indicates his contempt and indignation for the son of Ahab and Jezebel—"hath sent to behead me! When he comes, shut the door, and hold it fast against him. His master is following hard at his heels."

The messenger came, and was refused admittance. The king followed him,* and entering the room where the prophet and elders sat, he gave up his wicked design of slaying Elisha with the sword, but he overwhelmed him with reproaches, and in despair renounced all further trust in Jehovah. Elisha, as the king's words imply, must have refused all permission to capitulate: he must have held out from the first a promise that God would send deliverance. But no deliverance had come. The people were starving. Women were devouring their babes. Nothing worse could happen if they flung open their gates to the Syrian host. "Behold," the king said, "this evil is Jehovah's doing. You have deceived us. Jehovah does not intend to deliver us. Why should I wait for Him any longer?" Perhaps the king meant to imply that his mother's Baal was better worth serving, and would never have left his votaries to sink into these straits.

And now man's extremity had come, and it was God's opportunity. Elisha at last was permitted to announce that the worst was over, that the next day plenty should smile on the besieged city. "Thus saith the Lord," he exclaimed to the exhausted and despondent king, "To-morrow about this time, instead of an ass's head being sold for eighty shekels, and a thimbleful of pulse for five shekels, a peck of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two pecks of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria."

The king was leaning on the hand of his chief officer, and to this soldier the promise seemed not only incredible, but silly: for at the best he could only suppose that the Syrian host would raise the siege; and though to hope for that looked an absurdity, yet even that would not in the least fulfil the immense prediction. He answered, therefore, in utter scorn: "Yes! Jehovah is making windows in heaven! But even thus could this be?" It is much as if he should have answered some solemn pledge with a derisive proverb such as, "Yes! if the sky should fall, we should catch larks!"

Such contemptuous repudiation of a Divine

* In 2 Kings vi. 33 we should read *melek* (king) for *maleak* (messenger). Jehoram repented of his hasty order.

promise was a blasphemy; and answering scorn with scorn, and riddle with riddling, Elisha answers the mockery, "Yes! and *you* shall see this, but shall not enjoy it."

The word of the Lord was the word of a true prophet, and the miracle was wrought. Not only was the siege raised, but the wholly unforeseen spoil of the entire Syrian camp, with all its accumulated rapine, brought about the predicted plenty.

There were four lepers* outside the gate of Samaria, like the leprous mendicants who gather there to this day. They were cut off from all human society, except their own. Leprosy was treated as contagious, and if "houses of the unfortunate" (*Biut-el-Masâkin*) were provided for them, as seems to have been the case at Jerusalem, they were built outside the city walls.† They could only live by beggary, and this was an aggravation of their miserable condition. And how could any one fling food to these beggars over the walls, when food of any kind was barely to be had within them?

So taking counsel of their despair, they decided that they would desert to the Syrians: among them they would at least find food, if their lives were spared; and if not, death would be a happy release from their present misery.

So in the evening twilight, when they could not be seen or shot at from the city wall as deserters, they stole down to the Syrian camp.

When they reached its outermost circle, to their amazement all was silence. They crept into one of the tents in fear and astonishment. There were food and drink there, and they satisfied the craving of their hunger. It was also stored with booty from the plundered cities and villages of Israel. To this they helped themselves, and took it away and hid it. Having spoiled this tent, they entered a second. It was likewise deserted, and they carried a fresh store of treasures to their hiding-place. And then they began to feel uneasy at not divulging to their starving fellow-citizens the strange and golden tidings of a deserted camp. The night was wearing on; day would reveal the secret. If they carried the good news, they would doubtless earn a rich guerdon. If they waited till morning, they might be put to death for their selfish reticence and theft. It was safest to return to the city, and rouse the warder, and send a message to the palace. So the lepers hurried back through the night, and shouted to the sentinel at the gate, "We went to the Syrian camp, and it was deserted! Not a man was there, not a sound was to be heard. The horses were tethered there, and the asses, and the tents were left just as they were."

The sentinel called the other watchman to hear the wonderful news, and instantly ran with it to the palace. The slumbering house was roused; and though it was still night, the king himself arose. But he could not shake off his despondency, and made no reference to Elisha's prediction. News sometimes sounds too good to be true. "It is only a decoy," he said. "They can only have left their camp to lure us into an ambushade, that they may return, and slaughter us, and capture our city."

"Send to see," answered one of his courtiers. "Send five horsemen to test the truth, and to

* The Jews say Gehazi, and his three sons (Jarchi).

† Lev. xiii. 46. Num. v. 23.

look out. If they perish, their fate is but the fate of us all."

So two chariots with horses were despatched, with instructions not only to visit the camp, but track the movements of the host.

They went, and found that it was as the lepers had said. The camp was deserted, and lay there as an immense booty; and for some reason the Syrians had fled towards the Jordan to make good their escape to Damascus by the eastern bank. The whole road was strewn with the traces of their headlong flight; it was full of scattered garments and vessels.

Probably, too, the messengers came across some disabled fugitive, and learnt the secret of this amazing stampede. It was the result of one of those sudden unaccountable panics to which the huge, unwieldy, heterogeneous Eastern armies, which have no organised system of sentries, and no trained discipline, are constantly liable. We have already met with several instances in the history of Israel. Such was the panic which seized the Midianites when Gideon's three hundred blew their trumpets; and the panic of the Syrians before Ahab's pages of the provinces; and of the combined armies in the Valley of Salt; and of the Moabites at Wady-el-Ahshy; and afterwards of the Assyrians before the walls of Jerusalem. Fear is physically contagious, and, when once it has set in, it swells with such unaccountable violence, that the Greeks called these terrors "panic," because they believed them to be directly inspired by the god Pan. Well-disciplined as was the army of the Ten Thousand Greeks in their famous retreat, they nearly fell victims to a sudden panic, had not Clearchus, with prompt resource, published by the herald the proclamation of a reward for the arrest of the man who had let the ass loose. Such an unaccountable terror—caused by a noise as of chariots and of horses which reverberated among the hills—had seized the Syrian host. They thought that Jehoram had secretly hired an army of the princes of the Khetas* and of the Egyptians to march suddenly upon them. In wild confusion, not stopping to reason or to inquire, they took to flight, increasing their panic by the noise and rush of their own precipitance.

No sooner had the messengers delivered their glad tidings, than the people of Samaria began to pour tumultuously out of the gates, to fling themselves on the food and on the spoil. It was like the rush of the dirty, starving, emaciated wretches which horrified the keepers of the reserved stores at Smolensk in Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, and forced them to shut the gates, and fling food and grain to the struggling soldiers out of the windows of the granaries. To secure order and prevent disaster, the king appointed his attendant lord to keep the gate. But the torrent of people flung him down, and they trampled on his body in their eagerness for relief. He died after having seen that the promise of Elisha was fulfilled, and that the cheapness and abundance had been granted, the prophecy of which he thought only fit for his sceptical derision.

"The sudden panic which delivered the city," says Dean Stanley, "is the one marked inter-

* The capitals of the ancient Hittites—a nation whose fame had been almost entirely obliterated till a few years ago—were Karchemish, Kadesh, Hamath, and Helbon (Aleppo).

vention on behalf of the northern capital. No other incident could be found in the sacred annals so appropriately to express, in the Church of Gouda, the pious gratitude of the citizens of Leyden, for their deliverance from the Spanish army, as the miraculous raising of the siege of Samaria.*

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHUNAMMITE AND HAZAEL.

2 KINGS viii. 1-6, 7-15. (Circ. B. C. 886.)

"Our acts still follow with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are."
—GEORGE ELIOT.

THE next anecdote of Elisha brings us once more into contact with the Lady of Shunem. Famines, or dearths, were unhappily of very frequent occurrence in a country which is so wholly dependent, as Palestine is, upon the early and latter rain. On some former occasion Elisha had foreseen that "Jehovah had called for a famine"; for the sword, the famine, and the pestilence are represented as ministers who wait His bidding.† He had also foreseen that it would be of long duration, and in kindness to the Shunammite had warned her that she had better remove for a time into a land in which there was greater plenty. It was under similar circumstances that Elimelech and Naomi, ancestors of David's line, had taken their sons Mahlon and Chilion, and gone to live in the land of Moab; and, indeed, the famine which decided the migration of Jacob and his children into Egypt had been a turning-point in the history of the Chosen People.

The Lady of Shunem had learnt by experience the weight of Elisha's words. Her husband is not mentioned, and was probably dead; so she arose with her household, and went for seven years to live in the plain of Philistia. At the end of that time the dearth had ceased, and she returned to Shunem, but only to find that during her absence her house and land were in possession of other owners, and had probably escheated to the Crown. The king was the ultimate, and to a great extent the only, source of justice in his little kingdom, and she went to lay her claim before him and demand the restitution of her property. By a providential circumstance she came exactly at the most favourable moment. The king—it must have been Jehoram—was at the very time talking to Gehazi about the great works of Elisha. As it is unlikely that he would converse long with a leper, and as Gehazi is still called "the servant of the man of God," the incident may here be narrated out of order. It is pleasant to find Jehoram taking so deep an interest in the prophet's story. Already on many occasions during his wars with Moab and Syria, as well as on the occasion of Naaman's visit, if that had already occurred, he had received the completest proof of the reality of Elisha's mission, but he might be naturally unaware of the many private incidents in which he had exhibited a supernatural power. Among other stories Gehazi was telling him that of the Shunammite, and how Elisha had given life to

her dead son. At that juncture she came before the king, and Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, this is the very woman, and this is her son whom Elisha recalled to life." In answer to Jehoram's questions she confirmed the story, and he was so much impressed by the narrative that he not only ordered the immediate restitution of her land, but also of the value of its products during the seven years of her exile.

We now come to the fulfilment of the second of the commands which Elijah had received so long before at Horeb. To complete the retribution which was yet to fall on Israel, he had been bidden to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria in the room of Benhadad. Hitherto the mandate had remained unfulfilled, because no opportunity had occurred; but the appointed time had now arrived. Elisha, for some purpose, and during an interval of peace, visited Damascus, where the visit of Naaman and the events of the Syrian wars had made his name very famous. Benhadad II., grandson or great-grandson of Rezin, after a stormy reign of some thirty years, marked by some successes, but also by the terrible reverses already recorded, lay dangerously ill. Hearing the news that the wonder-working prophet of Israel was in his capital, he sent to ask of him the question, "Shall I recover?" It had been the custom from the earliest days to propitiate the favour of prophets by presents, without which even the humblest suppliant hardly ventured to approach them.* The gift sent by Benhadad was truly royal, for he thought perhaps that he could purchase the intercession or the miraculous intervention of this mighty thaumaturge. He sent Hazael with a selection "of every good thing of Damascus," and, like an Eastern, he endeavoured to make his offering seem more magnificent † by distributing it on the backs of forty camels.

At the head of this imposing procession of camels walked Hazael, the commander of the forces, and stood in Elisha's presence with the humble appeal, "Thy son Benhadad, King of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

About the king's munificence we are told no more, but we cannot doubt that it was refused. If Naaman's still costlier blessing had been rejected, though he was about to receive through Elisha's ministration an inestimable boon, it is unlikely that Elisha would accept a gift for which he could offer no return, and which, in fact, directly or indirectly, involved the death of the sender. But the historian does not think it necessary to pause and tell us that Elisha sent back the forty camels unladen of their treasures. It was not worth while to narrate what was a matter of course. If it had been no time, a few years earlier, to receive money and garments, and olive-yards and vineyards, and men-servants and maid-servants, still less was it a time to do so now. The days were darker now than they had been, and Elisha himself stood near the Great White Throne. The protection of these fearless prophets lay in their utter simplicity of soul. They rose above human fears because they stood above human desires. What Elisha possessed was more than sufficient for the needs of the plain and humble life of one whose com-

* See the cases of Samuel (1 Sam. ix. 7), of Ahijah (1 Kings xiv. 3), and of Elisha himself (2 Kings iv. 42).

† As Jacob did in sending forward his present to Esau. Comp. Chardin, "Voyages," iii. 217.

* "Lectures," ii. 345.

† Jer. xxv. 29, Ezek. xxxviii. 21.

muning was with God. It was not wonderful that prophets should rise to an elevation whence they could look down with indifference upon the superfluities of the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, when even sages of the heathen have attained to a similar independence of earthly luxuries. One who can climb such mountain-heights can look with silent contempt on gold.

But there is a serious difficulty about Elisha's answer to the embassy. "Go, say unto him"—so it is rendered in our Authorised Version—"Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die."

It is evident that the translators of 1611 meant the emphasis to be laid on the "*mayest*," and understood the answer of Elisha to mean, "Thy recovery is quite possible; and yet"—he adds to Hazael, and not as part of his answer to the king—"Jehovah has shown me that dying he shall die,"—not indeed of this disease, but by other means before he has recovered from it.

Unfortunately, however, the Hebrew will not bear this meaning. Elisha bids Hazael to go back with the distinct message, "Thou shalt surely recover," as it is rightly rendered in the Revised Version.

This, however, is the rendering, not of the *written* text as it stands, but of the margin. Every one knows that in the Masoretic original the text itself is called the K'thib, or "what is written," whereas the margin is called Q'ri, "read." Now, our translators, both those of 1611 and those of the Revision Committee, all but invariably follow the Kethib as the most authentic reading. In this instance, however, they abandon the rule and translate the marginal reading.

What, then, is the written text?

It is the reverse of the marginal reading, for it has: "Go, say, Thou shalt *not* recover."

The reader may naturally ask the cause of this startling discrepancy.

It seems to be twofold.

(I) Both the Hebrew word, *lo*, "not" (לֹא), and the word *lo*, "to him" (לוֹ), have precisely the same pronunciation. Hence this text might mean either "Go, say *to him*. Thou shalt certainly recover," or "Go, say, Thou shalt *not* recover." The same identity of the negative and the dative of the preposition has made nonsense of another passage of the Authorised Version, where "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and *not* increased the joy: they joy before Thee according to the joy of harvest," should be "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased *its* joy." So, too, the verse "It is He that hath made us, and *not* we ourselves," may mean "It is He that hath made us, and *to Him* we belong." In the present case the adoption of the negative (which would have conveyed to Benhadad the exact truth) is not possible; for it makes the next clause and its introduction by the word "Howbeit" entirely meaningless.

But (II) this confusion in the text might not have arisen in the present instance but for the difficulty of Elisha's appearing to send a deliberately false message to Benhadad, and a message which he tells Hazael at the time is false.

Can this be deemed impossible?

With the views prevalent in "those times of ignorance," I think not. Abraham and Isaac, saints and patriarchs as they were, both told practical falsehoods about their wives. They,

indeed, were reproved for this, though not severely; but, on the other hand, Jael is not reproved for her treachery to Sisera; and Samuel, under the semblance of a Divine permission, used a diplomatic ruse when he visited the household of Jesse; and in the apologue of Micaiah a lying spirit is represented as sent forth to do service to Jehovah; and Elisha himself tells a deliberate falsehood to the Syrians at Dothan. The sensitiveness to the duty of always speaking the exact truth is not felt in the East with anything like the intensity that it is in Christian lands; and reluctant as we should be to find in the message of Elisha another instance of that *falsitas dispensativa* which has been so fatally patronised by some of the Fathers and by many Romish theologians, the love of truth itself would compel us to accept this view of the case, if there were no other possible interpretation.

I think, however, that another view is possible. I think that Elisha may have said to Hazael, "Go, say unto him, Thou shalt surely recover," with the same accent of irony in which Micaiah said at first to the two kings, "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." I think that this whole manner and the tone of his voice may have shown to Hazael, and may have been meant to show him, that this was not Elisha's real message to Benhadad. Or, to adopt the same line of explanation with an unimportant difference, Elisha may have meant to imply, "Go, follow the bent which I know you *will* follow; go, carry back to your master the lying message that I said he would recover. But that is not *my* message. My message, whether it suits your courtier instincts or not, is that Jehovah has warned me that he shall surely die."

That some such meaning as this attaches to the verse seems to be shown by the context. For not only was some reproof involved in Elisha's words, but he showed his grief still more by his manner. It was as though he had said, "Take back what message you choose, but Benhadad will certainly die"; and then he fastened his steady gaze on the soldier's countenance, till Hazael blushed and became uneasy. Only when he noted that Hazael's conscience was troubled by the glittering eyes which seemed to read the inmost secrets of his heart did Elisha drop his glance, and burst into tears. "Why weepeth my lord?" asked Hazael, in still deeper uneasiness. Whereupon Elisha revealed to him the future. "I weep," he said, "because I see in thee the curse and the avenger of the sins of my native land. Thou wilt become to them a sword of God; thou wilt set their fortresses on fire; thou wilt slaughter their youths; thou wilt dash their little ones to pieces against the stones; thou wilt rip up their women with child." That he actually inflicted these savageries of warfare on the miserable Israelites we are not told, but we are told that he smote them in all their coasts; that Jehovah delivered them into his hands; that he oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.* That being so, there can be no question that he carried out the same laws of atrocious warfare which belonged to those times and continued long afterwards. Such atrocities were not only inflicted on the Israelites again and again by the Assyrians and others,† but they themselves had often inflicted them, and inflicted them with what

* 2 Kings x. 32, xiii. 3, 22.

† Isa. xiii. 15, 16; Hos. x. 14, xiii. 16; Nah. iii. 10.

they believed to be Divine approval, on their own enemies.* Centuries after, one of their own poets accounted it a beatitude to him who should dash the children of the Babylonians against the stones.†

As the answer of Hazael is usually read and interpreted, we are taught to regard it as an indignant declaration that he could never be guilty of such vile deeds. It is regarded as though it were "an abhorrent repudiation of his future self." The lesson often drawn from it in sermons is that a man may live to do, and to delight in, crimes which he once hated and deemed it impossible that he should ever commit.

The lesson is a most true one, and is capable of a thousand illustrations. It conveys the deeply needed warning that those who, even in thought, dabble with wrong courses, which they only regard as venial peccadilloes, may live to commit, without any sense of horror, the most enormous offences. It is the explanation of the terrible fact that youths who once seemed innocent and holy-minded may grow up, step by step, into colossal criminals. "Men," says Scherer, "advance unconsciously from errors to faults, and from faults to crimes, till sensibility is destroyed by the habitual spectacle of guilt, and the most savage atrocities come to be dignified by the name of State policy."

"Lui-même à son portrait forcé de rendre hommage,
Il frémira d'horreur devant sa propre image."

But true and needful as these lessons are, they are entirely beside the mark as deduced from the story of Hazael. What he said was not, as in our Authorised Version, "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" nor by "great thing" does he mean "so deadly a crime." His words, more accurately rendered in our Revision, are, "But what is thy servant, which is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?" or, "But what is the dog, thy servant?" It was a hypocritic deprecation of the future importance and eminence which Elisha had prophesied for him. There is not the least sense of horror either in his words or in his thoughts. He merely means "A mere dog, such as I am, can never accomplish such great designs." A dog in the East is utterly despised;‡ and Hazael, with Oriental irony, calls himself a dog, though he was the Syrian commander-in-chief—just as a Chinaman, in speaking of himself, adopts the periphrasis "this little thief."

Elisha did not notice his sham humility, but told him, "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be King over Syria." The date of the event was B. C. 886.

The scene has sometimes been misrepresented to Elisha's discredit, as though he suggested to the general the crimes of murder and rebellion. The accusation is entirely untenable. Elisha was, indeed, in one sense, commissioned to anoint Hazael King of Syria, because the cruel soldier had been predestined by God to that position; but, in another sense, he had no power whatever to give to Hazael the mighty kingdom of Aram, nor to wrest it from the dynasty which

had now held it for many generations. All this was brought about by the Divine purpose, in a course of events entirely out of the sphere of the humble man of God. In the transferring of this crown he was in no sense the agent or the suggester. The thought of usurpation must, without doubt, have been already in Hazael's mind. Benhadad, as far as we know, was childless. At any rate he had no natural heirs, and seems to have been a drunken king, whose reckless undertakings and immense failures had so completely alienated the affections of his subjects from himself and his dynasty, that he died undesired and unlamented, and no hand was uplifted to strike a blow in his defence. It hardly needed a prophet to foresee that the sceptre would be snatched by so strong a hand as that of Hazael from a grasp so feeble as that of Benhadad II. The utmost that Elisha had done was, under Divine guidance, to read his character and his designs, and to tell him that the accomplishment of these designs was near at hand.

So Hazael went back to Benhadad, and in answer to the eager inquiry, "What said Elisha to thee?" he gave the answer which Elisha had foreseen that he meant to give, and which was in any case a falsehood, for it suppressed half of what Elisha had really said. "He told me," said Hazael, "that thou shouldest surely recover."

Was the sequel of the interview the murder of Benhadad by Hazael?

The story has usually been so read, but Elisha had neither prophesied this nor suggested it. The sequel is thus described. "And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took the coverlet,* and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead." The repetition of the name Hazael in the last clause is superfluous if he was the subject of the previous clause, and it has been consequently conjectured that "he took" is merely the impersonal idiom "one took." Some suppose that, as Benhadad was in the bath, his servant took the bath-cloth, wetted it, and laid its thick folds over the mouth of the helpless king; others, that he soaked the thick quilt, which the king was too weak to lift away.† In either case it is hardly likely that a great officer like Hazael would have been in the bath-room or the bedroom of the dying king. Yet we must remember that the Prætorian Præfect Macro is said to have suffocated Tiberius with his bed-clothes. Josephus says that Hazael strangled his master with a net; and, indeed, he has generally been held guilty of the perpetration of the murder. But it is fair to give him the benefit of the doubt. Be that as it may, he seems to have reigned for some forty-six years (B. C. 886-840), and to have bequeathed the sceptre to a son on whom he had bestowed the old dynastic name of Benhadad.

* מַכְבֵּר. Jos., "Antt.," IX. iv. 6. δίκτυον διάβροχον. Aquila, Symmachus, τὸ στρώμα. Michaelis supposed it to be the mosquito-net (κωμωπέιον). Comp. 1 Sam. xix. 13. Ewald suggested "bath-mattress" (iii. 523). Sir G. Grove (*s. v.* "Elisha," "Bibl Dict.," ii. 923) mentions that Abbas Pasha is said to have been murdered in the same manner. Some, however, think that the measure was taken by way of cure (Bruce, "Travels," iii. 33. Klostermann, *ad loc.*, alters the text at his pleasure).

† 2 Kings viii. 15; LXX., τὸ μαχθάρ; Vulg., *stragulum*; lit., "woven cloth."

* See Josh. vi. 17, 21; 1 Sam. xv. 3; Lev. xxvii. 28, 29.

† Psalm cxxxvii. 9.

‡ 1 Sam. xxiv. 14; 2 Sam. ix. 8.

CHAPTER X.

(1) JEHORAM BEN-JEHOSHAPHAT OF JUDAH.

B. c. 851-843.

(2) AHAZIAH BEN-JEHORAM OF JUDAH.

B. c. 843-842.

2 KINGS viii. 16-24, 25-29.

"Bear with the Turk, no brother near the throne."—
DOPE.

THE narrative now reverts to the kingdom of Judah, of which the historian, mainly occupied with the great deeds of the prophet in Israel, takes at this period but little notice.

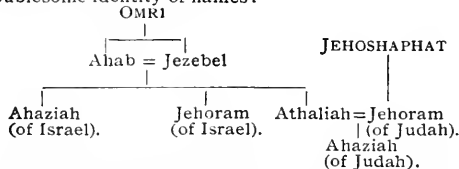
He tells us that in the fifth year of Jehoram of Israel, son of Ahab, his namesake and brother-in-law, Jehoram of Judah, began to reign in Judah, though his father, Jehoshaphat, was then king.*

The statement is full of difficulties, especially as we have been already told (i. 17) that Jehoram ben-Ahab of Israel began to reign in the second year of Jehoram ben-Jehoshaphat of Judah, and (iii. 1) in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. It is hardly worth while to pause here to disentangle these complexities in a writer who, like most Eastern historians, is content with loose chronological references. By the current mode of reckoning, the twenty-five years of Jehoshaphat's reign may merely mean twenty-three and a month or two of two other years; and some suppose that, when Jehoram of Judah was about sixteen, his father went on the expedition against Moab, and associated his son with him in the throne. This is only conjecture. Jehoshaphat, of all kings, least needed a coadjutor, particularly so weak and worthless a one as his son; and though the association of colleagues with themselves has been common in some realms, there is not a single instance of it in the history of Israel and Judah—the case of Uzziah, who was a leper, not being to the point.†

The kings both of Israel and of Judah at this period, with the single exception of the brave and good Jehoshaphat, were unworthy and miserable. The blight of the Jezebel-marriage and the curse of Baal-worship lay upon both kingdoms. It is scarcely possible to find such wretched monarchs as the two sons of Jezebel—Ahaziah and Jehoram in Israel, and the son-in-law and grandson of Jezebel, Jehoram and Ahaziah, in Judah. Their respective reigns are annals of shameful apostasy, and almost unbroken disaster.

Jehoram ben-Jehoshaphat of Judah was thirty-two years old when he began his independent

* The following genealogy may help to elucidate the troublesome identity of names:—



† Jotham ben-Uzziah was not the colleague of his father, but his public representative.

reign, and reigned for eight deplorable years. The fact that his mother's name is (exceptionally) omitted seems to imply that his father Jehoshaphat set the good example of monogamy.* Jehoram was wholly under the influence of Athaliah, his wife, and of Jezebel, his mother-in-law, and he introduced into Judah their alien abominations. He "walked in their way, and did evil in the sight of the Lord." The Chronicler fills up the general remark by saying that he did his utmost to foster idolatry by erecting *bamoth* in the mountains of Judah, and compelled his people to worship there, in order to decentralise the religious services of the kingdom, and so to diminish the glory of the Temple. He introduced Baal-worship into Judah, and either he or his son was the guilty builder of a temple to Baalim, not only on the "opprobrious mount" on which stood the idolatrous chapels of Solomon, but on the Hill of the House itself. This temple had its own high priest, and was actually adorned with treasures torn from the Temple of Jehovah.† So bad was Jehoram's conduct that the historian can only attribute his non-destruction to the "covenant of salt" which God had made with David, "to give him a lamp for his children always."

But if actual destruction did not come upon him and his race, he came very near such a fate, and he certainly experienced that "the path of transgressors is hard." There is nothing to record about him but crime and catastrophe. First Edom revolted. Jehoshaphat had subdued the Edomites, and only allowed them to be governed by a vassal; now they threw off the yoke. The Jewish King advanced against them to "Zair"—by which must be meant apparently either Zoar (through which the road to Edom lay), or their capital, Mount Seir.‡ There he was surrounded by the Edomite hosts; and though by a desperate act of valour he cut his way through them at night in spite of their reserve of chariots, yet his army left him in the lurch.§ Edom succeeded in establishing its final independence, to which we see an allusion in the one hope held out to Esau by Isaac in that "blessing" which was practically a curse.

The loss of so powerful a subject-territory, which now constituted a source of danger on the eastern frontier of Judah, was succeeded by another disaster on the southwest, in the Shephelah or lowland plain. Here Libnah revolted,|| and by gaining its autonomy contracted yet farther the narrow limits of the southern kingdom.

The Book of Kings tells us no more about the Jewish Jehoram, only adding that he died and was buried with his fathers, and was succeeded by his son Ahaziah. But the Book of Chronicles, which adds far darker touches to his character, also heightens to an extraordinary

* The only other king of Judah whose mother's name is not mentioned (perhaps because his father Jotham had but one wife) is Ahaz.

† 2 Kings xi. 18; 2 Chron. xxi. 11, xxiv. 7.
‡ Vulg., *Seira*; Arab., *Sa'ir* (but the historian never uses the name Mount Seir); LXX., *Σαίρα*. There is perhaps some corruption in the text, and the reading of the Chronicler "with his princes" shows that it may have once been עַם־יִשְׂרָאֵל.

§ 2 Kings viii. 21. "The people" (*i. e.*, the army of Judah) "fled to their tents." Apparently this means that they slunk away home. The word "tents" is a reminiscence of their nomad days, like the treasonable cry, "To your tents, O Israel."

|| Josh. x. 29-30.

degree the intensity of his punishment. It tells us that he began his reign by the atrocious murder of his six younger brothers, for whom, following the old precedent of Rehoboam, Jehoshaphat had provided by establishing them as governors of various cities. As his throne was secure, we cannot imagine any motive for this brutal massacre except the greed of gain, and we can only suppose that, as Jehoram ben-Jehoshaphat became little more than a friendly vassal of his kinsmen in Israel, so he fell under the deadly influence of his wife Athaliah, as completely as his father-in-law had done under the spell of her mother Jezebel. With his brothers he also swept away a number of the chief nobles, who perhaps embraced the cause of his murdered kinsmen. Such conduct breathes the known spirit of Jezebel and of Athaliah. To rebuke him for this wickedness, he received the menace of a tremendous judgment upon his home and people in a writing from *Elijah*, whom we should certainly have assumed to be dead long before that time. The judgment itself followed. The Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah, captured Jerusalem, and murdered all Jehoram's own children, except Ahaziah, who was the youngest. Then Jehoram, at the age of thirty-eight, was smitten with an incurable disease of the bowels, of which he died two years later, and not only died un lamented, but was refused burial in the sepulchres of the kings. In any case his reign and that of his son and successor were the most miserable in the annals of Judah, as the reigns of their namesakes and kinsmen, Ahaziah ben-Ahab and Jehoram ben-Ahab, were also the most miserable in the annals of Israel.

Jehoram was succeeded on the throne of Judah by his son Ahaziah. If the chronology and the facts be correct, Ahaziah ben-Jehoram of Judah must have been born when his father was only eighteen, though he was the youngest of the king's sons, and so escaped from being massacred in the Philistine invasion. He succeeded at the age of twenty-two, and only reigned a single year. During this year his mother, the Gebirah Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and granddaughter of the Tyrian Ethbaal, was all-supreme. She bent the weak nature of her son to still further apostasies. She was "his counsellor to do wickedly," and her Baal-priest Mattan was more important than the Aaronic high priest of the despoiled and desecrated Temple. Never did Judah sink to so low a level, and it was well that the days of Ahaziah of Judah were cut short.

The only event in his reign was the share he took with his uncle Jehoram of Israel in his campaign to protect Ramoth-Gilead from Hazael. The expedition seems to have been successful in its main purpose. Ramoth-Gilead, the key to the districts of Argob and Bashan, was of immense importance for commanding the country beyond Jordan. It seems to be the same as Ramath-Mizpeh (Josh. xiii. 26); and if so, it was the spot where Jacob made his covenant with Laban. Ahab, or his successors, in spite of the disastrous end of the expedition to Ahab personally, had evidently recovered the frontier fortress from the Syrian king.* Its position upon a hill made its possession vital to the interests of Gilead; for the master of Ramah was the master of that Trans-Jordanic district. But

* Jos., "Antt.," IX. vi. 1.

Hazael had succeeded his murdered master, and was already beginning to fulfil the ruthless mission which Elisha had foreseen with tears. Jehoram ben-Ahab seems to have held his own against Hazael for a time; but in the course of the campaign at Ramoth he was so severely wounded that he was compelled to leave his army under the command of Jehu, and to return to Jezreel, to be healed of his wounds. Thither his nephew Ahaziah of Judah went to visit him; and there, as we shall hear, he too met his doom. That fate, the Chronicler tells us, was the penalty of his iniquities. "The destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to Joram."

We have no ground for accusing either king of any want of courage; yet it was obviously impolitic of Jehoram to linger unnecessarily in his luxurious capital, while the army of Israel was engaged in service on a dangerous frontier. The wounds inflicted by the Syrian archers may have been originally severe. Their arrows at this time played as momentous a part in history as the cloth-yard shafts of our English bowmen which "sewed the French ranks together" at Poitiers, Crécy, and Azincour. But Jehoram had at any rate so far recovered that he could ride in his chariot; and if he had been wise and bravely vigorous, he would not have left his army under a subordinate at so perilous an epoch, and menaced by so resolute a foe. Or if he were indeed compelled to consult the better physicians at Jezreel, he should have persuaded his nephew Ahaziah of Judah—who seems to have been more or less of a vassal as well as a kinsman—to keep an eye on the beleaguered fort. Both kings, however, deserted their post,—Jehoram to recover perfect health; and Ahaziah, who had been his comrade—as their father and grandfather had gone together to the same war—to pay a state visit of condolence to the royal invalid. The army was left under a popular, resolute, and wholly unscrupulous commander, and the results powerfully affected the immediate and the ultimate destiny of both kingdoms.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REVOLT OF JEHU.

B. C. 842.

2 KINGS ix. 1-37.

"Te semper anteit sæva Necessitas,
Clavos trabales et cuneos manu,
Gestans ahenâ." —HORAT., "Od.," I. xxxv. 17.

A LONG period had elapsed since Elijah had received the triple commission which was to mark the close of his career. Two of those Divine behests had now been accomplished. He had anointed Elisha, son of Shaphat, of Abel-Meholah, to be prophet in his room;* and Elisha had anointed Hazael to be king over Syria;† the third and more dangerous commission, involving nothing less than the overthrow of the mighty dynasty of Omri, remained still unaccomplished.

If the name of Jehu ("Jehovah is He") ‡ had been actually mentioned to Elijah, the dreadful

* 1 Kings xix. 15, 16.

† 2 Kings viii. 12, 13.

‡ The name was not uncommon, 1 Chron. ii. 38, iv. 35, xii. 3.

secret must have remained buried in the breast of the prophet and in that of his successor for many years. Further, Jehu was yet a very young man, and to have marked him out as the founder of a dynasty would have been to doom him to certain destruction. An Eastern king, whose family has once securely seated itself on the throne, is hedged round with an awful divinity, and demands an unquestioning obedience. Elijah had been removed from earth before this task had been fulfilled, and Elisha had to wait for his opportunity. But the doom was passed, though the judgment was belated. The sons of Ahab were left a space to repent, or to fill to the brim the cup of their father's iniquities.

"The sword of Heaven is not in haste to smite,
Nor yet doth linger."

Ahaziah, Ahab's eldest son, after a reign of one year, marked only by crimes and misfortunes, had ended in overwhelming disaster his deplorable career. His brother Jehoram had succeeded him, and had now been on the throne for at least twelve years, which had been chiefly signalised by that unsuccessful attempt to recover the territory of revolted Moab, to which we owe the celebrated Stone of Mesha. We have already narrated the result of the campaign which had so many vicissitudes. The combined armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom had been delivered by the interposition of Elisha from perishing of thirst beside the scorched-up bed of the Wady-el-Ahsy; and availing themselves of the rash assault of the Moabites, had swept everything before them. But Moab stood at bay at Kirharaseth (Kerak), his strongest fortress, six miles from Ar or Rabbah, and ten miles east of the southern end of the Dead Sea. It stood three thousand feet above the level of the sea, and is defended by a network of steep valleys. Nevertheless, Israel would have subdued it, but for the act of horrible despair to which the King of Moab resorted in his extremity, by offering up his eldest son as a burnt-offering to Chemosh upon the wall of the city. Horror-stricken by the catastrophe, and terrified with the dread that the vengeance of Chemosh could not but be aroused by so tremendous a sacrifice, the besieging host had retired. From that moment Moab had not only been free, but assumed the rôle of an aggressor, and sent her marauding bands to harry and carry the farms and homesteads of her former conqueror.*

Then followed the aggressions of Benhadad which had been frustrated by the insight of Elisha, and which owed their temporary cessation to his generosity.† The reappearance of the Syrians in the field had reduced Samaria to the lowest depths of ghastly famine. But the day of the guilty city had not yet come, and a sudden panic, caused among the invaders by a rumoured assault of Hittites and Egyptians, had saved her from destruction.‡ Taking advantage of the respite caused by the change of the Syrian dynasty, and pressing on his advantage, Jehoram, with the aid of his Judæan nephew, had once more got possession of Ramoth-Gilead before Hazael was secure on the throne which he had usurped.

This then was the situation:—The allied and kindred kings of Israel and Judah were idling in the pomp of hospitality at Jezreel; their armies

were encamped about Ramoth-Gilead; and at the head of the host of Israel was the crafty and vehement grandson of Nimshi.

Elisha saw and seized his opportunity. The day of vengeance from the Lord had dawned. Things had not materially altered since the days of Ahab. If Jehovah was nominally worshipped, if the very names of the kings of Israel bore witness to His supremacy,* Baal was worshipped too. The curse which Elijah had pronounced against Ahab and his house remained unfulfilled. The credit of prophecy was at stake. The blood of Naboth and his slaughtered sons cried to the Lord from the ground; and hitherto it seemed to have cried in vain. If the *Nebûim* (the prophetic class) were to have their due weight in Israel, the hour had come, and the man was ready.

The light which falls on Elisha is dim and intermittent. His name is surrounded by a halo of nebulous wonders, of which many are of a private and personal character. But he was a known enemy of Ahab and his house. He had, indeed, more than once interposed to snatch them from ruin, as in the expedition against Moab, and in the awful straits of the siege of Samaria by the Syrians. But his person had none the less been hateful to the sons of Jezebel, and his life had been endangered by their bursts of sudden fury. He could hardly again have a chance so favourable as that which now offered itself, when the armed host was at one place and the king at another. Perhaps, too, he may have been made aware that the soldiers were not well pleased to find at their head a king who was so far a *fainéant* as to leave them exposed to a powerful enemy, and show no eagerness to return. His "urgent private affairs" were not so urgent as to entitle him to take his ease at luxurious Jezreel.

Where Elisha was at the time we do not know—perhaps at Dothan, perhaps at Samaria. Suddenly he called to him a youth—one of the Sons of the Prophets, on whose speed and courage he could rely—placed in his hands a vial of the consecrated anointing oil,† told him to gird up his loins,‡ and to speed across the Jordan to Ramoth-Gilead. When he arrived, he was to bid Jehu rise up from the company of his fellow-captains, to hurry him into "a chamber within a chamber,"§ to shut the door for secrecy, to pour the consecrating oil upon his head, to anoint him King of Israel in the name of Jehovah, and then to fly without a moment's delay.||

The messenger—the Rabbis guess that he was Jonah, the son of Amittai*—knew well that his was a service of immense peril, in which his life might easily pay the forfeit of his temerity. How was he to guess that at once, without striking a blow, the host of Israel would fling to the winds its sworn allegiance to the son of the warrior Ahab, the fourth monarch of the powerful dynasty of Omri? Might not any one of a thousand possible accidents thwart a conspiracy of which the success depended on the unflinching courage and promptitude of his single hand?

* Jehoram = Jehovah is exalted. Ahaziah = Jehovah holds.

† Vial (*phak*) only here and in 1 Sam. x. 1. "The oil" (LXX., *τὸν φακὸν τοῦ ἐλαίου*).

‡ "His habit fit for speed *succinct*" (Milton).

§ Inner chamber, 1 Kings xx. 30.

|| Perhaps, if Elisha had gone in person, suspicion might have been aroused. He was not more than fifty at this time, and lived forty-three years more.

* "Seder Olam," c. 18.

* 2 Kings xiii. 20, xxiv. 2; Jer. xlviii.

† 2 Kings vi. 8-23.

‡ 2 Kings vii. 6.

He was but a youth, but he was the trained pupil of a master who had, again and again, stood before kings, and not been afraid. He sprang from a community which inherited the splendid traditions of the Prophet of Flame.

He did not hesitate a moment. He tightened the camel's hide round his naked limbs, flung back the long dark locks of the Nazarite, and sped upon his way. A true son of the schools of Jehovah's prophets has, and can have, no fear of man. The armies of Israel and Judah saw the wild, flying figure of a young man, with his hairy garment and streaming locks, rush through the camp. Whatever might be their surmising, he brooked no questions. Availing himself of the awe with which the shadow of Elijah had covered the sacrosanct person of a prophetic messenger, he made his way straight to the war-council of the captains; and brushing aside every attempt to impede his progress with the plea that he was the bearer of Jehovah's message, he burst into the council of the astonished warriors, who were assembled in the private courtyard of a house in the fortress-town.*

He knew the fame of Jehu, but did not know his person, and dared not waste time. "I have an errand to thee, O captain," he said to the assembly generally. The message had been addressed to no one in particular, and Jehu naturally asked, "Unto which of all of us?" With the same swift intuition which has often enabled men in similar circumstances to recognise a leader—as Josephus recognised Vespasian, and St. Severinus recognised Odoacer, and Joan of Arc recognised Charles VI. of France—he at once replied, "To thee, O captain." Jehu did not hesitate a moment. Prophets had shown, many a time, that their messages might not be neglected or despised. He rose, and followed the youth, who led him into the most secret recess of the house, and there, emptying on his head the fragrant oil of consecration, said, "Thus saith Jehovah, God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of Jehovah, even over Israel."† He was to smite the house of his master Ahab in vengeance for the blood of Jehovah's prophets and servants whom Jezebel had murdered. Ahab's house, every male of it, young and old, bond and free,‡ is doomed to perish, as the houses of Jeroboam and of Baasha had perished before them, by a bloody end. Further, the dogs should eat Jezebel by the rampart of Jezreel.§ and there should be none to bury her.

One moment sufficed for his daring deed, for his burning message; the next he had flung open the door and fled. The soldiers of the camp must have whispered still more anxiously together as they saw the same agitated youth rushing through their lines with the same impetuosity which had marked his entrance. In those dark

days the sudden appearance of a prophet was usually the herald of some terrific storm.*

Jehu was utterly taken by surprise; but according to the reading preserved by Ephraim Syrus in 2 Kings ix. 26, he had on the previous night seen in a dream the blood of Naboth and his sons. If the thought of revolt had ever passed for a moment through his mind, it had never assumed a definite shape. True, he had been a warrior from his youth. True, he had been one of Ahab's bodyguard, and had ridden before him in a chariot at least twenty years earlier, and had now risen by valour and capacity to the high station of captain of the host. True, also, that he had heard the great curse which Elijah had pronounced on Ahab at the door of Naboth's vineyard; but he heard it while he was yet an obscure youth, and he had little dreamed that his was the hand which should carry it into execution. Who was he? And had not the house of Omri been, in some sense, sanctioned by Heaven? And were not the words of the prophet "wild and wandering cries," of which the issues might be averted by such a repentance as that of Ahab?

And he felt another misgiving. Might not this scene be the plot of some secret enemy? Might it not at any rate be a reckless jest palmed upon him by his comrades? If any jealous member of the confederacy of captains betrayed the fact that Jehu had tampered with their allegiance, would his head be safe for a single hour? He would act warily. He came back to his fellow-captains and said nothing.

But they were lurning with curiosity. Something must be impending. Prophets did not rush in thus tumultuously for no purpose. Must not the youth's mantle of hair be some standard of war?

"Is all right?" they shouted. "Why did this frantic fellow come to thee?"†

"You know all about it," answered Jehu, with wary coolness. "You know more about it than I do. You know the man, and what his talk was." "Lies!" bluntly answered the rough soldiers.‡ "Tell us now."

Then Jehu's eye took measure of them and their feelings. A judge of men and of men's countenances, he saw conspiracy flashing in their faces. He saw that they suspected the true state of things, and were on fire to carry it out. Perhaps they had caught sight of the vial of oil under the youth's scant dress. Could any quickened observation at least fail to notice that the soldier's dark locks were shining and fragrant, as they had not been a moment ago, with consecrated oil?

Then Jehu frankly told them the perilous secret. Thus and thus had the young prophet spoken, and had said, "Thus saith Jehovah, I have anointed thee king over Israel."

The message was met with a shout of answering approbation. That shout was the death-knell of the house of Omri. It showed that the reigning dynasty had utterly forfeited its popularity. No luck had followed the sons of Naboth's murderer. Israel was weary of their

* It seems as though they were *inside* the town to defend it, not a beleaguering host outside.

† The expression is remarkable, as showing how completely the prerogative of the Chosen People was supposed to rest with the Ten Tribes, as the most important representatives of the seed of Abraham.

‡ "Him that is shut up, and him that is left at large in Israel" (2 Kings ix. 8; 1 Kings xiv. 10, xvi. 3, 4).

§ The A. V. has, less accurately, "in the *portion* of Jezreel." See 1 Kings xxi. 23. Heb., הַחֵדָּר. The הַחֵדָּר of an eastern town is the ditch and empty space—a sort of external *pomarium* around it. It is the place of offal, and the haunt of vultures and pariah dogs.

* 1 Sam. xvi. 4: "Comest thou peaceably?"

† 2 Kings ix. 11, הִפְתִּיבָהּ לְךָ, LXX., ὁ ἐπιληπτος. Comp ver. 20, "he driveth *furiously*" (בְּחֵץ).

‡ Ver. 12, a lie! (שֶׁקֶר).

mother Jezebel. Why was this king Jehoram, this king of evil auspices, who had been repudiated by Moab and harried by Syria—why, in the first gleam of possible prosperity, was he being detained at Jezreel by wounds which rumour said were already sufficiently healed to allow him to return to his post? Down with the seed of the murderer and the sorceress! Let brave Jehu be king, as Jehovah has said!

So the captains sprang to their feet, and then and there seized Jehu, and carried him in triumph to the top of the stairs which ran round the inside of the courtyard, and stripped off their mantles to extemporise for him the semblance of a cushioned throne.* Then in the presence of such soldiers as they could trust they blew a sudden blast of the ram's horn, and shouted, "Jehu is king!"

Jehu was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. Nothing tries a man's vigour and nerve so surely as a sudden crisis. It is this swift resolution which has raised many a man to the throne, as it raised Otho, and Napoleon I., and Napoleon III. The history of Israel is specially full of *coups d'état*, but no one of them is half so decisive or overwhelming as this. Jehu instantly accepted the office of Jehovah's avenger on the house of Ahab.† Everything, as Jehu saw, depended on the suddenness and fury with which the blow was delivered. "If you want me to be your king,"‡ he said, "keep the lines secure, and guard the fortress walls. I will be my own messenger to Jehoram. Let no deserter go forth to give him warning."§

It was agreed; and Jehu, only taking with him Bidkar, his fellow-officer, and a small band of followers, set forth at full speed from Ramoth-Gilead.

The fortress of Ramoth, now the important town of Es-Salt, a place which must always have been the key of Gilead, was built on the summit of a rocky headland, fortified by nature as well as by art. It is south of the river Jabbok, and lies at the head of the only easy road which runs down westward to the Jordan and eastward to the rich plateau of the interior.|| Crossing the fords of the Jordan, Jehu would soon be able to join the main road, which, passing Tirzah, Zaretan, and Bethshean, and sweeping eastward of Mount Gilboa, gives ready access to Jezreel.

The watchman on the lofty watchtower of the summer palace caught sight of a storm of dust careering along from the eastward up the valley towards the city.¶ The times were wild and troublous. What could it be? He shouted his alarm, "I see a troop!" The tidings were startling, and the king was instantly informed that chariots and horsemen were approaching the

royal city. "Send a horseman to meet them," he said, "with the message, 'Is all well?'"

Forth flew the rider, and cried to the rushing escort, "The king asks, 'Is all well? Is it peace?'" For probably the anxious city hoped that there might have been some victory of the army against Hazael, which would fill them with joy.

"What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me," answered Jehu; and perforce the horseman, whatever may have been his conjectures, had to follow in the rear.

"He reached them," cried the sentry on the watch-tower, "but he does not return."

The news was enigmatical and alarming; and the troubled king sent another horseman. Again the same colloquy occurred, and again the watchman gave the ominous message, adding to it the yet more perplexing news that, in the mad and headlong driving* of the charioteer, he recognises the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi.†

What had happened to his army? Why should the captain of the host be driving thus furiously to Jezreel?

Matters were evidently very critical, whatever the swift approach of chariots and horsemen might portend. "Yoke my chariot," said Jehoram; and his nephew Ahaziah, who had shared his campaign, and was no less consumed with anxiety to learn tidings which could not but be pressing, rode by him in another chariot to meet Jehu. They took with them no escort worth mentioning. The rebellion was not only sudden but wholly unexpected.

The two kings met Jehu in a spot of the darkest omen. It was the plot of ground which had once been the vineyard of Naboth, at the door of which Ahab had heard from Elijah the awful message of his doom. As the New Forest was ominous to our early Norman kings as the witness of their cruelties and encroachments, so was this spot to the house of Omri, though it was adjacent to their ivory palace, and had been transformed from a vineyard into a garden or pleasance.

"Is it peace, Jehu?" shouted the agitated king; by which probably he only meant to ask, "Is all going well in the army at Ramoth?"

The fierce answer which burst from the lips of his general fatally undeceived him. "What peace," brutally answered the rebel, "so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" She, after all, was the *fons et origo mali* to the house of Jehoram. Hers was the dark spirit of murder and idolatry which had walked in that house. She was the instigator and the executer of the crime against Naboth. She had been the foundress of Baal- and Asherah-worship; she was the murderess of the prophets; she had been specially marked out for vengeance in the doom pronounced both by Elijah and Elisha.

The answer was unmistakable. This was a revolt, a revolution. "Treachery, Ahaziah!" shouted the terrified king, and instantly wheeled

* Clearly the rendering "he driveth furiously" is right. The word "furiously" is *beshigga'ôn* (Vulg., *præceps*), and is connected with "mad," ver. 11. LXX., *ἐν παραλλήλῳ*. Arab. Chald., "quietly." Josephus, "leisurely, and in good order." Such an approach would not, however, have been at all in accordance with the perilous urgency of his intent.

† Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, is named from his grandfather Nimshi, who seems to have been the founder of the greatness of his house.

* What is meant by the *gerem* of the staircase is uncertain. The word means "a bone" (Aquila, *ὀστέδες*), and is, in this connection, an *ὀπαξ λεγόμενον*. The Targum explains it as the top vane of a stair-dial. The margin of the R. V. renders it "on the bare steps." The Vulgate renders it in *similitudinem tribunalis*, as though *gerem* meant *tselem*. The LXX. conceal their perplexity by simply translating the word *ἐπὶ τῷ γαբῆ*. Grotius and Clericus, in *fastigio graduum*. Symmachus, *ἐπὶ μίαν τῶν ἀναβαθμίδων*.

† 2 Kings ix. 14: "So Jehu conspired against Joram." The same word is used in 2 Chron. xxiv. 25, 26.

‡ 2 Kings ix. 15, R. V.: "If this be your mind."

§ So far as we know, he never returned to Ramoth-Gilead, of which indeed we hear no more.

|| Tristram, "Land of Moab."
¶ Heb., *Shiph'hath*, "a dust-storm" (LXX., *κοινοτρόν, ἀλὸς*); Vulg., *globum*, not as in A. V. and R. V., "a company." Comp. Isa. lx. 6; Ezek. xxxi. 10.

round his chariot to flee.* But not so swiftly as to escape the Nemesis which had been stealing upon him with leaden feet, but now smote him irretrievably with iron hand. Without an instant's hesitation, Jehu snatched his bow from his attendant charioteer, "filled his hands with it," and from its full stretch and resonant string sped the arrow, which smote Jehoram in the back with fatal force, and passed through his heart.† Without a word the unhappy king sank down upon his knees‡ in his chariot, and fell face forward, dead.

"Take him up," cried Jehu to Bidkar,§ "and fling him down where he is,—here in this portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. Here, years ago, you and I, as we rode behind Ahab,|| heard Elijah utter his oracle on this man's father, that vengeance should meet him here. Where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth and his sons, let dogs lick the blood of the son of Ahab."¶

But Jehu was not the man to let the king's murder stay his chariot-wheels when more work had yet to be done. Ahaziah of Judah, too, belonged to Ahab's house, for he was Ahab's grandson, and Jehoram's nephew and ally. Without stopping to mourn or avenge the tragedy of his uncle's murder, Ahaziah fled towards Bethgan or Engannim,** the fountain of gardens, south of Jezreel, on the road to Samaria and Jerusalem. Jehu gave the laconic order, "Smite him also"; †† but fright added wings to the speed of the hapless King of Judah. His chariot-steeds were royal steeds, and were fresh; those of Jehu were spent with the long, fierce drive from Ramoth. He got as far as the ascent of Gur before he was overtaken.†† There, not far from Ibleam, the rocky hill impeded his flight, and he was wounded by the pursuers. But he managed to struggle onwards to Megiddo, on the south of the plain of Jezreel, and there he hid himself.||| He was discovered, dragged out, and slain. Even Jehu's fierce emissaries did not make war on dead bodies, any more than Hannibal did, or Charles V. They left such meanness to Jehu himself, and to our Charles II. They did not interfere with the dead king's remains. His servants carried them to Jerusalem, and there he was buried with his fathers in the sepulchre of the kings, in the city

* 2 Kings ix. 23: "Turned his hands." Comp. 1 Kings xxii. 34.

† Ver. 24. Vulg., *inter scapulas*.

‡ LXX., reading בִּרְכָּי עַל יְעָל.

§ Bidkar, perhaps Bar-dekar, "Son of stabbing." Comp. 1 Kings iv. 9.

|| Heb. *l'smadim*, "in pairs"; LXX., ἐπιβεβηκότες ἐπὶ ζεύγη. It is uncertain whether Jehu and Bidkar were in the same chariot as Ahab, as Josephus says (καθελόμενοι οὐρανοῦ τοῦ ἀραβῶτος), or in a separate chariot.

** 2 Kings ix. 26: "Saith the Lord." Ephræm Syrus omits these words. He says that the night before Jehu had seen the blood of Naboth and his sons in a dream. Comp. Hom., "Od.", iii. 253: Τῷ κε οἱ οὐδὲ θανόντι χυτὴν ἐπὶ γαίαν ἔχουσαν Ἄλλ' ἄρα τόνγε κύνας τε καὶ οἰῶνοι κατέδαψαν Κεῖμενον ἐν πεδίῳ.

** A. V., "By the way of the garden-house." LXX., Βαθνά.

†† The text is a little uncertain.

‡‡ Thienius supposes "Gur" to mean "a caravanserai." Comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 7, *Gur-Baal*; Vulg., *Hospitium Baalis*.

||| The account of Chronicler (2 Chron. xxii. 9) differs from that of the earlier historian. It may, however, be (uncertainly) reconciled with it as in the text, if we suppose the words "he was hid in Samaria" to mean in Megiddo, in the territory of Samaria. Obviously, however, the traditions varied. There are difficulties about the story, for Ibleam is on the west toward Megiddo, and not between Jezreel and Samaria.

of David. As there was nothing more to tell about him, the historian omits the usual formula about the rest of the acts of Ahaziah, and all that he did. His death illustrates the proverb *Mitgegangen mitgefahren*: he was the comrade of evil men, and he perished with them.

Jehu speedily reached Jezreel, but the interposition of Jehoram and the orders for the pursuit of Ahaziah had caused a brief delay, and Jezebel had already been made aware that her doom was imminent.

Not even the sudden and dreadful death of her son, and the nearness of her own fate, daunted the steely heart of the Tyrian sorceress. If she was to die, she would meet death like a queen. As though for some Court banquet, she painted her eyelashes and eyebrows with antimony, to make her eyes look large and lustrous,* and put on her jewelled head-dress.† Then she mounted the palace tower, and, looking down through the lattice above the city gate, watched the thundering advance of Jehu's chariot, and hailed the triumphant usurper with the bitterest insult she could devise. She knew that Omri, her husband's father, had taken swift vengeance on the guilt of the usurper Zimri, who had been forced to burn himself in the harem at Tirzah after one month's troubled reign. Her shrill voice was heard above the roar of the chariot-wheels in the ominous taunt,—

"Is it peace, thou Zimri, thou murderer of thy master?" ‡

No!—She meant, "There is no peace for thee nor thine, any more than for me or mine! Thou mayest murder us; but thee too, thy doom awaiteth!"

Stung by the ill-omened words, Jehu looked up at her and shouted,—

"Who is on my side? Who?"

The palace was apparently rife with traitors. Ahab had been the first polygamist among the kings of Israel, and therefore the first also to introduce the odious atrocity of eunuchs. Those hapless wretches, the portents of Eastern seraglios, the disgrace of humanity, are almost always the retributive enemies of the societies of which they are the helpless victims. Fidelity or gratitude is rarely to be looked for from natures warped into malignity by the ruthless misdoing of men. Nor was the nature of Jezebel one to inspire affection. One or two eunuchs§ immediately thrust out of the windows their bloated and beardless faces. "Fling her down!" Jehu shouted. Down they flung the wretched queen (has any queen ever died a death so shamefully ignominious?), and her blood spirted upon the wall, and on the horses. Jehu, who had only stopped for an instant in his headlong rush, drove his horses over her corpse,|| and entered

* פִּנְיָה, "Lead-glance." A mixture of pulverized antimony (*stibium*) and zinc is still used by women in the East for this purpose. In *calliblepharis dilatat oculos* (Plin., "H. N.," xxxiii.). Keren-Happuk, the name given by Job to one of his daughters, means "horn of stibium." The object could hardly have been to attract Jehu (as Ephræm Syrus thinks), for Jezebel had already a *grandson* twenty-three years old (viii. 26).

† A. V., "Tired her head." Comp. *tia*. Lit., "made good"; LXX., ἡγάθην.

‡ Josephus gives the sense very well: Καλὸς δόλος ὁ ἀποκτείνων τὸν δεσπότην ("Antt.," IX. vi. 4). The same question might have been addressed to Baasha, Shallum, Menahem Pekah, and Hoshea: but at least Jehu might plead a prophet's call.

§ "Two or three." Lit., "two three," like the old English "two three" for "several."

|| Ver. 33. Heb., "He trod her underfoot." LXX., Συνεπάτησεν αὐτήν; Vulg., *Conculcaverunt eam*.

the gate of her capital with his wheels crimson with her blood. History records scarcely another instance of such a scene, except when Tullia, a century later, drove her chariot over the dead body of her father Servius Tullius in the *Vices Secleratus* of ancient Rome.*

But what cared Jehu? Many a conqueror ere now has sat down to the dinner prepared for his enemy; and the obsequious household of the dead tyrants, ready to do the bidding of their new lord, ushered the hungry man to the banquet provided for the kings whom he had slain. No man dreamt of uttering a wail: no man thought of raising a finger for dead Jehoram or for dead Jezebel, though they had all been under her sway for at least five-and-thirty years. "The wicked perish, and no man regardeth." "When the wicked perish, there is shouting." †

We may be startled at a revolution so sudden and so complete; yet it is true to history. A tyrant or a cabal may oppress a nation for long years. Their word may be thought absolute, their power irresistible. Tyranny seems to paralyse the courage of resistance, like the fabled head of Medusa. Remove its fascination of corruption, and men become men, and not machines, once more. Jehu's daring woke Israel from the lethargy which had made her tolerate the murders and enchantments of this Baal-worshipping alien. In the same way in one week Robespierre seemed to be an invincible autocrat; the next week his power had crumbled into dust and ashes at a touch.

It was not until Jehu had sated his thirst and hunger after that wild drive, which had ended in the murder of two kings and a queen and in his sudden elevation to a throne, that it even occurred to this new tiger-king to ask what had become of Jezebel. But when he had eaten and drunk, he said, "Go, see now to this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter." That she had been first Princess, then Queen, then Gebirah in Israel for nearly a full lifetime was nothing: it was nothing to Jehu that she was a wife, and mother, and grandmother of kings and queens both of Israel and Judah;—but she was also the daughter of Ethbaal, the priest-king of Tyre and Sidon, and therefore any shameful treatment of her remains might kindle trouble from the region of Phœnicia. ‡

But no one had taken the trouble so much as to look after the corpse of Jezebel. The populace of Jezreel were occupied with their new king. Where Jezebel fell, there she had been suffered to lie; and no one, apparently, cared even to despoil her of the royal robes, now saturated with blood. Flung from the palace-tower, her body had fallen in the open space just outside the walls—what is called "the mounds" of an Eastern city. In the strange carelessness of sanitation which describes as "fate" even the visitation of an avoidable pestilence, all sorts of offal are shot into this vacant space to fester in the tropic heat. I myself have seen the pariah dogs and the vultures feeding on a ghastly dead horse in a ruined space within the street of Beit-Dejun; and the dogs and the vultures—"those

national undertakers"—had done their work unbidden on the corpse of the Tyrian queen. When men went to bury her, they only found a few dog-mumbled bones—the skull, and the feet, and the palms of the hands.* They brought the news to Jehu as he rested after his feast. It did not by any means discompose him. He at once recognised that another levin-bolt had fallen from the thunder-crash of Elijah's prophecy, and he troubled himself about the matter no further. Her carcase, as the man of God had prophesied, had become as dung upon the face of the field, so that none could say, "This is Jezebel." †

CHAPTER XII.

JEHU ESTABLISHED ON THE THRONE.

B. C. 842-814.

2 KINGS X. 1-17.

"The devil can quote Scripture for his purpose."
—SHAKESPEARE.

BUT the work of Jehu was not yet over. He was established at Jezreel; he was lord of the palace and seraglio of his master; the army of Israel was with him. But who could be sure that no civil war would arise, as between the partisans of Zimri and Omri, as between Omri and Tibni? Ahab, first of the kings of Israel, had left many sons. There were no less than seventy of these princes at Samaria. Might there not be among them some youth of greater courage and capacity than the murdered Jehoram? And could it be anticipated that the late dynasty was so utterly unfortunate and execrated as to have none left to do them reverence, or to strike one blow on their behalf, after nearly half a century of undisputed sway? ‡ Jehu's *coup de main* had been brilliantly successful. In one day he had leapt into the throne. But Samaria was strong upon its watch-tower hill. It was full of Ahab's sons, and had not yet declared on Jehu's side. It might be expected to feel some gratitude to the dynasty which Jehu had supplanted, seeing that it owed to the grandfather of the king whom he had just slain its very existence as the capital of Israel.

He would put a bold face on his usurpation, and strike while the iron was hot. He would not rouse opposition by seeming to assume that Samaria would accept his rebellion. He therefore wrote a letter to the rulers of Samaria §—which was but a journey of nine hours' distance from Jezreel—and to the guardians of the young princes, reminding them that they were masters in a strong city, protected with its own contingent of chariots and horses, and well supplied with armour. He suggested that they should select the most promising of Ahab's sons, make him king, and begin a civil war on his behalf.

The event showed how prudent was this line of

* 1 Kings xxi. 23.

† Comp. Psalm lxxxiii. 10. Her name remained a by-word till the latest days (Rev. ii. 20), and the Spanish Jews called their persecutress Isabella the Catholic "Jezebel."

‡ Omri, 12 years; Ahab, 22; Ahaziah, 18; Jehoram, 12.

§ The reading of 2 Kings x. 1, "Unto the rulers of Jezreel," is clearly wrong. The LXX. reads, "Unto the rulers of Samaria." Unless "Jezreel" be a clerical error for Israel, we must read, "He sent letters from Jezreel unto the rulers of Samaria."

* Liv., i. 46-48.

† Prov. xi. 10. Compare the remark of Voltaire, who saw "le peuple ivré de vin et de joie de la mort de Louis XIV."

‡ 1 Kings xvi. 31. At this time Ethbaal was dead. He reigned probably from B. C. 940-908, and died at the age of sixty-eight (Jos., "Antt.," VIII. xiii. 1, IX. vi. 6; "c. Ap.," i. 18).

conduct. As yet Jehu had not transferred the army from Ramoth-Gilead. He had doubtless taken good care to prevent intelligence of his plans from reaching the adherents of Jehoram in Samaria. To them the unknown was the terrible. All they knew was that "Behold, two kings stood not before him!" The army must have sanctioned his revolt: what chance had they? As for loyalty and affection, if ever they had existed towards this hapless dynasty, they had vanished like a dream. The people of Samaria and Jezreel had once been obedient as sheep to the iron dominance of Jezebel. They had tolerated her idol-abominations, and the insolence of her army of dark-browed priests. They had not risen to defend the prophets of Jehovah, and had suffered even Elijah, twice over, to be forced to flee for his life. They had borne, hitherto without a murmur, the tragedies, the sieges, the famines, the humiliations, with which during these reigns they had been familiar. And was not Jehovah against the waning fortunes of the Beni-Omri? Elijah had undoubtedly cursed them, and now the curse was falling. Jehu must doubtless have let it be known that he was only carrying out the behest of their own citizen the great Elisha, who had sent to him the anointing oil. They could find abundant excuses to justify their defection from the old house, and they sent to the terrible man a message of almost abject submission:—Let him do as he would; they would make no king: they were his servants, and would do his bidding.

Jehu was not likely to be content with verbal or even written promises. He determined, with cynical subtlety, to make them put a very bloody sign-manual to their treaty, by implicating them irrevocably in his rebellion. He wrote them a second mandate.

"If," he said, "ye accept my rule, prove it by your obedience. Cut off the heads of your master's sons, and see that they are brought to me here to-morrow by yourselves before the evening."

The ruthless order was fulfilled to the letter by the terrified traitors. The king's sons were with their tutors, the lords of the city. On the very morning that Jehu's second missive arrived, every one of these poor guiltless youths was unceremoniously beheaded. The hideous, bleeding trophies were packed in fig-baskets and sent to Jezreel.*

When Jehu was informed of this revolting present it was evening, and he was sitting at a meal with his friends.† He did not trouble himself to rise from his feast or to look at "death made proud by pure and princely beauty." He knew that those seventy heads could only be the heads of the royal youths. He issued a cool and brutal order that they should be piled in two heaps‡ until the morning on either side the entrance of the city gates. Were they watched? or were the dogs and vultures and hyænas again left

* Fig-baskets, Jer. xxiv. 2. The word *dudim* is rendered "pots" in 1 Sam. ii. 14. LXX., ἐν κασάλλοις · Vulg., in *coffinis*. In Psalm lxxx. 6 the LXX. has ἐν τῷ κοφίνῳ.

† Jos., "Antt." IX. vi. 5.

‡ Heb., *Tsibourim*; LXX. βουνοίς.

to do their work upon them? We do not know. In any case it was a scene of brutal barbarism such as might have been witnessed in living memory in Kliiva or Bokhara;* nor must we forget that even in the last century the heads of the brave and the noble rotted on Westminster Hall and Temple Bar, and over the Gate of York, and over the Tolbooth at Edinburgh, and on Wexford Bridge.

The day dawned, and all the people were gathered at the gate, which was the scene of justice. With the calmest air imaginable the warrior came out to them, and stood between the mangled heads of those who but yesterday had been the pampered minions of fortune and luxury. His speech was short and politic in its brutality. "Be yourselves the judges," he said. "Ye are righteous. Jezebel called me a Zimri. Yes! I conspired against my master and slew him: but"—and here he casually pointed to the horrible, bleeding heaps—"who smote all these?" The people of Jezreel and the lords of Samaria were not only passive witnesses of his rebellion; they were active sharers in it. They had dabbled their hands in the same blood. Now they could not choose but accept his dynasty: for who was there besides himself? And then, changing his tone, he does not offer "the tyrant's devilish plea, necessity," to cloak his atrocities, but—like a Romish inquisitor of Seville or Granada—claims Divine sanction for his sanguinary violence. This was not *his* doing. He was but an instrument in the hands of fate. Jehovah is alone responsible. He is doing what He spake by His servant Elijah. Yes! and there was yet more to do; for no word of Jehovah's shall fall to the ground.

With the same cynical ruthlessness, and cold indifference to smearing his robes in the blood of the slain, he carried out to the bitter end his task of policy which he gilded with the name of Divine justice. Not content with slaying Ahab's sons, he set himself to extirpate his race, and slew all who remained to him in Jezreel, not only his kith and kin, but every lord and every Baal-priest who favoured his house, until he left him none remaining.

But what a frightful picture do these scenes furnish us of the state of religion and even of civilisation in Jezreel! There was this man-eating tiger of a king wallowing in the blood of princes, and enacting scenes which remind us of Dahomey and Ashantee, or of some Tartary khanate where human hands are told out in the market-place after some avenging raid. And amid all this savagery, squalor, and Turkish atrocity, the man pleads the sanction of Jehovah, and claims, unrebuked, that he is only carrying out the behests of Jehovah's prophets! It is not until long afterwards that the voice of a prophet is heard repudiating his plea and denouncing his bloodthirstiness.†

"An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek—
A goodly apple rotten at the core."

* Comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 54; 2 Macc. xv. 30.
† 1 Hos. i. 4.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRESH MURDERS—THE EXTIRPATION OF BAAL-WORSHIP.

B. C. 842.

2 KINGS X. 12-28.

"Jéhu, sur les hauts lieux, enfin osant offrir
Un téméraire encens que Dieu ne peut souffrir,
N'a pour servir sa cause et venger ses injures
Ni le cœur assez droit, ni les mains assez pures."
—RACINE.

AFTER such abject subservience had been shown him by the lords of Samaria and Jezreel, Jehu evidently had no further shadow of apprehension. He seems to have loved blood for its own sake—to have been seized by a vertigo of blood-poisoning. Having waded through slaughter to a throne, he loved to wash his footsteps in the blood of the slain, and to stretch to the very uttermost—to stretch until it cracked all its ravelled threads—the Divine sanction claimed by his fanaticism or his hypocrisy.

When he had finished his massacres at Jezreel, he went to Samaria. It was only a journey of a few hours. On the high road he met a company of travellers, whose escorts and rich apparel showed that they were persons of importance. They were about to halt, perhaps for refreshment, at the shearing-house of the shepherds—the place in which the sheep were gathered before they were shorn.*

"Who are ye?" he asked.

They answered that they were princes of the house of Judah, the brethren of Ahaziah,† on their way to see the two kings at Jezreel, and to salute their cousins, the children of Jehoram, and their kinsfolk the children of Jezebel the Gebirah.‡ The answer sealed their fate. Jehu ordered his followers to take them alive. At first he had not decided what he would do with them. But half measures had now become impossible. This cavalcade of princes little knew that they were on their way to greet the dead children of a dead king and a dead queen. Jehu felt that the possibilities of an endless *vendetta* must be quenched in blood. He gave orders to slay them, and there in one hour forty-two more scions of the royal houses of Judah and Israel were done to death.§ With the usual reckless insouciance of the East, where any tank or well is made the natural receptacle for corpses regardless of ultimate consequences, their bodies were flung into the cistern of the shearing-house, in which the sheep were washed before shearing, just as the bodies of Gedaliah's followers were flung by Ishmael into the well at Mizpah, and the bodies of our own murdered countrymen were flung into the well of Cawnpore. He did not leave one of them alive.

Thus Jehu "murdered two kings, and one

hundred and twelve princes, and gave Queen Jezebel to dogs to eat; and if priests had but noticed how even Hosca condemns and denounces his savagery, they would have abstained from some of their glorifications of assassins and butchers, nor would they have appealed to this man's hideous example, as they have done, to excuse some of their own revolting atrocities."* But

"Crime was ne'er so black
As ghostly cheer and pious thanks to lack;
Satan is modest. At heaven's door he lays
His evil offspring, and in Scriptural phrase
And saintly posture gives to God the praise
And honour of his monstrous progeny."†

One cruel deed more or less was nothing to Jehu. Leaving this tank choked with death and incarnadined with royal blood, he went on his way as if nothing particular had happened. He had not proceeded far when he saw a man well known to him, and of a spirit kindred to his own. It was the Arab ascetic and Nazarite Jehonadab, the son of Rechab (or "The Rider"), the chief of the tribe of Kenites who had flung in their lot with the children of Israel since the days of Moses.‡ It was the tribe which had produced a Jael; and Jehonadab had something of the fierce, fanatical spirit of the ancient chieftainess, who, in her own tent, had dashed out with the tent-peg the brains of Sisera. His very name, "The Lord is noble," indicated that he was a worshipper of Jehovah, and his fierce zeal showed him to be a genuine Kenite. Disgusted with the wickedness of cities, disgusted above all with the loathly vice of drunkenness, which, as we see from the contemporary prophets, had begun in this age to acquire fresh prominence in luxurious and wealthy communities, he exacted of his sons a solemn oath that neither they nor their successors would drink wine nor strong drink, and that, shunning the squalor and corruption of cities, they would live in tents, as their nomad ancestors had done in the days when Jethro and Hobab were princes of pastoral Midian. We learn from Jeremiah, nearly two and a half centuries later, how faithfully that oath had been observed; and, how, in spite of all temptation, the vow of abstinence was maintained, even when the strain of foreign invasion had driven the Rechabites into Jerusalem from their desolated pastures.§

Jehu knew that the stern fanaticism of the Kenite Emir would rejoice in his exterminating zeal, and he recognised that the friendship and countenance of this "good man and just," as Josephus calls him, would add strength to his cause, and enable him to carry out his dark design. He therefore blessed him.||

"Is thine heart right with my heart, as my heart is with thy heart?" he asked, after he had returned the greeting of Jehonadab.

"It is, it is!" answered the vehement Rechabite.¶

* See Martin, "Hist. de France," ix. 114.

† Whittier.

‡ Jer. xxxv. 1-19. Josephus ("Antt.," IX. vi. 6) calls him "a good man and a just, who had long been a friend of Jehu." "He was," says Ewald ("Gesch.," iii. 543), "of a society of those who despaired of being able to observe true religion undisturbedly in the midst of the nation with the stringency with which they understood it, and therefore withdrew into the desert."

§ Jer. xxxv. (written about B. C. 604). Communities of Nazarites seem to have sprung up at this epoch, perhaps as a protest against the prevailing luxury (Amos ii. 11).

|| In Josephus it is Jehonadab who blesses the king.

¶ Heb. יָשׁוּב וְיָשׁוּב.

* 2 Kings x. 12. The shepherds' House of Meeting (*Beth-egud-haromim*). LXX., ἐν Βαιθακάθ; Vulg., *ad cameram pastorum*; Aquila, οἶκος κἀμψεως. It has been conjectured by Klostermann that it belonged to the Rechabites, that they had been persecuted by Jezebel, and that they were glad to help in taking vengeance on her descendants.

† The Chronicler (2 Chron. xxii. 8) says "sons of the brethren of Ahaziah."

‡ LXX., ἡ ἐνταφρευσθῶσα.

§ 2 Kin [s. x. 11, A. V., "at the pit." Lit., "in" or "into the cistern."

"Then give me thy hand," he said; and grasping the Arab by the hand,* he pulled him up into his chariot—the highest distinction he could bestow upon him—and bade him come and witness his zeal for Jehovah.

His first task on arriving at Samaria was to tear up the last fibres of Ahab's kith and destroy all his partisans. This was indeed to push to a self-interested extreme the denunciation which had been pronounced upon Ahab; but the crime helped to secure his fiercely founded throne.

One deep-seated plot was yet unaccomplished. It was the total extermination of Baal-worship. To drive out for ever this orgiastic, corrupt, and alien idolatry was right; but there is nothing to show that Jehu would have been unable to effect this purpose by one stern decree, together with the destruction of Baal's images and temple. A method so simply righteous did not suit this Nero-Torquemada, who seemed to be never happy unless he united Jesuitical cunning with the pouring out of rivers of massacre.

He summoned the people together; and as though he now threw off all pretence of zeal for orthodoxy, he proclaimed that Ahab had served Baal a little, but Jehu would serve him much. The Samaritans must have been endowed with infinite gullibility if they could suppose that the king who had ridden into the city side by side with such a man as Jehonadab—"the warrior in his coat of mail, the ascetic in his shirt of hair"—who had already exhibited an unfathomable cunning, and had swept away the Baal-priests of Jezreel, was indeed sincere in this new conversion.† Perhaps they felt it dangerous to question the sincerity of kings. The Baal-worshippers of former days were known, and Jehu proclaimed that if any one of them was missing at the great sacrifice which he intended to offer to Baal he should be put to death. A solemn assembly to Baal was proclaimed, and every apostate from God to nature-worship from all Israel was present, till the idol's temple was thronged from end to end.‡ To add splendour to the solemnity, Jehu bade the wardrobe-keeper to bring out all the rich vestments of Tyrian dye and Sidonian broidery, and clothe the worshippers.§ Solemnly advancing to the altar with the Rechabite by his side, he warned the assembly to see that their gathering was not polluted by the presence of a single known worshipper of Jehovah. Then, apparently, he still further disarmed suspicion by taking a personal part in offering the burnt-offering. Meanwhile, he had surrounded the temple and blocked every exit with eighty armed warriors, and had threatened that any one of them should be put to death if he let a single Baal-worshipper escape. When he

* Striking hands was a sign of good faith (Job. xvii. 3; Prov. xxii. 26).

† He did it "in subtilty" (בְּעֵקֶבָה). This substantive occurs nowhere else, but is connected with the name Jacob. LXX., ἐν πτερύματι, "in taking by the heel," with reference to the name Jacob, "supplanter."
‡ Lit., "mouth, to mouth." LXX., στόμα ἐς στόμα.

§ Ver. 22. כְּלִי־לְבָשׁוֹת; *Vestiarium*, occurs here only. The LXX. omits it or puts it in Greek letters. Targum, קַמְּפְרַי, "chests." Sil. Italicus (iii. 23) describes the robes of the priests of the Galatian Hercules,—

"*Nec discolor uli,
Ante aras cultus velantur corpora lino
Et Pelusiaco præfulget stamine vertex.*"

—KEIL, *ad loc.*

It was a mixture of "the rich dye of Tyre and the rich web of Nile."

had finished the offering,* he went forth, and bade his soldiers enter, and slay, and slay, and slay till none were left. Then flinging the corpses in a heap, they made their way to the fortress of the Temple, where some of the priests may have taken refuge. They dragged out and burnt the *matstseboth* of Baal,† broke down the great central idol, and utterly dismantled the whole building. To complete the pollution of the dishallowed shrine, he made it a common midden for Samaria, which it continued to be for centuries afterwards.‡ It was his last voluntary massacre. The House of Ahab was no more. Baal-worship in Israel never survived that exterminating blow.

Happily for the human race, such atrocities committed in the name of religion have not been common. In Pagan history we have but few instances, except the slaughter of the Magians at the beginning of the reign of Darius, son of Hystaspes. Alas that other parallels should be furnished by the abominable tyranny of a false Christianity, blessed and incited by popes and priests! The persecutions and massacres of the Albigenses, preached by Arnold of Citeaux, and instigated by Pope Innocent III.; the expulsion of the Jews from Spain; the deadly work of Torquemada; the murderous furies of Alva among the hapless Netherlanders, urged and approved by Pope Pius V.; the massacre of St. Bartholomew, for which Pope Gregory and his cardinals sang their horrible *Te Deum* in their desecrated shrines,—these are the parallels to the deeds of Jehu. He has found his chief imitators among the votaries of a blood-stained and usurping sacerdotalism, which has committed so many crimes and inflicted so many horrors on mankind.

And did God approve all this detestable mixture of zealous enthusiasm with lying deceit and the insatiate thirst of blood?

If right be right, and wrong be wrong, the answer must not be an elaborate subterfuge, but an uncompromising "No!" We need be under no doubt on that subject. Christ Himself reproved His Apostles for savage zealotry, and taught them that the Elijah-spirit was not the Christ-spirit. Nor is the Elisha-spirit the Christian spirit any the more if these deeds of hypocrisy and blood were in any sense approved by him who is sometimes regarded as the mild and gentle Elisha. Where was he? Why was he silent? Could he possibly approve of this murderer's fury? We do not, indeed, know how far Elisha lent his sanction to anything more than the general end. Ahab's house had been doomed to vengeance by the voice which gave utterance to the verdict of the national conscience. The doom was just; Jehu was ordained to be the executioner. In no other way could the judgment be carried out. The times were not sentimental. The murder of Jehoram was not regarded as an act of tyrannicide, but of divinely commissioned justice. Elisha may have shrunk from the unreined furies of the man whom he had sent his emissary to anoint. On the other hand, we have not the least proof that he did so. He partook, probably, of the wild spirit of the times, when

* The phrase may be impersonal, "when one [*i. e.*, they] had finished the sacrifice"; but the narrative seems to imply that Jehu offered it himself (LXX., ὡς συνέτελεσαν ποιῶντες τὴν ὁλοκαύτωσιν; Vulg., *cum completum esset holocaustum*).

† A. V., images; R. V., pillars.

‡ Comp. Ezra vi. 11; Dan. ii. 5.

such deeds were regarded with feelings very different from the abhorrence with which we, better taught by the spirit of love, and more enlightened by the widening dawn of history, now justly regard them. No remonstrance of *contemporary* prophecy, however faint, is recorded as having been uttered against the doings of Jehu. The fact that, several centuries later, they could be recorded by the historian without a syllable of reprobation shows that the education of nations in the lessons of righteousness is slow, and that we are still amid the annals of the deep night of moral imperfection. But the nation was on the eve of purer teaching, and in the prophets Amos and Hosea we read the clear condemnation of deeds of cruelty in general, and specially of the king who felt no pity. Amos condemns even the idolatrous King of Edom, "because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever."* He condemns no less severely the Chemosh-worshipping King of Moab even for an insult done to the dead: "Because he burned the bones of the King of Edom into lime."† Jehu had warred pitilessly upon the living, and had shamelessly insulted the dead. He had hung the heads of seventy princes in two bleeding heaps on the common road for all eyes to stare upon, and he had polluted the cistern of Beth-equed-haroim with the dead bodies of forty-two youths of the royal house of Judah. He might plead that he was but carrying out to the full the commission of Jehovah, imposed upon him by Elisha; but Hosea, a century later, gives God's message against his house: "Yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezebel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel."‡

Nay, more! If, as is possible, the ghastly story of the siege of Samaria, narrated in the memoirs of Elisha, is displaced, and if it really belongs to the reign of Jehoahaz ben-Jehu, then Elisha himself brands the cruelty of the rushing thunderbolt of vengeance which his own hand had launched. For he calls the unnamed "King of Israel!" "the son of a murderer."

Men who are swords of God, and human executioners of Divine justice, may easily deceive themselves. God works the ends of His own providence, and He uses their ministry. "The fierceness of man shall turn to Thy praise, and the fierceness of them shalt Thou refrain."§ But they can never make their plea of prophetic sanction a cloak of maliciousness. Cromwell had stern work to do. Rightly or wrongly, he deemed it inevitable, and did not shrink from it. But he hated it. Over and over again, he tells us: he had prayed to God that He would not put him to this work. To the best of his power he avoided, he minimised, every act of vengeance, even when the sternness of his Puritan sense of righteousness made him look on it as duty. Far different was the case of Jehu. He loved murder and cunning for their own sakes, and, like Joab, he dyed the garments of peace with the blood of war.

How little was his gain! It had been happier for him if he had never mounted higher than the captaincy of the host, or even so high. He reigned for twenty-eight years (842-814)—longer than any king except his great-grandson Jeroboam II.; and in recognition of any element of

righteousness which had actuated his revolt, his children, even to the fourth generation, were suffered to sit upon the throne. His dynasty lasted for one hundred and thirteen years.* But his own reign was only memorable for defeat, trouble, and irreparable disaster.

For Hazael, who had seized the throne of his murdered lord Benhadad, was a fierce and able warrior. He held his own against the overweening might of his northern neighbour Assyria; and whenever he obtained a respite from this desperate warfare, he indemnified himself for all losses by enlarging his dominion out of the territories of the Ten Tribes. "In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short, and Hazael smote them in all the borders of Israel." Jehu had the mortification of seeing the fairest and most fruitful regions of his dominion, those which had belonged to Israel from the most ancient times, wrenched out of his grasp. From this time towards Israel lost half the fair Promised Land which God had given to their fathers. It was the beginning of the end. Henceforth the tribal inheritance of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh was an oppressed dependency of Aram. Hazael overran and annexed the land of Bashan from the spurs of Mount Hermon to the Lake of Gennezareth; Gaulan, and volcanic Argob, and Hauran the entire ancient kingdom of Og, King of Bashan, with all the herds and pasture-lands. Southward of this he seized the whole forest-clad plateau of Gilead, with its lovely ravines, north of the Jabbok, the territory of Gad; and pushing still southward, established his sway over the district of the Ammonites and the tribe of Reuben, as far as the city of Aroer, on the other side of the great chasm of Arnon (Wady Mojib). All the fatness of Bashan and Rabbah with her watery plain of the Beni-Ammon, and the grass-covered uplands which fed the enormous flocks of Mesha, the great Emir and sheep-master of Moab, passed from Israel to Syria, never to be recovered. What made the humiliation more terrible was that the invasion and conquest were accompanied with acts of unwonted cruelty. Elisha had wept to think what evil Hazael would do the children of Israel †—how he would set their strongholds on fire, and slay their young men with the sword, and dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their women with child. These atrocities were in those horrible days the ordinary incidents of warfare;‡ but Hazael seems to have been pre-eminent in brutal fierceness. It was this which called down on him and his people the "burdens" of Amos. "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: but I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad."§

We can imagine rather than describe the anguish of Jehu when he was compelled to look impotently on, while his powerful Syrian neighbour laid waste his dominion with fire and sword, and the cry of his despoiled and slaughtered sub-

* Jehu	842-814.
Jehoahaz	814-797.
Joash	797-781.
Jeroboam II.	781-740.
Zechariah	740.

† 2 Kings viii. 12.
‡ Isa. xiii. 11-16; Hos. x. 14, xiii. 16; Nah. iii. 10.
§ Amos i. 3, 4.

* Amos i. 11.
† Amos ii. 1.

‡ Hos. i. 4.
§ Psalm lxxvi. 10.

jects was uplifted to him in vain. Nor was this all. Emboldened by these reverses, a host of other enemies, once subjugated and despised, began to wreak their revenge and insolence on humbled Israel. The Philistines eagerly undertook the sale of the wretched captives who were brought to them in gangs from the burnt Trans-Jordanic towns.* The old "brotherly covenant" with the Tyrian, which had once been formed by Solomon, and had been cemented by the marriage of Jezebel with Ahab, was cancelled by Jehu's insults, and the Tyrians emulously outbid the Philistines in the purchase of Israelitish slaves. The Edomites and the Ammonites also helped Hazael in his marauding raids, and enlarged their own domains at the expense of Samaria. Such insults and humiliations might well go far to break the heart of an impetuous and warrior-king.

Of Jehu the Books of Kings and Chronicles have no more to tell us, but we gain fresh insight into his degradation from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser II. (860-824), now in the British Museum. From the inscription we find that, in 842, Jehu—"the son of Omri," as he is erroneously called—was one of the vassal kings who subjected themselves to the Assyrian conqueror,† and sent him tribute, which may have euphemistically passed under the name of presents. The despot of Nineveh twice speaks of it as a tribute. On this obelisk we see a picture of Jehu's ambassadors—perhaps of Jehu himself. On the left stands the Assyrian King with the winged circle over his head. He holds a beaker of wine in his hand, and two eunuchs stand behind him, one of whom covers him with a sunshade. Before him kneels and grovels in adoration the Jewish King, with his beard sweeping the ground. In long array behind him come his servants—first two eunuchs, then a number of bearded figures, who carry the tribute. They are dressed in long richly fringed robes, exactly resembling those of the Assyrians themselves, and they wear shoes which turn up at the toes. They are carrying figures of gold and silver, goblets, golden vessels, ingots of precious metals, spear-shafts, a kingly sceptre, baskets, bags, and trays of treasure, the contribution of which must have fallen with crushing weight on the impoverished kingdom.‡

This tribute must have been sent in 842, the eighteenth year of Shalmaneser II.'s reign. Doubtless Jehu thought he might be delivered from his furious neighbour Hazael by propitiating the Northern tyrant, who at the same time received the submission of the Tyrians and Sidonians. But if so, Jehu's hopes were dashed to the ground. Shalmaneser was the enemy of Hazael (Ha-sa-ilu), who had gone out to meet him at Antilibanus, and there had fought a desperate battle. The Syrian King was routed, and driven back, and Shalmaneser had besieged Damascus. But he had failed to take it, and indeed had not troubled Syria again till 832, when

* Amos i. 6-15.

† See Appendix I., Schrader, "Keilinschriften u. das Alte Test.," 208 ff.; Sayce, "Records of the Past," v. 41; Layard, "Nineveh," p. 62; Rawlinson, "Herodotus," i. 46. He is twice mentioned in inscriptions of Shalmaneser II. (861-825). He is called Ja-hu-a, son of Omri. The name of Omri was familiar in Nineveh; for Ahab had fought as a vassal of Assyria at the battle of Karkar, and Samaria was called Beth-Khumri. Shalmaneser would not trouble himself with the fact that Jehu had extirpated the old dynasty. His black stèle was found by Layard, and is figured in "Monuments of Nineveh," i., pl. 53. The name of Jehu was first deciphered by Dr. Hincks in 1851.

‡ Schrader (E. T.), ii. 199.

he made an excursion of minor importance. His troubles on the north and east of Assyria had diverted his attention from Damascus; and this, together with the inferiority of his son Samsirras (*d.* 811), had given Hazael a free hand to avenge himself on Israel as the ally of Assyria. Of Jehu we hear no more. After his long reign of twenty-eight years he slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria, and Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead. Savage as had been his measures, his victory over alien idolatries was by no means complete. What Micah calls "the statutes of Omri, and the works of the House of Ahab,"* were still kept; and men, both in Israel and Judah, walked in their old sins. Even in the reign of Jehu's own son Jehoahaz there still remained in Samaria the Asherah, or tree consecrated to the nature-goddess, which Jehu seems to have put away, but not to have destroyed.† As he grovelled in the dust before Shalmaneser, did no memory of his own ferocities darken his humiliated soul? Must not he, like our Henry II., have been inclined to utter the wailing cry, "Shame, shame on a conquered king!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ATHALIAH (B. C. 842-836)—JOASH BEN AHAZIAH OF JUDAH (B. C. 836-796).

2 KINGS xi. 1-xii. 21.

"Par cette fin terrible, et due à ses forfaits,
Apprenez, Roi des Juifs, et n'oubliez jamais,
Que les rois dans le ciel ont un juge sévère,
L'innocence un vengeur, et les orphelins un père!"
—RACINE, "Athalie."

"Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,
That, hushed in grim repose, expects its evening prey."
—GRAY.

BEFORE we follow the destinies of the House of Jehu we must revert to Judah, and watch the final consequences of ruin which came in the train of Ahab's Tyrian marriage, and brought murder and idolatry into Judah, as well as into Israel.

Athaliah, who, as queen-mother, was more powerful than the queen-consort (*malekkah*), was the true daughter of Jezebel. She exhibits the same undaunted fierceness, the same idolatrous fanaticism, the same swift resolution, the same cruel and unscrupulous wickedness.

It might have been supposed that the miserable disease of her husband Jehoram, followed so speedily by the murder, after one year's reign, of her son Ahaziah, might have exercised over her character the softening influence of misfortune. On the contrary, she only saw in these events a short path to the consummation of her ambition.

Under Jehoram she had been queen; under Ahaziah she had exercised still more powerful influence as Gebirah, and had asserted her sway alike over her husband and over her son, whose counsellor she was to do wickedly. It was far from her intention tamely to sink from her commanding position into the abject nullity of an aged and despised dowager in a dull provincial seraglio. She even thought that

"To reign is worth ambition, though in hell;
Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."

* Mic. vi. 16.

† 2 Kings xiii. 6.

The royal family of the House of David, numerous and flourishing as it once was, had recently been decimated by cruel catastrophes. Jehoram, instigated probably by his heathen wife, had killed his six younger brothers.* Later on, the Arabs and Philistines, in their insulting invasion, had not only plundered his palace, but had carried away his sons; so that, according to the Chronicler, "there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz [i. e., Ahaziah], the youngest of his sons."† He may have had other sons after that invasion; and Ahaziah had left children, who must all, however, have been very young, since he was only twenty-two or twenty-three when Jehu's servants murdered him. Athaliah might naturally have hoped for the regency; but this did not content her. When she saw that her son Ahaziah was dead, "she arose and destroyed all the seed royal." In those days the life of a child was but little thought of; and it weighed less than nothing with Athaliah that these innocents were her grandchildren. She killed all of whose existence she was aware, and boldly seized the crown. No queen had ever reigned alone either in Israel or in Judah. Judah must have sunk very low, and the talents of Athaliah must have been commanding, or she could never have established a precedent hitherto undreamed of, by imposing on the people of David for six years the yoke of a woman, and that woman a half-Phœnician idolatress. Yet so it was! Athaliah, like her cousin Dido, felt herself strong enough to rule.

But a woman's ruthlessness was outwitted by a woman's cunning. Ahaziah had a half-sister on the father's side,‡ the princess Jehosheba, or Jehoshabeath, who was then or afterwards (we are told) married to Jehoiada, the high priest.§ The secrets of harems are hidden deep, and Athaliah may have been purposely kept in ignorance of the birth to Ahaziah of a little babe whose mother was Zibiah of Beersheba, and who had received the name of Joash. If she knew of his existence, some ruse must have been palmed off upon her, and she must have been led to believe that he too had been killed. But he had not been killed. Jehosheba "stole him from among the king's sons that were slain," and, with the connivance of his nurse, hid him from the murderers sent by Athaliah in the palace store-room in which beds and couches were kept.|| Thence, at the first favourable moment, she transferred the child and nurse to one of the chambers in the three storeys of chambers which ran round the Temple, and were variously used as ward-ropes or as dwelling-rooms.

The hiding-place was safe; for under Athaliah the Temple of Jehovah fell into neglect and disrepute, and its resident ministers would not be numerous. It would not have been difficult, in the seclusion of Eastern life, for Jehosheba to pass off the babe as her own child to all but the handful who knew the secret.

Six years passed away, and the iron hand of Athaliah still kept the people in subjection. She had boldly set up in Judah her mother's Baal-

worship. Baal had his temple not far from that of Jehovah; and though Athaliah did not imitate Jezebel in persecuting the worshippers of Jehovah, she made her own high priest, Mattan, a much more important person than Jehoiada for all who desired to propitiate the favours of the Court.

Joash had now reached his seventh year, and a Jewish prince in his seventh year is regarded as something more than a mere child. Jehoiada thought that it was time to strike a blow in his favour, and to deliver him from the dreadful confinement which made it impossible for him to leave the Temple precincts.

He began secretly to tamper with the guards both of the Temple and of the palace. Upon the Levitic guards, indignant at the intrusion of Baal-worship, he might securely count, and the Carites and queen's runners were not likely to be very much devoted to the rule of the manlike and idolatrous alien-queen. Taking an oath of them in secrecy, he bound them to allegiance to the little boy whom he produced from the Temple chamber as their lawful lord, and the son of their late king.

The plot was well laid. There were five captains of the five hundred royal body-guards, and the priest secretly enlisted them all in the service.* The Chronicler says that he also sent round to all the chief Levites, and collected them in Jerusalem for the emergency. The arrangements of the Sabbath gave special facility to his plans; for on that day only one of the five divisions of guards mounted watch at the palace, and the others were set free for the service of the Temple.† It had evidently been announced that some great ceremony would be held in the shrine of Jehovah; for all the people, we are told, were assembled in the courts of the house of the Lord. Jehoiada ordered one of the companies to guard the palace; another to be at the "gate Sur," or the gate "of the Foundation";‡ another at the gate behind the barracks (?) of the palace-runners, to be a barrier§ against any incursion from the palace. Two more were to ensure the safety of the little king by watching the precincts of the Temple. The Levitic officers were to protect the king's person with serried ranks. Jehoiada armed them with spears and shields, which David had placed as trophies in the porch; and if any one tried to force his way within their lines he was to be slain. The only danger to be apprehended was from any Carite mercenaries, or palace-servants of the queen; among all others Jehoiada found a widespread defection. The people, the Levites, even the soldiers, all hated the Baal-worshipping usurper.||

* 2 Kings xi. 4: "The centurions of the Carians and of the runners."

† This is the second time that the word "Sabbath" occurs, or that the institution is alluded to, in the history of either monarchy.

‡ Nothing is known of סור, Sur, or סור; *y'sôd*, the Foundation (2 Chron. xxiii. 5). They are not mentioned elsewhere. LXX., *ἐν τῇ πύλῃ των ὀδῶν*, and (in Chronicles) *ἐν τῇ πύλῃ τῆ μέσῃ*.

§ Not as in A. V., "that it be not broken down."

|| In reading side by side the narratives in the Books of Kings and Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiii.) it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the main anxiety of the Chronicler is to leave the impression that the work in the Temple was chiefly done by the Levites, and that the sacred precincts were not polluted by the presence of alien troops. He evidently stumbled at the notion, conveyed by the older narrative, that Carians and such-like semi-heathen mercenaries should have stood by the altar at a high priest's command; so he substitutes Levites for guardsmen, and the profane laymen are relegated out-

* 2 Chron. xxi. 2-4.

† 2 Chron. xxi. 17.

‡ *ὁμοπατριος ἀδελφῆ* (Jos.).

§ 2 Chron. xxii. 11. There are undoubted difficulties about the statement (see *infra*). There is no other instance of the marriage of a princess with a priest.

|| Jos., "Antt." IX. vii. 1: *τὸ ταμειὸν των κλιῶν*. The chamber of beds was a sort of unoccupied wardrobe-room.

At the fateful moment the guards were arranged in two dense lines, beginning from either side of the porch, till their ranks met beyond the altar, so as to form a hedge round the royal boy. Into this triangular space the young prince was led by the high priest, and placed beside the *Matstsebah*—some prominent pillar in the Temple court, either one of Solomon's pillars Jaclin and Boaz, or some special erection of later days.* Round him stood the princes of Judah, and there, in the midst of them, Jehoiada placed the crown upon his head, and in significant symbol also laid lightly upon it for a moment "The Testimony"—perhaps the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant—the most ancient fragment of the Pentateuch † which was treasured up with the pot of manna inside or in front of the Ark. Then he poured on the child's head the consecrated oil, and said, "Let the king live!"

The completion of the ceremony was marked by the blare of the rams' horns, the softer blast of the silver trumpets, and the answering shouts of the soldiers and the people. The tumult, or the news of it, reached the ears of Athaliah in the neighbouring palace, and, with all the undaunted courage of her mother, she instantly summoned her escort, and went into the Temple to see for herself what was taking place. ‡ She probably mounted the ascent which Solomon had made from the palace to the Temple court, though it had long been robbed of its precious metals and scented woods. She led the way, and thought to overawe by her personal ascendancy any irregularity which might be going on; for in the deathful hush to which she had reduced her subjects she does not seem to have dreamt of rebellion. No sooner had she entered than the guards closed behind her, excluding and menacing her escort. §

A glance was sufficient to reveal to her the significance of the whole scene. There, in royal robes, and crowned with the royal crown, stood her little unknown grandson beside the *Matstsebah*, ¶ while round him were the leaders of the people and the trumpeters, and the multitudes were still rolling their tumult of acclamation from the court below. In that sight she read her doom. Rending her clothes, she turned to fly, shrieking, "Treason! treason!" Then the commands of the priest rang out: "Keep her between the ranks, ¶ till you have got her outside the area of the Temple; and if any of her guards follow or try to rescue her, kill him with the sword. But let not the sacred courts be polluted with her blood." So they made way for her, ** and as she could not escape she passed between

side. In details the two accounts are only reconcilable by a special pleading which would reconcile any discrepancy. * 1 Kings vii. 21. Comp., however, 2 Kings xxiii. 3.

† See Exod. xxv. 16, 21, xvi. 34. מַטְּסֵבָה (see 2 Chron. xxiii. 11). Kimchi takes it to mean "a royal robe," and other Rabbis a phylactery on the coronet (Deut. vi. 8). In the Targum to Chronicles it is explained to mean the costly jewel (2 Sam. xii. 30), of which none but a descendant of David could bear the weight. For *ha'edôth* Klostermann therefore suggests *hats'adôth*, "the royal bracelets."

‡ So says Josephus (*μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας στρατίας*), and it is certain that she would hardly go unattended.

§ Jos., "Ant.," IX. vii. 3: Τοὺς δὲ ἐπομένους ὀπίστας εἶρξαι εἰσελθεῖν.

¶ The meaning of *al-ha'amôd* is uncertain (A. V., "by a pillar"; Vulg., "on the tribunal"). Comp. 2 Kings xxiii. 3; 2 Chron. xxiii. 13; 1 Kings viii. 22; 2 Chron. vi. 13.

** 2 Kings xi. 15. Not as in A. V., "without the ranges." Heb., *lath'derôth*; LXX., *ἐσῶθεν τῶν σαθρῶν*.

** A. V., "And they laid hands on her"; LXX., *ἐπέβαλον αὐτῇ χεῖρας*; Vulg., *imposuerunt ei manus*. But R. V., as

the rows of Levites and soldiers till she had reached the private chariot-road by which the kings drove to the precincts.* There the sword of vengeance fell. Athaliah disappears from history, and with her the dark race of Jezebel. But her story lives in the music of Händel and the verse of Racine.

This is the only recorded revolution in the history of Judah. In two later cases a king of Judah was murdered, but in both instances "the people of the land" restored the Davidic heir. Life in Judah was less dramatic and exciting than in Israel, but far more stable; † and this, together with comparative immunity from foreign invasions, constituted an immense advantage.

Jehoiada, of course, became regent for the young king, and continued to be his guide for many years, so that even the king's two wives were selected by his advice. As the nation had been distracted with idolatries, he made the covenant between the king and the people that they should be loyal to each other, and between Jehoiada and the king and the people that they should be Jehovah's people. Such covenants were not infrequent in Jewish history. Such a covenant had been made by Asa ‡ after Abijam's apostasy, as it was afterwards made by Hezekiah § and by Josiah. ¶ The new covenant, and the sense of awakenment from the dream of guilty apostasy, evoked an outburst of spontaneous enthusiasm in the hearts of the populace. Of their own impulse they rushed to the temple of Baal which Athaliah had reared, dismantled it, and smashed to pieces his altars and images. The riot was only staid by a single murder. They slew Mattan, Athaliah's Baal-priest, before the altars of his god. ¶

With Jehoiada begins the title of "high priest." Hitherto no higher name than "the priest" had been given even to Aaron, or Eli, or Zadok; but thenceforth the title of "chief priest" is given to his successors, among whom he inaugurated a new epoch. **

It was now Jehoiada's object to restore such splendour and solemnity as he could to the neglected worship of the Temple, which had suffered in every way from Baal's encroachments. He did this before the king's second solemn inauguration. Even the porters had been done away with, so that the Temple could at any time be polluted by the presence of the unclean, and the whole service of priests and Levites had fallen into desuetude.

Then he took the captains, and the Carians, in the text, following the Targum, and the Jewish commentators, "They made for her two sides."

* This is usually understood to be the "horse gate" of the city (Neh. iii. 28), and so Josephus seems to have taken it, for he says that Athaliah was killed in "the Kedron Valley." Canon Rawlinson says that it was more probably in the Tyropœon Valley. But there could have been no object in dragging the wretched queen all this way. Jehoiada was only anxious that she should not stain the Temple with her blood, and "the way by which the horses came into the king's house" seems to be some private palace-gate. We are expressly told (ver. 16) that Athaliah was slain "at the king's house," probably in "the king's garden" (2 Kings xxv. 4).

† Wellhausen, "Isr. and Jud.," p. 96.

‡ 2 Chron. xv. 9-15.

§ 2 Chron. xxxix. 10.

¶ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31.

** The name is perhaps an abbreviation from Mattan-Baal, "gift of Baal." Comp. "Methumballes" (Plaut.). The names of Tyrian kings, Mitinna, Mattun, occur in inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser II. See Herod., vii. 98 (Bahr, *ad loc.*). "Methumbal of Arvad" is mentioned on a monument of Tiglath-Pileser II. (Schrader, ii. 249).

** 2 Kings xii. 10; Jer. xxix. 26; 2 Chron. xxiv. 6. Stanley, "Lectures," ii. 399.

and the princes, and conducted the boy-king, amid throngs of his shouting and rejoicing people, from the Temple to his own palace. There he seated him on the lion-throne of Solomon his father, in the great hall of justice, and the city was quiet and the land had rest. According to the historian, "Joash did right *all his days*, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him."* The stock addition that "howbeit the *bamoth* were not removed, and the people still sacrificed and offered incense there," is no derogation from the merits of Joash, and perhaps not even of Jehoiada, since if the law against the *bamoth* then existed, it had become absolutely unknown, and these local sanctuaries were held to be conducive to true religion.†

It was natural that the child of the Temple should have at heart the interests of the Temple in which he had spent his early days, and to the shelter of which he owed his life and throne. The sacred house had been insulted and plundered by persons whom the Chronicler calls "the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman,"‡ meaning, probably, her adherents. Not only had its treasures been robbed to enrich the house of Baal, but it had been suffered to fall into complete disrepair. Breaches gaped in the outer walls, and the very foundations were insecure. The necessity for restoring it occurred, not, as we should have expected, to the priests who lived at its altar, but to the boy-king. He issued an order to the priests that they should take charge of all the money presented to the Temple for the hallowed things, all the money paid in current coin, and all the assessments for various fines and vows,§ together with every freewill contribution. They were to have this revenue entirely at their disposal, and to make themselves responsible for the necessary repairs. According to the Chronicler, they were further to raise a subscription throughout the country from all their personal friends.

The king's command had been urgent. Money had at first come in, but nothing was done. Joash had reached the twenty-third year of his reign, and was thirty years old; but the Temple remained in its old sordid condition. The matter is passed over by the king as lightly, courteously, and considerately as he could; but if he does not charge the priests with downright embezzlement, he does reproach them for most reprehensible neglect. They were the appointed guardians of the house: why did they suffer its dilapidations to remain untouched year after year, while they continued to receive the golden stream which poured—but now, owing to the disgust of the people, in diminished volume—into their coffers? "Take no more money, therefore," he said, "from your acquaintances, but deliver it for

the breaches of the house." For what they had already received he does not call them to account, but henceforth takes the who'e matter into his own hands. The neglectful priests were to receive no more contributions, and not to be responsible for the repairs. Joash, however, ordered Jehoiada to take a chest and put it beside the altar on the right.* All contributions were to be dropped into this chest. When it was full, it was carried by the Levites unopened into the palace,† and there the king's chancellor and the high priest had the ingots weighed and the money counted; its value was added up, and it was handed over immediately to the architects, who paid it to the carpenters and masons. The priests were left in possession of the money for the guilt-offerings‡ and for the sin-offerings, but with the rest of the funds they had nothing to do. In this way was restored the confidence which the management of the hierarchy had evidently forfeited, and with renewed confidence in the administration fresh gifts poured in. Even in the cautious narrative of the Chronicler it is clear that the priests hardly came out of these transactions with flying colours. If their honesty is not formally impugned, at least their torpor is obvious, as is the fact that they had wholly failed to inspire the zeal of the people till the young king took the affair into his own hands.§

The long reign of Joash ended in eclipse and murder. If the later tradition be correct, it was also darkened with atrocious ingratitude and crime.

For, according to the Chronicler, Jehoiada died at the advanced age of one hundred and thirty, and was buried, as an unwonted honour, in the sepulchres of the kings.¶ When he was dead, the princes of Judah came to Joash, who had now been king for many years, and with a strange suddenness tempted the zealous repairer of the Temple of Jehovah into idolatrous apostasy. With soft speech they seduced him into the worship of Asherim. It was marvellous indeed if the child of the Temple became its foe, and he who had made a covenant with Jehovah fell away to Baalim. But worse followed. Prophets reproved him, and he paid them no heed, in spite of "the greatness of the burdens"—i. e., the multitude of the menaces—laid upon him.¶ The stern, denunciative harangues were despised. At last Zechariah, the son of his benefactor Jehoiada, rebuked king and people. He cried aloud from some eminence in the court of the Temple, that "since they had transgressed the commandments of Jehovah they could not prosper: they had forsaken Him, and He would forsake them." Infuriated by this prophecy of woe, the guilty people, at the command of their guiltier king, stoned him to death.** As he lay dying,

* 2 Kings xii. 2. After "all his days," the R. V. and A. V. add "*wherein* Jehoiada instructed him." This, however, is not accurate. There is a stop at days, and "*wherein*" should be "*because*." There seems, however, from the LXX., to be some variation in the text, and according to the Chronicler Joash became an apostate. LXX, *ἡσάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἃς ἐφώτισεν αὐτὸν ὁ ἱερεὺς*; Vulg. *Cunctis diebus quibus docuit eum Jofadas sacerdos*.

† The Chronicler (2 Chron. xxiv. 1, 2) *more suo* copies 2 Kings xii. 1, 2, but omits 3, because he dislikes the fact that not even his hero Jehoiada had anything to say against the *bamoth*. But it appears from 2 Kings xxiii. 0 that the *bamoth* had regular priests of their own, who "eat the priestly portions" (according to an old MS.) among their brethren.

‡ 2 Chron. xxiv. 7.

§ 2 Kings xii. 4: "The money that every man is set at." Lit., "Each the money of the souls of his valuation." Comp. Numb. xviii. 16; Lev. xxvii. 2.

* The Chronicler says "at the gate."

† 2 Chron. xxiv. 11.

‡ Lev. v. 1-6, xiv. 13. "Trespass-money" is here first mentioned.

§ 2 Chron. xxiv. 8-10. There is a difference between the historian and the Chronicler respecting the vessels of the house.

¶ 2 Chron. xxiv. 15, 16. The statement of the Chronicler is (as so often) surrounded by difficulties and improbabilities. If Jehoiada was one hundred and thirty years old when he died, he must have been ninety when Abaziah was murdered, at the age of twenty-three. But as Abaziah was (apparently) born when his father Jehoram was eighteen, Jehosheba must have been under eighteen, and must have been married to a man seventy years older than herself! See Lord Arthur Hervey, "On the Genealogies," p. 113.

** 2 Chron. xxiv. 27.

** Stanley charitably thinks that Joash may have only

he exclaimed, "The Lord look upon it, and require it!"*

The entire silence of the elder and better authority might lead us to hope that there may be room for doubt as to the accuracy of the much later tradition. Yet there certainly was a persistent belief that Zechariah had been thus martyred. A wild legend, related in the Talmud,† tells us that when Nebuzaradan conquered Jerusalem and entered the Temple he saw blood bubbling up from the floor of the court, and slaughtered ninety-four myriads, so that the blood flowed till it touched the blood of Zechariah, that it might be fulfilled which is said (Hos. iv. 2), "Blood toucheth blood." When he saw the blood of Zechariah, and noticed that it was boiling and agitated, he asked, "What is this?" and was told that it was the spilled blood of the sacrifices. Finding this to be false, he threatened to comb the flesh of the priests with iron curry-combs if they did not tell the truth. Then they confessed that it was the blood of the murdered Zechariah. "Well," he said, "I will pacify him." First he slaughtered the greater and lesser Sanhedrin: but the blood did not rest. Then he sacrificed young men and maidens: but the blood still bubbled. At last he cried, "Zechariah, Zechariah, must I then slay them all?" Then the blood was still, and Nebuzaradan, thinking how much blood he had shed, fled, repented, and became a Jewish proselyte!

Perhaps the worst feature of the story against Joash might have been susceptible of a less shocking colouring. He had naturally all his life been under the influence of priestly domination. The ascendancy which Jehoiada had acquired as priest-regent had been maintained till long after the young king had arrived at full manhood. At last, however, he had come into collision with the priestly body. He was in the right; they were transparently in the wrong. The Chronicler, and even the older historians, soften the story against the priests as much as they can; but in both their narratives it is plain that Jehoiada and the whole hierarchy had been more careful of their own interests than of those of the Temple, of which they were the appointed guardians. Even if they can be acquitted of potential malfeasance, they had been guilty of reprehensible carelessness. It is clear that in this matter they did not command the confidence of the people; for so long as they had the management of affairs the sources of munificence were either dried up or only flowed in scanty streams, whereas they were poured forth with glad abundance when the administration of the funds was placed mainly in the hands of laymen under the king's chancellor. It is probable that when Jehoiada was dead Joash thought it right to assert his royal authority in greater independence of the priestly party; and that party was headed by Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. The Chronicler says that he prophesied: that, however, would not necessarily conburst into hasty words like those of Henry II. against Becket.

* The Chronicler says that "the sons of Jehoiada" had helped to crown him, and that he put "the sons of Jehoiada" to death (2 Chron. xxiii. 11, xxiv. 25).
† Gittin, f. 57, 2; Sanhedrin, f. 96, 2; Hershon, "Treasures of the Talmud," p. 276; Lightfoot on Matt. xxiii. 25. There can be little doubt that the reading "Berechiah" is a later correction of some one who remembered the murder narrated in Jos., "B. J." IV. v. 4, and that the true reading is "son of Jehoiada." This is the last murder of a prophet mentioned in the Old Testament, and we learn from the Gospel the fact that he was slain "between the Temple and the altar."

stitute him a prophet, any more than it constituted Caiaphas. If he was a prophet, and was yet at the head of the priests, he furnishes an all-but solitary instance of such a position. The position of a prophet, occupied in the great work of moral reformation, was so essentially antithetic to that of priests, absorbed in ritual ceremonies, that there is no body of men in Scripture of whom, as a whole, we have a more pitiful record than of the Jewish priests. From Aaron, who made the golden calf, to Urijah, who sanctioned the idolatrous altar of Ahaz, and so down to Annas and Caiaphas, who crucified the Lord of glory, they rendered few signal services to true religion. They opposed Uzziah when he invaded their functions, but they acquiesced in all the idolatries and abominations of Rehoboam, Abijah, Ahaziah, Ahaz, and many other kings, without a syllable of recorded protest. When a prophet did spring from their ranks, they set their faces with one consent, and were confederate against him. They mocked and ridiculed Isaiah. When Jeremiah rose among them, the priest Pashur smote him on the cheek, and the whole body persecuted him to death, leaving him to be protected only by the pity of eunuchs and courtiers. Ezekiel was the priestliest of the prophets, and yet he was forced to denounce the apostasies which they permitted in the very temple. The pages of the prophets ring with denunciations of their priestly contemporaries.*

We do not know enough of Zechariah to say much about his character; but priests in every age have shown themselves the most unscrupulous and the most implacable of enemies. Joash probably stood to him in the same relation that Henry II. stood to Thomas à Becket. The priest's murder may have been due to an outburst of passion on the part of the king's friends, or of the king himself—gentle as his character seems to have been—without being the act of black ingratitude which late traditions represented it to be. The legend about Zechariah's blood represents the priest's spirit as so ruthlessly unforgiving as to awaken the astonishment and even the rebukes of the Babylonian idolater. Such a legend could hardly have arisen in the case of a man who was other than a most formidable opponent. The murder of Joash may have been, in its turn, a final outcome of the revenge of the priestly party. The details of the story must be left to inference and conjecture, especially as they are not even mentioned in the earlier and more impartial annalists.

It is at least singular that while Joash, the king, is blamed for continuing the worship at the *bamoth*, Jehoiada, the high priest, is *not* blamed, though they continued throughout his long and powerful regency. Further, we have an instance of the priest-regent's autocracy which can hardly be regarded as redounding to his credit. It is preserved in an accidental allusion on the page of Jeremiah. In Jer. xxix. 26 we read his reproof and doom of the lying prophecy of the priest Shemaiah the Nehelamite, because as a priest he had sent a letter to the chief priest Zephaniah and all the priests, urging them as the successors of Jehoiada to follow the ruling of Jehoiada, which was to put Jeremiah in a collar. For Jehoiada, he said, "had ordered the priests, as officers [*pakidim*] in the house of Jehovah, to put in the stocks every one that is mad and

* Isa. xxiv. 2; Jer. v. 31, xxiii. 11; Ezek. vii. 26, xxii. 26; Hos. iv. 9; Mic. iii. 11, etc.

maketh himself a prophet."* If, then, the Jehoiada referred to is the priest-*regent*, as seems undoubtedly to be the case, we see that he hated all interference of Jehovah's prophets with his rule. That the prophets were usually regarded by the world and by priests as "mad," we see from the fact that the title is given by Jehu's captains to Elisha's emissary;† and that this continued to be the case we see from the fact that the priests and Pharisees of Jerusalem said of John the Baptist that he had a devil, and of Christ that He was a Samaritan, and that He, too, had a devil. If Joash was in opposition to the priestly party, he was in the same position as all God's greatest saints and reformers have ever been from the days of Moses to the days of John Wesley. The dominance of priestcraft is the invariable and inevitable death of true, as apart from functional, religion. Priests are always apt to concentrate their attention upon their temples, altars, religious practices and rites—in a word, upon the externals of religion. If they gain a complete ascendancy over their fellow-believers, the faithful become their absolute slaves, religion degenerates into formalism, "and the life of the soul is choked by the observance of the ceremonial law." It was a misfortune for the Chosen People that, except among the prophets and the wise men, the external worship was thought much more of than the moral law. "To the ordinary man," says Wellhausen, "it was not moral but liturgical acts which seemed to be religious." This accounts for the monotonous iteration of judgments on the character of kings, based primarily, not upon their essential character, but on their relation to the *bamoth* and the calves.

Although the historian of the Kings gives no hint of this dark story of Zechariah's murder, or of the apostasy of Joash, and indeed narrates no other event of the long reign of forty years, he tells us of the deplorable close. Hazael's ambition had been fatal to Israel; and now, in the cessation of Assyrian inroads upon Aram, he extended his arms towards Judah. He went up against Gath and took it, and cherished designs against Jerusalem. Apparently he did not head the expedition in person, and the historian implies that Joash bought off the attack of his "general." But the Chronicler makes things far worse. He says that the Syrian host marched to Jerusalem, destroyed all the princes of the people, plundered the city, and sent the spoil to Hazael, who was at Damascus. Judah, he says, had assembled a vast army to resist the small force of the Syrian raid; but Joash was ignominiously defeated, and was driven to pay blackmail to the invader. As to this defeat in battle the historian is silent; but he mentions what the Chronicler omits—namely, that the only way in which Joash could raise the requisite bribe was by once more stripping the Temple and the palace, and sending to Damascus all the treasures which his three predecessors had consecrated,—though we are surprised to learn that after so many strippings and plunderings any of them could still be left.

The anguish and mortification of mind caused by these disasters, and perhaps the wounds he had received in the defeat of his army, threw Joash into "great diseases." But he was not suffered to die of these.‡ His servants—perhaps,

if that story be authentic, to avenge the slain son of Jehoiada, but doubtless also in disgust at the national humiliation—rose in conspiracy against him, and smote him at Beth-Millo,* where he was lying sick. The Septuagint, in 2 Chron. xxiv. 27, adds the dark fact that *all his sons* joined in the conspiracy.† This cannot be true of Amaziah, who put the murderer to death. Such, however, was the deplorable end of the king who had stood by the Temple pillar in his fair childhood, amid the shouts and trumpet-blasts of a rejoicing people. At that time all things seemed full of promise and of hope. Who could have anticipated that the boy whose head had been touched with the sacred oil and over-shadowed with the Testimony—the young king who had made a covenant with Jehovah, and had initiated the task of restoring the ruined Temple to its pristine beauty—would end his reign in earthquake and eclipse? If indeed he had been guilty of the black ingratitude and murderous apostasy which tradition laid to his charge, we see in his end the Nemesis of his ill-doing; yet we cannot but pity one who, after so long a reign, perished amid the spoliation of his people, and was not even allowed to end his days by the sore sickness into which he had fallen, but was hurried into the next world by the assassin's knife.

It is impossible not to hope that his deeds were less black than the Chronicler painted. He had made the priests feel his power and resentment, and their Levitic recorder was not likely to take a lenient view of his offences. He says that though Joash was buried in the City of David, he was not buried in the sepulchres of his fathers. The historian of the Kings, however, expressly says that "they buried him with his fathers in the City of David," and he was peacefully succeeded by Amaziah his son.

There is a curious, though it may be an accidental, circumstance about the name of the two conspirators who slew him. They are called "Jozacar, the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad, the son of Shomer, his servants." The names mean "Jehovah remembers," the son of "Hearer," and "Jehovah awards," the son of "Watcher"; and this strangely recalls the last words attributed in the Book of Chronicles to the martyred Zechariah. "Jehovah look upon it, and require it!" The Chronicler turns the names into "Zabad, the son of Shimeath, an Ammonitess, and Jehozabad, the son of Shimrith, a Moabitess." Does he record this to account for their murderous deed by the blood of hated nations which ran in their veins?

CHAPTER XV.

AMAZIAH OF JUDAH.

B. C. 796-783 (?).

2 KINGS XIV. 1-22.

"All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."—MATT. xxvi. 52.

THE fate of Amaziah ("Jehovah is strong"), son of Joash of Judah, resembles in some respects that of his father. Both began to reign there had been any fighting at all. The Syrian commander had been bribed to retire.

* We cannot understand the addition "on the way that goeth down to Silla." Silla is nowhere else referred to.

† LXX., 2 Chron. xxiv. 27, *kai oi uioi autou parres.*

* Jer. xxix. 24-32.

† 2 Kings ix. 11.

‡ But from the Book of Kings we should not infer that

prosperously: the happiness of both ended in disaster. Amaziah at his accession was twenty-five years old. He was the son of a lady of Jerusalem named Jehoaddin. He reigned twenty-nine years, of which the later ones were passed in misery, peril, and degradation, and, like the unhappy Joash, and at about the same age, he fell the victim of domestic conspiracy.

The hereditary principle was too strongly established to enable the murderers of Joash to set it aside, but Amaziah was not at first strong enough to make any head against them. In time he became established in his kingdom, and then his earliest act was to bring the head conspirators, Jozacar and Jehozabad, to justice. It was noted as a most remarkable circumstance that he did not put to death their children, and extirpate their houses. In acting thus, if he were influenced by a spirit of mercy, he showed himself before his time; but such mercy was completely contrary to the universal custom, and was also regarded as most impolitic. Even the comparatively merciful Greeks had the proverb, "Fool, who has murdered the sire, and left his sons to avenge him!"*

In epochs of the wild justice of revenge, when blood-feuds are an established and approved institution, the policy of letting vengeance only fall on the actual offender was regarded as fatal. Perhaps Amaziah felt it beyond his power to do more than bring the actual murderers to justice, and it is possible that their children may have been among the conspirators who, in his hour of shame, ultimately destroyed him.

The historian, it is true, attributes his conduct to magnanimity, or rather to his obedience to the law, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin." This is a reference to Deut. xxiv. 16, and is probably the independent comment of the writer who recorded the event two centuries later. In the gradual growth of a milder civilisation, and the more common dominance of legal justice, such a law may have come into force, as expressive of that voice of conscience which is to sincere nations the voice of God. That the Book of Deuteronomy, as a book, was not in existence in its present form till four reigns later we shall hereafter see strong reasons to believe. But even if any part of that book was in existence, it is not easy to understand how Amaziah would have been able to decide that the law which forbade the punishment of the children with the offending parents was the law which he was bound to follow, when Moses and Joshua and other heroes of his race had acted on the olden principle. The innocent families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were represented as having been swallowed up with the ambitious heads of their houses. Joshua and all Israel had not only stoned Achan, but with him all his unoffending house. What, too, was the meaning of the law which established the five Cities of Refuge as the best way to protect the accidental homicide from the recognised and unrebuked actions of the Goel—the avenger of blood? The vengeance of a Goel was regarded, as it is in the East and South to this day, not as an implacable fierceness, but as a sacred duty, the neglect of which

would cover him with infamy. Judging of our documents by the impartial light of honest criticism, it seems impossible to deny that the law of Deuteronomy was the law of an advancing civilisation, which became more mild as justice became firmer and more available. If Deuteronomy represents the legislation of Moses, we can only say that in this respect Amaziah was the first person who paid the slightest attention to it. Such exceptional obedience may well excite the notice of the historian, in whose pages we see that prophets like Ahijah, Elijah, and Elisha had, again and again, in accordance with the spirit of their times, contemplated the total ex-cision, not only of erring kings, but even of their little children and their most distant kinsfolk.

Further:—We are told that Amaziah "did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah: he did according to all things as Joash his father did." The Chronicler also bestows his eulogy on Amaziah; but having told such dark stories of the apostasy of Joash to Asherah-worship and his murder of the prophets, he could hardly add "as Joash his father did"; so he omits those words. The reservation that Amaziah did right, "yet not like David his father" (2 Kings xiv. 3), "but not with a perfect heart" (2 Chron. xxv. 2), is followed by the stock abatement about the *bameth*, and the sacrifices and incense burnt in them. This was a crime in the eyes of writers in B. C. 540, but certainly not in the eyes of any king before the discovery of the "Book of the Law" in the reign of Josiah, B. C. 621. We are compelled, therefore, by simple truth, to ask, How came it that Amaziah should be so scrupulous as to observe the Deuteronomic law by not slaying the sons of his father's murderers, while he does not seem to be aware, any more than the best of his predecessors, that while he obeyed one precept he was violating the essence and spirit of the entire code in which the precept occurs? The one main object, the constantly repeated law of Deuteronomy, is the centralisation of all worship, and the rigid prohibition of every local place of sacrifice. Strange that Amaziah should have selected for attention a single precept, while he is profoundly unconscious of, or indifferent to, the fact that he is setting aside the regulation with which the law, as Deuteronomy represents it, begins and ends, and on which it incessantly insists!

Joash had been something of a weakling, as though the gloom of his early concealment in the Temple and the shadow of priestly dominance had paralysed his independence. Amaziah, on the other hand, born in the purple, was vigorous and restless. When he was secure upon the throne, and had done his duty to his father's memory, he bent his efforts to recover Edom. The Edomites had revolted in the days of his great-grandfather Jehoram,* and since then "did tear perpetually,"† harassing with incessant raids the miserable fellahin of Southern Judah. They reaped the crops of the settled inhabitants, cut down their fruit-trees, burnt their farmsteads, and carried their children into cruel and hopeless slavery. One verse tells us all that the historian knew, or cared to relate, of Amaziah's campaign. He only says that it was eminently successful. Amaziah confronted the Edomites in the Valley of Salt,‡ on the border of Edom, to the south

* Νήπιος ὁς πατέρα κτείνας υἱὸς καταλείπει. Comp. Q. Curtius, vi. 11: "Lege cautum erat ut propinqui eorum qui regi insidiati cum ipsis necarentur." Cic., "Ad Brut." 15.

* 2 Kings viii. 20-22.

† Amos i. 11.

‡ The Valley (*Gē*) of Salt is "the plain of the Sabkah,"

of the Dead Sea, and inflicted upon them a signal defeat. He not only slaughtered ten thousand of them, but, advancing southwards, he stormed and captured Selah or Petra, their rocky capital, two days' journey north of Ezion-Geber, on the gulf of Akabah.* Considering the natural strength of Petra, amid its mountain-fastnesses, this was a victory of which he might well be proud, and he marked his prowess by changing the name of the city to Joktheel, "subdued by God." The historian, copying the ancient record before him, says that Selah continued to be so called "to this day."† This is a curious instance of close transcription, for it is certain that Selah can only have retained the name of Joktheel for a very short period, and had lost it long before the days of the Exile. Even in the reign of Ahaz (B. C. 735-715) the Edomites had so completely recovered lost ground that they were able to make predatory excursions into Judah, and to threaten Hebron, which would have been obviously impossible if they were not masters of their own chief capital.‡ The district which Amaziah seems to have conquered was mainly west of the Arabah. He wished to restore Elath, and perhaps to carry out the old commerce with the Red Sea which Solomon began, and which had fired the ambition of Jehoshaphat. The conquest of Selah secured the road for his commercial caravans.

So far the older and better authorities. The Chronicler expands the story in his usual fashion, in which historical and critical verity is so often compelled, if not to suspect the disease of exaggeration and the bias of Levitism, at least to feel uncertainty as to the details. He says that Amaziah collected an army of three hundred thousand men of Judah, trained them to a high state of discipline, and armed them with spear and shield. He hired in addition one hundred thousand Israelitish mercenaries, mighty men of valour, at the heavy cost of one hundred talents of silver. He was rebuked by a prophet for employing Israelites, "because the Lord was not with them," so that if he used their aid he would certainly be defeated. Amaziah asked what he was to do for the hundred talents, and the prophet told him that Jehovah could give him much more than this.§ So he dismissed his Ephraimites, who, returning home in great fury, "fell upon the cities of Judah," from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, killed three thousand of their inhabitants, and took much spoil. Amaziah, however, defeated the Edomites without their aid, and not only slew ten thousand, but took captive ten thousand more, all of whom he dashed to pieces by hurling them from the top of the rock of Petra.||

Then, by an apostasy much more astounding than even that of his father Joash, he took home with him the idols of Mount Seir, worshipped them, and burnt incense before them. Jehovah sends a prophet to rebuke him for his senseless infatuation in worshipping the gods of the Edomites whom he had just so utterly defeated; but

about two miles broad, between the southern end of the Dead Sea and the hills which separate the Ghôr from the Arabah (Seezen, "Reisen," ii. 356; Robinson, "Researches," ii. 450, 483). David had won a great victory there (2 Sam. viii. 13; Psalm lx., *title*).

* Selah, "a rock" (Μέτρα). Eusebius calls it Rekem.

† It is the name also of a city of Judah (Josh. xv. 38).

‡ 2 Chron. xxviii. 17; Jos., "Antt.," XII. viii. 6.

§ 2 Chron. xxv. 5-10, 13.

|| Κατακρημνισμός. This mode of execution prevailed till quite recent times in the little republic of Andorra.

Amaziah returns him the insolent answer, "Who made thee of the king's council? Be silent, or I will put thee to death." The prophet met his ironical sneer with words of deeper meaning: "If I am not on *your* council, I am on God's. Because thou hast not hearkened to my counsel, I know that God has counselled to destroy thee."

The later writer thus accounts for the folly and overthrow of this valourous and hitherto eminently pious king. Certain it is, as we shall narrate in the next chapter, that, in spite of warning, he had the temerity to challenge to battle the warlike Joash ben-Jehoahaz of Israel, grandson of Jehu. The kings met at Beth-Shemesh, and Amaziah was utterly routed, with consequences so shameful to himself and to Jerusalem that he was never able to hold up his head again. He could but eat away his own heart in despair, a ruined man. After this he "lived" rather than reigned fifteen years longer.* The wall of Jerusalem, broken down near the Damascus Gate, on the side towards Israel, for a space of four hundred cubits, was a standing witness of the king's infatuated folly. His people were ashamed of him, and weary of him; and at last, seeing that nothing more could be expected of one whose spirit had evidently been broken from impetuosity into abjectness, they formed a conspiracy against him. To save his life he fled to the strong fort of Lachish, a royal Canaanite city, in the hills to the southwest of Judah.† But they pursued him thither, and even Lachish would not protect him. He was murdered. They threw the corpse upon a chariot, conveyed it to Jerusalem, and buried it in the sepulchres of his fathers. The people quietly elevated to the throne his son Azariah, then sixteen years old, who had been born the year before his father's crowning disgrace. What became of the conspirators we do not know. They were probably too strong to be brought to justice, and we are not told that Azariah even attempted to visit their crime upon their heads.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DYNASTY OF JEHU.

	B. C.	
Jehoahaz..	814-797 ..	2 Kings xiii. 1-9
Joash ..	797-781 ..	" xiii. 10-21, xiv. 8-16
Jeroboam II.	781-740 ..	" xiv. 23-29
Zechariah ..	740 ..	" xv. 8-12

"Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."—1 SAM. ii. 30.

ISRAEL had scarcely ever sunk to so low a nadir of degradation as she did in the reign of the son of Jehu. We have already mentioned that some assign to his reign the ghastly story which we have narrated in our sketch of the work of Elisha. It is told in the sixth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and seems to belong to the reign of Jehoram ben-Ahab; but it may have got displaced from this epoch of yet deeper wretchedness. The accounts of Jehoahaz in 2 Kings xiii. are evidently fragmentary and abrupt.

* 2 Kings xiv. 17. The phrase that "he *lived* fifteen years" is unusual, and seems to imply that the historian saw,

"In more of life, true life no more."

† Josh. x. 6, 31, xv. 39; 2 Kings xviii. 17; 2 Chron. xi. 9.

Jehoahaz reigned seventeen years.* Naturally, he did not disturb the calf-worship, which, like all his predecessors and successors, he regarded as a perfectly innocent symbolic adoration of Jehovah, whose name he bore and whose service he professed. Why should he do so? It had been established now for more than two centuries. His father, in spite of his passionate and ruthless zeal for Jehovah, had never attempted to disturb it. No prophet—not even Elijah nor Elisha, the practical establishers of his dynasty—had said one word to condemn it. It in no way rested on his conscience as an offence; and the formal condemnation of it by the historian only reflects the more enlightened judgment of the Southern Kingdom and of a later age. But according to the parenthesis which breaks the thread of this king's story (2 Kings xiii. 5, 6), he was guilty of a far more culpable defection from orthodox worship; for in his reign, the Asherah—the tree or pillar of the Tyrian nature-goddess—still remained in Samaria, and therefore must have had its worshippers. How it came there we cannot tell. Jezebel had set it up (1 Kings xvi. 33), with the connivance of Ahab. Jehu apparently had "put it away" with the great stèle of Baal (2 Kings iii. 2), but, for some reason or other, he had not destroyed it. It now apparently occupied some public place, a symbol of decadence, and provocative of the wrath of Heaven.

Jehoahaz sank very low. Hazael's savage sword, not content with the devastation of Bashan and Gilead, wasted the west of Israel also in all its borders. The king became a mere vassal of his brutal neighbour at Damascus. So little of the barest semblance of power was left him, that whereas, in the reign of David, Israel could muster an army of eight hundred thousand, and in the reign of Joash, the son and successor of Jehoahaz, Amaziah could hire from Israel one hundred thousand mighty men of valour as mercenaries, Jehoahaz was only allowed to maintain an army of ten chariots, fifty horsemen, and ten thousand infantry! In the picturesque phrase of the historian, "the King of Syria had threshed down Israel to the dust," in spite of all that Jehoahaz did, or tried to do, and "all his might." How completely helpless the Israelites were is shown by the fact that their armies could offer no opposition to the free passage of the Syrian troops through their land. Hazael did not regard them as threatening his rear; for, in the reign of Jehoahaz, he marched southwards, took the Philistine city of Gath, and threatened Jerusalem. Joash of Judah could only buy them off with the bribe of all his treasures, and according to the Chronicler they "destroyed all the princes of the people," and took great spoil to Damascus.†

Where was Elisha? After the anointing of Jehu he vanishes from the scene. Unless the narrative of the siege of Samaria has been dis-

placed, we do not so much as once hear of him for nearly half a century.

The fearful depth of humiliation to which the king was reduced drove him to repentance. Worn to death of the Syrian oppression of which he was the daily witness, and of the utter misery caused by prowling bands of Ammonites and Moabites—jackals who waited on the Syrian lion—Jehoahaz "besought the Lord,* and the Lord hearkened unto him, and gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime." If this indeed refers to events which come out of place in the memoirs of Elisha; and if Jehoahaz ben-Jehu, not Jehoram ben-Ahab, was the king in whose reign the siege of Samaria was so marvellously raised, then Elisha may possibly be the temporary deliverer who is here alluded to.† On this supposition we may see a sign of the repentance of Jehoahaz in the shirt of sackcloth which he wore under his robes, as it became visible to his starving people when he rent his clothes on hearing the cannibal instincts which had driven mothers to devour their own children. But the respite must have been brief, since Hazael (ver. 22) oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. If this rearrangement of events be untenable, we must suppose that the repentance of Jehoahaz was only so far accepted, and his prayer so far heard, that the deliverance, which did not come in his own days, came in those of his son and of his grandson.

Of him and of his wretched reign we hear no more; but a very different epoch dawned with the accession of his son Joash, named after the contemporary King of Judah, Joash ben-Ahaziah.

In the Books of Kings and Chronicles Joash of Israel is condemned with the usual refrains about the sins of Jeroboam. No other sin is laid to his charge; and breaking the monotony of reprobation which tells us of every king of Israel without exception that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," Josephus boldly ventures to call him "a good man, and the antithesis to his father."

He reigned sixteen years. At the beginning of his reign he found his country the despised prey, not only of Syria, but of the paltry neighbouring bandit-sheykhs who infested the east of the Jordan; he left it comparatively strong, prosperous, and independent.

In his reign we hear again of Elisha, now a very old man of past eighty years. Nearly half a century had elapsed since the grandfather of Joash had destroyed the house of Ahab at the prophet's command. News came to the king that Elisha was sick of a mortal sickness, and he naturally went to visit the death-bed of one who had called his dynasty to the throne, and had in earlier years played so memorable a part in the history of his country. He found the old man dying, and he wept over him, crying, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."‡ The address strikes us with some surprise. Elisha had indeed delivered Samaria more than once when the city had been reduced to direst extremity; but in spite of his prayers and of his presence, the sins of Israel

* 2 Kings xiii. 4; "besought," literally "stroked the face of" (1 Sam. xiii. 12; 1 Kings xiii. 6).

† The reference is usually explained of Jeroboam II.

‡ Comp. 2 Kings ii. 12.

* I have not thought it worth while to unravel by a series of uncertain conjectures the careless, and often self-contradictory, synchronism of the reigns of the kings in the two kingdoms. The compiler of these books evidently attached little or no importance to accurate chronology. For instance, the data of 2 Kings xiii. 1, 10, do not coincide; and instead of entering into tedious, doubtful, and confusing guesses, I have contented myself throughout with giving for the reigns of the kings such dates, or approximate dates, as seem to result from the several notices compared with the contemporary annals of Assyria.

† 2 Chron. xxiv. 23.

and her kings had rendered this chariot of Israel of very small avail. The names of Ahab, Jehu, Jehoahaz, call up memories of a series of miseries and humiliations which had reduced Israel to the very verge of extinction. For sixty-three years Elisha had been the prophet of Israel; and though his public interpositions had been signal on several occasions, they had not been availing to prevent Ahab from becoming the vassal of Assyria, nor Israel from becoming the appanage of the dominion of that Hazael whom Elisha himself had anointed King of Syria, and who had become of all the enemies of his country the most persistent and the most implacable.

The narrative which follows is very singular. We must give it as it occurs, with but little apprehension of its exact significance.

Elisha, though Joash "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," seems to have regarded him with affection. He bade the youth take his bow,* and laid his feeble, trembling hands on the strong hands of the king. Then he ordered an attendant to fling open the lattice, and told the king to shoot eastward towards Gilad, the region whence the bands of Syria made their way over the Jordan. The king shot, and the fire came back into the old prophet's eye as he heard the arrow whistle eastward. He cried, "The arrow of Jehovah's deliverance, even the arrow of victory over Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." † Then he bade the young king to take the sheaf of arrows, and smite towards the ground, as if he was striking down an enemy. Not understanding the significance of the act, the king made the sign of thrice striking the arrows downwards, and then naturally stopped. ‡ But Elisha was angry—or at any rate grieved.§ "You should have smitten five or six times," he said, "and then you would have smitten Syria to destruction. Now you shall only smite Syria thrice." The king's fault seems to have been lack of energy and faith.

There are in this story some peculiar elements which it is impossible to explain, but it has one beautiful and striking feature. It tells us of the death-bed of a prophet. Most of God's greatest prophets have perished amid the hatred of priests and worldlings. The progress of the truth they taught has been "from scaffold to scaffold, and from stake to stake."

Careless seems the Great Avenger. History's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems
and the Word—
Truth for ever on the scaffold, wrong for ever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the Future, and behind the dim
unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above
His own!"

Now and then, however, as an exception, a great prophetic teacher or reformer escapes the hatred of the priests and of the world, and dies in peace. Savonarola is burnt, Huss is burnt, but Wicliff dies in his bed at Lutterworth, and Luther died in peace at Eisleben. Elijah passed

* Lit., "Make thine hand to ride upon thy bow." There is not the slightest taint of belomancy in the story (Comp. Ezek. xxi. 21), nor does it allude to shooting an arrow into an enemy's country as a declaration of war (Virg., *Æn.*, ix. 57).

† Aphek, a name of good omen (1 Kings xx. 26-30),

‡ Thrice. Comp. Num. xxii. 28; Exod. xxiii. 17, etc.

§ LXX., ἐλπιῶνθῆ.

away in storm, and was seen no more. A king comes to weep by the death-bed of the aged Elisha. "For us," it has been said, "the scene at his bedside contains a lesson of comfort and even encouragement. Let us try to realise it. A man with no material power is dying in the capital of Israel. He is not rich: he holds no office which gives him any immediate control over the actions of men; he has but one weapon—the power of his word. Yet Israel's king stands weeping at his bedside—weeping because this inspired messenger of Jehovah is to be taken from him. In him both king and people will lose a mighty support, for this man is a greater strength to Israel than chariots and horsemen are. Joash does well to mourn for him, for he has had courage to wake the nation's conscience; the might of his personality has sufficed to turn them in the true direction, and rouse their moral and religious life. Such men as Elisha everywhere and always give a strength to their people above the strength of armies, for the true blessings of a nation are reared on the foundations of its moral force."

The annals are here interrupted to introduce a posthumous miracle—unlike any other in the whole Bible—wrought by the bones of Elisha. He died, and they buried him, "giving him," as Josephus says, "a magnificent burial." As usual, the spring brought with it the marauding bands of Moabites. Some Israelites who were burying a man caught sight of them, and, anxious to escape, thrust the man into the sepulchre of Elisha, which happened to be nearest at hand. But when he was placed in the rocky tomb, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet. Doubtless the story rests on some real circumstance. There is, however, something singular in the turn of the original, which says (literally) that the man *went and touched* the bones of Elisha; * and there is proof that the story was told in varying forms, for Josephus says that it was the Moabite plunderers who had killed the man, and that he was thrown by them into Elisha's tomb. † It is easy to invent moral and spiritual lessons out of this incident, but not so easy to see what lesson is intended by it. Certainly there is not throughout Scripture any other passage which even *seems* to sanction any suspicions of magic potency in the relics of the dead. ‡

But Elisha's symbolic prophecy of deliverance from Syria was amply fulfilled. About this time Hazael had died, and had left his power in the feebler hands of his son Benhadad III. Jehoahaz had not been able to make any way against him (2 Kings xiii. 3), but Joash his son thrice met and thrice defeated him at Aphek. As a consequence of these victories, he won back all the cities which Hazael had taken from his father on the west of Jordan. The east of Jordan was never recovered. It fell under the shadow of Assyria, and was practically lost for ever to the tribes of Israel.

Whether Assyria lent her help to Joash under certain conditions we do not know. Certain it is that from this time the terror of Syria vanishes. The Assyrian king Rammânîrâri III. about this time subjugated all Syria and its king, whom the tablets call Mari, perhaps the same as

* See R. V., margin.

† *Antt.*, IX. viii. 6.

‡ See Ecclus. xlviii. 13: "When he was dead, he prophesied in the tomb." (But the clause may be spurious.)

Benhadad III. In the next reign Damascus itself fell into the power of Jeroboam II., the son of Joash.

One more event, to which we have already alluded, is narrated in the reign of this prosperous and valiant king.

Amity had reigned for a century between Judah and Israel, the result of the politic-impolitic alliance which Jehoshaphat had sanctioned between his son Jehoram and the daughter of Jezebel. It was obviously most desirable that the two small kingdoms should be united as closely as possible by an offensive and defensive alliance. But the bond between them was broken by the overweening vanity of Amaziah ben-Joash of Judah. His victory over the Edomites, and his conquest of Petra, had puffed him up with the mistaken notion that he was a very great man and an invincible warrior. He had the wicked infatuation to kindle an unprovoked war against the Northern Tribes. It was the most wanton of the many instances in which, if Ephraim did not envy Judah, at least Judah vexed Ephraim. Amaziah challenged Joash to come out to battle, that they might look one another in the face. He had not recognised the difference between fighting with and without the sanction of the God of battles.

Joash had on his hands enough of necessary and internecine war to make him more than indifferent to that bloody game. Moreover, as the superior of Amaziah in every way, he saw through his inflated emptiness. He knew that it was the worst possible policy for Judah and Israel to weaken each other in fratricidal war, while Syria threatened their northern and eastern frontiers, and while the tread of the mighty march of Assyria was echoing ominously in the ears of the nations from afar. Better and kinder feelings may have mingled with these wise convictions. He had no wish to destroy the poor fool who so vaingloriously provoked his superior might. His answer was one of the most crushingly contemptuous pieces of irony which history records, and yet it was eminently kindly and good-humoured. It was meant to save the King of Judah from advancing any further on the path of certain ruin.

"The thistle that was in Lebanon" (such was the apologue which he addressed to his would-be rival) "sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying: Give thy daughter to my son to wife.* The cedar took no sort of notice of the thistle's ludicrous presumption, but a wild beast that was in Lebanon passed by, and trod down the thistle."

It was the answer of a giant to a dwarf;† and to make it quite clear to the humblest comprehension, Joash good-naturedly added: "You are puffed up with your victory over Edom: glory in this, and stay at home. Why by your vain meddling should you ruin yourself and Judah with you? Keep quiet: I have something else to do than to attend to you."

Happy had it been for Amaziah if he had taken warning! But vanity is a bad counsellor, and folly and self-deception—ill-matched pair—were whirling him to his doom. Seeing that he was bent on his own perdition, Joash took the initiative and marched to Beth-Shemesh, in the

* Possibly some matrimonial proposal may have lain behind the interchange of messages.

† Stade. For similar parables see Judg. ix. 8; Herod., i. 141; Rawlinson, "Anc. Mon.," iii. 226.

territory of Judah.* There the kings met, and there Amaziah was hopelessly defeated. His troops fled to their scattered homes, and he fell into the hands of his conqueror. Joash did not care to take any sanguinary revenge; but much as he despised his enemy, he thought it necessary to teach him and Judah the permanent lesson of not again meddling to their own hurt. He took the captive king with him to Jerusalem, which opened its gates without a blow.† We do not know whether, like a Roman conqueror, he entered it through the breach of four hundred cubits which he ordered them to make in the walls,‡ but otherwise he contented himself with spoil which would swell his treasure, and amply compensate for the expenses of the expedition which had been forced upon him. He ransacked Jerusalem for silver and gold; he made Obed-Edom, the treasurer, give up to him all the sacred vessels of the Temple, and all that was worth taking from the palace. He also took hostages—probably from among the number of the king's sons—to secure immunity from further intrusions. It is the first time in Scripture that hostages are mentioned. It is to his credit that he shed no blood, and was even content to leave his defeated challenger with the disgraced phantom of his kingly power, till, fifteen years later, he followed his father to the grave through the red path of murder at the hand of his own subjects.§

After this we hear no further records of this vigorous and able king, in whom the characteristics of his grandfather Jehu are reflected in softer outline. He left his son Jeroboam II. to continue his career of prosperity, and to advance Israel to a pitch of greatness which she had never yet attained, in which she rivalled the grandeur of the united kingdom in the earlier days of Solomon's dominion.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DYNASTY OF JEHU (continued)— JEROBOAM II.

B. C. 781-740.

2 KINGS xiv. 23-29.

If we had only the history of the kings to depend upon, we should scarcely form an adequate conception either of the greatness of Jeroboam II. or of the condition of society which prevailed in Israel during his long and most pros-

* Beth-Shemesh, "the house of the sun." It is mentioned in 1 Sam. vi. 9, 12, and was a priestly city, and one of Solomon's store-cities (1 Kings iv. 9). It ultimately fell into the hands of the Philistines (2 Chron. xxviii. 18). It is not the Beth-Shemesh of Josh. xix. 22.

† Josephus says that this was the fault of Amaziah, whom Joash of Israel threatened with death if Jerusalem resisted.

‡ This implies that at least half the northern wall was dismantled—the wall towards Ephraim.

§ Some have conjectured that Amaziah of Judah became more or less the vassal of Joash of Israel, and that the vassalage continued till after the death of Jeroboam II. (1) For Jeroboam II. held Elath till his death, when Uzziah recovered it (2 Kings xiv. 22), and he certainly could not have held this southern Judæan port if Judah was entirely independent; and (2) we read that Uzziah did not become king at all till the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam II. But if Amaziah only survived Joash of Israel fifteen years (2 Kings xiv. 17), Uzziah must have succeeded in the fifth year of Jeroboam. Is the explanation to be found in the fact that up to that time—for twelve years—Jeroboam did not allow the Judæans to elect a king? or are these among the hopeless confusions of synchronism which cannot be reconciled at all with our present data?

perous reign of forty-one years (B. C. 781-740). In the Books of Chronicles he is merely mentioned accidentally in a genealogy. The Second Book of Kings only devotes one verse to him (xiv. 25) beyond the stock formulæ of connection so often repeated. That verse, however, gives us at least a glimpse of his great importance, for it tells us that "he restored the coast of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the plain." Those two lines sufficiently prove to us that he was by far the greatest and most powerful of all the kings of Israel, as he was also the longest-lived and had the longest reign. His victories flung a broad gleam of sunset over the afflicted kingdom, and, for a time, they might have beguiled the Israelites into lofty hopes for the future; but with the death of Jeroboam the light instantly faded away, and there was no after-glow.

And this sudden brightness, if it deceived others, did not deceive the prophets of the Lord. It happened in accordance with the promise of Jehovah given by Jonah, the son of Amittai, of Gath-Hepher;* but Amos and Hosea saw that the glory of the reign was hollow and delusive, and that the outward prosperity did but "skin and film the ulcerous place" below.

In truth, the possibility of this sudden outburst of success was due to the very enemy who, within a few years, was to grind Israel to powder. God pitied the deplorable overthrow of His chosen people: He saw that there was neither slave nor freeman—"neither any shut up, nor any left at large, nor any helper for Israel"; and in Jeroboam He gave them the saviour who had been granted to the penitence of Jehoahaz.† It was, so to speak, a last pledge to them of the love and mercy of Jehovah, which gave them a respite, and would fain have saved them altogether, if they had turned with their whole heart to Him. And, personally, Jeroboam II. seems to have been one of the better kings. Not a single crime is laid to his charge; for under the circumstances of its deep-rooted continuance through the reigns of all his predecessors, it cannot be deemed a heinous crime that he did not put down the symbolic cult of Jehovah by the cherubic emblems at Dan and Bethel. The fact that he had been named after the founder of the kingdom of Israel shows that the kingdom was proud of the valiant and Heaven-commissioned rebel who had thrown off the yoke of the house of Solomon. The house of Jehu admired his policy and his institutions. The son of Nebat did not by any means appear in the eyes of his people as only worthy of the monotonous epitaph, "who made Israel to sin." It is true that now the voice of prophecy in Israel itself began to denounce the concomitants of the "calf-worship"; but the voices of the Jewish herdsman of Tekoa and of the Israelite Hosea probably raised but faint murmurs in the ears of the warrior-king, with whom they do not seem to have come into personal contact. In no case would he rank them as equal in importance with the fiery Elijah or the king-making Elisha, who had been for four generations the counsellor of his race. Neither of those great prophets had

* 2 Kings xiv. 25-27. There are other allusions to the historic events in 2 Kings x. 32, 33, xiii. 3-7, 22-25. Hitzig conjectures that Isa. xv., xvi. are "a burden of Moab" quoted from Jonah.

† 2 Kings xiii. 5, "The Lord gave Israel a saviour"; xiv. 27, "And He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash." Some suppose the saviour to be the Assyrian King.

insisted on the Deuteronomic law of a centralised worship, nor had they denounced the revered local sanctuaries with which Israel had been so long familiar. Jonah, indeed—who, if legend be correct, had been the boy of Zarephath, and the personal attendant of Elijah—had predicted the king's unbroken success, and had neither made it conditional on a religious revolution, nor, so far as we know, had in any way censured the existing institutions.

What rendered Jeroboam's glory possible was the immediate paralysis and imminent ruin of the power of Syria. The Israelitish king was probably on good terms with Assyria, and, during this epoch, three Assyrian monarchs had struck blow after blow against the house of Hazael. Damascus and its dependencies had received shattering defeats at the hands of Rammânîrâri III., Shalmaneser III. (782-772), and Assurdan III. (772-754). Rammânîrâri had made expeditions against Damascus (773) and Hazael (772); and Assurdan had invaded the Syrian domains in 767, 755, and 754. Syria had more than enough to do to hold her own in a struggle for life and death against her atrocious neighbour. With Uzziah in Judah, Jeroboam II. seems to have been on the friendliest terms; and probably Uzziah acted as a half-independent vassal, united with him by common interests. The day for Assyria to threaten Israel had not yet come. Syria lay in the path; and Assurdan III. had been succeeded by Assurnîrari, who gave the world the unusual spectacle of a peaceful Assyrian king.

Jeroboam II., therefore, was free to enlarge his domains; and unless there be a little patriotic exaggeration in the extent and reality of his prowess, he exercised at least a nominal suzerainty over a realm nearly as extensive as that of David. He first advanced against Damascus, and so far "recovered" it as to make it acknowledge his rule.* His father Joash had won back all the Israelite cities which Benhadad III. had taken from Jehoahaz; and Jeroboam, if he did not absolutely reconquer the district east of Jordan, yet kept it in check and repressed the predatory incursions of the Emirs of Moab and Ammon.† He thus extended the border of Israel to the sea of the Arabah and "the brook of willows" which divides Edom from Moab.‡ But this was not all. He pushed his conquests two hundred miles northwards of Samaria, and became lord of Hamath the Great. Ascending the gorge of the Litâny between the chains of Libanus and Antilibanus, which formed the northern limit of Israel, and following the river to its source near Ealbek, he then descended

* It had owned the feudal supremacy of David (2 Sam. viii. 6), and Ahab had extorted the privilege of having bazaars there (1 Kings xx. 34). Considering how immense had been the resources of Danasus (2 Kings vi. 14), which had once been able to send to battle twelve thousand war-chariots ("Eponym Canon," p. 108) under Benhadad, we see how fearfully the Syrian capital must have been weakened.

† If Isa. xv. 1, 2, refers to this invasion of Jeroboam II., as Hitzig first conjectured, we infer that he had taken both Ar of Moab (Rabbath) and Kir of Moab, a strong fortress on a hill, by night assaults; and that he had also captured Dibon, Nebo, and Medeba, and inflicted on them summary chastisement. It appears that the Moabites had advanced northwards from the Arnon, while Hazael occupied Ramoth-Gilead, and had seized part of the tribe of Reuben. Jeroboam II. first expelled them, and then invaded their own proper country. Hitzig conjectures that Isa. xv., xvi., are really an old prophecy—perhaps by Jonah, son of Amittai—which Isaiah quotes, and to which he adds two verses (Isa. xvi. 12, 13). In such overthrow Moab must have learnt to be ashamed of Chemosh (Jer. xlviii. 13).

‡ Isa. xv. 7; Amos vi. 14.

the Valley of the Orontes, which constitutes the "pass" or "entering in" of Hamath. Hamath was a town of the Hittites, the most powerful race of ancient Canaan. They were not of Semitic origin, but spoke a separate language. They were the last great branch of the once famous and dominant Khetas, whose former importance has only recently been revealed by their deciphered inscriptions. A century and a half earlier the Hamathites had thrown off the yoke of Solomon, and they governed nearly a hundred dependent cities. In alliance with the Phœnicians and Syrians, they had been valuable members of a league, which, though defeated, had long formed a barrier against the southward movement of the Assyrians. How striking was the conquest of this city by Jeroboam is shown by the title of "Hamath the Great," bestowed upon it by the contemporary prophets,* with whom literary prophecy begins.

The result of these conquests was unwonted peace. Agriculture once more became possible, when the farmers of Israel were secure that their crops would not be reaped by plundering Bedouin. Intercourse with neighbouring nations was revived, as in the golden days of Solomon, though it was regarded with suspicion.† Civilisation softened something of the old brutality. Prophecy assumed a different type, and literature began to dawn.

But to this state of things there was, as we learn from the contemporary prophets Amos and Hosea, a darker side. Of Jonah we know nothing more; for it is impossible to see in the Book of Jonah much more than a beautiful and edifying story, which may or may not rest on some surviving legends. It differs from every other prophetic book by beginning with the word: "And," and its late origin and legendary character cannot any longer be reasonably disputed.‡ We may hope, therefore, that the Northern prophet, whose home was not far from Nazareth, was not quite the morose and ruthless grumbler so strikingly portrayed in the book which bears his name. Of any historical intervention of his in the affairs of Jeroboam we know nothing further than the recorded promise of the king's prosperity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AMOS, HOSEA, AND THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

2 KINGS xiv. 23-29; xv. 8-12.

"In them is plainest taught and easiest learnt

What makes a nation happy and keeps it so.

What ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat."

—MILTON, "Paradise Regained."

"We see dimly in the Present what is small and what is great,

Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of Fate:

But the soul is still oracular: amid the market's din

List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave within,

'They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin.'" —LOWELL.

AMOS and HOSEA are the two earliest prophets whose "burdens" have come down to us. From them we gain a near insight into the inter-

* Amos vi. 2.

† Merchandise had hitherto been considered discreditable for a pure Jew, so that a trader is called a Canaanite (Hos. xii. 7, 8).

‡ See the writer's "Minor Prophets" ("Men of the Bible" Series), pp. 221-243.

nal condition of Israel in this day of her prosperity.

We see, first, that the prosperity was not unbroken. Though peace reigned, the people were not left to lapse unwarned into sloth and godlessness. The land had suffered from the horrible scourge of locusts, until every *carmel*—every garden of God on hill and plain—withered before them.* There had been widespread conflagrations;† there had been a visitation of pestilence; and, finally, there had been an earthquake so violent that it constituted an epoch from which dates were reckoned.‡ There were also two eclipses of the sun, which darkened with fear the minds of the superstitious.§

Nor was this the worst. Civilisation and commerce had brought luxury in their train, and all the bonds of morality had been relaxed. The country began to be comparatively depleted, and the innocent regularity of agricultural pursuits palled upon the young, who were seduced by the glittering excitement of the growing towns. All zeal for religion was looked on as archaic, and the splendour of formal services was regarded as a sufficient recognition of such gods as there were. As a natural consequence, the nobles and the wealthy classes were more and more infected with a gross materialism, which displayed itself in ostentatious furniture, and sumptuous palaces of precious marbles inlaid with ivory. The desire for such vanities increased the thirst for gold, and avarice replenished its exhausted coffers by grinding the faces of the poor, by defrauding the hireling of his wages, by selling the righteous for silver, the needy for handfuls of barley, and the poor for a pair of shoes. The degrading vice of intoxication acquired fresh vogue, and the gorgeous gluttonies of the rich were further disgraced by the shameful spectacle of drunkards, who lolled for hours over the revelries which were inflamed by voluptuous music. Worst of all, the purity of family life was invaded and broken down. Throwing aside the old veiled seclusion of women in Oriental life, the ladies of Israel showed themselves in the streets in all "the bravery of their tinkling ornaments of gold," and sank into the adulterous courses stimulated by their pampered effrontery.

Such is the picture which we draw from the burning denunciations of the peasant-prophet of Tekoa. He was no prophet nor prophet's son, but a humble gatherer of sycamore-fruit, a toil which only fell to the humblest of the people.¶ Who is not afraid, he asks, when a lion roars? and how can a prophet be silent when the Lord God has spoken? Indignation had transformed

* Amos vii. 1. Famine (iv. 6); drought (iv. 7, 8); yellow blight and locusts (iv. 9); pestilence (iv. 10); earthquake and burning (iv. 11).

† Amos vii. 4.

‡ Amos i. 1, iii. 14, iv. 11, viii. 8; Zech. xiv. 5; "Ye shall flee like as ye fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah." Josephus says that in an earthquake a little before the birth of Christ ten thousand were buried under the ruined houses ("Antt.," XV. v. 2), and he has many Rabbinic haggadot to tell us about the earthquake, which, he says, happened at the moment when Uzziah burnt incense in the Temple ("Antt.," IX. x. 4).

§ According to Hind, they took place on June 15th, B. C. 763, and February 9th, B. C. 784. Amos alludes to the capture of Gath by Uzziah, of Calneh (*Ktesiphon*), and of Hamath (vi. 2; 2 Chron. xxvi. 6). Gath henceforth disappears from the Philistian Pentapolis (Amos i. 7, 8; Zeph. ii. 4; Zech. ix. 5).

¶ Or "dresser of sycamore-trees" (R. V.). LXX., κνίζων σικαμύρα; Vulg., *vellicans sycamoros*. The sycamore-fruit (fruit of the *Ficus sycamoros*, or wild fig) is ripened by puncturing it (Theoph., "H. Plant.," iv. 2; Pliny, "H. N.," xiii. 14).

and dilated him from a labourer into a seer, and had summoned him from the pastoral shades of his native village—whether in Judah or in Israel is uncertain—to denounce the more flagrant iniquities of the Northern capital.* First he proclaims the vengeance of Jehovah upon the transgressions of the Philistines, of Tyre, of Edom, of Ammon, of Moab, and even of Judah; and then he turns with a crash upon apostatising Israel.† He speaks with unsparing plainness of their pitiless greed, their shameless debauchery, their exacting usury, their attempts to pervert even the abstinent Nazarites into intemperance, and to silence the prophets by opposition and obloquy. Jehovah was crushed under their violence.‡ And did they think to go unscathed after such black ingratitude? Nay! their mightiest should flee away naked in the day of defeat. Robbery was in their houses of ivory, and the few of them who should escape the spoiler should only be as when a shepherd tears out of the mouth of a lion two legs and a piece of an ear.§ As for Bethel, their shrine—which he calls Bethaven, "House of Vanity," not Bethel, "House of God"—the horns of its altars should be cut off. Should oppression and licentiousness flourish? Jehovah would take them with hooks, and their children with fish-hooks, and their sacrifices at Bethel and Gilgal should be utterly unavailing. Drought, and blasting, and mildew, and wasting plague, and earth-convulsions like those which had swallowed Sodom and Gomorrah, from which they should only be plucked as a "firebrand out of the burning," should warn them that they must prepare to meet their God.|| It was lamentable; but lamentation was vain, unless they would return to Jehovah, Lord of hosts,¶ and abandon the false worship of Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal, and listen to the voice of the righteous, whom they now abhorred for his rebukes. They talked hypocritically about "the day of the Lord," but to them it should be blackness. They relied on fast days, and services, and sacrifices; but since they would not give the sacrifice of judgment and righteousness, for which alone God cared, they should be carried into captivity beyond Damascus: yes! even to that terrible Assyria with whose king they now were on friendly terms. They lay at ease on their carved couches at their delicate feasts, draining the wine-bowls, and glistering with fragrant oils, heedless of the

* The well-known town of Tekoa had been Solomon's horse-fair, and had been fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 6). It lay in a wild country six miles south of Bethlehem (2 Chron. xx. 20; 1 Macc. ix. 33; Robinson, "Bibl. Res." i. 486). For a fuller account of these prophets, I must refer to my book on "The Minor Prophets" in the "Men of the Bible" Series. It has always been assumed that Amos belonged to the well-known Tekoa, and was therefore a subject of the Southern Kingdom. In recent days this has become uncertain. No sycamores grow or can grow on the bleak uplands of Tekoa (Tristram, "Nat. Hist. of the Bible," p. 307); so that Jerome, in his preface to Amos, thinks that "brambles" are intended. Even Kimchi conjectured that Tekoa was an unknown town in the tribe of Asher. Amos's allusions to scenery are all applicable to the Northern landscape.

† Amos i. 1-ii. 5.

‡ Amos ii. 6-13.

§ Amos iii. 9-15.

|| Amos iv. 1-13.

¶ This title, "Jehovah-Tsebaoth," now begins to occur. It is not found in the Hexateuch. It probably means "Lord of the *starry hosts*." Contact with Assyria first made the Israelites acquainted with star-worship. Amos alludes to the Pleiades and Orion (v. 8; comp. Job ix. 9, xxxviii. 31). Star-worship is forbidden in Deuteronomy. In Amos v. 26 the true meaning is that the Israelites would take with them, on their road to exile, Sakkuth (Moloch?) and Kewan (the god-star Saturn).

impending doom which would smite the great house with breaches and the little house with clefts, and which should bring upon them an avenger who should afflict them from their conquered Hamath southwards even to the wady of the wilderness.* The threatened judgments of locusts and fire had been mitigated at the prophet's prayer, but nothing could avert the plumb-line of destruction which Jehovah held over them, and He would rise against the House of Jeroboam with His sword.† We infer from all that Amos and Hosea say that the calf-worship at Bethel (for Dan is not mentioned in this connexion‡) had degenerated into an idolatry far more abject than it originally was. The familiarity of such multitudes of the people with Baal-worship and Asherah-worship had tended to obliterate the sense that the "calves" were cherubic emblems of Jehovah; and were it not for some confusions of this kind, it is inconceivable that Jehoram ben-Jehu should have restored the Asherah which his father had removed. Be that as it may, Bethel and Gilgal seem to have become centres of corruption. Dan is scarcely once alluded to as a scene of the calf-worship.

Others, then, might be deceived by the surface-glitter of extended empire in the days of Jeroboam II. Not so the true prophets. It has often happened—as to Persia, when, in B. C. 388, she dictated the Peace of Antalcidas, and to Papal Rome in the days of the Jubilee of 1300, and to Philip II. of Spain in the year of the Armada, and to Louis XIV. in 1667—that a nation has seemed to be at its zenith of pomp and power on the very eve of some tremendous catastrophe. Amos and Hosea saw that such a catastrophe was at hand for Israel, because they knew that Divine punishment inevitably dogs the heels of insolence and crime. The loftiness of Israel's privilege involved the utterness of her ruin. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."§

Such prophecies, so eloquent, so uncompromising, so varied, and so constantly disseminated among the people, first by public harangues, then in writing, could no longer be neglected. Amos, with his natural culture, his rhythmic utterances, and his inextinguishable fire, was far different from the wild fanatics, with their hairy garments, and sudden movements, and long locks, and cries, and self-inflicted wounds, with whom Israel had been familiar since the days of Elijah, whom they all imitated. So long as this inspired peasant confined himself to moral denunciations the aristocracy and priesthood of Samaria could afford comfortably to despise him. What were moral denunciations to them? What harm was there in ivory palaces and refined feasts? This man was a mere red socialist who tried to undermine the customs of society. The hold of the upper classes on the people, whom their exactions had burdened with hopeless debt, and whom they could with impunity crush into slavery, was too strong to be

* Amos vi. 1-14.

† Amos. vii. 1-9.

‡ Strange as it may seem, the early authority for the existence of any calf at Dan is very slight, and the extreme uncertainty of the reading and interpretation in one main passage (1 Kings xiii. 32) makes it at least possible that there were *two calves at Bethel*, and that at Dan there was no calf, but only the old idolatrous ephod of Micah, still served by the servant of Moses. See additional note at the end of the volume.

§ Amos iii. 2.

shaken by the "hysteric gush" of a philanthropic faddist and temperance fanatic like this. But when he had the enormous presumption to mention publicly the name of their victorious king, and to say that Jehovah would rise against him with the sword, it was time for the clergy to interfere, and to send the intruder back to his native obscurity.

So Amaziah, the priest of Bethel,* invoked the king's authority. "Amos," he said to the king, "hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel." The charge was grossly false, but it did well enough to serve the priest's purpose. "The land is not able to bear all his words."

That was true; for when nations have chosen to abide by their own vicious courses, and refuse to listen to the voice of warning, they are impatient of rebuke. They refuse to hear when God calls to them.

"For when we in our viciousness grow hard,
Oh misery on it! the wise gods seal our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at us while we strut
To our confusion."

The priest tried further to inflame the king's anger by telling him two more of Amos's supposed predictions. He had prophesied (which was a false inference) that Israel should be led away captive out of their own land,† and had also prophesied (which was a perversion of the fact) "that Jeroboam *should die* by the sword."

At the first prophecy Jeroboam probably smiled. It might indeed come true in the long-run. If he was a man of prescience as well as of prowess, he probably foresaw that the elements of ruin lurked in his transient success, and that though, for the present, Assyria was occupied in other directions, it was unlikely that the weaker Israel would escape the fate of the far more powerful Syria. As for the personal prophecy, he was strong, and was honoured, and had his army and his guards. He would take his chance. Nor does it seem to have troubled any one that Amos looked for the ultimate union of Israel with Judah. Since the time of Joash the inheritance of David had been but as "a ruined booth" (ix. 11); but Amos prophesied its restoration. This touch may have been added later, when he wrote and published his "burdens"; but he did not hesitate to speak as if the two kingdoms were really and properly one.‡

We are not told that Jeroboam II. interfered with the prophet in any way.§ Had he done so, he would have been rebuked and denounced for it. He probably went no further than to allow the priest and the prophet to settle the matter between themselves. Perhaps he gave a contemptuous permission that, if Amaziah thought it worth while to send the prophet back into Judah, he might do so.

Armed with this nonchalant mandate, Amaziah, with more mildness and good-humour than

might have been expected from one of his class, said to Amos, "O Seer,* go home, and eat thy bread, and prophesy to thy heart's content at home; but do not prophesy any more at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary and the king's court."

Amos obeyed perforce, but stopped to say that he had not prophesied out of his own mouth, but by Jehovah's bidding. He then hurled at the priest a message of doom as frightful as that which Jeremiah pronounced upon Pashur, when that priest smote him on the face. His wife should be a harlot in the city; his sons and daughters should be slain; his inheritance should be divided; he should die in a polluted land; and Israel should go into captivity. And as for his mission, he justified it by the fact that he was not one of an hereditary or a professional community; he was no prophet or prophet's son. Such men might—like Zedekiah, the son of Che-naanah, and his four hundred abettors—be led into mere function and professionalism, into manufactured enthusiasm and simulated inspiration. From such communities freshness, unconventionality, courage, were hardly to be expected. They would philippic at times; they would get to love their order and their privileges better than their message, and themselves best of all. It is the tendency of organised bodies to be tempted into conventionality, and to sink into banded unions chiefly concerned in the protection of their own prestige. Not such was Amos. He was a peasant herdsman in whose heart had burned the inspiration of Jehovah and the wrath against moral misdoing till they had burst into flame. It was indignation against iniquity which had called Amos from the flocks and the sycamores to launch against an apostatising people the menace of doom. In that grief and indignation he heard the voice and received the mandate of the Lord of hosts. He heads the long line of literary prophets whose priceless utterances are preserved in the Old Testament. The inestimable value of their teaching lies most of all in the fact that they were—like Moses—preachers of the moral law; and that, like the Book of the Covenant, which is the most ancient and the most valuable part of the Laws of the Pentateuch, they count external service as no better than the small dust of the balance in comparison with righteousness and true holiness.

The rest of the predictions of Amos were added at a later date. They dwell on the certainty and the awful details of the coming overthrow; the doom of the idolaters of Gilgal and Beersheba; the inevitable swiftness of the catastrophe in which Samaria should be sifted like corn in a sieve in spite of her incorrigible security.† Yet the ruin should not be absolute. "Thus saith Jehovah: As the shepherd teareth out of the mouth of the lion two legs and the piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be

* That the chief priest of Bethel bore the name "Jehovah is strong" shows once more that "calf-worship" was in no sense a substitute for the worship of Jehovah.

† This was not quite accurate; he had rather prophesied the devastation of the high places (vii. 9). In fact, his words had often been very vague. "Thus will I do unto thee" (iv. 12).

‡ Amos ix. 11-15. Comp. Hos. iii. 5.

§ The exaggerated haggadoth of later days say that Amaziah had Amos beaten with leaded thongs, and that he was carried home in a dying state (Epiphanius, "Opp." ii. 145), to which there is a supposed allusion in Heb. xi. 35: ἅλλοι δὲ ἐτυμπαίσθησαν.

* We cannot be sure that the term "Seer" was meant to be contemptuous, although from 1 Sam. ix. 9 we should infer that the title had become somewhat obsolete. Further, we must bear in mind that it may not have been always easy for worldlings to distinguish between true prophets and the unprincipled pretenders who, about this time, succeeded in making the name and aspect of a prophet so complete a disgrace that men had carefully to disclaim it (Zech. xiii. 2-6). It is true that the heading of Amos (i. 1), which may not, however, be by the prophet himself, tells us of "the words which he saw" (*i. e.*, spoke as a seer), and he also disclaims the name of prophet (vii. 14).

† Amos viii. 1-ix. 9, 10.

rescued, that sit in Samaria on the corner of a couch, and on the damask of a bed."

The Hebrew Prophets almost invariably weave together the triple strands of warning, exhortation, and hope. Hitherto Amos has not had a word of hope to utter. At last, however, he lets a glimpse of the rainbow irradiate the gloom. The overthrow of Israel should be accompanied by the restoration of the fallen booth of David, and, under the rule of a scion of that house, Israel should return from captivity to enjoy days of peaceful happiness, and to be rooted up no more.*

Hosea, the son of Beeri, was of a somewhat later date than Amos. He, too, "became electric," to flash into meager and corrupted minds the conviction that formalism is nothing, and that moral sincerity is all in all. That which God requires is not ritual service, but truth in the inward parts. He is one of the saddest of the prophets; but though he mingles prophecies of mercy with his menaces of wrath, the general tenor of his oracles is the same. He pictures the crimes of Ephraim by the image of domestic unfaithfulness, and bids Judah to take warning from the curse involved in her apostasy.† Many of his allusions touch upon the days of that deluge of anarchy which followed the death of Jeroboam II. (iv.-vi. 3). That he was a Northerner appears from the fact that he speaks of the King of Israel as "our king" (vii. 5). Yet he seems to blame the revolt of Jeroboam I. (i. 11, viii. 4), although a prophet had originated it, and he openly aspires after the reunion of the Twelve Tribes under a king of the House of David (iii. 5). He points more distinctly to Assyria, which he frequently names as the scourge of the Divine vengeance, and indicates how vain is the hope of the party which relied on the alliance of Egypt.‡ He speaks with far more distinct contempt of the cherub at Bethel and the shrine at Gilgal, and says scornfully, "Thy calf, O Samaria, has cast thee off."§ Shalmaneser had taken Beth-Arbel, and dashed to pieces mother and children. Such would be the fate of the cities of Israel.|| Yet Hosea, like Amos, cannot conclude with words of wrath and woe, and he ends with a lovely song of the days when Ephraim should be restored, after her true repentance, by the loving tenderness of God.

Jeroboam II. must have been aware of some at least of these prophecies. Those of Hosea must have impressed him all the more because Hosea was a prophet of his own kingdom, and all of his allusions were to such ancient and famous shrines of Ephraim as Mizpeh, Tabor, Bethel, Gilgal, Shechem,¶ Jezreel, and Lebanon. He was the Jeremiah of the North, and a passionate patriotism breathes through his melancholy strains. Yet in the powerful rule of Jer-

oboam II. he can only see a godless militarism founded upon massacre (i. 4), and he felt himself to be the prophet of decadence. Page after page rings with wailing, and with denunciations of drunkenness, robbery, and whoredom—"swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery" (iv. 2).

If Jeroboam was as wise and great as he seemed to have been, he must have seen with his own eyes the ominous clouds on the far horizon, and the deep-seated corruption which was eating like a cancer into the heart of his people. Probably, like many another great sovereign—like Marcus Aurelius when he noted the worthlessness of his son Commodus, like Charlemagne when he burst into tears at the sight of the ships of the Vikings—his thoughts were like those of the ancient and modern proverbs—"When I am dead, let earth be mixed with fire." We have no trace that Jeroboam treated Hosea as did those guilty priests to whom he was a rebuke, and who called him "a fool" and "mad" (ix. 7, 8, iv. 6-8, v. 2). Yet the aged king—he must have reached the unusual age of seventy-three at least, before he ended the longest and most successful reign in the annals of Israel—could hardly have anticipated that within half a year of his death his secure throne would be shaken to its foundation, his dynasty be hurled into oblivion, and that Israel, to whom, as long as he lived, mighty kingdoms had curtsied, should,

"Like a forlorn and desperate castaway,
Do shameful execution on herself."

Yet so it was. Jeroboam II. was succeeded by no less than six other kings, but he was the last who died a natural death. Every one of his successors fell a victim to the assassin or the conqueror. His son Zachariah ("Remembered by Jehovah") succeeded him (B. C. 740), the fourth in descent from Jehu. Considering the long reign of his father, he must have ascended the throne at a mature age. But he was the child of evil times. That he should not interrupt the "calf"-worship was a matter of course; but if he be the king of whom we catch a glimpse in Hos. vii. 2-7, we see that he partook deeply of the depravity of his day. We are there presented with a deplorable picture. There was thievishness at home, and bands of marauding bandits began to appear from abroad. The king was surrounded by a desperate knot of wicked counsellors, who fooled him to the top of his bent, and corrupted him to the utmost of his capacity. They were all scorers and adulterers, whose furious passions the prophet compares to the glowing heat of an oven heated by the baker. They made the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with lying flatteries. On the royal birthday, apparently at some public feast, this band of infamous revellers, who were the boon companions of Zachariah, first made him sick with bottles of wine, and then having set an ambush in waiting, murdered the effeminate and self-indulgent debauchee before all the people.* The scene reads like the assassination

* Hos. vii. 3-7. The allusions are vague, but we see a drunken king among his drunken princes, surrounded by wicked plotters who have flattered his vices. He is ignorant of his peril. The subjects aid the rulers in these abominations. All are blazing, like an oven, with passion and infamy, and only rest (as the baker does) to acquire new strength for inflaming their burning desires. At the dawn their treachery blazes into the crime of murder, and in the wine-sick fever-heat of the banquet the king is murdered by his corrupt intimates (see my "Minor Prophets," p. 78).

* Amos ix. 11-15.

† Hos. iv. 15-19.

‡ Hos. v. 13, vii. 11, viii. 9, ix. 3-6, xi. 5, xii. 1, xiv. 3. It must be borne in mind that the cuneiform inscriptions prove that Assyria had burst into sight like a lurid comet on the horizon far earlier than we had supposed. Jehu had paid tribute to Shalmaneser as far back as B. C. 842, more than a century before Menahem's tribute in 738. The destruction which Hosea prophesied took place within thirty-one years of his prophecies—probably in B. C. 722, when Sargon finished the siege of Samaria begun by Shalmaneser. The king Hoshea was perhaps taken captive before the siege.

§ Hos. viii. 5, ix. 15.

¶ Hos. x. 13, 14.

¶ Hos. vi. 9; for "by consent" read "towards Shechem."

of a Commodus or an Elagabalus. No one was likely to raise a hand in his favour. Like our Edward II., he was a weakling who followed a great and warlike father. It was evident that troublous times were near at hand, and nothing but the worst disasters could ensue if there was no one better than such a drunkard as Zachariah to stand at the helm of state.

So did the dynasty of the mighty Jehu expire like a torch blown out in stench and smoke.

Its close is memorable most of all because it evoked the magnificent moral and spiritual teaching of Hebrew prophecy. The ideal prophet and the ordinary priest are as necessarily opposed to each other as the saint and the formalist. The glory of prophecy lies in its recognition that right is always right, and wrong always wrong, apart from all expediency and all casuistry, apart from "all prejudices, private interests, and partial affections." "What Jehovah demands," they taught, "is righteousness—neither more nor less; what He hates is injustice. Sin or offence to the Deity is a thing of purely moral character. Morality is that for the sake of which all other things exist; it is the most essential element of all sincere religion. It is no postulate, no idea, but a necessity and a fact; the most intensely living of human powers—Jehovah, the God of hosts. In wrath, in ruin, this holy reality makes its existence known: it annihilates all that is hollow and false."*

CHAPTER XIX.

AZARIAH-UZZIAH.

B. C. 783 (?)—737.

JOTHAM.

B. C. 737—735.

2 KINGS XV. 1-7, 32-38.

"This is vanity, and it is a sore sickness."—ECCLES. vi. 2.

BEFORE we watch the last "glimmerings and decays" of the Northern Kingdom, we must once more revert to the fortunes of the House of David. Judah partook of the better fortunes of Israel. She, too, enjoyed the respite caused by the crippling of the power of Syria, and the cessation from aggression of the Assyrian kings, who, for a century, were either unambitious monarchs like Assurdan, or were engaged in fighting on their own northern and eastern frontiers. Judah, too, like Israel, was happy in the long and wise governance of a faithful king.

This king was Azariah ("My strength is Jehovah"), the son of Amaziah. He is called Uzziah by the Chronicles, and in some verses of the brief references to his long reign in the Book of Kings. It is not certain that he was the eldest son of Amaziah;† but he was so distinctly the ablest, that, at the age of sixteen, he was chosen king by "all the people." His official title to the world must have been Azariah, for in that form his name occurs in the Assyrian records. Uzziah seems to have been the more familiar title

* Wellhausen, "Isr. and Jud.," 85.

† Hence, perhaps, the expression that the people "took him." If Amaziah died at fifty-nine, he probably had other sons.

which he bore among his people.* There seems to be an allusion to both names—Jehovah-his-helper, and Jehovah-his-strength—in the Chronicles: "God helped him, and made him to prosper and his name spread far abroad, and he was marvellously helped, till he was strong."

The Book of Kings only devotes a few verses to him; but from the Chronicler we learn much more about his prosperous activity. His first achievement was to recover and fortify the port of Elath, on the Red Sea,† and to reduce the Edomites to the position they had held in the earlier days of his father's reign. This gave security to his commerce, and at once "his name spread far abroad, even to the entering in of Egypt."

He next subdued the Philistines; took Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod; dismantled their fortifications, filled them with Hebrew colonists, and "smote all Palestine with a rod."‡

He then chastised the roving Arabs of the Negeb or south country in Gur-Baal and Maon, and suppressed their plundering incursions.

His next achievement was to reduce the Ammonite Emirs to the position of tributaries, and to enforce from them rights of pasturage for the large flocks, not only in the low country (*shephelah*), but in the southern wilderness (*midbar*), and in the *carmels* or fertile grounds among the Trans-Jordanic hills.

Having thus subdued his enemies on all sides, he turned his attention to home affairs—built towers, strengthened the walls of Jerusalem at its most assailable points, provided catapults and other instruments of war, and rendered a permanent benefit to Jerusalem by irrigation and the storing of rain-water in tanks.

All these improvements so greatly increased his wealth and importance that he was able to renew David's old force of heroes (*Gibborim*), and to increase their number from six hundred to two thousand six hundred, whom he carefully enrolled, equipped with armour, and trained in the use of engines of war. And he not only extended his boundaries southwards and eastwards, but appears to have been strong enough, after the death of Jeroboam II., to make an expedition northwards, and to have headed a Syrian coalition against Tiglath-Pileser III., in B. C. 738. He is mentioned in two notable fragments of the annals of the eighth year of this Assyrian king. He is there called Azrijahu, and both his forces and those of Hamath seem to have suffered a defeat.§

It is distressing to find that a king so good and so great ended his days in overwhelming and irremediable misfortune. The glorious reign had a ghastly conclusion. All that the historian tells us

* Compare the interchange of the names Azariah and Uzziel (*Exod. vi. 18*) in 1 Chron. vi. 2, 18. Azariah means "Jehovah hath helped," and Uzziel "Strength of Jehovah." It is just possible that his name was changed at his accession, as the chief priest also was named Azariah, and confusion might otherwise have arisen.

† 2 Chron. xxvi. 2-15.

‡ Isa. xiv. 29. A mixed language arose in this district in consequence (*Neh. xiii. 24; Zech. ix. 6*). The word Palestine only applies strictly to the district of Philistia. Milton uses it, with his usual accuracy, in the description of Dagon as

"That twice-battered god of Palestine."

§ Uziah's opposition to Assyria—of which there seems to be no doubt, for he must be the Azrijahu of the "Eponym Canon"—took place about 738, and was a coalition movement. But it gives rise to great chronological and other difficulties. As the solution of these is at present only conjectural, I refer to Schrader (*E. Tr.*), ii. 211-219. He is called Azrijahu Jahudai.

is that "the Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper, and dwelt in a several [i. e., a separate] house." The word rendered "a several house" may perhaps mean (as in the margin of the A. V.) "a lazar house," like the *Beit el Massakin* or "house of the unfortunate," the hospital or abode of lepers, outside the walls of Jerusalem.* The rendering is uncertain, but it is by no means impossible that the prevalence of the affliction had, even in those early days, created a retreat for those thus smitten, especially as they formed a numerous class. Obviously the king could no more fulfil his royal duties. A leper becomes a horrible object, and no one would have been more anxious than the unhappy Azariah himself to conceal his aspect from the eyes of his people.† His son Jotham was set over the household; and though he is not called a regent or joint-king—for this institution does not seem to have existed among the ancient Hebrews—he acted as judge over the people of the land.

We are told that Isaiah wrote the annals of this king's reign, but we do not know whether it was from Isaiah's biography that the Chronicler took the story of the manner in which Uzziah was smitten with leprosy. The Chronicler says that his heart was puffed up with his successes and his prosperity, and that he was consequently led to thrust himself into the priest's office by burning incense in the Temple.‡ Solomon appears to have done the same without the least question of opposition; but now the times were changed, and Azariah, the high priest,§ and eighty of his colleagues went in a body to prevent Uzziah, to rebuke him, and to order him out of the Holy Place.¶ The opposition kindled him into the fiercest anger, and at this moment of hot altercation the red spot of leprosy suddenly rose and burned upon his forehead. The priests looked with horror on the fatal sign; and the stricken king, himself horrified at this awful visitation of God, ceased to resist the priests, and rushed forth to relieve the Temple of his unclean presence, and to linger out the sad remnant of his days in the living death of that most dishonouring disease. Surely no man was ever smitten down from the summits of splendour to a lower abyss of unspeakable calamity! We can but trust that the misery only laid waste the few last years of his reign; for Jotham was twenty-five when he began to reign, and he must have been more than a mere boy when he was set to perform his father's duties.

So the glory of Uzziah faded into dust and darkness. At the age of sixty-eight death came as the welcome release from his miseries, and "they buried him with his fathers in the City of David." The Levitically scrupulous Chronicler

* 2 Kings xv. 5 (2 Chron. xxvi. 21, "a house of sickness"). LXX., ἐν οἴκῳ ἀφροσύνης; Vulg., in domo libera seorsim. Comp. Lev. xiii. 46. Theodoret understands it that he was shut up privately in his own palace: ἐνδον ἐν θαλάμῳ ὑπὸ οὐδενος ὀφθαλμοῦ. Symmachus, ἐν κελουμένῳ.

† His misfortune must have made a deep impression, and is possibly alluded to in Hos. iv. 4: "For thy people are as they that strive with the priest."

‡ The Chronicler attributes the good part of his reign to the influence of an unknown Zechariah, "who had understanding in the visions of God"; and says that when Zechariah died Uzziah altered for the worse.

§ This high priest, Azariah, is only mentioned elsewhere in 2 Chron. xxvi. 17, 20.

¶ Josephus says that he had put on a priestly robe, and that a great feast was going on, and that the earthquake (Amos i. 1; Zech. xiv. 5) happened at the moment, which broke the Temple roof, so that a sunbeam smote his head and produced the leprosy. We here see the growth of the Haggadah.

adds that he was not laid in the actual sepulchre of his fathers, but in a field of burial which belonged to them—"for they said, He is a leper." The general outline of his reign resembled that of his father's. It began well; it fell by pride; it closed in misery.

The annals of his son Jotham were not eventful, and he died at the age of forty-one or earlier. He is said to have reigned sixteen years, but there are insuperable difficulties about the chronology of his reign, which can only be solved by hazardous conjectures.* He was a good king, "howbeit the high places were not removed." The Chronicler speaks of him chiefly as a builder. He built or restored the northern gate of the Temple, and defended Judah with fortresses and towns. But the glory and strength of his father's reign faded away under his rule. He did indeed suppress a revolt of the Ammonites, and exacted from them a heavy indemnity; but shortly afterwards the inaction of Assyria led to an alliance between Pekah, King of Israel, and Rezin, King of Damascus; and these kings harassed Jotham—perhaps because he refused to become a member of their coalition. The good king must also have been pained by the signs of moral degeneracy all around him in the customs of his own people. It was "in the year that King Uzziah died" that Isaiah saw his first vision, and he gives us a deplorable picture of contemporary laxity. Whatever the king may have been, the princes were no better than "rulers of Sodom," and the people were "people of Gomorrhah." There was abundance of lip-worship, but little security; plentiful religionism, but no godliness. Superstition went hand in hand with formalism, and the scrupulosity of outward service was made a substitute for righteousness and true holiness. This was the deadliest characteristic of this epoch, as we find it portrayed in the first chapter of Isaiah. The faithful city had become a harlot—but not in outward semblance. She "reflected heaven on her surface, and hid Gomorrhah in her heart." Righteousness had dwelt in her—but now murderers; but the murderers wore phylacteries, and for a pretence made long prayers. It was this deep-seated hypocrisy, this pretence of religion without the reality, which called forth the loudest crashes of Isaiah's thunder. There is more hope for a country avowedly guilty and irreligious than for one which makes its scrupulous ceremonialism a cloak of maliciousness. And thus there lay at the heart of Isaiah's message that protest for bare morality, as constituting the end and the essence of religion, which we find in all the earliest and greatest prophets:—

"Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; Give ear unto the Law of our God, ye people of Gomorrhah!

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord.

I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts;

And I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

When ye come to see My face, who hath required this at your hands, to trample My courts?

Bring no more vain oblations! Incense is an abomination unto Me:

New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meet-

ing. . . 'make you clean!'" †

* For instance, two verses earlier (2 Kings xv. 30) we read of the twentieth year of Jotham.

† Isa. i. 10-17.

Of Jotham we hear nothing more. He died a natural death at an early age. If the years of his reign are counted from the time when his father's affliction developed on him the responsibilities of office, it is probable that he did not long survive the illustrious leper, but was buried soon after him in the City of David his father.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AGONY OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

Shallum ..	..	B. C.	740	Pekahiah ..	..	B. C.	757-735
Menahem ..	..	740-737		Pekah ..	..		735-734

2 KINGS xv. 8-31.

"Blood toucheth blood."—HOS. iv. 2.

"The revolters are profuse in murders."—HOS. v. 2.

"They have set up kings, but not by Me: they have made princes, and I knew it not."—HOS. viii. 4.

"Non tam reges fuere quam fures, latrones, et tyranni."—WITSIUS, "Decaph.," 326.

WITH the death of Zachariah begins the acute agony of Israel's dissolution. Four kings were murdered in forty years. Indeed, within two centuries, at least nine kings—Nadab, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Jehoram, Zachariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, Pekah—had made the steps of the throne slippery with blood. Except in the house of Omri, all the kings of Israel either left no sons or left them to be slain. Amos, by his vision of the basket of summer fruit, had intimated that the sins of Israel were ripe for punishment, and the lesson had been emphasised by the paronomasia of *quits*, "summer," and *queets*, "end."* The prophet had singled four out of many crimes as the cause of her ruin. They were (1) greedy oppression of the poor; (2) land-grabbing; (3) licentious and idolatrous revelries; (4) cruelty to poor debtors, and rioting on the proceeds of unjust gains. In their drunkenness they even tempted God's Nazarites to break their vows. "Behold," saith Jehovah. "I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." Even women shared in the common intoxication, and showed themselves utterly shameless, so that Amos contemptuously calls them "fat cows of Bashan upon the mountain of Samaria," whom in punishment the brutal conqueror should drag by the hair out of their ivory palaces, as a fisherman drags his prey out of the water by hooks.†

Shallum, son of Jabesh, the unknown murderer of Zachariah and the usurper of his throne, suffered the fate of Zimri, and only reigned for one month. If his conspiracy was marked by the odious circumstances of treachery and corruption, which we infer from the allusions of Hosea, Shallum richly deserved the swift retribution which fell upon him. He seems to have destroyed Zachariah by means of his best affections—under the guise of friendship, in the midst of boon companionship. But the slayer of his master had no peace, and from the moment of his fruitless crime the unhappy country seems to have been plunged in the horrors of civil war. Some dim glimpses of the evils of the day

* Amos viii. 2.

† Amos iv. 1-3.

are gained from the earlier Zechariah,* just as some dim glimpses of the horrors of Rome in the days of the later Cæsars may be seen in the Apocalypse. The prophet speaks of three shepherds cut off in one month, who abhorred God, and His soul was impatient at them.†

Just as Galba, Otho, and Vitellius flit across the stage of the Empire amid war and assassinations, so Zachariah and Shallum are swept away by "dagger-thrusts through the purple." Was there a third? Ewald and others think that they detect a shadowy outline of him and of his name in 2 Kings xv. 10. If so, his name was Kobolam, but we know no more of him beyond the fact that "he was, and is not." For the sacred annals are but little concerned with this bloody phantasmagoria of feeble kings, who ruled amid usurpation, anarchy, hostile attacks from without, and civil war within. "Israel," said Hosea, "hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have made princes, and I knew it not." "They are all as hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings have fallen; there is none among them that calleth upon Me."‡

It was perhaps during this distracted epoch that for one moment there was an attempt to place the ruling authority of the nation in the hands of the prophet himself. So it would appear from Zech. xi. 7-14. Of course these chapters may be allegoric throughout, as, in any case, they are in great part. But if so, it becomes more difficult to understand the meaning. What the prophet says is as follows:—

First, as though he saw the terrible conflagration of the Assyrian tyranny rolling southwards, and felt it to be irresistible, he bids Lebanon open her doors, that the fire may devour her cedars. There is perhaps an allusion to the death of Jeroboam II. in the words, "Howl, fir tree, for the cedar is fallen." He sees in vision the forces of devastation raging among the oaks of Bashan, the forest and the vintage, while the shepherds cry, and the ousted lions roar in vain. Then Jehovah bids him feed "the flock of the slaughter"—the flock sold remorselessly by its rich possessors, and slain, and left unpitied, as the people were despoiled by its nobles and its kings. The prophet undertakes the charge of the miserable flock, and takes two staves, one of which he calls "Prosperity," and the other "Union." While he was thus engaged three shepherds were cut off in one month,§ whom he loathed, and who abhorred him. But he finds his task hopeless, and flings it up; and in sign that his covenant with the people is broken, he breaks his staff "Prosperity." The nation refused to pay him anything for his services, except a paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver, and these he disdainfully flung into the sacred treasury.¶ Then seeing that all hope of union between Is-

* It is probable that our present Book of Zechariah is composed of the works of three prophets of different dates, each of whom may have borne the name. See my "Minor Prophets" ("Men of the Bible" Series).

† Zech. xi. 8. In 2 Kings xv. 10 the LXX. read *καὶ ἐνάτωθεν αὐτὸν ἐν κεβλάμ;* and Ewald thinks that "before the people" (קָבֹלָם) is really a proper name of the third king in one month—"and Kobolam slew him." There is insufficient ground for this, though a similar name is found in Assyrian records.

‡ Hos. viii. 3, vii. 7.

§ Zachariah, Shallum, Kobolam (?).

¶ Zech. xi. 1-17 (Heb. 13).

rael and Judah was at an end, he broke his staff "Union." Lastly, Jehovah says He will raise up a foolish, neglectful, cruel shepherd who would care for nothing but to eat the flesh of the fat and break the hoofs of the flock. And as for this worthless shepherd, the sword should be upon his arm and in his right eye; his arm shall be dried up, and his right eye utterly darkened.

By this cruel and self-seeking shepherd is probably meant Menahem. He had been, according to Josephus, the captain of the guard, and was living at Tirzah, the old beautiful capital of the land. From Tirzah, where he occupied the position of the captain of the chariots, he marched on the ill-supported Shallum. Samaria apparently offered no protection to the usurper. Menahem defeated him and put him to death. Then he proceeded to enforce the allegiance of the rest of the country. An otherwise unknown town of the name of Tiph-sach* ventured to resist him. Menahem conquered it, and perhaps thinking, as Machiavelli thought, that princes had better exhibit their utmost cruelty at first, to deter any further opposition, he let loose his ferocity on the town in a way which created a shuddering remembrance. As though he had been one of the ferocious heathen, who had never been restrained by the knowledge of God, he exhibited the extreme of callous brutality by ripping up all the women that were with child.† In this he followed the remorseless example of Hazael. Hosea had prophesied that this should be the fate of Samaria;‡ Amos had denounced the Ammonites for acting thus in the cities of Gilead;§ Shalmaneser III. had, in B. C. 732, thus avenged himself on the resistance of Beth-Arbel.|| and Assyria was ultimately to meet an analogous retribution,¶ as also was Babylon.** But that a king of Ephraim, of God's chosen people, should act thus to his own brethren was a horrible portent, ominous of swift destruction.

And the vengeance came. Menahem reigned, at least in name, for ten years; for the sword which had slain mothers with their unborn infants reduced the stricken people to terrified silence. But at this epoch Assyria woke once more from her lethargy, and became the scourge of God to the guilty people and their guiltier kings. For a whole century the Assyrians had either been governed by kings who had abjured the lust of blood and conquest, or had been too seriously occupied on their own eastern and northern frontiers to intermeddle with the southern kingdoms, or break down the barriers

* That this was Thapsacus on the Euphrates (1 Kings iv. 24), and that Menahem was in a position to march northward three hundred miles, and offer so deadly and wanton an insult to the might of Assyria, is out of the question. The name means "a ford," and might apply to any town on a river. Thenius thinks the name is a clerical error for *Tappuach*, between Ephraim and Manasseh (Josh. xvii. 7, 8).

† Josephus says, *ὠμότητος ὑπερβολὴν οὐ καταλιπὼν οὐδὲ ἀγρίοτης*. It is said that the same crime was committed in 1861 by a Mexican bandit. Machiavelli says, "He who violently and without just right usurps a crown must use cruelty, if cruelty becomes necessary, once for all" ("De Princ.," 8).

‡ 2 Kings viii. 12; Hos. xiii. 16.

§ Amos i. 13.

|| Hos. x. 14. This allusion is, however, uncertain. Shalmaneser III. is not elsewhere found abbreviated into Shalman. Some suppose him to be a Moabitish king, Salamannu, who was a vassal of Tiglath-Pileser. The LXX., Vulg., etc. identify him with the Zalmunna of Judg. viii. 18. Psalm lxxxiii. 11 renders the word *ex domo ejus qui judicavit Baal* (i. e., Gideon). Beth-Arbel is either Arbela in Galilee, or Irbid, northeast of Pella.

¶ Nah. iii. 10.

** Isa. xiii. 16.

erected by the confederacy of Hamath and Damascus between Nineveh and the weaker principalities of Palestine. But now (B. C. 745) there came to the throne a king who, in Chaldæa, was known by the name of Pul, and in Assyria by the name of Tiglath-Pileser;* and being too formidable for any power to stay his path, he marched against Menahem. Already he was lord of the world from the Caspian to the Gulf of Persia; already he had subdued Babylonia, Elam, Media, Armenia, eastward—Mesopotamia and Syria westward. Who was Menahem, the petty usurper of a tenth-rate kingdom, that he should withstand his power or even retard his advance?

The cruel usurper was in no condition to resist him. The brand of Cain was on him and his kingdom. How could the weak, impoverished, harassed troops of Israel stand up in battle against those numberless serried ranks, or withstand their tremendous discipline? If the very name of Persia had once stricken terror into the brave Greeks before the spell of Persian ascendancy was broken at Marathon, Thermopylæ, and Salamis, much more did the name of Assyria make the hearts of the wretched Israelites melt like water. They now for the first time saw those bearded warriors with their broad swords, their tremendous bows, their fierce, sensual faces, their thicket figures. In the language of the prophets we still hear the echo of the fears which they excited by their swift, unflinching marches, their sleepless vigilance, their girded loins, stout sandals, and barbed arrows.†

"Their horses' hoofs," says Isaiah, "shall be like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind; their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and carry it away safe, and there shall be none to deliver. And they shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea; and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and distress, and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof."

Ancient Assyria lay beneath the Snowy Mountains of Kurdistan; and its capital, Nineveh—near Mosul, Kouyunjik, and Neby-Junus—lay six hundred miles from the Gulf of Persia. The people spoke, as their descendants still speak, a dialect of Syriac, akin both grammatically and structurally to Hebrew. Assyria was constantly at war with Babylonia; but for the most part the kings of Assyria held Babylon in subjection, and Tiglath-Pileser was a king of the Chaldæans under the name Pul, as well as a king of Nineveh.

Menahem was warrior enough to know how hopeless it was to struggle against these trained forces. He was not even secure on his own throne. He thought it best to offer himself without resistance as a feudatory, if the Assyrian King would confirm his sovereignty. Tiglath-Pileser did not think Menahem worth more trouble, and was graciously pleased to accept by way of bribe a tribute of a thousand talents of silver, or about £125,000. This, however, as we learn from the "Eponym Canon," was not all. Menahem had to pay a further tribute year by year. Later on, in 738, Shalmaneser mentions Minik-himmi (Menahem), as well as Rasunnu (Rezin), among his tributaries.

The Assyrian withdrew, and Menahem had to exact this vast sum of money from his miserable

* The two predecessors of Tiglath-Pileser (*Tuklat-abal-sarra*) were Assurdayan and Assurnirari.

† Isa. v. 26-29.

subjects. To tax the poor was hopeless. He found that there were some sixty thousand persons who might be reckoned among the wealthier farmers and proprietors,* and from them he at once exacted fifty shekels of silver (more than £3) apiece. Probably they thought that to pay the sum demanded was not too heavy a price for the retirement of these frightful Assyrians, whose forces Tiglath-Pileser did not withdraw until he had the money in hand. The event took place in 738, and Tiglath-Pileser continued to reign till 727. How bitterly the burden of foreign tribute was felt appears from Hos. viii. 9, 10, which should perhaps be rendered, "They are gone up to Assyria like a wild ass alone by himself. Ephraim hath hired lovers. And they begin to be diminished by reason of the burden of the king of princes." "The king of princes" was the haughty title usurped by Tiglath-Pileser, who said, "Are not my princes all of them kings?" (Isa. x. 8).

All this was a fulfilment of what Hosea had foreseen:—

"Ephraim is oppressed, he is crushed in judgment, because he was content to walk after vanity. Therefore am I unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and the house of Judah his wound, then went Ephraim to Assyria, and sent unto an avenging king:† yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the House of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him." The Assyrian was irresistible, because he was the destined instrument of the wrath of God. The "mixing with the heathens" was a sin, and Israel in cooing to Assyria was like a foolish dove; but the day sometimes comes to doomed nations when no course can save them from the fate which they have provoked.‡

Not long afterwards Menahem died, and he had sufficiently established his rule to be succeeded as a matter of course by his son Pekahiah.

But

"Revenge and wrong bring forth their kind;
The foul cubs like their parents are."

Samaria had fearful object-lessons in the apparently immediate success of murder and rebellion. The prize looked near and splendid: the vengeance might be belated or might not come. Of Pekahiah we are told absolutely nothing but that he reigned two years, with this stereotyped addition, that "he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah" by continuing the calf-worship.§ After this brief and uneventful reign, his captain Pekah got together fifty fierce Gileadites, and with the aid of two otherwise unknown friends, Argob and Arieh, murdered Pekahiah in his own harem.|| Argob was probably so named

from the district in Bashan, and Arieh was a *fi* name for a lion-faced Gadite (1 Chron. xii. 8).

The sacred historian troubles himself but little about these kings. His annals of them are brief to extreme meagreness. Like the prophet, he viewed them as God-abandoned phantoms of guilty royalty.

"They that cry unto me, My God, we, Israel, know thee
Israel hath cast off that which is good:
The enemy shall pursue him.
They have set up kings, but not by Me;
They have removed them, and I knew it not:
Of their silver and their gold have they made them
idols,
That they may be cut off.
He hath cast off thy calf, O Samaria."

Probably Pekahiah was, as so often happens, the weak son of a vigorous father. The times could not tolerate incapable sovereigns; and the fact that Pekah not only maintained himself on the throne for twenty years,* but was able to take active steps of aggression against Jerusalem, seems to show that he was a man of some administrative capacity. If he had not achieved political and military importance, it would hardly have been worth while for a fierce and powerful king like Rezin, the last king of Syria, to form so close an alliance with him. Probably Rezin saw that his throne and his very existence were in danger, and Pekah wished with Rezin's aid to resist to the uttermost the encroachments of Assyria, and escape the burdensome tribute which Menahem had paid. Indeed, it may well be that Pekahiah's passive continuance of this tribute may have been distasteful to the people of the land, and that they condoned or even tacitly aided Pekah's rebellion in order to get rid of it, and to find protection in an abler monarch. It was the last, perhaps the only, chance for the kings of Syria and of Israel. As we hear no more of Hamath as a member of the alliance, we must suppose that it had now been reduced to impotence and vassalage by the all-powerful Assyrian. If, however, there was to be any over-balance to the colossal menace of Nineveh, it could only be by a large confederacy; and it may have been the refusal of Jotham to join that confederacy, on the death of his father Uzziah, which caused the joint invasion of Rezin and Pekah to force him to accept their alliance or to suppress him altogether. In that case they might have formed a close alliance with Egypt, and the forces of the united South might, they fancied, prove to be a match for the forces of the North.†

Whatever designs they may have formed against Jotham, or to whatever extent they may have annoyed him, it was not till the reign of his son Ahaz that they became formidable and ruinous. Of this we shall say more in recounting the reign of Ahaz. All that we need now remark is that their bold aggression on Judah became the cause of utter destruction to them both. They advanced against Ahaz, and overran his helpless country. It was their object to depose the de-

* Comp. Job xx. 15; Ruth ii. 1.
† Hos. v. 11-13. Comp. x. 6: "It [Samaria] shall be carried to Assyria for a present unto King Jareb." Sayce ("Bab. and Orient. Records," December, 1887) thinks that Jareb may have been the original name of Sargon, and so too Neubauer. *Zeitschr. für Assyriol.* 1886. The Vulg. renders King Jareb *ad regem ultorem*, and so too Symmachus. Aquila and Theodotion have *δικασόμενον*. It may be the name of an unknown king of Assyria, or of Pul, or of Sargon—R. V., margin, "a king that should contend."

‡ Hos. vii. 8-12.

§ Josephus says, τῆ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀκολουθίας ὠμότητι."

|| 2 Kings xv. 25, A. V., "in the palace of the king's house" (*armon*), rather "fortress." For the character of the Gileadites see 1 Chron. xii. 8, xxvi. 31.

* The length of Pekah's reign is most doubtful. If the periods assigned to the reigns in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms be added together up to the Fall of Samaria in the sixth year of Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 9, 10), it will be found that the Southern chronology is twenty years longer than the Northern. G. Smith would alter the text, and make Jeroboam II. reign fifty-one years and Pekah thirty years; others invent an interregnum of eleven years between Jeroboam II. and Zachariah, and an anarchy of nine years before Hoshea's accession; others shorten Pekah's reign to one year.

† 2 Kings xv. 37.

scendant of David, and to crown in his place a certain unnamed "son of *Tabcal*," whom Ewald supposed to have been a Syrian, but whose name may possibly furnish a specimen of the later Jewish device of Gematria.*

It is not impossible that behind these events we may find the efforts and yearnings of a party which cared more for Israel's unity than for David's throne. Such a party may easily have sprung up during the splendid, prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. It has been conjectured by some that the election of Uzziah by the people—delayed, according to one reckoning, for twelve years—was in reality the triumph of the party which felt an unquenchable allegiance to David's house. In Deut. xxxiii. Reuben is put before Judah; Jeshurun (*i. e.*, Israel) is magnified far more than Judah; and some Northern shrine in Zebulon, as well as the Temple, is celebrated as a sanctuary.† That there were men in Jerusalem who preferred Rezin and Pekahiah to their own king is clearly stated in Isaiah. He compares them to those who prefer a turbid torrent to a soft, sweet stream. "Because," he says, "this people despise the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and take delight in Rezin and Remaliah's son; now, therefore, the Lord bringeth upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the King of Assyria, and all his glory."‡ Isaiah seems to have had a contempt for the whole attack. He told Ahaz not to fear for the stumps of those two smoking firebrands Rezin, King of Syria, and the Israelitish usurper, whom he only condescends to call "Remaliah's son." He promises the trembling Ahaz that, since he had faithlessly refused a sign, God would give him a sign. The sign was that the young woman who accompanied Isaiah—perhaps his youthful wife—should bear a son, whose name should be called Immanuel; and that before the child Immanuel—whose designation, "God with us," was an omen of the loftiest hope—should be of an age to distinguish evil from good, the Northern land, which Ahaz abhorred, should be forsaken of both her kings.

The prophecy came true in every particular. Rezin and Pekah swept all before them, and besieged Jerusalem; but they wasted their time in vain before the fortifications which Jotham had strengthened and repaired. Obligated to raise the siege, Rezin carried his army southward, and indemnified himself by seizing Elath, by driving out the Judæan garrison, and replacing them with Syrians.§ It was the last gleam of Syrian success, before the final overthrow of Damascus which prophecy had often and emphatically foretold.

Pekah also withdrew his forces—no doubt compelled to do so by the step which Ahaz took in his desperation. For now the King of Judah invoked the protection and invited the active interference of Tiglath-Pileser against his enemies—"to save him out of the hand of the King of Syria, and out of the hand of the King of Israel, who were risen up against him."

Rezin and Damascus first felt the might of the Assyrian's conquering arm. The account of his decisive conquest is preserved in the "Eponym Canon" and the passages which refer to the de-

feat of the Syrians will be found in the First Appendix at the end of the volume. It appears from the monuments that Rezin (Rasannu) lost not only his kingdom, but his life.

It is the death-knell of Aramæan greatness, as Amos had foretold.

"Thus saith Jehovah:

For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; Because they have threshed Gilbead with threshing instruments of iron:
But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, Which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad. And I will break the bar of Damascus,* And cut off him that sitteth [on the throne] in the Valley of Aven,† And him that holdeth the sceptre from Beth-Eden; ‡ And the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir,§ Saith Jehovah."

Rezin was slain—how we know not; very probably by one of the horrible methods of torture—by being flayed alive, or decapitated, or having his lips and nose cut off—which were practised by these demon-kings of Nineveh.

Nor did Pekah escape. Tiglath-Pileser advanced against the northern part of his dominions, and afflicted the land of Zebulon and Naphtali. Ijon; Abel-beth-Maachah, the city of Elisha; Zanoah, the ancient sanctuary of Kedesh-Naphtali, the home of the hero Barak; Hazor, the former capital of the Canaanitish king Jabin; Gilead; Galilee,—all submitted to him, apparently without striking a serious blow. He dealt with the miserable inhabitants in the way familiar to kings of Assyria. He deported them *en masse* into a strange country of which they did not understand the language, and in which they were reduced to hopeless subjection, while he supplied their places by aliens from various parts of his own dominions. There could be no securer method of reducing to paralysis all their national aspirations. Strangers in a strange land, they forgot their nationality, forgot their religion, forgot their language, forgot their traditions. Their sole resource was to plunge into material pursuits, and to melt away into indistinguishable obliteration among the neighbouring heathen. It was the beginning of the Northern Captivity—of the loss of the Ten Tribes.

As Tiglath-Pileser thus permanently subdued and depopulated the land of the Northern Tribes, it is a Jewish tradition that at this time he carried away the golden "calf" from Dan among his spoils.¶ Scripture does not record the fact, though in Hosea (viii. 5) there may be an allusion to the fate of that at Bethel, whether the right version be "He hath cast off thy calf, O Samaria," or "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off."¶¶ "The workman made it," he con-

* The bar of its city gate.

† Bikath-Aven—"The cleft of the Aven"—Cæle Syria, or Hollow Syria, still called by the Arabs El-Bukāa. Comp. Josh. xi. 17, xii. 7. Aven—or "Vanity"—is perhaps Heliopolis or Baalbek. Comp. Ezek. xxx. 17.

‡ Perhaps Beit el Jarre, "House of Paradise"—about eight hours from Damascus (Porter, "Five Years in Syria," i. 313).

§ Kir, in Armenia—the land of their origin (Amos ix. 7).

¶ But, after all, was there a golden calf at Dan? It is scarcely ever alluded to, and the notion that there was one may have arisen (1) from a corruption or mistaken rendering of the text in 1 Kings xii. 29, and (2) from the existence there of the idolatrous ephod. See Klostermann, *ad. loc.*; Isa. ix. 8-17.

¶ LXX., Ἀπορρίψαι τὸν μόσχον σου, Σαμάρεια; Vulg., Profectus est vitulus tuus, Samaria. Orelli renders it, "Abscheulich ist dein Kalb, O Samaria." In Jer. xlvi. 12 we read (of Egypt), "Why is thy strong one swept away?" where the true reading may be, "Hath Khaph [*i. e.*, Apis],

* Vide *infra*.

† Deut. xxxiii. 10: "They [Zebulon] shall call the peoples unto the mountain: there shall they offer the sacrifices of righteousness."

‡ Isa. viii. 6. 7.

§ Perhaps we should read Edomites (2 Kings xvi. 6).

times; "therefore it is not God: for the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces." And again (x. 5): "The people of Samaria shall fear because of the heifer of the House of Vanity: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the chemarim [i. e., the black-robed false priests thereof] shall tremble for it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed. It [the idol] shall also be carried to Assyria for a present to King Combat."

For a time Pekah escaped; but unsuccessful is fatal to a murderous usurper, weakened by the loss and plunder of dominions which he is unable to defend. Instead of wasting time in the siege of a strong city like Samaria, Tiglath-Pileser in all probability stirred up Hoshea, the son of Elath, to rise in conspiracy against his master and slay him. For Pekah and Israel seem to have made light of the Northern raid. They said in their pride and stoutness of heart, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with new stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Such pretence of security was ill-timed and senseless, and Isaiah denounced it. "Therefore," he said, "Jehovah hath set up against Israel the adversaries of Rezin [i. e., the Assyrians], and hath stirred up his enemies; the Syrians on the east, and the Philistines on the west; and they have devoured Israel with open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. Yet the people have not turned unto Him that smote them, neither have they sought the Lord of hosts. Therefore Jehovah hath cut off from Israel palm-branch and rush in one day. The elder and the honourable man, he is the head; and the prophet that speaketh lies, he is the tail. For they that lead this people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are swallowed up."*

The following verses furnish one of the numerous pictures of the anarchy and abounding misery of these evil days. "For wickedness burneth as the fire: it devoureth the briars and thorns; yea, it kindleth in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upwards in thick clouds of smoke. Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land burnt up; the people also are the fuel of fire: *no man spareth his brother*. And one shall snatch on the right, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."

We are told in the Book of Kings that Pekah reigned for twenty years; but some of these later reigns must be shortened to suit the exigencies of known chronological data. It seems probable that he occupied the throne for a much shorter time.†

Such was the weakened, harassed, vassal kingdom—the gaunt spectre of itself—to the throne

thy chosen one, fled?" LXX., "ἄπὸς δὲ μόσχου σου, ὃ ἐκλεκτός. So Amos had prophesied that the "god of Dan" and the "way of Beersheba" should fall for evermore (Amos, viii. 74).

* Isa. ix. 11-16. With this passage comp. 2 Kings xxiii. 5; Zeph. i. 4; Hos. vii. 9, 10.

† Tiglath-Pileser says: "Pakaha, their king. I killed: Ausi [Hoshea] I placed over them. The distant land of Bit-Khumri [the "house of Omri"]—the whole of its inhabitants, with their goods—I carried away to Asshur" (B. C. 734). In this year he mentions Ahaz among his tributaries.

of which, after a period of anarchy and chaos, Hoshea, by conspiracy and murder, succeeded as the miserable feudatory of Assyria.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOSHEA, AND THE FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

B. C. 734-725.

2 KINGS xvii. 1-41.

"As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water."—Hos. x. 7.

As a matter of convenience, we follow our English Bible in calling the prophet by the name *Hosea*, and the nineteenth, last, and best king of Israel *Hoshea*. The names, however, are identical (הוֹשֵׁעַ), and mean "Salvation"—the name borne by Joshua also in his earlier days. In the irony of history the name of the last king of Ephraim was thus identical with that of her earliest and greatest hero, just as the last of Roman emperors bore the double name of the Founder of Rome and the Founder of the Empire—Romulus Augustulus. By a yet deeper irony of events the king in whose reign came the final precipitation of ruin wore the name which signified deliverance from it.

And more and more, as time went on, the prophet Hosea felt that he had no word of present hope or comfort for the king his namesake. It was the more brilliant lot of Isaiah in the Southern Kingdom, to kindle the ardour of a generous courage. Like Tyrtæus, who roused the Spartans to feel their own greatness—like Demosthenes, who hurled the might of Athens against Philip of Macedon—like Chatham, "bidding England be of good cheer, and hurl defiance at her foes"—like Pitt, pouring forth, in the days of the Napoleonic terror, "the indomitable language of courage and of hope,"—Isaiah was missioned to encourage Judah to despise first the mighty Syrian, and then the mightier Assyrian. Far different was the lot of Hosea, who could only be the denouncer of an inevitable doom. His sad function was like that of Phocion after Chæroneia, of Hannibal after Zama, of Thiers after Sedan: he had to utter the Cassandra-voices of prophecy, which his besotted and demented contemporaries—among whom the priests were the worst of all*—despised, and flouted until the time for repentance had gone by for ever.

True it is that Hosea could not be content—what true heart could?—to breathe nothing but the language of reprobation and despair. Israel had been "yoked to his two transgressions," † but Jehovah could not give up His love for His chosen people:

* Hos. iv. 4; v. 1. "Hear ye this, O priests . . . ye have been a snare on Mizpah," etc.; vi. 9. "The company of the priests murder by the way to Shechem."

† Hos. x. 10 (so R. V., and in the main the versions after the Hebrew margin). LXX., ἐν τῷ παίδεσθαι αὐτοῖς ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς ἀδικίας αὐτῶν; Vulg., cum corripentur propter duas iniquitates suas"; A. V., "When they shall bind themselves in their two furrows." I believe that the "two iniquities" may mean two cherubs at Bethel. See x. 15; "So shall Bethel do ur to you because of the evil of your evil."

"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?
How shall I surrender thee, Israel?
How shall I make thee as Admah?
How shall I treat thee as Zebonim?
Mine heart is turned within Me;
I am wholly filled with compassion!
I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger.
I will not again destroy Ephraim:
For I am God, and not man.
The Holy One in the midst of thee!
I will not come to exterminate!

They shall come after Jehovah as after a lion that roars!
For he shall roar, and his sons shall come hurrying from the west,

They shall come hurrying as a bird out of Egypt,
And as a dove out of the land of Assyria;
And I will cause them to dwell in their houses,
Saieth Jehovah."*

Alas! the gleam of alleviation was imaginary rather than actual. The prophet's wish was father to his thought. He had prophesied that Israel should be scattered in all lands (ix. 3, 12, 17, xiii. 3-16). This was true; and it did not prove true, except in some higher ideal sense, that "Israel shall again dwell in his own land" (xiv. 4-7) in prosperity and joy.

The date of Hoshea's accession is uncertain, and we cannot tell in what sense we are to understand his reign as having lasted "nine years." † We have no grounds for accepting the statement of Josephus ("Antt." IX. xiii. 1), that Hoshea had been a friend of Pekah and plotted against him. Tiglath-Pileser expressly says that he himself slew Pekah and appointed Hoshea. ‡ His must have been, at the best, a pitiful and humiliating reign. He owed his purely vassal sovereignty to Assyrian patronage. He probably did as well for Israel as was in his power. Singular to relate, he is the only one of all the kings of Israel of whom the historian has a word of commendation: for while we are told that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," it is added that it was "not as the kings of Israel that were before him." But we do not know wherein either his evil-doing or his superiority consisted. The Rabbis guess that he did not replace the golden calf at Dan which Tiglath-Pileser had taken away (Hos. x. 6); or that he did not prevent his subjects from going to Hezekiah's passover. § "It seems like a harsh jest," says Ewald, "that this Hoshea, who was better than all his predecessors, was to be the last king." But so it has often been in history. The vengeance of the French Revolution smote the innocent and harmless Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette—not Louis XIV., or Louis XV. and Madame du Pompadour.

His patron Tiglath-Pileser ended his magnificent reign of conquest in 727, soon after he had seated Hoshea on the throne. The removal of his strong grasp on the helm caused immediate revolt. Phœnicia especially asserted her independence against Shalmaneser IV. He seems to have spent five years in an unavailing attempt to capture Island-Tyre. Meanwhile, the internal troubles which had harassed and weakened Egypt ceased, and a strong Ethiopian king named Sabaco established his rule over the whole country. ¶ It was perhaps the hope that Phœ-

nicia might hold out against the Assyrian, and that the Egyptian might protect Samaria, which kindled in the mind of Hoshea the delusive plan of freeing himself and his impoverished land from the grinding tribute imposed by Nineveh. While Shalmaneser* was trying to quell Tyre, Hoshea, having received promises of assistance from Sabaco, withheld the "presents"—the *minchah*, as the tribute is euphemistically called—which he had hitherto paid. Seeing the danger of a powerful coalition, Shalmaneser swept down on Samaria in 724. Possibly he defeated the army of Israel in the plain of Jezreel (Hos. i. 5), and got hold of the person of Hoshea. Josephus says that he "besieged him"; but the sacred historian only tells us that "he shut him up, and bound him in prison." Whether Hoshea was taken in battle, or betrayed by the Assyrian party in Samaria, or whether he went in person to see if he could pacify the ruthless conqueror, he henceforth disappears from history "like foam"—or like a chip or a bubble—"upon the water." We do not know whether he was put to death, but we infer from an allusion in Micah that he was subjected to the cruel indignities in which the Assyrians delighted; for the prophet says, "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." † Perhaps in the title "Judge" (Shophet, *suffes*) we may see a sign that Hoshea's royalty was little more than the shadow of a name.

Having thus got rid of the king, Shalmaneser proceeded to invest the capital. But Samaria was strongly fortified upon its hill, and the Jewish race has again and again shown—as it showed so conspicuously in the final crisis of its destiny, when Jerusalem defied the terrible armies of Rome—that with walls to protect them they could pluck up a terrible courage and endurance from despair. Strong as Assyria was, the capital of Ephraim for three years resisted her beleaguering host and her crashing battering-rams. About all the anguish which prevailed within the city, and the wild vicissitudes of orgy and starvation, history is silent. But prophecy tells us that the sorrows of a travailing woman came upon the now kingless city. They drank to the dregs the cup of fury. ‡ The saddest Northern prophet. "The Jeremiah of Israel," sings the dirge of Israel's saddest king. §

"I am become to them as a lion;
As a leopard will I watch by the way;
I will meet them as a bear bereaved of her whelps,
And rend the caul of their heart,
And there will I devour them like a lioness:
The beast of the field shall tear them. . . .
Where now is thy king, that he may save thee in all thy cities?
And thy judges, of whom thou saidst, 'Give me a king and prince?'
I give thee a king in Mine anger,
And take him away in My wrath."

etho, *Sabachon*. In the "Eponym Canon" he is called an Egyptian general, *Sibakhi*, who helped Gaza against Assyria, and was defeated. The *ka* appended at the end of his name (Egyptian *Shaba-ka*) is thought by some to be the Cushite article. The race of the priest Hirhor died out with Piankhi, and the Ethiopians elected a noble named Kashta. Shabak was his son. He conquered Sais, and burnt his rival Bek-en-raut alive (B. C. 724). His dynasty ruled for fifty years; he was succeeded by Sevechus (Shabatok), and he by Tehrak (Tirhakah).

* His name means "Salmán, pardon." We have no monuments or inscriptions of this king; only an imperial weight.

† Mic. v. 1.

‡ Hos. xiii. 13.

§ Hos. xiii. 7-11. The prophecy is rhythmic, though not written in actual poetry.

* Hos. xi. 8-11.

† 2 Kings xvii. 1 is inconsistent with xv. 30, 33, and it is wholly useless for our purpose to enter into complicated chronological hypotheses, every one of which may be erroneous.

‡ Schrader, "K. A. T.," p. 255.

§ "Seder Olam," xxii. 2; 2 Chron. xxx. 6-11.

¶ See Herod., ii. 137; called So (Heb., Sô or Seve) in 2 Kings xvii. 4. Perhaps Shebek, the founder of the twenty-fifth dynasty. LXX., Σηβωρ; Vulg., *Sua*; Man-

For three years Samaria held out. During the siege Shalmaneser died, and was succeeded by Sargon, who—though he vaguely talks of “the kings his ancestors,” and says that he had been preceded by three hundred and thirty Assyrian dynasts—never names his father, and seems to have been a usurping general.*

Sabaco remained inactive, and basely deserted the miserable people which had relied on his protection. In this conduct Egypt was true to its historic character of untrustworthiness and inertness. Both in Israel and in Judah there were two political parties. One relied on the strength of Egypt; the other counselled submission to Assyria, or—in the hour when it became necessary to defy Assyria—confidence in God. Egypt was as frail a support as one of her own paper-reeds, which bent under the weight, and broke and ran into the hand of every one who leaned on it.

Sargon did not raze the city, and we see from the “Eponym Canon” that its inhabitants were still strong enough some years later to take part in a futile revolt. But we have one dreadful glimpse of the horrors which he inflicted upon it. They were the inevitable punishment of every conquered city which had dared to resist the Assyrian arm.

“Samaria shall bear her guilt,
For she hath rebelled against her God.
They shall fall by the sword:
Their infants shall be dashed in pieces,
And their women in child shall be ripped up.” †

Sargon’s own record of the matter on the tablets at Khorsabad is: “I besieged, took, and occupied the city of Samaria, and carried into captivity twenty-seven thousand two hundred and eighty of its inhabitants. I changed the former government of this country, and placed over it lieutenants of my own. And Sebeh, Sultan of Egypt, came to Raphia to fight against me. They met me, and I routed them. Sebeh fled.” ‡ The Assyrians were occupied in the unsuccessful siege of Tyre between 720-715, during which years Sargon put down Yahubid of Hamath, whose revolt had been aided by Damascus and Samaria. In 710 he marched against Ashdod (Isa. xx. 1). In 709 he defeated Mero-dach-Baladan at Dur-Yakin, and reconquered Chaldaea, deporting some of the population into

*Till the discovery of the Assyrian records, Sargon (Sharru-kenu, “the faithful king”) was but a name. The Jews knew but little of him. He is but once mentioned in Scripture (Isa. xx. 1), and was probably confused by some Jews with other kings. Yet he reigned sixteen years (722-705), and his records give the annals of fifteen campaigns. In 720 he crushed a confederacy headed by Yahubid of Hamath, and reduced that city to a “heap of ruins.” He then advanced against Hanno, King of Gaza, who was in alliance with Sabaco, and defeated the combined forces of the Philistines and Egyptians at Raphia, half-way between Gaza and the Wady-el-Arish, “the torrent [*uachal*] of Egypt.” Sargon was at the time too much occupied with other enemies to pursue his advantage over Egypt; for Armenia, Media, and other countries needed his attention. This encouraged Ashdod to rebel, and its king, Azuri, refused his tribute (see Isa. xx. 1). Sargon deposed him, and put his brother Ahimit in his place. Relying on Egyptian promises, Philistia joined Judah, Edom, and Moab in defying Assyria. They deposed Ahimit as an Assyrian nominee, and put Yaman in his place. Egypt, as usual, failed to help, and in 711 the Assyrian Turtan, or Commander-in-chief, took Ashdod after three years’ resistance, and carried its people into captivity. The punishment of Egypt was reserved for the subsequent reigns of Esarhaddon (681-668) and Assurbanipal. See Driver’s “Isaiah xlv.” (Isa. xx.). Isa. xiv. 20-32 is an ode of triumph for the Fall of Philistia.

† Hos. xiii. 16.

‡ See Dr. Hincks in *Journ. of Sac. Lit.*, October, 1858; Layard, “Nin. and Bab.,” i. 148.

Samaria. In 704, in the fifteenth year of his reign, he was assassinated, after a career of victory. He inscribes on his palace at Khorsabad a prayer to his god Assur, that, after his toils and conquests, “I may be preserved for the long years of a long life, for the happiness of my body, for the satisfaction of my heart. May I accumulate in this palace immense treasures, the booties of all countries, the products of mountains and valleys.” Assur and the gods of Chaldaea were invoked in vain; the prayer was scattered to the winds, and the murderer’s dagger was the comment on Sargon’s happy anticipations of peace and splendour.

Israel fell unpitied by her southern neighbour, for Judah was still smarting under memories of the old contempt and injury of Joash ben-Jehoahaz, and the more recent wrongs inflicted by Pekah and Rezin. Isaiah exults over the fate of Samaria, while he points the moral of her fall to the drunken priests and prophets of Jerusalem. “Woe,” he says, “to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley of them that are smitten down with wine! Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one [i. e., the Assyrian]; as a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, as a tempest of mighty water overflowing, shall he cast down to the earth with violence. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden underfoot: and the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be as the first ripe fig before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.” * Israel had begun in hostility to Judah, and perished by it at last.

Such, then, was the end of the once brilliant kingdom of Israel—the kingdom which, even so late as the reign of Jeroboam II., seemed to have a great future before it. No one could have foreseen beforehand that, when, with the prophetic encouragement of Ahijah, Jeroboam I. established his sovereignty over the greater, richer, and more flourishing part of the land assigned to the sons of Jacob, the new kingdom should fall into utter ruin and destruction after only two and a half centuries of existence, and its tribes melt away amid the surrounding nations, and sink into a mixed and semi-heathen race without any further nationality or distinctive history. It seemed far less probable that the mere fragment of the Southern Kingdom, after retaining its separate existence for more than one hundred and sixty years longer than its more powerful brother, should continue to endure as a nation till the end of time. Such was the design of God’s providence, and we know no more. The Northern Kingdom had, up to this time, produced the greatest and most numerous prophets—Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Nahum, and many more. † It had also produced the loveliest and most enduring poetry in the Song of Songs, the Song of Deborah, and other contributions to the Books of Jashar, and of the Wars of Jehovah. It had also brought into vigour the earliest and best historic literature, the narratives of the Elohist and the Jehovist. These immortal legacies of the religious

* Isa. xxviii. 1-4.

† 2 Kings xvii. 13, “by all the prophets, and all the seers” (*hōzeh*). Hävernick thinks that the *nebi'im* were such officially.

spirit of the Northern Kingdom were incomparably superior in moral and enduring value to the Levitic jejuneness of the Priestly Code, with its hierarchic interests and ineffectual rules, which, in the exaggerated supremacy attached to rites, proved to be the final blight of an unspiritual Judaism. Israel had also been superior in prowess and in deeds of war, and in the days of Joash ben-Jehoahaz ben-Jehu had barely conceded to Judah a right to separate existence. More than all this, the apostasies of Judah, from the days of Solomon downwards, were quite as heinous as Jezebel's Baal-worship, and far more deadly than the irregular but not at first idolatrous cultus of Bethel. The prophets are careful to teach Judah that if she was spared it was not because of any good deservings.* Yet now the cedar was scathed and smitten down, and its boughs were rent and scattered; and the thistle had escaped the wild beast's tread!

In the former volume we glanced at some of the causes of this, and the blessings which resulted from it. The central and chiefest blessing was, first, the preservation of a purer form of monotheism, and a loftier ideal of religion—though only realised by a few in Judah—than had ever prevailed in the Northern Tribes; secondly, and above all, the development of that inspiring Messianic prophecy which was to be fulfilled seven centuries later, when He who was David's Son and David's Lord came to our lost race from the bosom of the Father, and brought life and immortality to light.

And it was the work purely of "God's unseen providence, by men nicknamed 'Chance,'" which, dealing with nations as the potter with his clay, chooses some to honour and some to dishonour. For, as all the prophets are anxious to remind the Judean Kingdom, their success, the procrastination of their downfall, their restoration from captivity, were not due to any merits of their own. The Jews were and ever had been a stiff-necked nation; and though some of their kings had been faithful servants of Jehovah, yet many of them—like Rehoboam, and Ahaz, and Manasseh—exceeded in wickedness and inexcusable apostasy the least faithful of the worshippers at Gilgal and Bethel. They were plainly reminded of their nothingness: "And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation." † "Fear not, thou worm Jacob: I will help thee." ‡

But this was the end of the Ten Tribes. Nor must we say that Hosea's prediction of mercy was laughed to scorn by the irony of events, when he had given it as God's promise that—

"I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger,
I will not again destroy Israel;
For I am God, and not man." §

The words mean that mercy is God's chiefest and most essential attribute; and, after all, a nation is composed of families and individuals, and in political extinction there may have been many families and individuals in Israel, like that of Tobias, and like that of Anna, the prophetess of the tribe of Asher, who found, either in their far exile, or among the scattered Jews who still

peopled the old territories, a peace which was impossible during the distracted anarchy and deepening corruption of the whole period which had elapsed since the founding of the house of Omri. In any case God knows and loves His own. The words,

"I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger;
For I am God, and not man,"

might stand for an epitome of much that is most precious in Holy Writ. God's orthodoxy is the truth; and the truth remaineth, though man's orthodoxy exercises all its fury and all its baseness to overwhelm it. What hope has any man, even a St. Paul—what hope had even the Lord Himself—before the harsh, self-interested tribunals of human judgment, or of that purely external religionism which has always shown itself more brutal and more blundering than secular cruelty? What chance has there been, humanly speaking, for God's best saints, prophets, and reformers, when priests, popes, or inquisitors have been their judges? If God resembled those generations of unresisted ecclesiastics, whose chief resort has been the syllogism of violence, and whose main arguments have been the torture-chamber and the stake, what hope could there possibly be for the vast majority of mankind but those endless torments by the terrors of which corrupt Churches have forced their tyranny upon the crushed liberties and the paralysed conscience of mankind? The Indian sage was right who said that "God can only be truly described by the words No! No!"—that is, by repudiating multitudes of the ignoble and cruel basenesses which religious teachers have imagined or invented respecting Him. Because God is God, and not man—God, not a tyrant or an inquisitor—God, with the great compassionate heart of unfathomable tenderness,—therefore, in all who truly love Him, perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. Sin means ruin; yet God is love.*

The historian of the Kings here digresses, in a manner unusual to the Old Testament, to give us a most interesting glimpse of the fate of the conquered people, and the origin of the race which was known to after-ages by the name "Samaritan."

Sargon, when he had sacked the capital, carried out the policy of deportation which had now been established by the Assyrian kings. He achieved the double purpose of populating the capital and province of Nineveh, while he reduced subject nations to inanition, by sweeping away all the chief of the inhabitants from conquered states, and settling them in his own more immediate dominions. There they would be reduced to impotence, and mingle with the races among whom their lot would henceforth be cast. He therefore "carried Israel away" into Assyria, and placed them in Halah, north of Thapsacus, on the Euphrates, and in Habor, the river of Gozan †—i. e., on the river in Northern Assyria which still bears the name of Khabour, and flows into the Euphrates—and in the cities of the Medes.‡ He replaced the old population by

* See my "Minor Prophets," 6-97.

† Not as in A. V., "Habor, by the river of Gozan."

‡ 2 Kings xvii. 6. The LXX. has "rivers" and "mountains"; εν Αλαε και Αβυρ ποταμοις Τυζαν και ορη Μιδων. The river is not Ezekiel's Chebar. These deportations en masse of a whole population, with their women and children, their waggons and flocks, are depicted on Sar-

* See Amos ii. 4, 5; Isa. xxviii. 15; Jer. xvi. 19, 20; Ezek. xx. 13-30, etc.
† Deut. xxvii. 5.
‡ Isa. xli. 14.
§ Hos. xi. 9.

Dinaites, Tarpelites, Apharsathchites, Susan-chites, Elamites, Dehavites, and Babylonians, after carrying away the great bulk of the better-class population.*

After this the historian pauses to sum up and emphasise once more the main lesson of his narrative. It is that "righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is the reproach of any people." God had called His son Israel out of Egypt, delivered His chosen from Pharaoh, given them a pleasant land; but "Israel had sinned against Jehovah their God, and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the heathen." They had failed therefore in fulfilling the very purpose for which they had been set apart. They had been intended "to uplift among the nations the banner of righteousness" and the banner of the One True God. Instead of this, they were seduced by the heathen ritual of

"Gay religions full of pomp and gold"

They decked out alien institutions,† and alike in unfrequented and populous places—"from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city"—set up *matstseboth* (A. V., "pillars") and *Asherim* on every high hill. The green trees became *obumbratrices scelerum*, the secret bowers of their iniquities. They burnt incense on the *bamoth*, and served idols, and wrought wickedness. Useless had been the voices of all the prophets and the seers. They went after vain things, and became vain. Beginning with the two "calves," they proceeded to lewd and orgiastic idolatries. Ahab and Jezebel seduced them into Tyrian Baal-worship. From the Assyrians they learnt and practised the adoration of the host of heaven.‡ From Moab and Ammon they borrowed the abominable rites of Moloch, and used divination and enchantments by means of belomancy (Ezek. xxi. 21, 22) and necromancy, and sold themselves to do wickedness.

Nor was this all. These idolatries, with their guilty ritualism, were not confined to Israel, but also

"Infected Zion's daughters with like heat,
Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch
Ezekiel saw, when, by the vision led,
His eye surveyed the dark idolatries
Of alienated Judah."

And thus, when Jehovah afflicted the seed of Israel and cast them out of His sight, Judah also had to feel the stroke of retribution.§

And it is idle to object that even if Israel had been faithful she must have inevitably perished before the superior might of Damascus, or Nineveh, or Babylon. How can we tell? It is not

gon's series of tablets in his splendid palace at Khorsabad.

* Ezra iv. 10. "The great and noble Asnapper" of the passage is either some Assyrian general, or a confusion of the name Assurbanipal.

† 2 Kings xvii. 9. Heb., "covered"; A. V. and R. V., "did secretly," rather "perfidiously"; LXX, ἡμφέσσαντο λόγους ἀδίκους κατὰ κύριον; Vulg. *Et offenderunt verbis non rectis dominum suum.*

‡ Star-worship is not mentioned in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. xx.-xxiii.) or the oldest sections of the Mosaic Law. It is first forbidden in Deut. iv. 10, xvii. 2, when contact with Syrians and Assyrians made it known (comp. Job xxxi. 26-28; Jer. viii. 2, xix. 13; Zeph. i. 5). The language of 2 Kings vii.-xxiii. frequently reflects the prohibitions of Deuteronomy (see Deut. xii. 2, 30, 31, iv. 19, v. 7, 8, xvi. 21, xviii. 10, xxxi. 16, etc.).

§ In 2 Kings xvii. 11, for "they did wicked things," the LXX has κοινωσις, i. e., *qedeshim*) ἐξάρπαζαν καὶ ἐρασίδας (*qedeshoth*); i. e., they had depraved *hieroduli* of both sexes. Comp. Hos. iv. 14; Gen. xxxviii. 21) where the allusion is to one of the votaries of Asherah.)

possible for us thus to write unwritten history, and there is absolutely nothing to show that the surmise is correct. In the days of David, of Uzziah, of Jeroboam II., Judah and Israel had shown what they could achieve. Had they been strong in faithfulness to Jehovah, and in the righteousness which that faith required, they would have shown an invincible strength amid the moral enervation of the surrounding people. They might have held their own by welding into one strong kingdom the whole of Palestine, including Philistia, Phœnicia, the Negeb, and the Trans-Jordanic region. They might have consolidated the sway which they at various times attained southwards, as far as the Red Sea port of Elath; northwards over Aram and Damascus, as far as the Hamath on the Orontes; eastwards to Thapsacus on the Euphrates; westward to the Isles of the Gentiles. There is nothing improbable, still less impossible, in the view that, if the Israelites had truly served Jehovah and obeyed His laws, they might then have permanently established the monarchy which was ideally regarded as their inheritance, and which for brief and fitful periods they partially maintained. And such a monarchy, held together by warrior statesmen, strong and righteous, and above all secure in the blessing of God, would have been a thoroughly adequate counterpoise, not only to dilatory and distracted Egypt, which had long ceased to be aggressive, but even to brutal Assyria, which prevailed in no small measure because of the isolation and mutual dissension of these southern principalities.

But, as it was, "Assyria and Egypt—the two world-powers in the dawn of history, the two chief sources of ancient civilisation, the twin giant-empires which bounded the Israelite people on the right hand and on the left—were cruel neighbours, between whom the ill-fated nation was tossed to and fro in wanton sport like a shuttlecock. They were cruel friends before whom it must cringe in turns, praying sometimes for help, suing sometimes for very life—alternate scourges in the hand of the Divine wrath. Now it is the fly of Egypt, and now it is the bee of Assyria, whose ruthless swarms issue forth at the word of Jehovah, settling in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes, with deadly sting, fatal to man and beast, devastating the land far and wide. Holding the poor Israelite in their relentless embrace, they threatened ever and again to crush him by their grip. Like the fabled rocks which frowned over the narrow straits of the Bosphorus, they would crash together and annihilate the helpless craft which the storms of destiny had placed at their mercy. Israel reeled under their successive blows. As was the beginning, so was the end. As the captivity of Egypt had been the cradle of the nation, so was the captivity of Assyria to be its tomb.*"

In any case the principle of the historian remains unshaken. Sin is weakness; idolatry is folly and rebellion; uncleanness is decrepitude. St. Paul was not thinking of this ancient Philosophy of History when he wrote his Epistle to the Romans; yet the intense and masterly sketch which he gives of that moral corruption which brought about the long, slow, agonising dissolution of the beauty that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome, is one of its strongest justifications. His view only differs from the

* Bishop Lightfoot, "Sermons," p. 267.

summary before us in the power of its eloquence and the profoundness of its psychologic insight. He says the same thing as the historian of the Kings, only in words of greater power and wider reach, when he writes: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness. Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings" (*ἐματαιώθησαν*, the very word used in the LXX. in 2 Kings xvii. 15), "and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (words which might describe the expediency-policy of Jeroboam I., and its fatal consequences), "and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. For this cause God gave them up to passions of dishonour, and unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity,"—and so on through a long catalogue of iniquities which are identical with those which we find so burningly denounced on the pages of the prophets of Israel and Judah.

Even a Machiavelli, cool and cynical and audacious as was his scepticism, could see and admit that faithfulness to religion is the secret of the happiness and prosperity of states.* An irreligious society tends inevitably and always to be a dissolute society; and a "dissolute society is the most tragic spectacle which history has ever to present—a nest of disease, of jealousy, of dissensions, of ruin, and despair, whose last hope is to be washed off the world and disappear. Such societies must die sooner or later of their own gangrene, of their own corruption, because the infection of evil, spreading into unbounded selfishness, ever intensifying and reproducing passions which defeat their own aim, can never end in anything but moral dissolution." We need not look further than the collapse of France after the battle of Sedan, and the cause to which that collapse was attributed, not only by Christians, but by her own most worldly and sceptical writers, to see that the same causes ever issue and will issue in the same ruinous effects.

In order to complete the history of the Northern Kingdom, the historian here anticipates the order of time by telling us what happened to the mongrel population whom Sargon transplanted into central Ephraim in place of the old inhabitants.

The king, we are told, brought them from Babylon—which was at this time under the rule of Assyria; from Cuthah—by which seems to be meant some part of Mesopotamia near Babylon; † from Avva, or Ivah—probably the same as Ahalah or Hit, on the Euphrates, northwest of Babylon; from Sepharvaim, or Sippara, also on the Euphrates; ‡ and from Hamath, on the Oron-

* La quale Religione se ne Principi della Republica Christiana si fusse mantenuta, secondo che dal dottore d'essa ne fu ordinato, sarebbero gli State e le Republiche Christiane più nitite e più felici assai ch'elle non sono" ("Discorsi," i. 12).

† 2 Kings xvii. 24. Comp. xviii. 34. Hence the later Jews comprehensively called the Samaritans Cuthites. Comp. 2 Kings xix. 13; Isa xxxvii. 13.

‡ Heliopolis. Ptolemy, v. 18. § 7; Isa. xxxvi. 10. Here, according to the Chaldean legends, Xisuthrus buried his tablets about the Creation, etc.

tes, which had not long remained under Jeroboam II.* It must not be supposed that the whole population of Ephraim was deported; that was a physical impossibility. Although we are told in Assyrian annals that Sargon carried away with him so vast a number of captives, it is, of course, clear that the lowest and poorest part of the population was left † We can imagine the wild confusion which arose when they found themselves compelled to share the dismantled palaces and abandoned estates of the wealthy with the horde of new colonists, whose language, in all probability, they but imperfectly understood. There must have been many a tumult, many a scene of horror, such as took place in the long antagonism of Normans and Saxons in England, before the immigrants and the relics of the former populace settled down to amalgamation and mutual tolerance.

Sargon is said to have carried away with him the golden calf or calves of Bethel, as Tiglath-Pileser is said by the Rabbis to have carried away that of Dan. ‡ He also took away with him all the educated classes, and all the teachers of religion. § No one was left to instruct the ignorant inhabitants; and, as Hosea had prophesied, there was neither a sacrifice, nor a pillar, nor an ephod, and not even teraphim to which they could resort. || Naturally enough, the disunited dregs of an old and of a new population had no clear knowledge of religion. They "feared not Jehovah." The sparseness of inhabitants, with its consequent neglect of agriculture, caused the increase of wild beasts among them. There had always been lions and bears in "the swellings of Jordan," ¶ and in all the lonelier parts of the land; and to this day there are leopards in the woods of Carmel, and hyænas and jackals in many regions. Conscious of their miserable and godless condition, and afflicted by the lions, which they regarded as a sign of Jehovah's anger, the Ephraimites sent a message to the King of Assyria. They only claimed Jehovah as their local god, and complained that the new colonists had provoked the wrath of "the God of the land" by not knowing His "manner"—that is, the way in which He should be worshipped. The consequence was that they were in danger of being exterminated by lions. The kings of Assyria were devoted worshippers of Assur and Merodach, but they held the common belief of ancient polytheists that each country had its own potent divinities. Sargon, therefore, gave orders that one of the priests of his captivity should be sent back to Samaria, "to teach them the manner of the god of the land." The priest selected for the purpose returned, took up his residence at the old shrine of Bethel, and "taught them how they should fear Jehovah." His success was, however, extremely limited, except among the former followers of Jeroboam's dishonoured cult. The old religious shrines still continued, and the immigrants used them for the glorification of their former deities.

* From Ezra iv. 2 some infer that the main immigrants were introduced by Esarhaddon, who did not succeed till B. C. 681. He claims to have colonised Syria.

† So we see from 2 Kings xix. 13, which applies to the reign of Hezekiah.

‡ See Appendix, "The Golden Calves."

§ He uses the agency of "the great and noble Asnapper" (Ezra iv. 12) for the deportation (see Botta, 145; Layard, "Nin. and Bab.," i. 148; Dr. Hincks, *Jour. of Sac. Lit.*, October, 1853), unless Asnapper be a confusion for Assurbanibal (Sardanapalus).

¶ Hos. iii. 4.

¶ See Jer. xlix. 10, l. 44; Prov. xxii. 13, etc.

Samaria, therefore, witnessed the establishment of a singularly hybrid form of religionism. The Babylonians worshipped Succoth-Benoth,* perhaps Zirbanit, wife of Merodach or Bel; the Cuthites worshipped Nergal, the Assyrian war-god, the lion-god;† the Hittites, from Hamath, worshipped Ashima or Esmûn, the god of air and thunder, under the form of a goat;‡ the Avites preferred Nibhaz and Tartak, perhaps Saturn—unless these names be Jewish jeers, implying that one of these deities had the head of a dog, and the other of an ass.§ More dreadful, if less ridiculous, was the worship of the Sepharvites, who adored Adrammelech and Anammelech, the sun-god under male and female forms, to whom, as to Moloch, they burnt their children in the fire. As for ministers, "they made unto them priests from among themselves,|| who offered sacrifices for them in the shrines of the bamoth." Thus the whole mongrel population "feared the Lord, and served their own gods," as they continued to do in the days of the annalist whose record the historian quotes. He ends his interesting sketch with the words, that, in spite of the Divine teaching, "these nations"—so he calls them, and so completely does he refuse to them the dignity of being Israel's children—feared the Lord, and served their graven images, their children likewise, and their children's children,—as did their fathers, so do they unto this day."¶

The "unto this day" refers, no doubt, to the document from which the historian of the Kings was quoting—perhaps about B. c. 560, in the third generation after the fall of Samaria. A very brief glance will suffice to indicate the future history of the Samaritans. We hear but little of them between the present reference and the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. By that time they had purged themselves of these grosser idolatries, and held themselves fit in all respects to cooperate with the returned exiles in the work of building the Temple. Such was not the opinion of the Jews. Ezra regarded them as "the adversaries of Judah and Israel."** The exiles rejected their overtures. In B. c. 409 Manasseh, a grandson of the high priest expelled by Nehemiah for an unlawful marriage with a daughter of Sanballat, of the Samaritan city of Beth-horon, built the schismatic temple on Mount Gerizim.†† The relations of the Samaritans to the Jews became thenceforth deadly. In B. c. 175 they seconded the profane attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to paganise the Jews, and in

* Lit., "Daughter-huts" (Selden, "De Dis Syr.," ii. 7), but probably a transiteration. Zarpantit—"She who gives seed"—was Aphrodite Pandemos (Mylitta—Herod., i. 199). The Rabbis—who only guess—say she represented "the Clucking Hen"—i. e., the Pleiades. There does not seem to be any connection between Succoth and "Sakuth," the various reading in Amos v. 26, which seems to be the Assyrian Moloch.

† Said to be worshipped under the form of a cock.

‡ LXX., Ἐβλαζέρ. Jarchi says these deities were worshipped under base animal forms—but it is more than doubtful.

§ The Rabbis, from Exod. xxiii. 13; Josh., xxiii. 7, thought they were bound to give scornful nicknames to heathen deities. Hence such changes as Kir-Heres for Kir-Cheres, Beelzebub for Beelzebub, Bethaven for Bethel, Bosheth for Baal, etc.

|| Not as in A. V., "of the lowest of them," but, "of all classes." Comp. 1 Kings xii. 31.

¶ In 2 Kings xvii. 31-38 we again find repeated references to Deuteronomy (iv. 23, v. 32, x. 20, etc.).

** Ezra iv. 1. The actual word "Samaritans" occurs only once in the Old Testament, in 2 Kings xvii. 29.

†† See Neh. xiii. 4-9, 28, 29; Jos., "Antt.," XI. vii. 2. Josephus makes Manasseh a brother of the high priest Jaddua (B. c. 333).

B. c. 130 John Hyrcanus, the Maccabee, destroyed their temple. They were accused of waylaying Jews on their way to the Feasts, and of polluting the Temple with dead bones.* They claimed Jewish descent (John iv. 12), but our Lord called them "aliens" (ἀλλογενής), Luke xvii. 18), and Josephus describes them as "residents from other nations" (μέτοικοι, ἀλλοθνήεις). They are now a rapidly dwindling community of fewer than a hundred souls—"the oldest and smallest sect in the world"—equally despised by Jews and Mohammedans. The Jews, as in the days of Christ, have no dealings with them. When Dr. Frankl, on his philanthropic visit to the Jews of the East, went to see their celebrated Pentateuch, and mentioned the fact to a Jewish lady—"What!" she exclaimed: "have you been among the worshippers of the pigeon? Take a purifying bath!" Regarding Gerizim as the place which God had chosen (John iv. 20), they alone can keep up the old tradition of the *sacrificial* passover. For long centuries, since the Fall of Jerusalem, it is only on Gerizim that the Paschal lambs and kids have been actually slain and eaten, as they are to this day, and will be, till, not long hence, the whole tribe disappears.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE REIGN OF AHAZ.

B. C. 735-715.

2 KINGS xvi. 1-20.

"Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharpar, lucid streams.
He also against the House was bold:
A leper once he lost, and gained a king—
Ahaz, his sottish conqueror, whom he drew
God's altar to disparage and displace
For one of Syrian mode, whereon to burn
His odious offerings, and adore the gods
Whom he had vanquished."

—"Paradise Lost," i. 467-476.

ACCORDING to our authorities, Ahaz ("Possessor")† began his reign of sixteen years at the age of twenty. Of the exactitude of these references we cannot be certain, because they also state (2 Kings xviii. 2) that Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and this reduces us to the absurdity of supposing that Hezekiah was born when his father was only eleven years old.‡ We might infer from Isa. iii. 4 that Ahaz was not so old as twenty when he succeeded Jotham; for there—in a terrible prophecy which can only refer to the beginning of this reign—we read, "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them"; or, as it should be perhaps rendered, "And with childishness, or wilfulness, shall they rule over them."

Whatever may have been the king's age, surely never king succeeded to a more distracted kingdom, or reigned over a more terrified people! If he could have had any choice in the matter,

* Jos., "Antt." IX. xiv. 3, XII. v. 5, XIII. ix. 1, XX. vi., XVIII. ii. 2. The bitterly hostile relations between Jews and Samaritans in the time of Christ are illustrated by Luke ix. 52-54.

† Probably, a shortened form for Jehoahaz ("The Lord taketh hold"). He is called Jahuzah in Tiglath-Pileser's inscription (Schrader, "Keilinschr.," p. 163).

‡ For twenty-five it is not improbable that we should read fifteen.

he might well have declined the fearful burden. Describing the state of things, the great prophet Isaiah, who now began his career, exclaims,—

“For, behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah stay and staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water; the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the elder; the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning charmer, and the skillful enchanter. And the people shall be oppressed every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the elder, and the base against the honourable. Then a man shall take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, ‘Thou hast clothing, be *thou our judge*, and let this ruin be under thy hand’: in that day shall he lift his voice, saying, ‘I will not be a builder-up; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing; ye shall not make me a ruler of the people.’ For Jerusalem is ruined and Judah is fallen. The show of their countenance is against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not. As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them.”*

This is a frightful picture of famine—the dearth of intellect, the dearth of statesmen, of all genius, of all insight. It describes the prevalence of oppression and of ghastly destitution, accompanied by such utter despair that no one cared to exert himself for the arrest of the ruin which seemed imminent over that which was already no better than itself a ruin.

The Book of Isaiah is arranged in a most confused and unchronological manner, and it is probable that the first five chapters should be placed after the sixth, which describes the prophet’s call in the year that King Uzziah died. They paint a picture of moral collapse. His first chapter is called by Ewald “the great arraignment,” and by its references describes the awful period of alarm during the war of Syria and Ephraim against Judah. It might seem as if the combined host was even then in the country, or had only just retired from it; for we read,—

“Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a wilderness, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.”

But even in the midst of this afflictive dispensation there were no signs of repentance. The children of Israel were rebels who despised the Holy One of Israel,—“Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly!” (i. 7-9). They had all the externals of religion: they offered vain sacrifices, and kept a multitude of idle feasts, and offered many formal prayers; but all this was but a cumberance to Him who desired clean hands and a pure heart as conditions of forgiveness (10-20). What hope could there be for a city of murderers, who loved bribes and perverted judgment (21-24)? The land was full of pride, full of idols, full of the luxury of the rich amid the starvation of the poor (ii. 1-22).† Women par-

took of the general corruption. They walked mincingly with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes,* thinking of nothing but their anklets, and crescents, and bracelets, and mufflers, ear-drops, head-tires, perfumes, mirrors, armllets, and nose-jewels: therefore they should have sackcloth for stomachers, ropes for girdles, and burning instead of beauty, and only a remnant should escape (iii. 16-iv. 1). Judah was like a vineyard,—rich in advantages, blessed with fondest care; but when God looked for grapes, it only brought forth wild grapes—a semblance, but only a poisoned semblance, of the true vintage: therefore it should be left neglected and rainless. Woe to the greedy land-grabbing, and drunkenness, and revelry of the rich! Woe to their mockery of God and their devotion to vanity! Woe to their insane pride and wanton injustice! Could they escape vengeance? No! Jehovah had looked for judgment (*mishpat*), but behold oppression (*mishpach*); for righteousness (*tse’dakah*), but behold a cry (*tse’akah*) (v. 1-24).† They might escape—they would escape—the Syrian and the Ephraimite; but behind these lay a more terrible and a more portentous foe, even the Assyrian, the scourge of God’s wrath (25-30).

“It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim.” Is it strange that in such a condition of things the heart of Ahaz and of his people “was moved as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind”?

Such was the terrible crisis at which Isaiah began his ministry. He was the son of Amoz,‡ who has been (much too precariously) identified with a brother of Amaziah. It is probable that he was a man of distinguished, if not of princely, birth, and he exercised a more powerful influence over the politics of his country than any other prophet—not even excepting Jeremiah.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ISAIAH AND AHAZ.

2 KINGS XVI.

“Expediency is man’s wisdom; doing right is God’s.”
—GEORGE MEREDITH.

ISAIAH was one of those men whom God provides for the need of kingdoms. He was not only a prophet, but a statesman, a reformer, a poet, a man of invincible faith and unequalled insight. If Ahaz had accepted his counsels and followed his moral guidance, the whole history of Judah might have been different.

But the position of things was indeed disastrous. Judah was attacked from every side. On the southeast the Edomites renewed their devastating raids, and swept off multitudes of captives, who were sold as slaves in the Western slave-markets. On the southwest the Philistines once more rose in revolt, and acquired permanent reposition of many parts of the Shephelah, mastering Beth-Shemesh, Ajalon, Gede-

prophets they are a quotation from some older source—perhaps from Jonah, son of Amittai.

* Heb., “deceiving with their eyes.”

† Isa. v. 7. The paronomasia of the original is striking. Van Oort renders it, “He looked for *reason*, but behold *treason*; and for *right*, but behold *affright*.”

‡ His name means “Jehovah saves,” and is perhaps alluded to in Isa. viii. 18. Amos (“One who bears a burden”), needless to say, is a totally different name from that of Amoz (“Vigorous”), the father of Isaiah.

* Isa. iii. 1-12.

† In Isa. ii. 2-4 we find, as so often in the prophetic books in their present too-often haphazard arrangement, a glowing promise of universal peace placed before unsparring denunciations. The verses are also found in Micah (iv. 1, 2), and it has been conjectured that in both

roth, Shocho, Timnath, Gimzo, and all the adjacent districts. But this was nothing compared with the humiliation and destruction inflicted by Rezin and Pekah. They shut up Ahaz in Jerusalem; and though they could not storm its almost impregnable defences, which had recently been fortified by Uzziah and Jotham, they were undisputed masters of the rest of the land, so that Judah was "brought low and made naked."* Rezin, indeed, weary of a tedious siege, swept southwards to Elath, on the gulf of Akabah, seized it, and peopled it with an Edomite garrison, thereby destroying the commerce in which Solomon and Jehoshaphat had taken pride, and which Uzziah had recently re-established. Having thus left an effectual annoyance to Judah in his rear, he gave up the design of dethroning Ahaz and substituting in his place "the son of Tabeal," who would have been a tool in the hands of the confederate kings. He seized, however, a multitude of captives, and with them and with much booty he returned to Damascus. "The son of Tabeal"—a name which occurs nowhere else—has been found very puzzling.† I believe it to be simply an instance of the Rabbinic process of transposition, called *Themourah*. Some identify it with Itibi'alu of an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser. Others suppose that he was a Syrian, and that Tabeal stands for Tabrimmon. But by the application of *Themourah* (called the *Albam*) Tabeal simply gives us "Remaliah," and is either a scornful variation of the name of Pekah's father, or has arisen from the watchword of a secret conspiracy. Since in the text of Jeremiah (li. 41, xxv. 26) (by *Abash*, another form of the secret transposition of letters of which the generic name was *Gematría*) we read *Sheshach* for Babel, the name Tabeal may have been dealt with in a similar method.‡ Pekah, according to the Chronicler, inflicted far deadlier injuries than Rezin. In one day he slew one hundred and twenty thousand "sons of valour," because they had forsaken Jehovah, God of their fathers. His general Zichri, a mighty Ephraimite, slew Maaseiah, the king's son;§ and Azrikam, the chancellor; and Elkanah, "the second to the king." The army carried away two hundred thousand captives and much spoil to Samaria. But on their arrival, a prophet named Oded|| reproved the Israelites for having massacred the Judeans "in a rage that reacheth to heaven." Aided by various princes, he succeeded in inducing the people to refuse to harbour the captives, and clothed, fed, and sent them back unharmed to Jericho, mounting the feeble on horses and asses. The story bears on the face of it the signs of enormous exaggeration.

In the crisis of their miseries, but just before the siege, Ahaz had gone outside the city walls "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the causeway of the fuller's field," probably to look after the water-supply, which had always been a difficulty for Jerusalem, and on which depended her capacity to withstand a siege. Here he was met by the prophet Isaiah, who was leading by the hand the little son to whom he had given the name of "Shear-jashub" ("A remnant shall return"),¶ as a witness to the truth of the

prophecy which he had heard on the occasion of his call.—

"And if there should yet be a tenth in it, this shall be again consumed; yet as the terebinth and the oak, though cut down, have their stock remaining, even so a sacred seed shall be the stock thereof."*

The object of the prophet was to cheer up the fainting heart of the king, and to say to him first,—

"Take heed, and be quiet."

This mandate probably refers to rumours—which Isaiah must have heard—of the king's intention to follow the counsels of the party which urged him to seek foreign assistance. One of these parties advised him to throw himself into the arms of Egypt, and rely on her protection; the other gave the more perilous counsel of invoking the aid of Assyria. Isaiah's mandate to the king and to the nation was to take neither step, but to trust in the Lord, and to repent of individual and national misdoing. He summed up his message in the rule,—

"In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

The advice was emphasised by a promise of the most decisive and encouraging kind. When all looked so helpless, the prophet was bidden to say,—

"Fear not, neither be faint-hearted, for these two stumps of smoking torches, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of Remaliah's son. They have taken evil counsel against thee. But thus saith the Lord God, 'It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is only Rezin, and the head of Samaria is a mere Remaliah's son.'"†

And then, to confirm the lesson of confidence in God, the brief assurance,—

"If ye will not confide,
Surely ye shall not abide."

Convinced of the certainty of this immediate deliverance, Isaiah bade the king to ask for a sign from Jehovah, either in the height above, or in the depth beneath.

But the timid and hypocritical king was not so to be influenced. He had on his side "the scornful men, who ruled Judah"; the mocking priests, who sneered and jeered at Isaiah's teaching as repetitive and commonplace, and only fit for children; and the princes and nobles, who formed the Court party, headed by Shebna the scribe. He probably looked on Isaiah as a mere unpractical faddist, an excited fanatic—all very well as a prophet, but not a man who ought to thrust himself into the plans of politicians. Ahaz had his own plans, and he had not the smallest intention of altering them in consequence of anything which Isaiah might say. He was far too timid and unfaithful to rely on anything so vague as Divine assurance. He was convinced that his only chance lay in the horses of Egypt or the fierce infantry of Assyria. So he said with sham piety, merely intended to put the

repents" (LXX., ὁ καταλειφθεὶς Ἰασοῦβ; Vulg., *Qui derelictus est Jaseb*).

* Isa. vi. 13.

† The words "And within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people" (Isa. vii. 8), are almost certainly an interpolation: for (1) the overthrow came within far less than sixty years; (2) the clause awkwardly breaks the context; (3) the "sixty years" is inconsistent with the promise (vii. 16) that it should be within very few years.

* 2 Chron. xxviii. 19.

† It may mean "God is good" (Tabeal).

‡ For further explanations I must refer to my paper on Rabbinic Exegesis (*Expositor*, First Series, v. 373).

§ 2 Chron. xxviii. 7.

|| Of Oded nothing else is known.

¶ Some, however, interpret the name "A remnant

prophet off, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah."

That moment marks what may be called the birth-throe of Messianic prophecy in its most specific character. For then the prophet, after reproving the king for wearying Jehovah as well as His servants, adds, in words of far wider and deeper significance than their immediate bearing, that Jehovah Himself should give a sign; for the maiden should conceive and bear a Son, and call His name Immanuel ("God with us"). The child should grow up in a time of scarcity; for owing to the devastation of the land, he would only be able to be nurtured on curdled milk and honey. But before he had reached years of discretion—before he had arrived at the power of moral choice—the land whose two kings Ahaz abhorred should be a desert. Yet let not Ahaz exult too much in the immediate deliverance! Days of unexampled misery were at hand. Jehovah should hiss for the fly from the farthest canals of Egypt, and for the bee of Assyria, and they should settle in swarms in the valleys and pastures. Ahaz—he had not alluded to the design, but Isaiah knew it well—was about to hire a razor from beyond the Euphrates, but that razor should sweep away the hair and beard of Judah. Agriculture should languish, and the people should only be able to live in privation on whey and honey; and the vineyards should be full of briers and thorns, and should be mere places for hunting.*

This event, therefore, as Caspari says, stands at the turning-point of Old Testament History. It marks the beginning of that second period of the History of the Chosen People in which their hopes were granted as a counterpoise to their anguish and their humiliation. "It stood, therefore, at the point where a prospect offered itself to the eye of the prophet which reached out over the whole development of the people of God."

To all such prophecies Ahaz was utterly deaf; they did not for a moment induce him to swerve from his purpose. But to call still further attention to his promise as the Syrian Ephraimitish host pressed forward, Isaiah took a great piece of vellum, and inscribed on it, in the ordinary characters,—

"SPEED-PLUNDER-HASTE-SPOIL."

He put it up in some conspicuous place, before his own house or in the Temple, and took the priest Urijah and Zechariah, the son of Jeberechiah, into his confidence as faithful witnesses. He told them the explanation of his sign, and they would satisfy the curiosity of the people on the subject. It meant that in nine months' time his wife should bear a son, and that he and his wife, the prophetess, would call the boy's name "Speed-plunder-haste-spoil," as a sign that before the child was able to say "Father" or "Mother" Rezin and Pekah should be extinguished. For the Assyrian should speed to the plunder and haste to the spoil, and the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria should be carried away by the King of Assyria. Since Judah despised "the soft flowing waters of Shiloah,"† and preferred Rezin and Pekah,‡ they

should be deluged by the Euphrates of Assyria, and Assyria's outspread wings should overshadow thy land, O Immanuel (viii. 1-8). How vain, then, of the people to try and meet the confederacy of Syria and Ephraim by a new confederacy of Judah with Assyria! This, after all, is Immanuel's land. God is with us. We have but to fear God, we have but to be faithful to duty, and Jehovah shall be our sanctuary, though He be a stumbling-block to many in Israel, and a snare to many in Jerusalem.* This is God's teaching and God's testimony, and Isaiah and his children are signs of it. For does not Isaiah mean "Salvation of Jehovah"; and Shear-jashub, "A remnant shall return"; and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "Swift-spoil-speedy-prey"; and Immanuel, "God is with us"? What need, then, to seek wizards and necromancers? Seek God; confide, abide! † Trouble and darkness there should be; but all was not utterly hopeless. Northern Israel had been bedimmed and afflicted; but soon they should be exalted, and see light, and their yoke be broken as in the day of Midian, and the trampling boot and blood-stained mantle of the warrior shall be burned in the fire: for a Child is born, a Son is given unto us of David's line, who shall be a Mighty Deliverer, a Prince of Peace—and Israel shall perish.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE APOSTASIES OF AHAZ.

2 KINGS XVI. 1-18.

"For when we in our wickedness grow hard,
Oh the misery on't! the wise gods seal our eyes;
In our own fiith drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at us while we strut
To our confusion."

AHAZ was indifferent to these prophecies because his heart was elsewhere. It is clear from our authorities that this king had excited an unusually deep antipathy in the hearts of those later writers who judged religion not only from the earlier standpoint, but from the stern and inexorable requirements of the Deuteronomic and the Priestly Codes. The historian, adopting an unusual phrase, says that "he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel." He not only continued the high places, as the best of his predecessors had done, but he increased their popularity and importance by personally offering sacrifices and burning incense "on the hills and under every green tree." It is probable, too, that he introduced into Judah horses and chariots dedicated to the sun,‡ "He made molten images for the Baalim," says the Chronicler, "and burnt incense in the valley of the son of Himmon."

This last was his crowning atrocity; he actually sanctioned the revolting worship of the abomination of the children of Ammon, which Solomon had tolerated on the mount of offence. "He made his son to pass through the

Tabael had a party in Jerusalem; but Hitzig renders it "dreadeth," not "rejoiceth in."

* The meaning is by no means clear.

† See Driver, "Isaiah," p. 34.

* Isa. vii. 1-25.
† Not improbably the water which afterwards flowed through Hezekiah's new tunnel between the Virgin's Tomb and the Pool of Siloam. It is referred to in 2 Chron. xxxii. 3, 30 (Isa. xxii. 9-11). See Appendix II.

‡ This, if it be correct, can only mean that the son of

‡ See 2 Kings xxiii. 17, which shows that this was not an innovation of Manasseh's. They were common in Persia. See Q. Curtius, iii. 3.

fire." The Chronicler expresses it still more dreadfully by saying that "he burnt his children in the fire."*

In the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, or of the Beni-Hinnom, of which the name is perpetuated in Gehenna, the place of torture for lost souls, there stood a frightful image of the king—Moloch, Melek, Malcham. It represented the sun-god, worshipped, not only as Baal under the emblems of prolific nature, but, like the Egyptian Typhon, as the emblem of the sun's scorching and blighting force. It was perhaps a human figure with the head of an ox. The arms of the brazen image sloped downwards over a cistern, which was filled with fuel; and when a human sacrifice was to be offered to him, the child was probably first killed, and then placed on these brazen arms as a gift to the idol. It rolled down into the flaming tank, and was consumed amid the strains of music. Recourse was only had to the most frightful form of human sacrifice—the burning of grown-up victims—in extremities of disaster, as when Mesha of Moab offered up his eldest son to Chemosh on the wall of Kirhareth in the sight of his people and of the three invading armies. But the sacrifice of children was public, and perhaps annual. Hence Milton, following the learned researches of Selden in his *Syntagma "De Dis Syriis,"* writes:—

"First, Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood
Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears;
Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud,
Their children's cries unheard that pass'd through fire
To his grim idol. Him the Ammonite
Worshipp'd in Rabba and her watery plain,
In Argob and in Basan, to the stream
Of utmost Arnon. Nor content with such
Audacious neighbourhood, the wisest heart
Of Solomon he led by fraud to build
His temple right against the Temple of God
On that opprobrious hill, and made his grove
The pleasant Valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence
And black Gehenna call'd, the type of hell."†

But it may be doubted whether Ahaz, in spite of his frightful position, or, in later days, the less excusable Manasseh, really destroyed the lives of their young sons.‡ The ancients had a notion that they could easily cheat their devil-deities. If a white ox of Clitumnus became unfitted for a victim to Jupiter of the Capitol by having on its body a few black spots, it was quite sufficient to make it pass with the *Di faciles* by chalking the black spots over it.§ If human victims had to be thrown into the Tiber to Hercules, Numa taught the people that little wickerwork images (*scirpea*) would suit the purpose just as well. ||

* 2 Kings xvii. 31; Ezek. xvi. 21, xxiii. 37, xxxiii. 6; Deut. xii. 31; Jer. xix. 5. See 2 Chron. xxviii. 3; for "his son," יָחִיד, it uses יָחִידִים "his sons," but perhaps generically.

Moloch-worship may have been stimulated by accounts of the Assyrian fire-god Adrammelech (Movers, "Phöniz," ii. 101). On this sacrifice of children to Moloch, which the Phœnicians referred back to the god El or Il, once King of Byblos, who in a crisis of danger sacrificed his eldest son Icond, see Plut., "De Superst.," § 13; Diod. Sic., xx. 12-14; 2 Kings iii. 27, xvi. 3, xxi. 6; Mic. vi. 7; Döllinger, "Judenthum u. Heidenthum" (E. T.), i. 427-429.

† This worship was to be punished by stoning (Lev. xviii. 21, xx. 2-5; Deut. xviii. 10). On the whole subject see Movers, "Phöniz.," 64; Jarchi "On Jer. vii." 31; Euseb., "Præp. Ev.," iv. 16.

‡ Josephus says that Ahaz made "a whole burnt-offering" of his son; but his authority is very small (καὶ ἰδίῳ ὠλοκαύσασεν παῖδα). Comp. Psalm cvi. 37.

§ Ignorant Romanists have often cherished the same notions about the saints. For centuries in Spain the people bought the old gowns and cowls of the monks, and buried their dead in them, to deceive St. Peter into the notion that they were Dominicans or Franciscans!

|| See Ovid, "Fasti," v. 659: "Scirpea pro domino Tiberi tactur imago." They were also called *Argei*, *id.* 621; Varro, "L. L.," vi. 3.

Figures of dough were sometimes offered instead of human beings on the altar of Artemis of Tauris. Thus it became the custom, it is believed, merely to throw or to pass children through or over the flames, and conventionally to regard them as having been sacrificed, though they might escape the ordeal with little or no hurt. This was called *februatio*, or "lustration by fire."* We may hope that this device was adopted by the two Judæan kings, and, if so, they did not add to their horrible apostasy the crime of infanticide. If, however, Ahaz was even to the smallest extent implicated in such foul idolatries, it is not surprising that he was in no mood to listen to Isaiah. What is profoundly surprising, and is indeed a circumstance for which we cannot account, is that no word of fierce indignation was addressed to him on this account by Urijah, the high priest, whom Isaiah seems to describe as faithful, or by Zechariah, the son of Jeberechiah, or by Micah, or by Isaiah, who feared man so little and God so much.

The Assyrian party at the Court of Ahaz prevailed over the Egyptian. Until the accession of the Ethiopian Sabaco† in 725, Egypt was indeed in so weak, harassed, and divided a condition under feeble native Pharaohs, that her help was obviously unavailable. The King of Judah, seeing no extrication from his calamities except in the way of worldly expediency, appealed to Tiglath-Pileser. In this he followed the precedent of his ancestor Asa, who had diverted the attack of Baasha by invoking the assistance of Syria. Ahaz sent to the Assyrian potentate the humble message, "I am thy servant and thy son; come up and save me from the Kings of Syria and Israel." If he had not faith to accept Isaiah's promises, what else could he do, when Syria, Israel, the Philistines, Edom, and Moab were all arrayed against him? The ambassadors probably made their way, not without peril, along the east of Jordan, or else by sea from Joppa, and so inland. Whether they took with them the enormous bribe without which the appeal of the helpless king might have been in vain, or whether this was sent subsequently under Assyrian escort, we do not know. It was euphemistically described as "a present" or "a blessing," but must be regarded either as a tribute or a bribe.

Tiglath-Pileser II. saw his opportunity, and at once invaded Damascus. In B. C. 733 he failed, but the next year he entirely subjugated the kingdom, and put an end to the dynasty. Rezin was probably put to death with the horrible barbarities which were normal among the brutal Ninevites; and as the Assyrians had no conception of colonisation or the wise government of dependencies, the Syrian population was deported *en masse* to Elam and an unknown Kir.‡ For a time Damascus was made "a ruinous heap," and the cities of Aroer were the desolated lairs of pasturing flocks. Israel, as we have seen, was next overwhelmed by the same irremediable catastrophe, none of her people being left except such as might be compared to the mere gleanings of

* Varro, "L. L.," v. 3.

† Herod. ii. 137. Egypt, *Sebek*; Heb. *So* (2 Kings xvii. 4), or perhaps *Seve*; Arab., *Shab'i*. Rawlinson, "Hist. of Ant. Egypt," ii. 433-450.

‡ Kir (see Amos ix. 7) is omitted in the LXX. Elam is added in Isa. xxii. 6. Tiglath-Pileser calls the king Rasunnu Sarimirisu—*i. e.*, of Aram. See Smith, "Assyr. Discoveries," p. 274; "Eponym Canon," 68; Schrader, "K. A. T.," 152 ff.

a vintage, and the few berries on the topmost boughs of the olive tree.*

Tiglath-Pileser meant to make Ahaz feel his yoke. He summoned him to do homage at Damascus, and there Ahaz once more displayed his cosmopolitan æstheticism at the expense of every pure tradition of the religion of his fathers.

His visit to Damascus was no doubt compulsory. His worldly policy, which looked so expedient, and which—apart from the defiance which it involved to the voice of God by His prophets—seemed to be so pardonable, had for the time succeeded. Isaiah's promises had been fulfilled to the letter. There was nothing more to fear either from Rezin or from Remaliah's son. Their kingdoms were a desolation. In his own annals Tiglath-Pileser† does not exaggerate his achievements.‡ He wrote as follows:—

"Rezin's warriors I captured, and with the sword I destroyed.
Of his charioteers and [his horsemen] the arms I broke;
Their bow-bearing warriors, [their footmen] armed with spear and shield,
With my hand I captured them, and those that fought in their battle-line.
He to save his life fled away alone;
Like a deer [he ran], and entered into the great gate of his city.
His generals, whom I had taken alive, on crosses I hung;
His country I subdued;
Damascus, his city, I subdued, and like a caged bird I shut him in.
I cut down the unnumbered trees of his forest; I left not one.
Hadara, the palace of the father of Rezin of Syria, [I burnt].
The city of Samaria I besieged, I captured; eight hundred of its people and children I took;
Their oxen and their sheep I carried away.
I took five hundred and ninety-one cities;
Over sixteen districts of Syria like a flood I swept."

But the more complete destruction of Israel was due to Shalmaneser IV., who says,—

"The city of Samaria I besieged, I took,
I carried away twenty-seven thousand two hundred of its inhabitants;
I seized fifty of their chariots.
I gave up to plunder the rest of their possessions.
I appointed officers over them;
I laid on them the tribute of the former king.
In their place I settled the men of conquered countries."

The immediate service to Judah looked immense. The Assyrian might safely claim, and Ahaz might truthfully confess, that the intervention of Tiglath-Pileser had rescued him from the apparent imminence of destruction. But the Assyrian kings served no one for nothing. The price which had to be paid for Tiglath-Pileser's intervention was vassalage and tribute. Ahaz, or, as the Assyrians call him, Jehoahaz,§ had styled himself Tiglath-Pileser's "servant and his son," and the Assyrian chose to have substantial proof of this parental suzerainty. The great king therefore summoned the poor subject-potentate to Damascus, where he was holding his victorious court.

So far Ahaz had no reason to complain of his

"dreadful patron"; and if he had returned when he paid his homage, no immediate harm would have happened. But during his visit he saw "the altar" (*Heb.*) at the conquered city. Was it the altar of the defeated Syrian god Rimmon? or did the Assyrian persuade his willing vassal to sacrifice at the portable altar of his god Assur? We may, perhaps, infer the former from 2 Chron. xxviii. 23, where Ahaz says: "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." There is room to suspect some error here, because Rezin had fallen, and Damascus was in ruins, and Rimmon had conspicuously failed to help or to avenge his votaries.* Ahaz admired the altar, to whatever god it had been erected; and unmindful, or perhaps unconscious, that the altar of the Temple of Jerusalem was declared in the Pentateuch to have been divinely ordained—a fact to which the historian does not himself refer—he sent to the head priest Urijah a pattern of the altar which had struck his fancy at Damascus. The subservient priest, without a murmur or a remonstrance, undertook to have a similar altar ready for Ahaz in the Temple by the time of his return—a crime, if crime it were, which the Chronicler conceals. "Never any prince was so foully idolatrous," says Bishop Hall, "as that he wanted a priest to second him. A Urijah is fit to humour an Ahaz.† Greatness could never command anything which some servile wits were not ready both to applaud and justify." Certainly we should have hoped for more fidelity to ancient tradition from a man who earned the approving word of Isaiah; but it is only fair and just to admit that Urijah, in the universal ignorance which prevailed about the codes which were afterwards collected and published as the total legislation of the wilderness, may have viewed his obedience to the king's commands with very different eyes from those by which it was regarded in the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ. He may have been frankly unaware that he was guilty of an act which would afterwards be denounced as an apostatising enormity.‡

When Ahaz returned, he was so much pleased with his new plaything that he at once acted as priest at his own new altar. Without the least opposition from the priests—who had so sternly resisted Uzziah—he offered burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and drink-offerings, and sprinkled the blood of peace-offerings on his altar.§ Not content with this, he did not hesitate

* That remark may refer to some earlier period in the reign of Ahaz, before the capture of Damascus. It is more probable that the altar was used for some Assyrian deity, and the adoption of it may have flattered Tiglath-Pileser.

† 2 Kings xvi. 11, which records the zealous subservience of Urijah, is wanting in some MSS. of the LXX. But that the altar was made, and without his opposition, is clear from the narrative. Asa (2 Chron. xv. 8) had repaired Solomon's great altar; Hezekiah subsequently cleansed it (*id.*, xxix. 18); Manasseh rebuilt it (*Q'ri*). The brass of it ultimately went to Babylon (*Jer.* lii. 17-20).

* Isa. xvi. 1-11.

† The name seems to be Tuklat-abal-issarra,—according to Oppert worshipper of the son of the Zodiac—*i. e.*, of Nin or Hercules. According to Polyhistor, he was a usurper who had been a vine-dresser in the royal gardens. He never mentions his ancestry. But see Schrader, "K. A. T.," 217 ff., 240 ff., and in Riehm.

‡ "Eponym Canon," p. 121, lines 1-15. On this fall of Damascus and Samaria, see Isa. xvii.

§ Jahuhazi (Schrader, "Keilinschr.," p. 263). He probably bore both names; but, as in the case of Jeconiah, who is called Coniah, the omission of the element "Jehovah" from his name may have been intended as a mark of reprobation.

‡ Bähr says: "It seems that Urijah, like his companion, was only anxious for his revenues. At any rate, his conduct is a sign of the character and standing of the priests of that time. They were 'dumb dogs who could not bark.' They all followed their own ways, every one for his own gain" (Isa. lvi. 10, 11). "We have in this high priest," says the *Württemberg Summary*, "a specimen of those hypocrites and belly-servants who say, 'Whose bread I eat, his song I sing'; who veer about with the wind, and seek to be pleasant to all men; who wish to hurt no one's feelings, but teach just what any one wants to hear."

§ 1 Kings viii. 64; 2 Chron. iv. 1. In this and similar instances commentators, biased by a *priori* considera-

to order the removal of the huge brazen altar from the position, in front of the Temple porch, which it had held since the days of Solomon. He did this in order that his own favourite altar might be in the line of vision from the court, and not be overshadowed by the old one, which he shifted from the place of honour to the north side. He proceeded to call his own altar "the great altar," and ordered that the morning burnt-offering, and the evening *minchah*, and all the principal sacrifices should henceforth be offered upon it.* He did not wholly supersede the old brazen altar, which, he said, "shall be for me to inquire by," or, as the Hebrew may perhaps mean, "it should await"—i. e., "I will hereafter consider what to do with it."

Ahaz is charged with the additional crime of removing the ornamental festoons of bronze pomegranates from the lavers, and the brazen oxen from under the molten sea, which henceforth lay dishonoured, without its proper and splendid supports, on the pavement of the court.† He also took away the balustrade of the royal "ascent" from the palace to the Temple, and made a new entrance of a less gorgeous character than that which, in the days of Solomon, the Queen of Sheba had admired.‡

No doubt these proceedings helped to heighten the unpopularity of Ahaz. But what could he do? He could, indeed, if he had had sufficient faith, have "trusted in Jehovah," as Isaiah bade him do. But he was under the terrific pressure of hostile circumstances, and, being a weak and timid man, felt himself unable to resist the influence of the haughty politicians and worldly priests by whom he was surrounded—men who openly made Isaiah their scoff. §When he invited the interposition of Tiglath-Pileser,§ all the other consequences of humiliation would naturally follow. He probably disliked as much as any one to see the great molten laver taken off the backs of the oxen which showed the skill of the ancient Hiram, and did not admire the despoiled aspect of the shrine of his capital. But if the King of Assyria or his emissaries had (as the historian implies) cast greedy eyes on these splendid objects of antiquity, the poor vassal could not refuse them. Better, he may have thought, that these material ornaments should go to Nineveh than that he should be forced to exact yet heavier burdens from an impoverished people. His expedient is mentioned among his crimes, yet no one blamed the pious Hezekiah when,

tions, have imagined that Ahaz did not in person offer sacrifices. But this is what the text says, and it was the custom of kings to regard themselves as invested with Divine attributes. Ahaz may have had this lesson impressed on his mind by his visit to Tiglath-Pileser. See Grätz, "Gesch. der Juden," ii. 150. Layard, "Nin. and Bab.," 472 ff., gives us pictures of Assyrian kings ministering at their altars, which are of various shapes.

* 2 Kings xvi. 15. Vulg., *paratum erit ad voluntatem meam*. The LXX. followed another reading: *ἕσται μοι εἰς τὸ πρῶν*. Grätz (ii. 150), for *לִבְקֹר*, "to inquire," reads

לִקְרֹב "to draw near to."

† 1 Kings vii. 23-39.

‡ 2 Kings xvi. 18. The allusions are obscure. R. V., "the covered way"; A. V., "the covert for the Sabbath." See 2 Chron. ix. 4. Here the Hebr. *Q'ri* has *Misak*, and the Vulg. *Musach Sabbati*. The LXX. evidently did not understand it (*καὶ τὸν θεμελίον τῆς καθέρας ψεκδομένησεν*). For "covert for the Sabbath," Geiger suggests, "molten images for the Shame" (Bosheth-Baal, by transposition of *Shabbath*). Comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 2.

§ 2 Chron. xxviii. 20: "Tiglath-Pileser came unto him, and distressed him, but helped him not."

under similar circumstances, he acted in precisely the same manner.*

The Chronicler gives a darker aspect to his misdoings by saying that he cut to pieces the vessels of the house of God, and made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem, and *bamoth* to burn incense unto other gods in every several city of Judah. He says, further, that he closed the great gates of the Temple; put an end to the kindling of the lamps, the burning of incense, and the daily offerings; and left the whole Temple to fall into ruin and neglect.† We know no more of him. He lived through an epoch marked by the final crisis in the existence of the kingdom of Israel. Dark omens of every kind were around him, and he seems to have been too frivolous to see them. If he plumed himself on the removal of the two relentless invaders Rezin and Pekah, he must have lived to feel that the terror of Assyria had come appreciably nearer. Tiglath-Pileser had only helped Judah in furtherance of his own designs, and his exactions came like a chronic distress after the acuter crisis. Nor was there any improvement when he died in 727. He was succeeded by Shalmaneser IV., and Shalmaneser IV. by Sargon in 722, the year of the fall of Samaria. We know no more of Ahaz. The historian says that he was buried with his fathers, and the Chronicler adds, as in the case of Uzziah and other kings, that he was not permitted to rest in the sepulchres of the kings.‡ He had sown the wind; his son Hezekiah had to reap the whirlwind.§

PROBABLE DATES.

- B. C.
 745. Accession of Tiglath-Pileser.
 746. Death of Uzziah. Accession of Jotham. First vision of Isaiah (Isa. vi.).
 735. Accession of Ahaz. Syro-Ephraimitish war.
 734-732. Siege and capture of Damascus, and ravage of Northern Israel by Tiglath-pileser. Visit of Ahaz to Damascus.
 727. Accession of Shalmaneser IV.
 722. Accession of Sargon. Capture of Samaria, and captivity of the Ten Tribes.
 720. Defeat of Sabaco by Sargon at Raphia.
 715 (?). Accession of Hezekiah.
 711. Sargon captures Ashdod.
 707. Sargon defeats Merodach-Baladan, and captures Babylon.
 705. Murder of Sargon, Accession of Sennacherib.
 701. Sennacherib besieges Ekron. Defeats Egypt at Altauq. Invades Judah, and spares Hezekiah. Invades Egypt, and sends the Rabshakeh to Jerusalem. Disaster of Assyrians at Pelusium, and disappearance from before Jerusalem.
 697. Death of Hezekiah. Accession of Manasseh.
 681. Death of Sennacherib.
 608. Battle of Megiddo. Death of Josiah.
 607. Fall of Nineveh and Assyria. Triumph of Babylon.
 605. Battle of Carchemish. Defeat of Pharaoh Necho by Nebuchadrezzar.
 599. First deportation of Jews to Babylon by Nebuchadrezzar.
 588. Destruction of Jerusalem. Second deportation.
 538. Cyrus captures Babylon.
 536. Decree of Cyrus. Return of Zerubbabel and the first Jewish exiles.
 458. Return of Ezra.

* 2 Kings xviii. 15, 16.

† In justice to Ahaz, we should observe that (1) in every instance the later account multiplies and magnifies and gives a darker colouring to his offences; (2) that neither Isaiah, Micah, nor any other prophet has a word of reproach for such enormities in Ahaz.

‡ It is a Jewish tradition that Hezekiah would not bury his father Ahaz in a sarcophagus, but on a bier ("Peschin," f. 56, 1; "Sanhedrin," f. 47, 1; Grätz, "Gesch. d. Juden," ii. 224).

§ His name, *Chisquiyah*, is shortened from *Yechizquiyahoo* (Isa. i. 1; 2 Kings xx. 10; Hos. i. 1). It means "Jehovah's strength" (*Gesen.*), or "Yah is might" (*Fürst.*).

CHAPTER XXV.

HEZEKIAH.

B. C. 715-686.*

2 KINGS xviii.

"For Ezekias had done the thing that pleased the Lord, and was strong in the ways of David his father, as Esay the prophet, who was great and faithful in his vision, had commanded him."—ECCLUS. xlvi. 22.

THE reign of Hezekiah was epoch-making in many respects, but especially for its religious reformation, and the relations of Judah with Assyria and with Babylon. It is also most closely interwoven with the annals of Hebrew prophecy, and acquires unwonted lustre from the magnificent activity and impassioned eloquence of the great prophet Isaiah, who merits in many ways the title of "the Evangelical Prophet," and who was the greatest of the prophets of the Old Dispensation.

According to the notice in 2 Kings xviii. 2, Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign in the third year of Hoshea of Israel. This, however, is practically impossible consistently with the dates that Ahaz reigned sixteen years and became king at the age of twenty, for it would then follow that Hezekiah was born when his father was a mere boy—and this, although Hezekiah does not seem to have been the eldest son; for Ahaz had burnt "his son," and, according to the Chronicler, more than one son, to propitiate Moloch. Probably Hezekiah was a boy of fifteen when he began to reign. The chronology of his reign of twenty-nine years is, unhappily, much confused.

The historian of the Kings agrees with the Chronicler, and the son of Sirach, in pronouncing upon him a high eulogy, and making him equal even to David in faithfulness. There is, however, much difference in the method of their descriptions of his doings. The historian devotes but one verse to his reformation—which probably began early in his reign, though it occupied many years. The Chronicler, on the other hand, in his three chapters manages to overlook, if not to suppress, the one incident of the reformation which is of the deepest interest. It is exactly one of those suppressions which help to create the deep misgiving as to the historic exactness of this biased and late historian. It must be regarded as doubtful whether many of the Levitic details in which he revels are or are not intended to be literally historic. Imaginative additions to literal history became common among the Jews after the Exile, and leaders of that day instinctively drew the line between moral homiletics and literal history. It may be perfectly historical that, as the Chronicler says, Hezekiah opened and repaired the Temple; gathered the priests and the Levites together, and made them cleanse themselves; offered a solemn sacrifice; reappointed the musical services; and—though this can hardly have been till after the Fall of Samaria in 722—invited all the Israelites to a solemn, but in some respects irregular, passover of fourteen days. It may be true also that he broke up the idolatrous altars in Jerusalem, and tossed their débris into the Kidron; and (again after the de-

* The first of these dates is highly uncertain, as is the entire chronology of this reign. I follow Kittel.

portation of Israel) destroyed some of the *bamoth* in Israel as well as in Judah. If he reinstated the courses of the priests, the collection of tithes, and all else that he is said to have done,* he accomplished quite as much as was effected in the reign of his great-grandson Josiah. But while the Chronicler dwells on all this at such length, what induces him to omit the most significant fact of all—the destruction of the brazen serpent?

The historian tells us that Hezekiah "removed the *bamoth*"—the chapels on the high places, with their ephods and teraphim—whether dedicated to the worship of Jehovah or profaned by alien idolatry. That he did, or attempted, something of this kind seems certain; for the Rabshakeh, if we regard his speech as historical in its details, actually taunted him with impiety, and threatened him with the wrath of Jehovah on this very account. Yet here we are at once met with the many difficulties with which the history of Israel abounds, and which remind us at every turn that we know much less about the inner life and religious conditions of the Hebrews than we might infer from a superficial study of the historians who wrote so many centuries after the events which they describe. Over and over again their incidental notices reveal a condition of society and worship which violently collides with what seems to be their general estimate. Who, for instance, would not infer from this notice that in Judah, at any rate, the king's suppression of the "high places," and above all of those which were idolatrous, had been tolerably thorough? How much, then, are we amazed to find that Hezekiah had not effectually desecrated even the old shrines which Solomon had erected to Ash-toreth, Chemosh, and Milcom† "at the right hand of the mount of corruption"—in other words, on one of the peaks of the Mount of Olives, in full view of the walls of Jerusalem and of the Temple Hill!

"And he brake the images," or, as the R. V. more correctly renders it, "the pillars," the *matstseboth*. Originally—that is, before the appearance of the Deuteronomic and the Priestly Codes—no objection seems to have been felt to the erection of a *matstsebah*. Jacob erected one of these *baitulia* or anointed stones at Bethel, with every sign of Divine approval.‡ Moses erected twelve round his altar at Sinai.§ Joshua erected them in Shechem and on Mount Ebal. Hosea, in one passage (iii. 4), seems to mention pillars, ephods, and teraphim as legitimate objects of desire. Whether they have any relation to obelisks, and what is their exact significance, is uncertain; but they had become objects of just suspicion in the universal tendency to idolatry, and in the deepening conviction that the second commandment required a far more rigid adherence than it had hitherto received.

"And cut down the groves"—or rather the Asherim, the wooden, and probably in some instances phallic, emblems of the nature-goddess Asherah, the goddess of fertility.¶ She is some-

* 2 Chron. xxxi. 2-21.

† Josiah did this many years later (2 Kings xxiii. 13).

‡ Gen. xxv. 14. See Spencer, "De legg. Hebr.," i. 144; Bochart, "Canaan," ii. 2.

§ Exod. xxiv. 4. Comp. Deut. vii. 5, xii. 3, xvi. 22; Lev. xxvi. 1; 2 Chron. xiv. 3, xxxi. 1; Jer. xliii. 13; Hos. x. 2; Mic. v. 15 (where the A. V. often has "statue" or "image"). Comp. Clem. Alex., "Strom.," i. 24; Arnob., "c. Gent.," i. 39.

¶ The rendering "grove" in the A. V. is borrowed from

times identified with Astarte, the goddess of the moon and of love; but there is no sufficient ground for the identification. Some, indeed, doubt whether Asherah is the name of a goddess at all. They suppose that the word only means a consecrated pole or pillar, emblematic of the sacred tree.*

Then comes the startling addition, "And brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it." This addition is all the more singular because the Hebrew tense implies habitual worship. The story of the brazen serpent of the wilderness is told in Num. xxi. 9; but not an allusion to it occurs anywhere, till now—some eight centuries later—we are told that up to this time the children of Israel had been in the habit of burning incense to it! Comparing Num. xxi. 4, with xxxiii. 42, we find that the scene of the serpent-plague of the Exodus was either Zalmonah ("the place of the image") or Punon, which Bochart connects with Phainoi, a place mentioned as famous for copper-mines,† Moses, for unknown reasons, chose it as an innocent and potent symbol; but obviously in later days it subserved, or was mingled with, the tendency to ophiolatry, which has been fatally common in all ages in many heathen lands. It is indeed most difficult to understand a state of things in which the children of Israel habitually burned incense to this venerable relic, nor can we imagine that this was done without the cognisance and connivance of the priests. Ewald makes the conjecture that the brazen *Saraph* had been left at Zalmonah, and was an occasional object of Israelite adoration in pilgrimage for the purpose. There is, however, nothing more extraordinary in the prevalence of serpent-worship among the Jews than in the fact that, "in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, we" (the Jews), "and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, burnt incense unto the Queen of Heaven."‡ If this were the case, the serpent may have been brought to Jerusalem in the idolatrous reign of Ahaz. It shows an intensity of reforming zeal, and an inspired insight into the reality of things, that Hezekiah should not have hesitated to smash to pieces so interesting a relic of the oldest history of his people, rather than see it abused to idolatrous purposes.§ Certainly, in conduct so heroic, and hatred of idolatry so strong, the Puritans might well find sufficient authority for removing from Westminster Abbey the images of the Virgin, which, in their opinion, had been worshipped, and before which lamps had had been perpetually burned. If we can imagine an English king breaking to pieces the shrine the *άλσος* of the LXX., and the *lucus* of the Vulgate. On the connection of the Asherah with the sacred tree of the Assyrian, see my article on "Grove" in Smith's "Dict. of the Bible"; and Fergusson, "Nineveh and Persepolis Restored," 299-304. On the worship of Asherah, see 1 Kings xv. 13; 2 Kings xxi. 3-7, xxiii. 4; 2 Chron. xv. 16; Judg. iii. 5-7; vi. 25, xviii. 18. Baudissin in "Herzog Realencykl.," s. v. We may well be startled by the prevalence of idolatry in Jerusalem revealed in Isa. x. 11, xxvii. 9, xxix. 11, xxx. 9, 22, etc.

* See Wellhausen, "Hist.," 235; Stade, "Gesch. d. V. I.," 460; W. R. Smith, "Religion of the Semites," 171; Cheyne, "Isaiah," ii. 303; Renan, "Hist. du Peuple d'Israel," i. 230 (Prof. Driver, "Bibl. Dict.," i. 258, 2d edition).

† "Hierozoicon," ii. 3, § 13.

‡ Jer. xlv. 17. In the collection of antiquities of Baron Ustinoff at Jaffa are five or six dragon-headed serpents, with ears of copper and hollow inside. They are ancient, and were perhaps used as talismanic copies of Nehushtan.

§ If this was a genuine relic, it must have been nearly eight hundred years old. It is never mentioned elsewhere.

of the Confessor in the Abbey, or a French king destroying the sacred ampulla of Rheims or the *goupillon* of St. Eligius, on the ground that many regarded them with superstitious reverence, we may measure the effect produced by this startling act of Puritan zeal on the part of Hezekiah.

"And he called it *Nehushtan*." If this rendering—in which our A. V. and R. V. follow the LXX. and the Vulgate—be correct, Hezekiah justified the iconoclasm by a brilliant play of words.* The Hebrew words for "a serpent" (*nachash*) and for brass (*nechosheth*) are closely akin to each other; and the king showed his just estimate of the relic which had been so shamefully abused by contemptuously designating it—as it was in itself and apart from its sacred historic associations—"nehushtan," a thing of brass. The rendering, however, is uncertain, for the phrase may be impersonal—"one" or "they" called it *Nehushtan*†—in which case the assonance had lost any ironic connotation.‡

For this act of purity of worship, and for other reasons, the historian calls Hezekiah the best of all the kings of Judah, superior alike to all his predecessors and all his successors. He regarded him as coming up to the Deuteronomic ideal, and says that therefore "the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth."

The date of this great reformation is rendered uncertain by the impossibility of ascertaining the exact order of Isaiah's prophecies. The most probable view is that it was gradual, and some of the king's most effective measures may not have been carried out till after the deliverance from Assyria. It is clear, however, that the wisdom of Hezekiah and his counsellors began from the first to uplift Judah from the degradation and decrepitude to which it had sunk under the reign of Ahaz. The boy-king found a wretched state of affairs at his accession. His father had bequeathed to him "an empty treasury, a ruined peasantry, an unprotected frontier, and a shattered army";§ but although he was still the vassal of Assyria, he reverted to the ideas of his great-grandfather Uzziah. He strengthened the city, and enabled it to stand a siege by improving the water-supply. Of these labours we have, in all probability, a most interesting confirmation in the inscription by Hezekiah's engineers, discovered in 1880, on the rocky walls of the subterranean tunnel (*siloh*) between the spring of Gihon and the Pool of Siloam.¶ He encouraged

* *נְחֻשְׁתָּן*, "a brazen thing." The king certainly showed a horror of sacerdotal imposture and religious materialism. Yet Renan argues, from Isa. x. 11, xxvii. 9, xxx. 9, 22, that he must have had a certain amount of tolerance. See "Hist. du Peuple d'Israel," iii. 30.

† 2 Kings xviii. 4. *Vayyikra* is like the English indefinite plural. The impersonal rendering (as in other passages) is adopted in the Targum of Jonathan, the Peshito, etc., and by Luther, Bunsen, Ewald, and most moderns.

‡ This relic is still shown in the Church of St. Ambrose at Milan. It used to be the popular notion that it would hiss at the end of the world. The history of the Milan "relic" is that a Milanese envoy to the court of the Emperor John Zimisces at Constantinople chose it from the imperial treasures, being assured that it was made of the same metal that Hezekiah had broken up (Sigonius, "Hist. Regn. Ital.," vii.). It is probably a symbol used by some opiate sect., See Dean Plumpré, "Dict. of Bibl.," s. v. "Serpent."

§ 2 Kings xvi. 8; Driver, "Isaiah," 68.

¶ The diverting of the water-courses enabled him to bring the water into the city by a subterranean tunnel. The Saracens took a similar precaution (Gul. Tyr., viii. 7). See Appendix II., where the inscription is given; and compare 2 Chron. xxxii. 30. Apparently it carried the water of Gihon to the southeast gate, where were the

agriculture, the storage of produce, and the proper tendance of flocks and herds, so that he acquired wealth which dimly reminded men of the days of Solomon.

There is little doubt that he early meditated revolt from Assyria; for renewed faithfulness to Jehovah had elevated the moral tone, and therefore the courage and hopefulness, of the whole people. The Forty-Sixth Psalm, whatever may be its date, expresses the invincible spirit of a nation which in its penitence and self-purification began to feel itself irresistible, and could sing:—

' God is our hope and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved,
Though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea,
There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the
city of God,
The Holy City where dwells the Most High.
God is in the midst of her; therefore shall she not be
shaken;
God shall help her, and that right early.
Heathens raged and kingdoms trembled:
He lifted His voice—the earth melted away.
Jehovah of Hosts is with us;
Elohim of Jacob is our refuge.' *

It was no doubt the spirit of renewed confidence which led Hezekiah to undertake his one military enterprise—the chastisement of the long-troublesome Philistines. He was entirely successful. He not only won back the cities which his father had lost,† but he also dispossessed them of their own cities, even unto Gaza, which was their southernmost possession—"from the tower of the watchman to the fenced city."‡ There can be no doubt that this act involved an almost open defiance of the Assyrian King; but if Hezekiah dreamed of independence, it was essential for him to be free from the raids and the menace of a neighbour so dangerous as Philistia, and so inveterately hostile. It is not improbable that he may have devoted to this war the money which would otherwise have gone to pay the tribute to Shalmaneser or Sargon, which had been continued since the date of the appeal of Ahaz to Tiglath-Pileser II. When Sargon applied for the tribute Hezekiah refused it, and even omitted to send the customary present.

It is clear that in this line of conduct the king was following the exhortations of Isaiah. It showed no small firmness of character that he was able to choose a decided course amid the chaos of contending counsels. Nothing but a most heroic courage could have enabled him at any period of his reign to defy that dark cloud of Assyrian war which ever loomed on the horizon, and from which but little sufficed to elicit the destructive lightning-flash.

There were three permanent parties in the Court of Hezekiah, each incessantly trying to sway the king to its own counsels, and each representing those counsels as indispensable to the happiness, and even to the existence, of the State.

I. There was the Assyrian party, urging with natural vehemence that the fierce northern king was as irresistible in power as he was terrible in vengeance. The fearful cruelties which had been committed at Beth-Arbel, the devastation and

king's gardens. *Eccles. xlviii. 17*: "Ezekias fortified his city, and brought in water into the midst thereof: he digged the hard rock with iron, and made wells for water." For "water" the MSS. read "Gog," a corruption probably for ἀγώνιον, "a conduit" (Geiger) or "Gihon" (Fritzsch).

* Psalm xlvi. 1-11.

† 2 Chron. xxviii. 18.

‡ Kings xviii. 8: comp. xvii. 9. Josephus says that he failed to take Gath ("Antt.," IX. xifi. 3).

misery of the Trans-Jordanic tribes, the obliteration and deportation of the heavily afflicted districts of Zebulun, Naphtali, and the way of the sea in Galilee of the nations, the already inevitable and imminent destruction of Samaria and her king and the whole Northern Kingdom, together with that certain deportation of its inhabitants of which the fatal policy had been established by Tiglath-Pileser, would constitute weighty arguments against resistance. Such considerations would appeal powerfully to the panic of the despondent section of the community, which was only actuated, as most men are, by considerations of ordinary political expediency. The foul apparition of the Ninevites, which for five centuries afflicted the nations, is now only visible to us in the bas-reliefs and inscriptions unearthed from their burnt palaces. There they live before us in their own sculptures, with their "thickset, sensual figures," and the expression of calm and settled ferocity on their faces, exhibiting a frightful nonchalance as they look on at the infliction of diabolical atrocities upon their vanquished enemies. But in the eighth century before Christ they were visible to all the eastern world in the exuberance of the most brutal parts of the nature of man. Men had heard how, a century earlier, Assurnazipal boasted that he had "died the mountains of the Nairi with blood like wool"; how he had flayed captive kings alive, and dressed pillars with their skins; how he had walled up others alive, or impaled them on stakes; how he had burnt boys and girls alive, put out eyes, cut off hands, feet, ears, and noses, pulled out the tongues of his enemies, and "at the command of Assur his god" had flung their limbs to vultures and eagles, to dogs and bears. The Jews, too, must have realised with a vividness which is to us impossible the cruel nature of the usurper Sargon. He is represented on his monuments as putting out with his own hands the eyes of his miserable captives; while, to prevent them from flinching when the spear which he holds in his hand is plunged into their eye-sockets, a hook is inserted through their nose and lips and held fast with a bridle. Can we not imagine the pathos with which this party would depict such horrors to the tremblers of Judah? Would they not bewail the fanaticism which led the prophets to seduce their king into the suicidal policy of defying such a power? To these men the sole path of national safety lay in continuing to be quiet vassals and faithful tributaries of these destroyers of cities and treaders-down of foes.

II. Then there was the Egyptian party, headed probably by the powerful Shebna, the chancellor.* His foreign name, the fact that his father is not mentioned, and the question of Isaiah—"What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here?"—seem to indicate that he was by birth a foreigner, perhaps a Syrian.† The prophet, indignant at his powerful interference with domestic politics, threatens him, in words of tremendous energy, with exile and degradation.‡ He

* A. V., "treasurer" (*soken*; lit., "deputy" or "associate": Isa. xxii. 15). He was "over the household." The Egyptian alliance had for Judah, as Renan points out, some of the fascination that a Russian alliance has often had for troubled spirits in France ("Hist. du Peuple d'Israel," iii. 12).

† Renan says that he may have been a Sebennyite, and his name Sebent.

‡ Isa. xxii. 17, 18: "Behold, the Lord shall sling and sling, and pack and pack, and toss and toss thee away like

lost his place of chancellor, and we next find him in the inferior, though still honourable, office of secretary (*sopher*, 2 Kings xviii. 18), while Eliakim had been promoted to his vacant place (Isa. xxii. 21). Perhaps he may have afterwards repented, and the doom have been lightened.* Circumstances at any rate reduced him from the scornful spirit which seems to have marked his earlier opposition to the prophetic counsels, and perhaps the powerful warning and menace of Isaiah may have exercised an influence on his mind.

III. The third party, if it could even be called a party, was that of Isaiah and a few of the faithful, aided no doubt by the influence of the prophecies of Micah. Their attitude to both the other parties was antagonistic.

i. As regards the Assyrian, they did not attempt to minimise the danger. They represented the peril from the kingdom of Nineveh as God's appointed scourge for the transgressions of Judah, as it had been for the transgressions of Israel.

Thus Micah sees in imagination the terrible march of the invader by Gath, Akko, Beth-le-Aphrah, Maroth, Lachish, and Adullam. He plays with bitter anguish on the name of each town as an omen of humiliation and ruin, and calls on Zion to make herself bald for the children of her delight, and to enlarge her baldness as the vultures, because they are gone into captivity.† He turns fiercely on the greedy grandees, the false prophets, the blood-stained princes, the hireling priests, the bribe-taking soothsayers, who were responsible for the guilt which should draw down the vengeance. He ends with the fearful prophecy—which struck a chill into men's hearts a century later, and had an important influence on Jewish history—"Therefore, because of you shall Zion be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem become ruins, and the hill of the Temple as heights in the wood";—though there should be an ultimate deliverance from Migdal-Eder, and a remnant should be saved.‡

Similar to Micah's, and possibly not uninfluenced by it, is Isaiah's imaginary picture of the march of Assyria, which must have been full of terror to the poor inhabitants of Jerusalem.§

"He is come to Aiath!
He is passed through Migron!
At Michmash he layeth up his baggage:
They are gone over the pass:
'Geba,' they cry, 'is our lodging.'
Ramah trembleth:
Gibeah of Saul is fled!
Raise thy shrill cries, O daughter of Gallim!
Hearken, O Laishah! Answer her, O Anathoth!
Madmenah is in wild flight (?).
The inhabitants of Gebim gather their stuff to flee.
This very day shall he halt at Nob.
He shaketh his hand at the mount of the daughter of Zion,
The hill of Jerusalem."

a ball into a distant land: and there thou shalt die" (Stanley). The versions vary considerably.

* Isa. xxxvii. 2. There can be little doubt that there were not *two* Shebnas.

† Mic. i. 10-16. See the writer's "Minor Prophets" ("Men of the Bible" Series), pp. 130-133, for an explanation of this enigmatic prophecy.

‡ Jer. xxvi. 8-24. He tells us that the prophecy was delivered in the reign of Hezekiah. See my "Minor Prophets," pp. 123-140.

§ Isa. x. 28-32. It would involve a cross-country route over several deep ravines—*e. g.*, the Wady Suweinit, near Michmash. In 1 Sam. xiv. 2, Thenius, for "Migron," reads "the Precipice." Some take Aiath for Ai, three miles south of Bethel. Renan says ("Hist. du Peuple d'Israel," iii.): "Nom d'Anathoth, arrangé symboliquement."

Yet Isaiah, and the little band of prophets, in spite of their perils, did *not* share the views of the Assyrian party or counsel submission. On the contrary, even as they contemplate in imagination this terrific march of Sargon, they threaten Assyria. The Assyrian might smite Judah, but God should smite the Assyrians. He boasts that he will rifle the riches of the people as one robs the eggs of a trembling bird, which does not dare to cheep or move the wing.* But Isaiah tells him that he is but the axe boasting against the hewer, and the wooden staff lifting itself up against its wielder. Burning should be scattered over his glory. The Lord of hosts should lop his boughs with terror, and a mighty one should hew down the crashing forest of his haughty Lebanon.

ii. Still more indignant were the true prophets against those who trusted in an alliance with Egypt. From first to last Isaiah warned Ahaz, and warned Hezekiah, that no reliance was to be placed on Egyptian promises—that Egypt was but like the reed of his own Nile. He mocked the hopes placed on Egyptian intervention as being no less sure of disannulment than a covenant with death and an agreement with Sheol. This rebellious reliance on the shadow of Egypt was but the weaving of an unrighteous web, and the adding of sin to sin. It should lead to nothing but shame, and confusion, and the Jewish ambassadors to Zoan and Egypt should only have to blush for a people that could neither help nor profit. And then branding Egypt with the old insulting name of Rahab, or "Blusterer," he says.—

"Egypt helpeth in vain, and to no purpose.
Therefore have I called her 'Rahab, that sitteth still.'"

Indolent braggart—that was the only designation which she deserved! Intrigue and braggadocio—smoke and lukewarm water,—this was all which could be expected from *her*!†

Such teaching was eminently distasteful to the worldly politicians, who regarded faith in Jehovah's intervention as no better than ridiculous fanaticism, and forgot God's wisdom in the inflated self-satisfaction of their own. The priests—luxurious, drunken, scornful—were naturally with them. Men were fine and stylish, and in their religious criticisms could not express too lofty a contempt for any one who, like Isaiah, was too sincere to care for the mere polishing of phrases, and too much in earnest to shrink from reiteration. In their self-indulgent banquets these sleek, smug euphemists made themselves very merry over Isaiah's simplicity, reiteration, and directness of expression. With hicoughing insolence they asked whether they were to be treated like weaned babes; and then wagging their heads, as their successors did at Christ upon the cross, they indulged themselves in a mimicry, which they regarded as witty, of Isaiah's style and manner. With him they said it is all,—

"Tsav-la-tsav, tsav-la-tsav,
Quav-la-quav, quav-la-quav,
Z'eir sham, Z'eir sham!"—

which may be imitated thus:—With him it is always "Bit and bit, bid and bid, for-bid and for-

* Isa. x. 14. The metaphor of a bird's nest occurs more than once in the boastful Assyrian Records.

† Isa. xxx. 1-7. Rahab means "fierceness," "insolence." For the various uses of the word, see Job xxvi. 12; Isa. li. 9, 10, 15; Psalm lxxxix. 9, 10, lxxxvii. 4, 5.

bid, *forbid* and *forbid*, a lit-tle bit here, a lit-tle bit there." * Monosyllable is heaped on monosyllable; and no doubt the speakers tipsily adopted the tones of fond mothers addressing their babes and weanlings. Using the Hebrew words, one of these shameless roysterers would say, "*Tsar-la-tsav, tsav-la-tsav, quav-la-quav, quav-la-quav, Z'cir sham, Z'cir sham*,"—that is how that simpleton Isaiah speaks." And then doubtless a drunken laugh would go round the table, and half a dozen of them would be saying thus, "*Tsar-la-tsav, tsav-la-tsav*," at once. They derided Isaiah just as the philosophers of Athens derided St. Paul—as a mere *spermologos*, "a seed-pecker!" † or "picker-up of learning's crumbs." Is all this petty monosyllabism fit teaching for persons like us? Are we to be taught by copy-books? Do we need the censorship of this Old Morality?

On whom, full of the fire of God, Isaiah turned, and told these scornful tipplers, who lorded it over God's heritage in Jerusalem, that, since they disdained his stammerings, God would teach them by men of strange lips and alien tongue. They might mimic the style of the Assyrians also if they liked; but they should fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. ‡

It must not be forgotten that the struggle of the prophets against these parties was far more severe than we might suppose. The politicians of expediency had supporters among the leading princes. The priests—whom the prophets so constantly and sternly denounce—adhered to them; and, as usual, the women were all of the priestly party (comp. Isa. xxxii. 9-20). The king indeed was inclined to side with his prophet, but the king was terribly overshadowed by a powerful and worldly aristocracy, of which the influence was almost always on the side of luxury, idolatry, and oppression.

iii. But what had Isaiah to offer in the place of the policy of these worldly and sacerdotal advisers of the king? It was the simple command "Trust in the Lord." It was the threefold message "God is high; God is near; God is Love." § Had he not told Ahaz not to fear the "stumps of two smouldering torches," when Rezin and Pekah seemed awfully dangerous to Judah? So he tells them now that, though their sins had necessitated the rushing stroke of Assyrian judgment, Zion should not be utterly destroyed. In Isaiah "the calmness requisite for sagacity rose from faith." Mr. Bagehot might have appealed to Isaiah's whole policy in illustration of what he has so well described as the military and political benefits of religion. Monotheism is of advantage to men not only "by reason of the high concentration of steady feeling which it produces, but also for the mental calmness and sagacity which surely spring from a pure and vivid conviction that the Lord reigneth." || Isaiah's whole conviction might have been summed up in the name of the king himself: "Jehovah maketh strong."

King Hezekiah, apparently not a man of much personal force, though of sincere piety, was naturally distracted by the counsels of these three parties: and who can judge him severely if, beset

with such terrific dangers, he occasionally wavered, now to one side, now to the other? On the whole, it is clear that he was wise and faithful, and deserves the high eulogy that his faith failed not. Naturally he had not within his soul that burning light of inspiration which made Isaiah so sure that, even though clouds and darkness might lower on every side, God was an eternal Sun, which flamed for ever in the zenith, even when not visible to any eye save that of Faith.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS, AND THE EMBASSY FROM BABYLON.

2 KINGS XX. 1-19.

"Thou hast loved me out of the pit of nothingness. — ISA. xxxviii. 17 (A. V., margin).

"See the shadow of the dial
In the lot of every one
Marks the passing of the trial,
Proves the presence of the Sun."
— E. B. BROWNING.

In the chaos of uncertainties which surrounds the chronology of King Hezekiah's reign, it is impossible to fix a precise date to the sickness which almost brought him to the grave. It has, however, been conjectured by some Assyriologists that the story of this episode has been displaced, because it seemed to break the continuity of the narrative of the Assyrian invasion; and that, though it is placed in the Book of Kings after the deliverance from Sennacherib, it really followed the earlier incursion of Sargon. This is rendered more probable by Isaiah's promise (2 Kings xx. 6), "I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria," and by the fact that Hezekiah still possessed such numerous and splendid treasures to display to the ambassadors of Merodach-Baladan. This could hardly have been the case after he had been forced to pay a fine to the King of Assyria of all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, to cut off the gold from the doors and pillars of the Temple, and even to send as captives to Nineveh some of his wives, and of the eunuchs of his palace.* The date "in those days" (2 Kings xx. 1) is vague and elastic, and may apply to any time before or after the great invasion.

He was sick unto death. The only indication which we have of the nature of his illness is that it took the form of a carbuncle or imposthume, † which could be locally treated, but which, in days of very imperfect therapeutic knowledge, might easily end in death, especially if it were on the back of the neck. The conjecture of Witsius and others that it was a form of the plague which they suppose to have caused the disaster to the Assyrian army has nothing whatever to recommend it.

Seeing the fatal character of his illness, Isaiah came to the king with the dark message, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live."

* One of the first to point out the necessary rearrangement of the events of Hezekiah's reign was Dr. Hincks, in his paper on "A Rectification of Chronology which the newly discovered Apis-stèles render necessary" (*Journal of Sacred Lit.*, October, 1858). See my article on Hezekiah, Smith, "Dict. of the Bible," 2d ed., ii. 1251.
† Heb., *sh'chîn* : LXX., *ἄλλος*; Vulg., *ulcus*.

* See Dr. S. Cox (*Expositor*, i. 98-104) on Isa. xxviii. 7-13.

† Acts xvii. 18.

‡ Isa. xxviii. 7-22.

§ Professor Smith, "Isaiah," i. 12.

|| Bagehot, "Physics and Politics," p. 73; Smith, "Isaiah" 100.

The message is interesting as furnishing yet another proof that even the most positive announcements of the prophets were, and were always meant to be, to some extent hypothetical and dependent on unexpressed conditions. This was the case with the famous prophecy of Micah that Zion should be ploughed down into a heap of ruins. It was never fulfilled; yet the prophet lost none of his authority, for it was well understood that the doom which would otherwise have been carried out had been averted by timely penitence.

But the message of Isaiah fell with terrible anguish on the heart of the suffering king. He had hoped for a better fate. He had begun a great religious reformation. He had uplifted his people, at least in part, out of the moral slough into which they had fallen in the days of his predecessor. He had inspired into his threatened capital something of his own faith and courage. Surely he, if any man, might claim the old promises which Jehovah in His loving-kindness and truth had sworn to his father David and his father Abraham, that he being delivered out of the hand of his enemies should serve God without fear, walking in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of his life. He was but a young man still—perhaps not yet thirty years old; further, not only would he leave behind him an unfinished work, but he was childless,* and therefore it seemed as if with him would end the direct line of the house of David, heir to so many precious promises. He has left us—it is preserved in the Book of Isaiah—the poem which he wrote on his recovery, but which enshrines the emotion of his agonising anticipations:—†

"I said, In the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of Sheol.

I am deprived of the residue of my years.

I said, I shall not see Yah, Yah, in the land of the living, I shall behold no man more, when I am among them that cease to be.

Mine habitation is removed, and is carried away from me like a shepherd's tent.

Like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he will cut me from the thrum.

Like a swallow or a crane, so did I chatter;

I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward.

O Lord, I am oppressed; be Thou my surety."

We must remember, as we contemplate his utter prostration of soul, that he was not blessed, as we are, with the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. All was dim and dark to him in the shadowy world of *eidola* beyond the grave, and many a century was to elapse before Christ brought life and immortality to light. To enter Sheol meant to Hezekiah to pass beyond the cheerful sunshine of earth and the felt presence of God. No more worship, no more gladness there!

"For Sheol cannot praise Thee, Death cannot celebrate

Thee;

They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth."

On every ground, therefore, the feelings of Hezekiah, had he not been a worshipper of God, might have been like those of Mycerinus, and,

* The Rabbis even make his sickness the punishment for his having neglected to secure an heir. He pleads that he foresaw the wickedness of his son. Isaiah tells him not to try to forestall God ("Berachoth," f. 10, 1).

† Isa. xxxviii. 10-20.

like that legendary Egyptian king, he might have cursed God before he died.

"My father loved injustice, and lived long;
I loved the good he scorned and hated wrong—
The gods declare my recompense to-day.
I looked for life more lasting, rule more high;
And when six years are measured, lo, I die!
Yet surely, O my people, did I ween,
Man's justice from the all-just gods was given,
A light that from some upper point did beam,
Some better archetypic whose seat was heaven:
A light that, shining from the blest abodes,
Did shadow somewhat of the life of gods."

The indignation of Mycerinus often finds an echo on Pagan tombstones, as in the famous epitaph on the grave of the girl Procope:—

"I, Procope, lift up my hands against the gods,
Who took me hence undeserving,
Aged nineteen years."

It was far otherwise with Hezekiah. There was anguish in his heart, but no rebellion or defiance. He wept sore; he turned his face to the wall and wept;* but as he wept he also prayed, and said,—

"O Lord, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight."

Isaiah, after delivering his dark message, and doubtless adding to it such words of human consolation as were possible—if under such circumstances any were possible—had left the king's chamber. On every ground his feelings must have been almost as overwhelmed with sorrow as those of the king. Hezekiah was personally his friend, and the hope of his nation. Doubtless the prophet's prayers rose as fervently and as effectually as those of Luther, which snatched his friend Melancthon back from the very gates of death. By the time that he had reached the middle of the court,† he felt borne in upon him, by that Divine intuition which constituted his prophetic call, the certainty that God would withdraw the immediate doom which he had been commissioned to announce. It has been conjectured by some that the conviction was deepened in his mind by observing on the steps of Ahaz one of those remarkable but rare effects of refraction—or, as some have conjectured, of a solar eclipse, involving an obscuration of the upper limb of the sun—which had seemed to take the advancing shadow ten steps backwards; and that this was to him a sign from heaven of the promise of God and the prolongation of the king's life. Awestruck and glad, he hastened back into the presence of the dying king with the life-giving message that God had heard his prayer, and seen his tears, and would add fifteen years to his life, and would defend him, and deliver him and Jerusalem out of the hand of the King of Assyria. And this should be the sign to him from Jehovah.—Jehovah would bring again the shadow ten steps up the stairs of Ahaz. To this sign—if it was visible from the chamber—

* Comp. 1 Kings xxi. 4 (Ahab).

† 2 Kings xx. 4. The *Qrī* or "read" text is, as here rendered, *chātsee* (comp. 1 Kings vii. 8), and is followed by the LXX. (*ἐν τῇ ἀλλῇ τῇ μέσῃ*), by the Vulgate (*mediam partem atrii*), and by the A. V. The R. V., which adopts the Kethib or written text, *hā'ir*, renders it "the middle part of the city." If this be the true reading, it would mean that Isaiah had gone some distance from the palace, and was now perhaps in the Valley between the Upper and the Lower City. But it seems not improbable that (1) "the steps of Ahaz" would be in the royal court, and (2) the answer of God, like the mercy of Christ to the suffering, may have come promptly as an echo to the appealing cry.

window—he called the attention of the astonished king.*

We here naturally follow the narrative of Isaiah himself, as more authoritative than that of the historian of the Kings as to details in which they differ.† Not only is it quite in accordance with all that we know of history that slight variations should occur in the traditions of long-past times, but the text of the Book of Kings suggests some difficulty. There we read that Hezekiah asked Isaiah what should be the sign of the promise—not mentioned in Isaiah—that he should go up to the House of the Lord the third day. Isaiah then asked him whether the sign should be that the shadow should advance ten steps, or recede ten steps. But there is no interrogation in the Hebrew, which rather means, "The shadow hath advanced ten steps . . . if it shall recede ten steps?" or if we insert the interrogation in the first clause, "Hath the shadow advanced ten steps?"‡ The king's natural answer to so strange an alternative would be that for the shadow to advance ten steps was nothing; whereas its retrogression would be a sign indeed. Then Isaiah cried unto Jehovah, and the shadow went backward. In the obvious divergence of details we naturally follow Isaiah himself; and if it be a true and understood rule of all theology, "*Miracula non sunt multiplicanda prater necessitatem*," the miracle in this case—in the opportuneness of its occurrence, and the issues which it inspired—was none the less a miracle because it was carried out in direct accordance with God's unseen, perpetual, miraculous Providence, which none but unbelievers will nickname Chance. That we are here dealing with an historic incident is certain; and they who see and acknowledge God in all history find no difficulty at all in seeing His dealings with men in striking interpositions. But these, by the analogy of His whole Divine economy, would naturally be carried out in accordance with natural laws.

The words rendered "the sun-dial of Ahaz" mean no more than "the steps [*ma'aloth*] of Ahaz." Ahaz evidently was a king of æsthetic tastes, who was fond of introducing foreign novelties and curiosities into Jerusalem.§ Steps, with a staff on the top of them as a gnomon, to serve as sun-dials had been invented at Babylon, and Ahaz may probably have become acquainted with their form and use when he paid his visit to Tiglath-Pileser at Damascus. No one could blame him—it was indeed a meritorious act—to introduce to his people so useful an invention. The word "hour" first occurs in Dan. iii. 6, and it was doubtless from Babylon that the Hebrews borrowed the division of days into hours. This is the earliest instance in the Bible of the mention of any instrument to measure time. That the recession of the shadow could be caused by refraction is certain, for it has been observed in modern days. Thus, as is mentioned by Rosen-

müller, on March 27th, 1703, Père Romauld, prior of the monastery at Metz, noticed that the shadow on his dial deviated an hour and a half, owing to refraction in the higher regions of the atmosphere.* Or again, according to Mr. Bosanquet, the same effect might have been produced by the darkening shadow of an eclipse. But while he appealed to Divine indications the great prophet did not neglect natural remedies. He ordered that a cake of figs should be laid on the imposthume. It was a recognised and an efficient remedy, still recommended, centuries later, by Dioscorides, by Pliny, and by St. Jerome. By God's blessing on man's therapeutic care, the king was speedily rescued from the gates of death. Constantly in Scripture what we call the miraculous and what we call the providential are mingled together. To those who regard the providential as a constant miracle, the question of the miraculous becomes subordinate.†

With intense joy and gratitude the king hailed the respite which God had granted him. In fifteen years much might be done, much might be hoped for. All this he acknowledged with deep feeling in the song which he wrote on his recovery.

"I shall go as in solemn procession † all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.
O Lord, by these things men live,
And wholly therein is the life of my spirit.
Behold, it was for my peace that I had great bitterness;
But Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of nothingness:
For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.

The Lord is ready to save me;
Therefore will we sing my songs to the stringed instruments
All the days of our life in the house of the Lord." §

"The wonder done in the land" was, according to the Chronicler, one of the grounds for the embassy which, after his recovery, Hezekiah received from Merodach-Baladan, the patriot prince of Babylon. The other ostensible object of the embassy was to send letters and a present in congratulation for the king's restoration to health. But the real object lay deeper, out of sight. It was to secure a southern alliance for Babylon against the incessant tyranny of Nineveh.

Merodach-Baladan is mentioned in the inscriptions of Sargon.‖ He is described as "Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, King of Sumir and Accad, king of the four countries, and conqueror of all his enemies." There had been long strug-

* *Journ. of Asiatic Soc.*, xv. 286-293.

† Figs have a recognised use for imposthumes. See Dioscorides and Pliny quoted in Celsius, "Hierobot," ii. 723. In the passage of "Berachoth" quoted above, Hezekiah in his sickness asks Isaiah to give him his daughter in marriage, that he may have an heir. Isaiah replies that the decree of his death is irrevocable. The king bids Isaiah depart, and says (quoting Job xiii. 15) that a man must not despair, even if a sword is laid on his neck.

‡ Comp. Psalm xlii. 4.

§ Isa. xxxviii. 10-20.

‖ The Babylonian form of his name is Marduk-habal-iddi-na—i. e., "Merodach gave a son." He is the Mardokempados of the "Ptolemaic Canon," and the second fragment of his reign (six months) is mentioned by Polyhistor (*ap. Euseb.*). Josephus calls him Baladan ("Antt.," X. ii. 2). He was originally the prince of the Chaldean *Bit Yakim*. Sargon calls him "Merodach-Baladan, the foe, the perverse, who, contrary to the will of the great gods, ruled as king at Babylon." He displaced him for a time by "Belibus, the son of a wise man, whom one had reared like a little dog" (as we might say "like a tame cat") "in my palace" (Schrader, ii. 32). In the Assyrian records he is often called (by mistake?) "the son of Yakim." For the adventures of the Babylonian hero, see Schrader, "K. A. T.," 213 ff., 224 ff., 227, and in Riehm, "Handwörterbuch," ii. 982.

* The LXX. calls "the stairs" ἀναβαθμοὺς τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ κυρίου σου, and so, too, Josephus ("Antt.," X. ii. 1). The Pargum calls them "an hour-stone." Symmachus has, τρέψω τὴν σκίαν τῶν γραμμῶν ἢ κατέβη ἐν ὀρολόγιῳ Ἀχάζ.

† It should, however, be observed that on the question of priority critics are divided. Grotius, Vitringa, Paulus, Drechsler, etc., thought that the account in the Book of Isaiah is the original; De Wette, Maurer, Koster, Winer, Driver, etc., regard that account as a later abbreviation, perhaps from a common source.

‡ See Professor Lumbly, *ad loc.*

§ There is an exactly similar sun-dial not far from Qalhi.

gles, lasting indeed for centuries, between the city on the Euphrates and the city on the Tigris. Sometimes one, sometimes the other, had been victorious. Babylon—on the monuments Kur-Dunyash—had its original Accadian name of Ca-dinirra, which, like its Semitic equivalent Bab-el, means "Gate of God." Kalah (Larissa and Birs Nimroud) had been built by Shalmaneser I. before B. C. 1300. His son conquered Babylon, but not permanently; for in some later raid the Babylonians got possession of his signet-ring, with its proud inscription, "Conqueror of Kur-Dunyash," and it was not recovered by the Assyrians till six centuries later, when it fell into the hands of Sennacherib. About 1150 Nebuchadrezzar I. of Babylon thrice invaded Assyria, but there was again peace and alliance in 1100. Merodach-Baladan I. reigned before 900. The king who now sought the friendship of Hezekiah was the second of the name. He seized or recovered the throne of Babylon in 721, after the death of Shalmaneser, perhaps because Sargon was a usurper of dubious descent. He helped the Elamites against Assyria. Sargon was compelled to retreat to Assyria, but returned in 712, and drove Merodach-Baladan to flight. He was captured and taken to Assyria. But on the murder of Sargon in 705, he again managed to seize the throne of Babylon, killed the viceroy who had been set up, and became king for six months. After this, Sennacherib invaded his country, defeated him, and drove him once more to flight. He was perhaps killed by his successor.

Whether his overtures to Hezekiah took place before his defeat by Sargon, or after his escape, is uncertain. In either case he doubtless sent a splendid embassy, for Babylon was far-famed for its golden magnificence as "the glory of kingdoms" and "the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency."* At that time the Jews knew but little of the far-off city which was destined to be so closely interwoven with their future fortunes, as it was mingled with their oldest and dimmest traditions.† Apart from the magnificence of the presents brought to him, it was not unnatural that Hezekiah should regard this embassy with intense satisfaction. It was flattering to the power of his little kingdom that its alliance should be sought by the far-off and powerful capital on the great river;‡ it was still more encouraging to know that the frightful Nineveh had a strong enemy not far from her own frontier. Merodach-Baladan's ambassadors would be sure to inform Hezekiah that their lord had flung off the authority of Sargon, had kept him at bay for many years, and was still the undisputed king of the dominions snatched from the common enemy. It might have seemed reasonable that Hezekiah, for his part, should desire to leave the most favourable impression of his wealth and power on the mind of his distant and magnificent ally. He "hearkened unto" the ambassadors, or, more properly, "he was glad of them" (R. V.), § and "showed them all the house of his spicery and other treasures, his precious unguents, his armoury, his bullion, plate, and the whole resources of his kingdom." The Chronicler regards this as ingratitude to God. He says that

"Hezekiah rendered not again according unto the benefits done unto him; for his heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem." It is a severe judgment of later times, and the historian of the Kings pronounces no such censure. Nevertheless, he records the stern sentence pronounced by Isaiah. The prophet had seen through the secret diplomacy of the Babylonian ambassadors, and knew that the real object of their mission was to induce his king to revolt against Assyria in reliance on an arm of flesh. He came to ask Hezekiah whose these men were, whence they came, and what they had said. The king told him who they were, and how he had received them; but he did not think it wise to reveal their secret proposals. If Isaiah had so vehemently reprobated all negotiations with Egypt, there was little probability that he would sanction the overtures of Babylon. He saw in Hezekiah's conduct a vein of ostentatious elation, a swerving from theocratic faith; and with remarkable prophetic insight convinced the king of the error and impolicy of his proceedings, by announcing that the final and, in fact, irrevocable captivity of Judah would ultimately come, not from Nineveh, the fierce enemy, whose cloud of war was lurid on the horizon, but from Babylon, the apparently weaker friend, who was now making overtures of amity. With what heartrending grief must the king have heard the doom that the display of his treasures would prove to be in the future an incentive to the cupidity of the kings of Babylon, and that they would sweep away all those precious things to the banks of the Euphrates with such final overthrow that even the descendants of David should be sunk to the infinite degradation of being eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon.* The doom seems to have been fulfilled in part in the reign of Hezekiah's son, and more fearfully in the days of his great-grandchildren.†

The king's pride was humbled to the dust. In the spirit of Job—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" ‡—he resigned himself without a murmur to the will of Heaven, and exclaimed that all which God did must be well done. At least God granted him a respite. Peace and truth would be in his own days; for that let him be thankful. They were words of humble resignation, uttered by one who had learnt to believe that whatever God decreed was just and right.

It would be unjust to measure the feelings of those far centuries by those of our own day, and there was none of the gross selfishness in the words of Hezekiah which led Nero to quote the line—

"When I am dead, let earth be mixed with fire";

or which led Louis XIV. to say—

"Après moi le déluge."

We may perhaps trace in his exclamation something of the fatalism which gives a touch of apathy to the submissiveness of the Oriental. Some, too, have imagined that his distress was tinged by a gleam of happiness at the implicit promise that he should have a son. His wife's name was Hephzibah ("My delight is in her"), and within two years she brought forth the first-

* Isa. xiv. 4, xiii. 19.

† Gen. x. 10, xi. xi. 1-9.

‡ Jos. "Antt.," X. ii. 2: Σύμμαχον τε αὐτὸν εἶναι παρεκάλεσται καὶ φίλον.

§ 2 Kings xx. 12. LXX., ἐχάρη.

* See Dan. i. 6.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.

‡ Job i. 21.

born son, whose career, indeed, was dark and evil, but who became in due time an ancestor of the promised Messiah. The name "Manasseh" given him by his parents recalled the child born to Joseph in the land of his exile who had caused him to forget his sorrows.* Hezekiah had the spirit which says,—

"That which Thou bleasest is most good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right which seems most wrong,
So it be Thy sweet will."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HEZEKIAH AND ASSYRIA.

B. C. 701.

2 KINGS xviii. 13-xix. 37.

'Αλλ' ὁ σοφώτατος βασιλεὺς οὐχ ὅπλα ταῖς ἐκείνων βλασφημίαις, ἀλλὰ προεὐχὴν καὶ δάκρυα καὶ σάκκον ἀπέταξεν.—THEODORET.

"When, sudden—how think ye the end?
Did I say 'without friend'?
Say rather from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his target,
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast,
Where the wretch was safe pressed."
—BROWNING.

ALTHOUGH during a few memorable scenes the relations of Judah with Assyria in the reign of Hezekiah leap into fierce light, many previous details are unfortunately left in the deepest obscurity—an obscurity all the more impenetrable from the lack of certain dates. It will perhaps help to simplify our conceptions if we first sketch what is known of Assyria from the cuneiform inscriptions, and then fill up the sketch of those scenes which are more minutely delineated in the Book of Kings and in the prophecies of Isaiah.

Sargon—perhaps a successful general of royal blood, though he never calls himself the son of any one †—seems to have usurped the throne on the death of Shalmaneser IV., during the siege of Samaria in B. C. 722. He took Samaria, deported its inhabitants, and re-peopled it from the Assyrian dominions. "In their place," he says, in his tablets in the halls of his palace at Khorsabad, "I settled the men of countries conquered [by my hand]." ‡ In 720 he suppressed a futile attempt at revolt, headed by a pretender named Yahubid, in Hamath, which he reduced to "a heap of ruins." For some years after this he was occupied mainly on his northern frontiers, but he tells us that until 711 tribute continued to come in from Judah and Philistia. Meanwhile, these terrified and oppressed feudatories, writhing under the remorseless dominion of Nineveh, naturally began to listen to the intrigues of Egypt, whose interest it was to create a bulwark between herself and the invasion of the armies which were the abhorrence of the world. Under the influence of Sabaco, which gave new strength and unity to Egypt, she succeeded in seducing Ashdod from its allegiance to Sargon. Sargon at once deposed Azuri, King of Ashdod, and put his brother Ahimit in his place. The Ashdodites

* Manasseh seems to mean "one who forgets." See Gen. xli. 51. It was the name of the husband of Judith (Judith viii. 2), and is found in Ezra x. 30, 33.

† One legend of his birth resembles the finding of Moses in the bulrushes.

‡ Schrader, "K. A. T.," pp. 272-274; "Records of the Past," vii. 28.

soon after deposed Ahimit, and elected in his place Jaman, who was in alliance with Sabaco.* This revolt was evidently favoured by Judah, Edom, and Moab; for Sargon says that they, as well as the people of Philistia, "were speaking treason." The rebellion was crushed by Sargon's promptitude. † He tells his own tale thus:

"In the wrath of my heart I did not divide my army, and I did not diminish the ranks, but I marched against Ashdod with my warriors, who did not separate themselves from the traces of my sandals. I besieged, I took Ashdod and Gunt-Asdodim. I then re-established these towns. I placed [in them] the people whom my arms had conquered, I put over them my lieutenant as governor. I regarded them as Assyrians, and they practised obedience." ‡

Sargon does not, however, seem to have conducted this campaign in person; for we read in Isa. xx. 1 that he sent his Turan—i. e., his commander-in-chief, § whose name seems to have been Zir-bâni—|| to Ashdod, who fought against it and took it. The wretched Philistines had put their trust in Sabaco. "The people," says Sargon, "and their evil chiefs sent their presents to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, a prince who could not save them, and besought his alliance." Isaiah had for three years been indicating how vain this policy was by one of those acted parables which so powerfully affect the Eastern mind. He had, by the word of the Lord, stripped the shoes from off his feet and the upper robe of sackcloth from his loins, and walked, "naked and barefoot, for a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia," to indicate that even thus should the people of Egypt and Ethiopia be carried away as captives, naked and barefoot, by the kings of Assyria. Egypt was the boast of one party at Jerusalem, and Ethiopia, which had now become master of Egypt under Sabaco, was their expectation; but Isaiah's public self-humiliation showed how utterly their hopes should come to naught. ¶ Before the outbreak at Ashdod, Sargon had suppressed a revolt of Hanan, or Hanno, King of Gaza, and Egypt and Assyria first met face to face at Raphia (about B. C. 720), where Sabaco fought in person with an Egyptian contingent, at a spot halfway between Gaza and the "river of Egypt." ¶¶ Sabaco, whom Sargon calls "the Sultan of Egypt" (Siltannu Muzri), had been defeated, and fled precipitately, but Sargon was not then sufficiently free from other complications to advance to the Nile. The hoarded vengeance of Assyria was inflicted upon Egypt nearly a century later by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.

In the two suppressions of revolt at Ashdod,

* Smith, "Eponym Canon," p. 13c.

† See Prof. Smith, "Isaiah," p. 198.

‡ "Records of the Past," vii. 40. Sargon's words are, "The people of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab were speaking treason. The people and their evil chiefs, to fight against me, unto Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, a monarch who could not save them, their presents carried, and besought his alliance" (G. Smith, "Assyrian Discoveries," 290).

§ On the monuments called *Turtanu*, "Holder of power." See Schrader in Riehm, s. v.

¶ Raphia, or Ropheh, is on the borders of the desert. Asia beat Africa in every encounter—at Raphia, at Altaqu, at Carchemish. The impression of the seal of Shabak, attached to his capitulations with Sargon, was found at Nineveh by Sir A. H. Layard, and is now in the British Museum. Shabak died in 712. His son Shabatah succeeded him in Egypt, and his nephew (?) Tirhakah in Ethiopia. Sabaco's name assumes many forms (LXX., Σηγαῖρ; Herod., ii. 137, Σαβακῶς; Vulg., *Sua*). The Egyptians called him Shaba(ka).

¶¶ Isa. xx. 1-6.

Sargon or his Turtan must have come perilously near Jerusalem, and perhaps he may have inflicted sufficient damage to admit of the boast that he had "conquered" Judæa. If so, his military vanity made him guilty of an exaggeration.

Far more serious to Sargon was the revolt of Merodach-Baladan, King of Chaldæa. Babylon had always been a rival of Nineveh in the competition for world-wide dominion, and for twelve years, as Sargon says, Merodach-Baladan had been "sending ambassadors" *—to Hezekiah among others—in the patient effort to consolidate a formidable league. Elam and Media were with him; and at a solemn banquet, for which they had "spread the carpets," † and eaten and drank, the cry had risen, "Arise, ye princes! anoint the shield." Standing in ideal vision on his watch-tower, Isaiah saw the sweeping rush of the Assyrian troops on their horses and camels on their way to Babylon. What should come of it? The answer is in the words, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon, and all the images of her gods he [Sargon] hath broken to the ground." Alas! there is no hope from Babylon or its embassy! Would that Isaiah could have held out a hope! But no, "O my threshed one, son of my threshing-floor, that which I have heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, that have I declared unto you." ‡ And so it came to pass. The brave Babylonian was defeated. In 709 Sargon occupied his palace, took Dur-yakin, to which he had fled for refuge, and made himself Lord Paramount as far as the Persian Gulf. It was his last great enterprise. He built and adorned his palaces, and looked forward to long years of peace and splendour; but in 705 the dagger-thrust of an assassin—a malcontent of the town of Kullum—found its way to his heart; and Sennacherib reigned in his stead.

Sennacherib—Sin-ahi-irba ("Sin, the moon-god, has multiplied brothers")§—was one of the haughtiest, most splendid, and most powerful of all the kings of Assyria, though the petty state of Judah, relying on her God, defied and flouted him. The son of a mighty conqueror, at the head of a magnificent army, he regarded himself as the undisputed lord of the world. || Born in the purple, and bred up as crown prince, his primary characteristic was an overweening pride and arrogance, which shows itself in all his inscriptions. He calls himself "the Great King, the Powerful King, the King of the Assyrians, of the nations of the four regions, the diligent ruler,

* Lenormant, "Les Premières Civilisations," ii. 203; "Records of the Past," vii. 41-46.

† Isa. xxi. 6, A. V. "Watch in the watch-tower." Hitzig, Cheyne, "They spread the carpets." Much in this short oracle (xxi. 1-10) is obscure. Isaiah seems, in denouncing the fate of Babylon, to mourn for the ruin of the smaller states of which it was the prelude (G. Smith, "Soc. of Bibl. Arch.," ii. 320; Kleinert, "Stud. u. Krit.," 1877; W. R. Smith in "Enc. Brit.," s. v. "Isaiah").

‡ Isa. xxi. 10—*l. e.*, "My people threshed and trodden"; LXX., ὁ καταλελειμμένος καὶ οἱ ὀδυνώμενοι; "Records of the Past," vii. 47.

§ Herod., Σαναχάρβος; Jos., Σαναχάρβος. See Appendix I. Sin was the moon-god; Merodach, the planet Jupiter; Adar, Saturn; Ishtai, Venus; Nebo, Mercury; Nergal, Mars (Schrader, ii. 117).

|| Sargon seems to have been murdered in the palace of unparalleled splendour which he built at Dur-Sharrukin ("The City of Sargon"). It took him five years to build it with armies of workmen. Its halls, opened by Botta, were the first Assyrian halls ever entered by a modern's foot. It is strange that this greatest of Assyrian kings is only mentioned once in the Bible (Isa. xx. 1). We owe to Assyriology his restoration to his proper place in the annals of mankind. See Ragozin, "Assyria," 247-254.

the favourite of the Great Gods, the observer of sworn faith, the guardian of law, the establisher of monuments, the noble hero, the strong warrior, the first of kings, the punisher of unbelievers, the destroyer of wicked men." * He was mighty both in war and peace. His warlike glories are attested by Herodotus, by Polyhistor, by Abydenus, by Demetrius, and by his own annals. His peaceful triumphs are attested by the great palace which he erected at Nineveh, and the magnificent series of sculptured slabs with which he adorned it; by his canals and aqueducts, his gateways and embankments, his Babylon sculpture, and his *stèle* at the Nahr-el-Kelb. He was a worthy successor of his father Sargon, and of the second Tiglath-Pileser—active in his military enterprises, indefatigable, persevering, full of resource. †

On one of his bas-reliefs we see this magnificent potentate seated on his throne, holding two arrows in his right hand, while his left grasps the bow. A rich bracelet clasps each of his brawny arms. On his head is the jeweled pyramidal crown of Assyria, with its embroidered lappets. His dark locks stream down over his shoulders, and the long, curled beard flows over his breast. His strongly marked, sensual features wear an aspect of unearthly haughtiness. He is clad in superbly brodered robes, and his throne is covered with rich tapestries, and bas-reliefs of Assyrians or captives, who, like the Greek caryatides, uphold its divisions with their heads and arms.

Yet all this glory faded into darkness, and all this colossal pride crumbled into dust. Sennacherib not only died, like his father, by murder, but by the murderous hands of his own sons, and after the shattering of all his immense pretensions—a defeated and dishonoured man.

One of his invasions of Judæa occupies a large part of the Scripture narrative. ‡ It was the fourth time of that terrible contact between the great world-power which symbolised all that was tyrannic and idolatrous, and the insignificant tribe which God had chosen for His own inheritance.

In the reign of Ahaz, about B. C. 732, Judah had come into collision with Tiglath-Pileser II.

Under Shalmaneser IV. and Sargon, the Northern Kingdom had ceased to exist in 722.

Under Sargon, Judah had been harassed and humbled, and had witnessed the suppression of the Philistine revolt, and of the defeat of the powerful Sabaco at Raphia about 720.

Now came the fourth and most overwhelming calamity. If the patriots of Jerusalem had placed any hopes in the disappearance of the ferocious Sargon, they must speedily have recognised that he had left behind him a no less terrible successor.

Sennacherib reigned apparently twenty-four years (B. C. 705-681). On his accession he placed a brother, whose name is unknown, on the viceregal throne of Babylon, and contented himself with the title of King of the Assyrians. This brother was speedily dethroned by a usurper

* Rawlinson, "Ancient Monarchies," ii. 178.

† Canon Rawlinson, "Kings of Israel and Judah," 187.

‡ On his own monuments this campaign, except its final catastrophe, is narrated in four sections: (1) The subjugation of Phœnicia, and of Philistine towns; (2) the conquest of King Zidka of Askelon; (3) the defeat of Ekron, the restoration of their vassal king Padi to his throne, and the defeat of Egypt at Altagu; (4) the expedition against Jerusalem (Schrader, E. Tr., i. 298). See Appendix I.

named Hagisa, who only reigned thirty days, and was then slain by the indefatigable Merodach-Baladan, who held the throne for six months. He was driven out by Belibus, who had been trained "like a little dog" in the palace of Nineveh,* but was now made King of Sumir and Accad—*i. e.*, of Babylonia. Sennacherib entered the palace of Babylon and carried off the wife of Merodach and endless spoil in triumph, while Merodach fled into the land of Guzumman, and (like the Duke of Monmouth) hid himself "among the marshes and reeds," where the Assyrians searched for him for five days, but found no trace of him. After three years (702-699) Belibus proved faithless, and Sennacherib made his son Assur-nadin-sum vice-roy of Babylon.

His second campaign was against the Medes in Northern Elam.

His third (701) was against the Khatti (the Hittites)—*i. e.*, against Phœnicia and Palestine. † He drove King Luli from Sidon "by the mere terror of the splendour of my sovereignty," and placed Tubalu (*i. e.*, Ithbaal) in his place, and subdued into tributary districts Arpad, Byblos, Ashdod, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, suppressing at the same time a very abortive rising in Samaria. "All these brought rich presents and kissed my feet." He also subdued Zidka, King of Askelon, from whom he took Beth-Dagon, Joppa, and other towns. Padi, the King of Ekron, was a faithful vassal of Assyria; he was therefore deposed by the revolting Ekronites, and sent in chains into the safe custody of Hezekiah, who "imprisoned him in darkness." The rebel states all relied on the Egyptians and Ethiopians. Sennacherib fought against Egyptians and Ethiopians, "in reliance upon Assur my God," at Altauq (B. C. 701), and claims to have defeated them, and carried off the sons and charioteers of the King of Egypt, and the charioteers of the kings of Ethiopia. ‡ He then tells us that he punished Altauq and Timnath. § He impaled the rebels of Ekron on stakes all round the city. He restored Padi, and made him a vassal. "Hezekiah [Chazaqiahu] of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, the terror of the splendour of my sovereignty overwhelmed. Himself as a bird in a cage, in the midst of Jerusalem, his royal city, I shut up. The Arabians and his dependants, whom he had introduced for the defence of Jerusalem, his royal city, together with thirty talents of gold, eight hundred of silver, bullion, precious stones, ivory couches and thrones, an abundant treasure, with his daughters, his harem, and his attendants. I caused to be brought after me to Nineveh. He sent his envoy to pay tribute and render homage." At the same time, he overran Judæa, took forty-six fenced cities and many smaller towns, "with laying down of walls, hewing about, and trampling down," and carried off more than two hundred thousand captives with their spoil. Part of Hezekiah's domains was divided among three

Philistine vassals who had remained faithful to Assyria.

It was in the midst of this terrible crisis that Hezekiah had sent to Sennacherib at Lachish his offer of submission, saying, "I have offended; return from me; that which thou puttest upon me I will bear."* The spoiling of the palace and Temple was rendered necessary to raise the vast mulct which the Assyrian King required. †

It is at Lachish—now Um-Lakis, a fortified hill in the Shephelah, south of Jerusalem, between Gaza and Eleutheropolis—that we catch another personal glimpse of the mighty oppressor. We see him depicted, on his triumphal tablets, in the palace-chambers of Kouyunjik, engaged in the siege; for the town offered a determined resistance, ‡ and required all the energies and all the trained heroism of his forces. We see him next, carefully painted, seated on his royal throne in magnificent apparel, with his tiara and bracelets, receiving the spoils and captives of the city. The inscription says: "Sennacherib, the mighty king, the king of the country of Assyria, sitting on the throne of judgment at the entrance of the city of Lakisha. I give permission for its slaughter." He certainly implies that he took the city, but a doubt is thrown on this by 2 Chron. xxxii. 1, which only says that "he thought to win these cities"; and the historian says (2 Kings xix. 8) that he "departed from Lachish." Lachish was evidently a very strong city, and it is so depicted in the palace-tablets at Kouyunjik. It had been fortified by Rehoboam, and had furnished a refuge to the wretched Amaziah §

If Judah and Jerusalem had listened to the messages of Isaiah, ¶ they might have been saved the humiliating affliction which seemed to have plunged the brief sun of their prosperity into seas of blood. He had warned them incessantly and in vain. He had foretold their present desolation, in which Zion should be like a woman seated on the ground, wailing in her despair. He had taught them that formalism was no religion, and that external rites did not win Jehovah's approval. He had told them how foolish it was to put trust in the shadow of Egypt, and had not shrunk from revealing the fearful consequences which should follow the setting up of their own false wisdom against the wisdom of Jehovah. Yet, intermingled with pictures of suffering, and threats of a harvestless year, designed to punish the vanity and display of their women, and the intimation—never actually fulfilled—that even the palace and Temple should

* This very phrase "I imposed on them" is found on Sennacherib's monument (Schrader, ii. 1). The references, when not otherwise specified, are to Whitehouse's English translation.

† In 2 Kings xviii. 16 the word "pillars" or "doorposts" is uncertain. LXX., *εστηρικυρια*; Vulg., *laminas auri*.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxii. 9. He had to besiege it "with all his power." He seems to have thought it even more important than Jerusalem, for he superintended the siege in person (Layard, "Nineveh and Babylon," 150; "Monuments of Nineveh," 2d series, pl. 21). The ruined Tel of Umm-el-Lakis lies between the Wady Simsim and the Wady-el-Ahshy (Riehm).

§ See 2 Chron. xi. 9, xxv. 27; Jer. xxxiv. 7. The allusion to this city in Micah (i. 13) is obscure: "O thou inhabitant of Lachish [swift steed], bind the chariot to the swift steed: she is the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee." This seems to imply that some form of idolatry had come from Israel to Lachish, and from Lachish to Jerusalem. In Sennacherib's picture of the city, foreign worship is represented as going on in it (Layard, "Monuments of Nineveh," Pis. 21 and 24; Rawlinson, "Herodotus," i. 477).

¶ Isa. xxix. xxx., xxxi.

* This allusion is said to be the only instance of humour—"grim humour, or it would not be Assyrian"—which occurs in the Assyrian annals.

† Schrader, pp. 234-270. The account of the memorable campaign is narrated in duplicate on the Taylor Cylinder in the British Museum, and on the Bull Inscription at Kouyunjik.

‡ Sennacherib calls Tirhakah's army "a host that no man could number"; but it was defeated by the better discipline, the heavier armour, and the superior physical strength of the Assyrians.

§ See Josh. xix. 43.

become "the joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks," he constantly implies that the disaster would be followed by a mysterious, divine, complete deliverance, and ultimately by a Messianic reign of joy and peace. Night is at hand, he said, and darkness; but after the darkness will come a brighter dawn.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GREAT DELIVERANCE.

B. C. 701.

2 KINGS xix. 1-37.

"There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle."—PSALM lxxvi. 3.

"ὄδῃ πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσύριον."—LXX.

"And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword, Hath melted like snow at the glance of the Lord."—BYRON.

"Vuolsi così colà dove si puote
Cio che si vuole: e più non dimandare."—DANTE.

"Through love, through hope, through faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."—WORDSWORTH.

"God shall help her, and that when the morning dawns."—PSALM xli. 5.

In spite of the humble submission of Hezekiah, it is a surprise to learn from Isaiah that Sennacherib—after he had accepted the huge fine and fixed the tribute, and departed to subdue Lachish—broke his covenant.* He sent his three chief officers—the Turtan, or commander-in-chief, whose name seems to have been Belemurani;† the Rabsaris, or chief eunuch;‡ and the Rabshakeh, or chief captain§—from Lachish to Hezekiah, with a command of absolute, unconditional surrender, to be followed by deportation. By this conduct Sennacherib violated his own boast that he was "a keeper of treaties." Yet it is not difficult to conjecture the reason for his change of plan. He had found it no easy matter to subdue even the very minor fortress of Lachish; how unwise, then, would it be for him to leave in his rear an uncaptured city so well fortified as Jerusalem! He was advancing towards Egypt. It was obviously a strategic error to spare on his route a hostile and almost impregnable stronghold as a nucleus for the plans of his enemies. Moreover, he had heard rumours that Tirhakah, the third and last Ethiopian king of Egypt, was advancing against him, and it was most important to prevent any junction between his forces and those of Hezekiah.¶ He could not come in person to Jerusalem, for the siege of Lachish was on his hands; but he detached from his army a large contingent under

* Isa. xxxiii. 8.

† Isa. xx. 1.

‡ Jer xxxix 3. The meaning of the name is not certain. *Saris*, in Hebrew, is "eunuch"; but the word is not known in Assyrian records, and we should expect *Rabsarisism*, as in Dan. i. 3.

§ Rabsak perhaps means *chief officer* or *vizier*, and is Hebraised into Rabshakeh. Prof. G. A. Smith ("Isaiah," p. 345) calls him "Sennacherib's Bismarek." Rabshakeh, usually rendered "chief cupbearer," is an Aramaised form of Rabsak (great chief); but we know of no chief cupbearer at the Assyrian court (Schraeder, "K. A. T.," 109 E.).

¶ From an Apis-stèle he seems to have reigned twenty-six years (B. C. 694-668 ?).

his Turtan, to win the Jews by seductive promises, or to subdue Jerusalem by force. Once more, therefore, the Holy City saw beneath her often-captured walls the vast beleaguering host, and "governors and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men." Isaiah describes to us how the people crowded to the house-tops, half dead with fear, weeping and despairing, and crying to the hills to cover them, and bereft of their rulers, who had been bound by the archers of the enemy in their attempt to escape. They gazed on the quiver-bearing warriors of Elam in their chariots, and the serried ranks of the shields of Kir, and the cavalry round the gates. And he tells us how, as so often occurs at moments of mad hopelessness, many who ought to have been crying to God in sackcloth and ashes, gave themselves up, on the contrary, to riot and revelry, eating flesh, and drinking wine, and saying: "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die."* The king alone had shown patience, calmness, and active foresight; and he alone, by his energy and faith, had restored some confidence to the spirits of his fainting people.

Although the city had been refortified by the king, and supplied with water, the hearts of the inhabitants must have sunk within them when they saw the Assyrian army investing the walls, and when the three commissioners—taking their station "by the conduit of the upper pool which is in the highway of the fuller's field"—summoned the king to hear the ultimatum of Sennacherib.

The king did not in person obey the summons; but he, too, sent out his three chief officers. They were Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, who, as the chamberlain (*al-hab-baith*), was a great prince (*nagid*); Shebna, who had been degraded, perhaps at the instance of Isaiah, from the higher post, and was now secretary (*sopher*); and Joah, son of Asaph, the chronicler (*mazkir*), to whom we probably owe the minute report of the memorable scene. No doubt they went forth in the pomp of office—Eliakim with his robe, and girdle, and key;† The Rabshakeh proved himself, indeed, "an affluent orator," and evinced such familiarity with the religious politics of Judah and Jerusalem, that this, in conjunction with his perfect mastery of Hebrew, gives colour to the belief that he was an apostate Jew. He began by challenging the idle confidence of Hezekiah, and his vain words‡ that he had counsel and strength for the war. Upon what did he rely? On the broken and dangerous bulrush of Egypt?§ It would but pierce his hand! On Jehovah? But Hezekiah had forfeited his protection by sweeping away His *bamoth* and His altars! Why, let Hezekiah make a wager;|| and if Sennacherib furnished him with two thousand horses, he would be unable to find riders for them! How, then, could he drive back even the lowest of the Assyrian captains? And was not Jehovah on their side? It was He who had bidden them destroy Jerusalem!

* Isa. xxii. 1-13.

† Eliakim. See Isa. xxii. 21, 22.

‡ "Vain words"; lit., "a word of the lips." LXX., λόγοι χελεῶν.

§ Comp. Isa. xxx. 1-7; Ezek. xxix. 6. It seems to be an over-refinement to suppose that Sennacherib refers to the divisions between Egypt and Ethiopia.

|| 2 Kings xviii. 23, A. V.: "Let Hezekiah give pledges."

That last bold assertion, appealing as it did to all that was erroneous and abject in the minds of the superstitious, and backed, as it was, by the undeniable force of the envoy's argument, smote so bitterly on the ear of Hezekiah's courtiers, that they feared it would render negotiation impossible. They humbly entreated the orator to speak to "his servants" in the Aramaic language of Assyria, which they understood,* and not in Hebrew, which was the language of all the Jews who stood in crowds on the walls. Surely this was a diplomatic embassy to their king, not an incitement to popular sedition!

The answer of the Rabshakeh was truly Assyrian in its utterly brutal and ruthless coarseness. Taking up his position directly in front of the wall,† and ostentatiously addressing the multitude, he ignored the representatives of Hezekiah. Who were they? asked he. His master had not sent him to speak to them, or to their poor little puppet of a king, but to the people on the wall, the foul garbage of whose sufferings of thirst and famine they should share.‡ And to all the multitude the great king's§ message was:—Do not be deceived. Hezekiah cannot save you. Jehovah will not save you. Come to terms with me, and give me hostages and pledges and a present, and then live in happy peace and plenty until I come and deport you to a land as fair and fruitful as this. How should Jehovah deliver them? Had any of the gods of the nations delivered them out of the hands of the King of Assyria? "Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have the gods of Samaria delivered Samaria out of my hand, that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"||

It was a very powerful oration, but the orator must have been a little disconcerted to find that it was listened to in absolute silence. He had disgracefully violated the comity of international intercourse by appealing to subjects against their lawful king; yet from the starving people there came not a murmur of reply. Faithful to the behest of their king in the midst of their misery and terror, they answered not a word. Agamemnon is silent before the coarse jeers of Thersites. "The sulphurous flash dies in its own smoke, only leaving a hateful stench behind it!" And in this attitude of the people there was something very sublime and very instructive. Dumb, stricken, starving, the wretched Jews did not answer the envoy's taunts or menaces, because they would not. They were not even in those extremities to be seduced from their allegiance to the king whom they honoured, though the speaker had contemptuously ignored his existence. And though the Rabshakeh had cut them to the heart with his specious appeals and braggart vaunts, yet "this clever, self-confident, persuasive personage, with two languages on his tongue, and an army at his back," could not shake the confidence in God, which, however

unreasonable it might seem, had been elevated into a conviction by their king and their prophet. The Rabsak had tried to seduce the people into rebellion, but he had failed.* They were ready to die for Hezekiah with the fidelity of despair. The mirage of sensual comfort in exiled servitude should not tempt them from the scorched wilderness from which they could still cry out for the living God.

Yet the Assyrian's words had struck home into the hearts of his greatest hearers, and therefore how much more into those of the ignorant multitudes! Eliakim and Shebna and Joah came to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh. And when the king heard it, when he found that even his submission had been utterly in vain, he too rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth,‡ and went into the only place where he could hope to find comfort, even into the house of the Lord, which he had cleansed and restored to beauty, although afterwards he had been driven to despoil it. Needing an earthly counsellor, he sent Eliakim and Shebna and the elders of the priests to Isaiah. They were to tell him the outcome of this day of trouble, rebuke, and contumely; and since the Rabshakeh had insulted and despised Jehovah, they were to urge the prophet to make his appeal to Him, and to pray for the remnant which the Assyrians had left.†

The answer of Isaiah was a dauntless defiance. If others were in despair, he was not in the least dismayed. "Be not afraid"—such was his message—"of the mere words with which the boastful boys of the King of Assyria have blasphemed Me.§ Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear a rumour,|| and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

Much crestfallen at the total and unexpected failure of the embassy, and of his own heart-shaking appeals, the Rabshakeh returned. But meanwhile Sennacherib had taken Lachish, and marched to Libnah (Tel-es-Safia), which he was now besieging.¶ There it was that he heard the "rumour" of which Isaiah had spoken—the report, namely, that Tirhakah, the third king of the Ethiopian dynasty of Pharaohs,** was advancing in person to meet him. This was B. C. 701, and it is perhaps only by anticipation that Tirhakah is called "King" of Ethiopia. He was only the general and representative of his father Shabatok, if (as some think) he did not succeed to the throne till 698.

It was impossible for Sennacherib under these

* Isa. xxxiii. 8: "He hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man."

† 1 Kings xx. 32; 2 Kings vi. 30.

‡ Sennacherib had already carried off vast numbers. See Isa. xxiv. 1-12; Demetrius *ap. Cleni. Alex.*, "Strom.," i. 403.

§ Isaiah's phrase, *na'ari melek*, "lads of the king," is contemptuous. LXX., *παῖδες βασιλέως*.

|| Heb., *ruach*; LXX., *δίδωμι ἐν αὐτῷ πνεῦμα*. Theodoret calls this "spirit" *cowardice* (*τὴν δειλίαν οἰμαι δηλοῦν*).

¶ Libnah means "whiteness." Dean Stanley ("S. and P.," 207, 258) identifies it with a white-faced hill, the Blanchegarde of the Crusaders.

** The dates usually given are Sabaco, B. C. 725-712; Shabatok, 712-698; Tirhakah, 698-672. Manetho, *Τάραχος*; Srebo, *Τεράκων*, ὁ Λιβηΐψ. He was third king of the twenty-fifth dynasty, and the greatest of the Egyptian sovereigns who came from Ethiopia. He reigned gloriously for many years. We see his figure at Medinet Abou, smiting ten captive princes with an iron mace; but he was finally defeated by Esarhaddon, and in 668 by Assurbanipal at Karbanit (Canopus). He is called by his conqueror "Tar-ku-u, King of Egypt and Cush" (Schrader, "K. A. T.," 336 ff.).

* Heb., *Arāmīth*.

† 2 Kings xviii. 28, where *stood* should be rendered *came forward*.

‡ The coarse expression is softened down by the Chronicler (2 Chron. xxxii. 18).

§ The kings of Assyria usually called themselves "great king, mighty king, king of the multitude, king of the land Assur."

¶ Every one must notice the glaring inconsistency between this *defiance* of Jehovah and the previous claim to the possession of His sanction. On Hamath, Arpad, etc.; see Schrader, ii. 7-10.

circumstances to return northwards to Jerusalem, of which the siege would inevitably occupy some time. But he sent a menacing letter,* reminding Hezekiah that neither king nor god had ever yet saved any city from the hands of the Assyrian destroyers. Where were the kings, he asked again, of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, Ivvah? What had the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezep, and the children of Eden in Telassar done to save their countries from Sennacherib's ancestors, when they had laid them under the ban?†

Again the pious king found comfort in God's Temple. Taking with him the scornful and blasphemous letter, he spread it out before Jehovah in the Temple with childlike simplicity, that Jehovah might read its insults and be moved by this dumb appeal.‡ Then both he and Isaiah cried mightily to God, "who sitteth above the cherubim," admitting the truth of what Sennacherib had said, and that the kings of Assyria had destroyed the nations, and burnt their vain gods in the fire. But of what significance was that? Those were but gods of wood and stone, the works of men's hands.§ But Jehovah was the One, the True, the Living God. Would He not manifest among the nations His eternal supremacy?

And as the king prayed the word of Jehovah came to Isaiah, and he sent to Hezekiah this glorious message about Sennacherib:

"The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn. The daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee."¶

The blasphemies, the vaunts, the menacing self-confidence of Sennacherib, were his surest condemnation. Did he count God a cypher? It was to God alone that he owed the fearful power which had made the nations like grass upon the housetops, like blasted corn, before him. And because God knew his rage and tumult, God would treat him as Sargon his father had treated conquered kings:—

"I will put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips.¶ And I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." He had thought to conquer Egypt:** instead of that he should be driven back in confusion to Assyria.

It was but a plainer enunciation of the truths which Isaiah had again and again intimated in enigma and parable. It was the fearless security

of Judah's lion; the safety of the rock amid the deluge; the safety of the poor brood under the wings of the Divine protection from "the great Birds'-nester of the world"; the crashing downfall of the lopped Lebanonian cedar, while the green shoot and tender branch out of the withered stump of Jesse should take root downward and bear fruit upward.*

And the sign was given to Hezekiah that this should be so.† This year there should be no harvest, except such as was spontaneous; for in the stress of Assyrian invasion sowing and reaping had been impossible. The next year the harvest should only be from this accidental produce. But in the third year, secure at last, they should sow and reap, and plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof.‡ And though but a remnant of the people was left out of the recent captivity, they should grow and flourish, and Jerusalem should see the besieging host of Assyria no more for ever: for Jehovah would defend the city for His own sake, and for His servant David's sake.

Thereafter occurred the great deliverance.§ In some way—we know not and never shall know how—by a blast of the simoom, or sudden outbreak of plague, or furious panic, or sudden assault, or by some other calamity,|| the host of Assyria was smitten in the camp, and one hundred and eighty-five thousand, including their chief leaders, perished. The historian, in a manner habitual to pious Semitic writers, attributes the devastation to the direct action of "the angel of the Lord";¶ but as Dr. Johnson said long ago, "We are certainly not to suppose that the angel went about with a sword in his hand, striking them one by one, but that some powerful natural agent was employed."**

The Forty-Sixth Psalm is generally regarded as the *Te Deum* sung in the Temple over this deliverance, and its opening words, "God is our refuge and strength," are inscribed over the cathedral of St. Sophia at Constantinople.

It is usually supposed that this overwhelming disaster happened to the host of Assyria before Jerusalem. This, however, is not stated; and as the capture of Lachish was an urgent necessity, it is probable that the Turtan led back the forces which had accompanied him, and took them afterwards to Libnah.†† Yet, since Libnah was but ten miles from Jerusalem, the Jews could not

* Isa. x. 33, 34, xi. 1, xv. 8; Stanley, "Lectures," ii. 410.

† לָיִן. A sign "is a thing, an event, or an action intended as a pledge of the Divine certainty of another. Sometimes it is a miracle (Gen. iv. 15, Heb.), or a permanent symbol (Isa. viii. 18, xx. 3, xxxvii. 30; Jer. xlv. 29)" (Delitzsch).

‡ The first year they should eat *saphiach* (LXX., ἀνόματα, Vulg., *quæ repereris*); the second year, *sachish* (LXX., τὰ ἀνατέλλοντα; Vulg., *quæ sponte nascuntur*).

§ 2 Kings xix. 35: "It came to pass that night." Isaiah only has "then"; Josephus, *κατὰ τὴν πρώτην τῆς πολιορκίας νύκτα*. Menochius understands it "in celebri illa nocte." The LXX. omits "that," and simply says "in the night" (νυκτός). Comp. Psalm xlv. 5 (Heb.); Isa. xvii. 14.

|| Josephus, followed by many moderns, and even by Keil, suggests a plague. The malaria of the Pelusiotic marshes easily breeds pestilence. The "*maleak Jehovah*" is "the destroyer" (*mashchil*) (Exod. xii. 23; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. Comp. Justin., xix. 11; Diod. Sic., xix. 434.

¶ Comp. 2 Sam. xxiv. 15, 16.

** The Babyl. Talmud and some Targums, followed by Vitringa, etc., attribute it to storms of lightning; Prideaux, Heine, and Faber, and to the simoom; R. José, Ussher, etc., to a nocturnal attack of Tirhakah.

†† It is, however, perfectly possible that a contingent was left on guard. "Where is the [past] terror? Where is he that rated the tribute? Where is he that received it?" (Isa. xxxiii. 18). "At the noise of the tumult the people flee" (Isa. xxxiii. 3); "At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep" (Psalm lxxvi. 6). Comp. Psalm. xlvi. 4-6.

* Heb. *Sepharim*: Vulg., *litteræ*; 2 Chron. xxxii. 17. The more ordinary term for a letter is *iggereth*.

† 2 Kings xix. 12 (Heb.); Ezek. xxvii. 23. On these places see Schrader, ii. 11, 12. It had been indeed Sennacherib's work "to reduce fenced cities to ruinous heaps." He boasts on the Bellino Cylinder, "Their smaller towns without number I overthrew, and reduced them to heaps of rubbish" ("Records of the Past," i. 27).

‡ "It is a prayer without words, a prayer in action, which then passes into a spoken prayer" (Delitzsch).

§ The Assyrians are sometimes represented in their monuments as hewing idols to pieces in honour of their god Assur (Botta, "Monum.," pl. 140.)

¶ LXX., *κινεῖν τὴν κεφαλὴν*, "a gesture of scorn" (Psalm xxii. 7, cix. 25; Lam. ii. 15). With the vaunts of Sennacherib compare Claudian, "De bell. Geth.," 526-532.

"Cum cesserit omnis

Obsequiis natura meis? Subsidiere nostris

Sub pedibus montes, *arescere vidimus amnos* . . .

Fregi Alpes, *galeis Padum victricibus hausi*."

—KEIL, *ad loc.*

¶ Comp. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11 (Heb.); Psalm xxxix. 1; Isa. xxx. 28; Ezek. xxxviii. 4, xxxix. 4. The Assyrians drove a ring through the lower lip, the Babylonians through the nose. See Rawlinson, "Ancient Monarchies," ii. 374, iii. 436.

** 2 Kings xix. 33. "The river of Egypt" (*Nachal-ha-Mizraim*) is the Wady-el-Arish.

feel safe for a day until the mighty news came that the

"Angel of God spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed,
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed heavy and chill,
And their breasts but once heaved, and for ever grew
still."

When the catastrophe which had happened to the main army and the flight of Sennacherib became known, the scattered forces would melt away.

All the Assyrians who escaped were now hurrying back* to Nineveh with their foiled king. Sennacherib seems to have occupied himself in the north, except so far as he was forced to fight fiercely against his own rebel subjects. He never recovered this complete humiliation. He never again came southwards. He survived the catastrophe for seventeen or twenty years,† and fought five or six campaigns; but at the end of that period, while he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch or Assarac (Assur), his god,‡ he was murdered by his two sons Adrammelech (Adar-malik—"Adar is king") and Sharezer (Nergal-sarussar—"Nergal protect the king"),§ who envied him his throne. They escaped into the land of Ararat, but were defeated and killed by their younger brother Esarhaddon (Assur-âkh-iddin—"Assur bestowed a 'brother'") at the battle of Hani-Rabbat, on the Upper Euphrates. He succeeded Sennacherib, and ultimately avenged on Egypt his father's overwhelming disaster. He is perhaps the "cruel lord" of Isaiah xix. 4, and it is not unnatural that he should have prevailed against his partricial brothers, for we are told that in a previous battle at Melitene he had shown such prowess that the troops then and there proclaimed him King of Assyria with shouts of "This is our king."|| He reigned from B. C. 681-668, and in his reign Assyria culminated before her last decline.¶ He was the builder of the temple at Nimrud, and erected thirty other temples. Babylon and Nineveh were both his capitals,** and he had previously been viceroy of the former.

The glorious deliverance in which the faith and courage of the King of Judah had had their share naturally increased the prosperity and prestige of Hezekiah, and lifted the authority of Isaiah to an unprecedented height. Hezekiah probably did not long survive the uplifting of this dark cloud, but during the remainder of his life "he was magnified in the sight of all na-

* This is the meaning of "he departed, and went, and returned."

† Not, only fifty-five days, as we read in Tobit i. 21.

‡ Jos., "Antt.," X. i. 5: "In his own temple to Araskê"; LXX., Ἀσραχ; Isa. xxxvii. 38. One guess connects the word with Neshet, "the eagle-god" often seen on the Assyrian bas-reliefs. Lenormant calls him "the god of human destiny."

§ Alex. Polyhistor ap. Euseb., i. 27; Kimchi ad 2 Kings xix. 37. Buxtorf ("Bibl. Rabbinic.") says that Sennacherib entered the temple to ask his counsellors why Jehovah favoured Israel. Being told that it was because of Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac, he said, "Then I will offer my two sons." Rashi adds that they slew him to save their own lives. (See Schenkel and Riehm, s. v. "Sanherib"—both articles by Schrader.)

|| See Schrader in Riehm's "Handwörterbuch," s. v. "Sanherib," "Asarhaddon." Esarhaddon, judging from what is called "Sennacherib's will," in which the king leaves him splendid presents, seems to have been a favorite of his father ("Records of the Past," i. 136). He says that on hearing of his father's murder, "I was wrathful as a lion, and my soul raged within me, and I lifted my hands to the great gods to assume the sovereignty of my father's house." See Appendix I.

¶ The Book of Tobit (i. 21) calls him Sarchedonias.

** 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11.

tions."* When he died, all Judah and Jerusalem did him honour, and gave him a splendid burial. Apparently the old tombs of the kings—the catacomb constructed by David and Solomon—had in the course of two and a half centuries become full, so that he had to be buried "in the ascent of the sepulchres," perhaps some niche higher than the other graves of the catacomb, which was henceforth disused for the burial of the kings of Judah. We have had occasion to observe the many particulars in which his reign was memorable, and to his other services must be added the literary activity to which we owe the collection and editing, by his scribes, of the Proverbs of Solomon. His reign had practically witnessed the institution of the faithful Jewish Church under the influence of his great prophetic guide.†

The question whether the portent of the destruction of the Assyrian was identical with that related by Herodotus has never been finally answered. Herodotus places the scene of the disaster at Pelusium,‡ and tells this story:—Sennacherib, King of the Arabs and Assyrians, invaded Egypt. Its king, Sethos, of the Tanite dynasty, in despair entered the temple of his god Pthah (or Vulcan), and wept.§ The god appeared to him with promises of deliverance, and Sethos marched to meet Sennacherib with an army of poor artisans, since he was a priest, and the caste of warriors was ill-affected to him. In the night the god Pthah sent hosts of field-mice, which gnawed the quivers, bow-strings, and shield-straps of the Assyrians, who consequently fled, and were massacred. An image of the priest-king with a mouse in his hand stood in the temple of Pthah, and on its pedestal the inscription, which might also point the moral of the Biblical narrative, Ἐσέ μὲ τις ὀρέων εὐσεβῆς ἔστω ("Let him who looks on me be pious"). Josephus seems so far to accept this version that he refers to Herodotus, and says that Sennacherib's failure was the result of a frustration in Egypt.|| The mouse in the hand of the statue probably originated the details of the legend; but according to Horapollion it was the hieroglyphic sign of destruction by plague.¶ Bähr says that it was also the symbol of Mars. Readers of Homer will remember the title Apollo *Smintheus* ("the destroyer of mice"), and the story that mice were worshipped in the Troas because they gnawed the bow-strings of the enemy.

But whatever may have been the mode of the retribution, or the scene in which it took place, it is certainly historical. The outlines of the narrative in the sacred historian are identical with those in the Assyrian records. The annals of Sennacherib tell us the four initial stages of the great campaign in the conquest of Phœnicia, of Askelon, and of Ekron, the defeat of the Egyptians at Altaqu, and the earlier hostilities against Hezekiah. The Book of Kings concentrates our attention on the details of the close of

* 2 Chron. xxxii. 23.

† Wellhausen, p. 116.

‡ Herod. ii. 14. "Sin" (Tanis?), Ezek. xxx. 15. It lay in the midst of morasses, and some attribute the catastrophe to the malaria.

§ The deliverance is really connected with Tirhakah, whose deeds are recorded in a temple at Medinet Habou, but the jealousy of the Memphites attributed it to the piety of Sethos. See G. W. Wilkinson, "Ancient Egyptians," i. 141; Rawlinson, "Herodotus," i. 394.

|| Antt., X. i. 1-5.

¶ Comp. 1 Sam. v., vi., where, after a plague, the Philistines sent an expiation of five golden mice.

the invasion. On this point, whether from accident, or because Sennacherib did not choose to register his own calamity, and the frustration of the gods of whose protection he boasted, the Assyrian records are silent. Baffled conquerors rarely dwell on their own disasters. It is not in the despatches of Napoleon that we shall find the true story of his abandonment of Syria, of the defeats of his forces in Spain, or of his retreat from Moscow.*

The great lesson of the whole story is the reward and the triumph of indomitable faith. Faith may still burn with a steady flame when the difficulties around it seem insuperable, when all refutation of the attacks of its enemies seems to be impossible, when Hope itself has sunk into white ashes in which scarcely a gleam of heat remains. Isaiah had nothing to rely upon; he had no argument wherewith to furnish Hezekiah beyond the bare and apparently unmeaning promise, "Jehovah is our Judge; Jehovah is our Lawgiver; Jehovah is our King. He will save us." It was a magnificent vindication of his inspired conviction, when all turned out—not indeed in minute details, but in every essential fact—exactly as he had prophesied from the first. Even in B. C. 740 he had declared that the sins of Judah deserved and would receive condign punishment, though a remnant should be saved. † That the retribution would come from some foreign enemy—Assyria or Egypt, or both—he felt sure. Jehovah would hiss for the fly in the uttermost canals of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria, and both should swarm in the crevices of the rocks, and over the pastures. ‡ Later on in 732, in the reign of Ahaz, he pointed to Assyria, § as the destined scourge, and he realised this still more clearly in 725 and 721, when Shalmaneser and Sargon were tearing Samaria to pieces. || Contrary, indeed, to his expectation, the Assyrians did not then destroy Jerusalem, or even formally besiege it. The revolt from Assyria, the reliance on Egypt, did not for a moment blind his judgment or alter his conviction; and in 701 it came true when Sennacherib was on the march for Palestine. ¶ Yet he never wavered in the apparently impossible conclusion, that, in spite of all, in spite even of his own darker prophecies (xxxii. 14), Jerusalem shall in some Divine manner be saved. ** The deliverance would be, as he declared from first to last, the work of Jehovah, not the work of man, †† and because of it Sennacherib would return to his own land and perish there. ††† The details might be dim and wavering; the result was certain. Isaiah was no thaumaturge, no peeping wizard, no muttering necromancer, no monthly prognosticator. §§ He was a prophet—that is, an inspired moral and spiritual teacher who was able to foresee and to foretell, not in their details, but in their broad outlines, the events yet future, because he was enabled to read them by the eye of faith ere they had yet occurred. His faith

convinced him that predictions founded on eternal principles have all the certainty of a law, and that God's dealings with men and nations in the future can be seen in the light of experience derived from the history of the past. Courage, zeal, unquenchable hope, indomitable resolution, spring from that perfect confidence in God which is the natural reward of innocence and faithfulness. Isaiah trusted in God, and he knew that they who put their trust in Him can never be confounded.

No event produced a deeper impression on the minds of the Jews, though that impression was soon afterwards, for a time, obliterated. Naturally, it elevated the authority of Isaiah into unquestioned pre-eminence during the reign of Hezekiah. It has left its echo, not only in his own triumphant peans, but also in the Forty-Sixth Psalm, which the Septuagint calls "An ode to the Assyrian," and perhaps also in the Seventy-Fifth and Seventy-Sixth Psalms. In the minds of all faithful Israelites it established for ever the conviction that God had chosen Judah for Himself, and Israel for His own possession; that God was in the midst of Zion, and she should not be confounded: "God shall help her, and that right early." And it contains a noble and inspiring lesson for all time. "It is not without reason," says Dean Stanley, "that in the Churches of Moscow the exultation over the fall of Sennacherib is still read on the anniversary of the retreat of the French from Russia, or that Arnold, in his lectures on Modern History, in the impressive passage in which he dwells on that great catastrophe, declared that for the memorable night of the frost in which twenty-thousand horses perished, and the strength of the French army was utterly broken, he knew of no language so well fitted to describe it as the words in which Isaiah described the advance and destruction of the hosts of Sennacherib." *

They had been brought face to face, the two kings—Sennacherib and Hezekiah. One was the impious boaster who relied on his own strength, and on the mighty host which dried up rivers with their trampling march—the worldling who thought to lord it over the affrighted globe; the other was the poor kinglet of the Chosen People, with his one city and his enfeebled people, and his dominion not so large as one of the smallest English counties. But "one with God is irresistible," "one with God is always in a majority." The poor, weak prince triumphs over the terrific conqueror, because he trusts in Him to whom world-desolating tyrants are but as the small dust of the balance, and who "taketh up the isles as a very little thing." †

As Assyria now vanishes almost entirely from the history of the Chosen People, we may here recall with delight one large and loving prophecy, to show that the Hebrews were sometimes uplifted by the power of inspiration above the narrowness of a bigoted and exclusive spirit. Desperately as Israel had suffered, both from Egypt and Assyria, Isaiah could still utter the glowing Messianic Prophecy which included the Gentiles in the privileges of the Golden Age to come. He foretold that—

"In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and Assyria, as a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria

* We may add that even the Chronicler drops a veil over Sennacherib's actual capture of fortresses in Judah ("he thought to win them for himself," 2 Chron. xxxii. 1: comp. 2 Kings xviii. 13; Isa. xxxvi. 1).

† Isa. vi. 11-13.

‡ Isa. v. 26-30.

§ Isa. vii. 18.

|| Isa. viii., xxviii. 1-15, x. 28-34.

¶ Isa. xiv. 29-32, xxix., xxx.

** Isa. i. 19, 20.

†† Isa. x. 33, xxix. 5-8, xxx. 20-26, 30-33.

††† Isa. xxxviii. 6. See for this paragraph an admirable chapter in Prof. Smith's "Isaiah," pp. 368-374.

§§ Isa. xlvii. 13.

* Stanley, "Lectures," ii. 531.

† Isa. xl. 15.

the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." *

"That strain I heard was of a higher mood!"

King Hezekiah can have no finer panegyric than that of the son of Sirach: "Even the kings of Judah failed, for they forsook the law of the Most High: all except David, and Ezekias, and Josias failed." †

CHAPTER XXIX.

MANASSEH.

B. C. 686-641.

2 KINGS XXI. 1-16.

"Shall the throne of wickedness have fellowship with Thee,
That frameth mischief by statute?
They gather themselves in troops against the soul of the righteous,
And condemn the innocent blood."—PSALM xciv. 20, 21.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience long He waiteth, with exactness grinds He all."

MANASSEH was born after Hezekiah's recovery from his terrible illness. He was but twelve years old when he began to reign. Of his mother Hephzibah we know nothing, nor of the Zechariah who was her father; but perhaps Isaiah in one passage (lxii. 4) may refer to her name, "My delight is in her." ‡ The son of Hezekiah and Hephzibah was the worst of all the kings of Judah, and had the longest reign.

The tender age of Manasseh when he came to the throne may account for the fact that the "forgetfulness" which his name implied§ was not a forgetting of other sorrows, but of all that was noble and righteous in the attempted reformation which had been the main religious work of his father's life. In Judah, as in England, a king was not supposed to be of age until he was eighteen.¶ For six years Manasseh must have been to a great extent under the influence of his regents and counsellors.

There always existed in Jerusalem, even in the best times, a heathenising party, and it was, unfortunately, composed of princes and aristocrats who could bring strong influence to bear upon the king.¶ They did not deny Jehovah, but they did not recognise Him as the sole or the supreme God of heaven and earth. To them He was the local deity of Israel and Judah. But there were other gods, the gods of the nations, and their aim always was to recognise the existence of these deities and to pay homage to their power. If their favour could not be purchased except by their immediate votaries, at least their anger might be averted. These politicians advocated a fatal and incongruous syncretism, or at least an unlimited tolerance for heathen idols, for which they could, unhappily, quote the precepts and example of the Wise King, Solomon. If

* Isa. xix. 24, 25.

† Eccles. xlix. 4.

‡ One legend says that Hephzibah was a daughter of Isaiah. Not so Josephus ("Antt.," X. iii. 1).

§ See Gen. xli. 51. His name may have referred to the new union between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Comp. 2 Chron. xxx. 6, xxxi. 1.

¶ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 1-3.

¶ See Zeph. i. 8. Comp. 2 Chron. xxiv. 17; Isa. xxviii. 34; Jer. v. 5, etc.

any one questioned their views as a dangerous idolatry, and an insult to

"Jehovah thundering out of Zion, throned
Between the cherubim,"

they had but to point from the walls of Jerusalem to the confronting summit of Olivet, where still remained the shrines which the son of David had erected three centuries earlier to Chemosh, and Milcom, and Ashtoreth, who, since his day, had always found, even in Jerusalem, some worshippers, open or secret, to acknowledge their divinity.

And these worldlings, in their tolerance for the intolerable, could always appeal to two powerful instincts of man's fallen nature—sensuality and fear—"lust hard by hate." There was something in the worship of Baal-Peor and of Moloch which appealed to the undying ape and tiger in the unregenerate human heart.

The true worship of Jehovah is exactly that form of religion which man finds it least easy to render to Him—the religion of pure morality. Services, rites, functions look like religious diligence, and readily secure a reverent outward devotion. Even self-maceration, fasts, and flagellation are a cheap way of escaping the "endless torments" which always loom so hugely in terrifying superstition.

Such superstitions are children of the fear and faithlessness which hath torment. They are the corruptions with which every form of false religion, and with which also a corrupt and perverted Christianity, are always tainted. And they demanded the easy expiation of physical ritual. But all the best and most spiritual teachers of Scripture—alike the Hebrew Prophets and the Christian Apostles—are at one with the Lord Christ in perpetual insistence on the truth that "mercy is better than sacrifice," and that true religion consists in that good mind and good life which are the sole proof of genuine sincerity.

If Jehovah would but be contented with gifts, men would gladly offer Him thousands of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of oil. But the prophets taught that He was above all mean bribes, and that such offerings never could be anything to One whose were all the beasts of the forests and the cattle upon a thousand hills. It was not easy, then, to bribe such a God, or to make Him a respecter of persons.

How easy, again, would it be, if He would even accept human sacrifices! A child was but a child. How easy to kill a child, and place it in the brazen arms which sloped over the fiery cistern! Moloch and Chemosh were supremely to be won by such holocausts; and surely Moloch and Chemosh must be lords of power! But here again the prophets of Jehovah stepped in, and said it was of no avail with the High, the Holy, the Merciful, to give even our firstborn for our transgressions, or the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul.

Asceticism, then—occasional fasting, severe self-deprivations—surely the gods would accept these? And they were as nothing compared to the burden of sin and the agony of conscience! Baal and Asherah could command agonised devotees, and could approve of them. By Jehovah and His prophets such bodily service is discouraged and forbidden.

Pleasure, then?—the consecration of the natural impulses, the devotion in religious cultus of the passions and appetites of the flesh—why should that be so abhorrent to Jehovah? Other

deities exulted in licentiousness. Was not the temple of Astarte full of her women-worshippers and of her eunuchs? Was there no fascination in the voluptuous allurements, the orgiastic dances, the stolen waters, the bread eaten in secret, when not only was the conscience lulled by the removal therefrom of all sense of guilt and degradation, but such orgies were even crowned with merit, as part of an acceptable worship? After all, there was "a fascination of corruption" in these idols of gold and jewels, of lust and blood!

How stern, how cold, how bare, by comparison, was the moral law which only said, "Thou shalt not," and emphasised its prohibition with the unalterable sanctions, "This do, and thou shalt live"; "Do it not, and thou shalt die"! What could they make of a religion which was so eloquently silent as to the meritoriousness of ritual?

And how chill and simple and dreary was that which—according to Micah—Jehovah had shown to be good, and which He required of every man,—which was nothing more than to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God!

And what right had the prophets—so asked these apostates—to lord it over God's heritage in this way? Solomon was the greatest king of Israel and Judah; and Solomon had never been so exclusive in his religionism, though he had built the Temple of the Lord; nor Rehoboam; nor the great Phœnician Queen Athaliah; nor the cultivated and æsthetic Ahaz; nor, in the kingdom of Israel, the lordly warrior Ahab; nor the splendid and long-lived victor Jeroboam II. Had not Manasseh plenty of examples of religious syncretism, to which he might appeal in the joy of his youthful age?

Not impossibly there lay in the background another reason why the young king might be inclined to listen to these evil counsellors. Micah may still have been living; but of Isaiah we hear no more. Probably he was dead. It is not recorded that he delivered any prophecy during the reign of Manasseh, nor is it certain that he outlived the former king. Tradition, indeed, in later days, asserted that he had confronted Manasseh, and been doomed to death; that he had taken refuge in a cedar tree, and in that cedar had been sawn asunder; but the tradition is wholly without a vestige of authority. One of Micah's sternest oracles was perhaps uttered in the days of Manasseh.* But Micah was only a provincial prophet of Moresheth-Gath. He never moved in the midst of princes as Isaiah had done, or possessed a tithe of the authority which had rested for so many years on the shoulders of his mighty contemporary.

Moreover—so the heathen party might suggest—had not Isaiah's prophecies been falsified by the result? Had he not distinctly promised and pledged his credit to two things? and had not both turned out to be unworthy of reliance?

i. Surely he had prophesied the utter downfall of the Assyrians. And it was true that after his disaster on the confines of Egypt, Sennacherib had fled in haste to Nineveh, and his occupations with rebels on his own frontiers had left Judah unmolested, and he had been murdered by his sons. But, on the other hand, in no sense of the word had Assyria fallen. On the contrary, she had never been more powerful. Not one of his predecessors had seemed more ir-

resistible than Esarhaddon. He was undisputed king of Babylon and of Nineveh. There would be no more embassies from Merodach-Baladan, or any revolted viceroy! And rumour would early begin to narrate that Esarhaddon had not forgotten the catastrophe at Pelusium, but intended to avenge it, and to teach Egypt the forgotten lessons of Raphia (B. C. 720) and Altaqu (B. C. 701).

ii. And as for Judah, where was the golden Messianic age which Isaiah had promised? Where did they see the Divine Prince whom he had foretold, or the lion lying down with the lamb, and the child laying his hand on the cockatrice's den?

All this, they would argue, had greatly shaken Isaiah's prophetic authority. Judah was a mere vassal—safe only in so far as she remained a vassal, and did not join Tyre or any other rebellious power, but abode safe under the shadow of Assyria's mighty wings.

Was it not, then, as well to look facts in the face? to accept things as they were? And—so they would argue, with false plausibility—since the triumph, after all, had remained with the gods of the nations, might it not be as well to dethrone Jehovah from His exclusive dominion, and at least to propitiate the potent and less-exacting deities, the charming *Di faciles* who smiled at lewd aberrations, and even flung over them the glamour of devotion?

With these bolder renegades would be the whole body of the priests of the *bamoth*. Those old sanctuaries had been repressed by Hezekiah without any compensation; for in those days life-interests were little, or not at all, regarded. Multitudes of priests and Levites must have been flung out of employment and reduced to poverty by the recent religious revolution. It is not likely that they bore without a murmur the obliteration of forms of worship sanctioned by immemorial custom, or that they made no efforts to procure the re-establishment of what the people loved.

Thus a vast weight of evil influence was brought to bear upon the boy-king; and it was also the more powerful because repeated indications exist that, while the king was nominally a despot, and was surrounded with external observance, the real control of affairs was, to a large extent, in the hands of an aristocracy of priests and princes, except when the king was a man of great personal force.

Manasseh went over to these retrogressionists heart and soul, and he contentedly remained a tributary of Assyria. Even when Esarhaddon's forces marched to the chastisement of Egypt, he felt secure in his allegiance to the dominant tyrant of Babylon and Nineveh, whose interest it would be not to disturb a faithful subject.

There followed a reaction, an absolute rebound from the old monotheistic strictness and righteousness. The nation emancipated itself from the moral law as with a shout of relief, and plunged into superstition and licentiousness. The reign of Manasseh resembled at once the recrudescence of Popery in the reign of Mary Tudor, with its rekindling of the fires of Smithfield, and the foul orgies of debauchery at the Restoration of 1660, when human nature, loving degraded license better than strenuous liberty, flung away the noble freedom of Puritanism for the loathly mysteries of Cotyto. The age of Manasseh resembled that of Charles II., in the

* Mic. vii. 1-20.

famous description of Lord Macaulay. "Then came days never to be recalled without a blush, the days of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. In every high place worship was paid to Belial and Moloch, and England propitiated these obscene and cruel idols with the blood of her best and bravest children." Sensuous intoxication is in all cases closely connected with fiendish cruelty, and the introducer of voluptuous idolatries naturally became the first persecutor of the true religion.

1. The first step of the king, and probably the one which the people welcomed most, was the restoration of the chapelries under the trees and on the hills, which, more strenuously than any of his predecessors, Hezekiah had at least attempted to put down. For this step Manasseh might have pleaded the sanction of ages to which the Book of Deuteronomy had either been wholly unknown, or during which its laws had become as utterly forgotten as though they had never existed. To many worshippers these old shrines had become extremely precious. They felt it to be either an actual impossibility, or at the best intolerably burdensome, to make their way by long dreary, and difficult journeys to Jerusalem, when they desired to pay the most ordinary rites of worship. They knew no reason, and had never known of any reason, why Jehovah should be worshipped in one Temple only. All their religious instincts led them the other way. They could point to the example of all the highly honoured saints who had worshipped God at Gilgal, Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, Beersheba, Kedesh, Gibeah, and many another shrine; and of all the saintly kings who had not dreamt of interfering with such free worship. Why should Jerusalem monopolise all sanctity? It might be a politic view for kings to maintain, and highly profitable for priests to establish; but none of their great prophets, not even the princely Isaiah, had said one syllable against the innocent high places of Jehovah. In those days there were no synagogues. The extinction of the high places doubtless seemed to many of the people an extinction of religion in daily life, and they were more than half disposed to agree with the Rabshakeh that Jehovah was offended by what they regarded as a burdensome, unwise, and sweeping innovation.—If it be necessary to answer arguments which might have seemed natural, against a custom which might have seemed innocent, it must suffice to say that it was the chief mission of Israel to keep alive among the nations of the world the knowledge of the One True God, and that, amid the constant temptations to accept the gods of the heathen as they were adored in groves and on high places, the faith of Israel could no longer be kept pure except by the Deuteronomic institution of one central and exclusive shrine.

2. But Manasseh did far worse than rehabilitate the worship at the high places which his father had discouraged. "He reared up altars for Baal,* and made an Asherah, as did Ahab,

* LXX., τῆ Βαάλ. The feminine, however, does not imply that Baal was here worshipped as a female deity, but is probably due to the fact that later Jews always avoided using the names of idols (from a misapprehension or too literal view of Exod. xxiii. 13), and therefore called Baal *Bosheth* ("shame"), which is feminine. Hence the names Mephibosheth, Jerubbesheth, Ish-

King of Israel." This was the first bad element of the new cosmopolitan eclecticism. It involved the acceptance of the Phœnician nature-worship with its manifold abominations. The people had grown familiar with it under Athaliah (2 Kings xi. 18), and under Ahaz (2 Chron. xxviii. 2); but Manasseh, as we infer from the account given of Josiah's reformation, had gone further than either. He had actually ventured to introduce the image of Baal into the Temple, and to set up the Asherah-pillar in front of it (2 Kings xxiii. 4). Worse even than this, he had erected in the very Temple (*id.* 7) houses devoted to the execrable *Qedeshim* (Vulg., *effeminati*), in which also the women wore brodered hangings to adorn the shrines of the idol image, as in the worship of the Assyrian *Mylitta*.* He, at the same time, displaced the altar and removed the Ark. To the latter circumstances is perhaps due the Rabbinic legend that Hezekiah hid the Ark till the coming of the Messiah.

3. To this Phœnician worship he added Sabatism, the worship of the stars, "all the host of heaven, whom he served." This was an entirely new phase of idolatry, unknown to the Hebrews till they came in contact with Assyria.† It came rapidly into vogue, and exercised over their imaginations the spell of a seductive novelty, as we see from the strong testimony of the prophet Jeremiah.‡ This is why it is so emphatically forbidden in the book of Deuteronomy.§ The king built altars to the stars of the Zodiac (*Maz-zaroth*), both in the outer court of the Temple, and in the court of the priests, and on these altars incense or victims were continually burned. He also introduced or encouraged the introduction into the Temple precincts of the horses and chariots dedicated to the sun.||

When we read of the actual invasion of the Temple-precincts in this as in preceding and subsequent reigns, we cannot but ask, Were these atrocities committed with the sanction or with the connivance of the priests? We are not told. Yet how can it have been otherwise? If the high priest Azariah could muster eighty priests to oppose King Uzziah, when he merely wished to burn incense in the Temple, as Solomon had done before him, and as Ahaz did after him—if Jehoiada could, according to the Chronicler, muster a perfect army of priests and Levites to dethrone Athaliah, and could so stir up the people that they rose *en masse* to tear down the temple of Baal, and slay Mattan, his high priest,—how was it possible for Manasseh to perpetrate these flagrant acts of idolatrous apostasy, if the priests were all ranged in opposition to his power? Was their authority suddenly paralysed? Did their influence with the people shrivel into nothing when Hezekiah had been carried to his

bosheth. In Suidas (*s. v.* Μανασσης) he is charged with having set up in the Temple "a four-faced image of Zeus."

* For מִלִּיתָא, in 2 Kings xxiii. 7, the LXX. read χερτίμ (2).

Grätz ("Gesch. d. Juden.," ii. 277) suggests מִלִּיתָא; "brodered robes." Ezek. xvi. 16. See Herod., i. 199; Strabo, xvi. 1058; Luc., "De Deâ. Syr.," § 6; Libanius, "Opp.," xi. 456, 557; "Ep. of Jeremy," 43; Döllinger, "Judenthum u. Heidenthum," i. 431. Rawlinson, "Phœnicia," 431.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3; 2 Kings xxiii. 5. Movers, "Rel. d. Phöniz.," i. 65; "In all the books of the Old Testament written before the Assyrian period no trace of star-worship is to be found." 2 Kings xvii. 16.

‡ Jer. vii. 18, viii. 2, xix. 13; Zeph. i. 5.

§ See Deut. iv. 10, xvii. 3.

|| 2 Kings xxiii. 11, 12.

tomb? Or did these priests follow the easy and profitable course which they seem to have followed throughout the whole history of the kings without an exception?—did they simply answer the kings according to their idols?

4. Another, and the most hideous, element of the new mixture of cults was the reintroduction of the ancient Canaanite worship of Moloch with its human sacrifices. Manasseh, like Ahaz, made his son—or, according to the Chronicler and the Septuagint, “his sons”—pass through the fire to this grim Ammonite idol in Tophet of the Valley of Hinnom, so as to leave no chance untried. And herein he was far more inexcusable than his grandfather; for Ahaz had at least been driven by desperate extremity to this last expedient, but Manasseh was *living*, if not in prosperity, at least in unbroken peace. Moreover, he not only did this himself, but did his utmost to make a popular institution of children sacrifice, so that many practised it in the dreadful valley and amid the rocks outside Jerusalem.*

5. Even this did not suffice him. To these Assyrian, Phœnician, and Canaanite elements of idolatry he added Babylonian novelties. He practised augury, and used enchantments, and he dealt with familiar spirits and wizards, as though without Egyptian necromancy and Mesopotamian shamanism his eclectic worship would be incomplete.†

6. Thus “he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger.” He placed a graven image of his Asherah inside the Temple, and utterly profaned the sacred house, and seduced his people “to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel.”

Whatever was the conduct of the priests, the prophets were not silent. They denounced Manasseh for having done worse than even the ancient Amorites, and declared that, in consequence of his crimes, God would bring upon Jerusalem such evil as would cause both the ears of him that heard it to tingle;‡ that He would stretch over Jerusalem for ruin the line and the level of Ahab;§ He would cast off even the remnant, and deliver them to their enemies; that He would wipe out Jerusalem “as a man wipeth a dish, wiping and turning it upside down.”||

The finest oracles of Micah (vi. 1-vii. 7) were probably uttered in the reign of Manasseh, and give the simplest and purest expression to the supremacy of morality as the one true end and test of religion. Micah is as indifferent as the Decalogue to all claims of rites, ceremonies, and outward worship. “Jehovah demands nothing for Himself; all that He asks is for man: this is the fundamental law of the theocracy.”

The apostasies of the king and the denunciation of the prophets thus came into fierce collision, and led naturally to persecution and bloodshed. Perhaps in Mic. vii. 1-7 we catch the echoes of the Reign of Terror. The king resorted to violence, using, no doubt, the tyrant's devilish plea of necessity. He made blood run like water

in the streets of Jerusalem from end to end,* and, in the exaggerated phrase of Josephus, was *daily* slaying the prophets.† It was during this persecution, according to Rabbinic tradition, that Isaiah received the martyr's crown.‡

And no miracles were wrought to save the martyrs. Elijah and Elisha had been surrounded with a blaze of miracles, but in Judah no prophet arose who could so wield the power of Heaven.

At this point the narrative of the historian about Manasseh ends. If he shared the current opinion of his day, which connected individual and national prosperity with well-doing, and regarded length of days as a sign of the favour of Heaven, while, on the other hand, misfortune and misery invariably resulted from the wrath of Jehovah, he could not have been otherwise than surprised, and perhaps even pained, to have to relate that Manasseh reigned fifty-five years. Not only was his reign longer than that of any other king of Israel or Judah; not only did he attain a greater age than any of them; but, further, no calamity seems to have marked his rule. A contented and protected vassal of Esarhaddon, secure from his attacks, and also, unmolested by the weakened and subjugated nations around him, he would seem, in the story of the Kings, to have enjoyed an enviable external lot, and to have presided over a people who were happy, in that, during his rule, they had no history. But whatever the writer may have felt, he tells us no more, and lets us see Manasseh sink peacefully into his grave “in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza,” and leave to his son Amon a peaceful realm and an undisputed crown. Such a career would undoubtedly perplex and confound all the preconceived opinions of Jewish orthodoxy. The prosperity of Manasseh would have presented as great a problem to them as the miseries of Job. They looked to temporal prosperity as the reward of righteousness, and to acute misery as the retribution of apostasy and sin. They had little or no conception of a future which should redress the balance of apparent earthly inequalities. Alike the sight of Manasseh's long reign and Josiah's undeserved death in battle would give a powerful shock to their fixed convictions.

Far different is the end of the story in the Book of Chronicles. The records of Esarhaddon tell us that in 680 he made an expedition into Palestine to restore the shaken influence of his father,§ and about 647 he mentions among his submissive tributaries the kings of Tyre, Edom, Moab, Gaza, Ekron, Askalon, Gebal, Ammon, Ashdod, and Manasseh, King of Judah (“Minasi-sar-Yahudi”), as well as ten princes of Cyprus. Whether the King of Judah rebelled later on, and intrigued with Tirhakah, we do not know; but in 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11 we read that Esarhaddon sent his generals to Jerusalem, took Manasseh

* 2 Kings xxi. 16; Heb., “from mouth to mouth”; LXX., *στόμα εἰς στόμα*; Vulg., *donec impleat Jerusalem usque ad os*. Comp. 2 Kings x. 21.

† “Antt.,” X. iii. 1; “He butchered alike all the just among the Hebrews.” To this reign of terror some refer Psalm xii. 1; Isa. lvii. 1-4.

‡ This (as I have said) cannot be regarded as certain. Isaiah began to prophesy in the year that King Uzziah died, sixty years before Manasseh. It is a Jewish Haggadah. See Gesen on Isa. i., p. 9, and the Apocryphal “Ascension of Isaiah.”

§ Esarhaddon reigned only eight years, till 668, and then resigned in favour of his son Assurbanipal. In his reign Psammetichus recovered Egypt, and put an end to the Dodecarchy. In the reign of his successor, Assurediliani, Assyria began to decline (647-625).

* See Jer. vii. 31, 32, xix. 2-6, xxxii. 35; Psalm cvi. 37, 38.

† Ewald infers from Isa. lvii. 5-9; Jer. ii. 5-13, that he actually *sought* for all foreign kinds of worship, in order to introduce them.

‡ 1 Sam. iii. 11; Jer. xix. 3.

§ Comp. Isa. xxxvii. 11; Tam. ii. 8.

|| 2 Kings xxi. 13. LXX., *ἀλάβατρος, αὐ πύθιον*. The Vulgate also takes it to mean the obliteration of writing on a tablet: “Delebo Jerusalem sicut deleri solent tabulæ; et ducam crebrius stylum super faciem ejus.”

sel by stratagem, drove rings through his lips, bound him in chains, and brought him to Babylon, where Esarhaddon was holding his court.* We find from the "Eponym Canon" that Tyre revolted from Assyria in the tenth year of Esarhaddon, and Manasseh may have been drawn away to join in the revolt; or he may have joined Shamash-shum-ukin, the Viceroy of Babylon, in his revolt against his brother Assurbanipal. As a rule, the lot of a conquered vassal at the Assyrian Court was horrible, and in his utter misery Manasseh repented, humbled himself, and prayed.† His prayer was heard. The despots of Nineveh were capricious alike in their insults and in their favours, and Esarhaddon not only pardoned Manasseh, but sent him back to Jerusalem,‡ thinking that he would be more useful to him there than in a Babylonian dungeon. After this reprieve he lived like a penitent and a patriot. Esarhaddon was preparing for his expedition against Tirhakah, and would not attack a king who was now bound to him by gratitude as well as fear. But the times were very troublous. Manasseh prepared for eventualities by building an outer wall on the west of the city of David, unto Gihon in the Valley, by surrounding Ophel with a high wall, and by garrisoning the fenced cities.§ All this was necessary and patriotic work, considering that Judah might be attacked by other enemies as well as the Assyrians. She was like a grain of corn amid the grinding mills of the nations. Media and Lydia were rising into strong kingdoms. Babylon was becoming daily more formidable. Dim rumours reached the East of movements among vast hosts of Cimmerian and Scythian barbarians. Jerusalem had no human strength for war. She could only rely upon her battlements, on the natural strength of her position, and on the protection of her God. Almost in the last year of Manasseh, the powerful Psammetichus I., king of a now united Egypt, made an assault on Ashdod; but he did not venture on the difficult task of besieging Jerusalem.

The religious reformation of Manasseh attested the sincerity of his amendment. He flung out the Asherah from the Temple, put away the strange gods, destroyed the altars, burnt sacrifices to God, and used all his power to restore the worship of Jehovah. He did not, however, destroy the high places. For this story the Chronicler refers to "the words of Chozai," ||

* Comp. Isa. xxxix. 6; Jos., "Antt.," X. iii. 2. The phrase "among the thorns" means "with rings" (comp. Isa. xxx. 28, xxxvii. 29; Ezek. xxxviii. 4; Amos iv. 2). Assurbanipal says similarly that he seized Necho, "bound him with bonds and iron chains, hands and feet," but afterwards allowed him to return to Egypt (Schrader, ii. 50).

† Late and worthless Haggadoth, echoed by still later writers (Suidas and Syncellus), say he was kept in a brazen cage, fed on bran bread dipped in vinegar, etc. See "Apost. Const.," ii. 22: "And the Lord hearkened to his voice, and there became about him a flame of fire, and all the irons about him melted." John Damasc., "Parall.," ii. 15, quotes from Julius Africanus, that while Manasseh was saying a psalm his iron bonds burst, and he escaped. See "Speaker's Commentary," on Apocrypha, ii. 363.

‡ Such pardon from a king of Assyria was rare, but not unparalleled. Pharaoh Necho I. was taken in chains to Nineveh, and afterward set free (Schrader, "K. A. T.," p. 371).

§ See 2 Chron. xxvii. 3. The "fish gate" was, perhaps, a weak point (Zeph. i. 10).

|| 2 Chron. xxxiii. 19. Heb., *dibhrî Chozai*; A. V., "the story of the Seers"; R. V., "in the history of Hozai"; LXX., *ἐν τῶν λόγων τῶν οὐρανοῦν*; Vulg., *in sermonibus Hozai*. The elements of doubt suggested by the name "Babylon," and by the liberation of Manasseh, have been

according to the present text, which some suppose to have meant "the story of the Seers." He also refers to a prayer of Manasseh, which cannot of course be the Greek forgery of the second or third century which goes by that name in the Apocrypha.* His repentance doubtless secured his own salvation. "Whoso saith 'Manasseh hath no part in the world to come,'" said Rabbi Johanan, "discourageth the penitent"; but the partial reformation was too late to save his land.

Is this a literal history, or an edifying Haggadah? The non-historical character of the story is maintained by De Wette, Graf, Nöldeke, and many others. Both views have been taken. This we can, at any rate, assert—that there seems to be nothing in the story which is inconsistent with probability. The Chronicler may have derived it from genuine documents or traditions, though it is difficult to account for the silence of the elder and more trustworthy historian. Nor is it only his silence for which we have to account; it is the continuance of his positive statements. It would be, in any case, a strange conception of history which, after narrating a man's crimes, omitted alike the retribution which befell him on account of them, the heartfelt penitence for the sake of which they were forgiven, and the seriously earnest endeavour to undo at least something of the evil which he had done. Not only does the historian make these omissions, but in no subsequent allusion to Manasseh does he so much as indicate that he is aware of his amendment.† He says that Amon "did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did." ‡ He speaks of the altars to the hosts of heaven which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the Temple as still standing in the reign of Josiah, though the Chronicler tells us that Manasseh had cast them all out of the city.§ He says that, notwithstanding all that Josiah did, "the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal," || and that on this account God cast off Jerusalem. Never, even by the most distant allusions, does he refer to Manasseh's captivity, his prayer, his penitence, or his counter-efforts. Had he been aware of these, his silence would have been neither generous nor just. Nay, he even leaves apparent facts at conflict with the Chronicler's story, for he makes Josiah do all that the Chronicler tells us that Manasseh himself had done in the removal of his worst abominations.

Even now we have not exhausted the historic difficulties which surround the repentance of Manasseh. During his reign Jeremiah received his call, and while still a young boy began his work. Neither he, nor Zephaniah, nor Habakkuk drop the slightest hint that the wicked, idolatrous king had ever turned over a new leaf. Jeremiah's silence is specially difficult to account for. He, too, records Jehovah's final and irrevocable decree, that He would give up Judah to death, to exile, and to famine, to the sword to slay, to the dogs to tear, to the fowls of the

removed by further knowledge. See Budge, "Hist. of Esarhaddon," p. 78; Schrader, "K. A. T.," 369 ff.

* Since the Council of Trent this prayer has been relegated to the end of the Vulgate with 3, 4, Esdras, Verse 8 (the supposed sinlessness of the Patriarchs) at once shows it to be a mere composition.

† 2 Kings xxiii. 12.

‡ 2 Kings xxi. 20.

§ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 15.

|| 2 Kings xxiii. 25.

heaven and the beasts of the earth to devour and to destroy.* And the cause of the pitiless doom pronounced by a Judge weary of repenting is "because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, King of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem."†

The judgment was not long delayed.

It was the vast movement of the Scythians in Media and Western Asia, and the rumours of it, which gave to Manasseh and Amon such respite as they had; and even this respite was full of misery and fear.‡

AMON. §

B. C. 641-639.

2 KINGS xxi. 19-26.

THE brief reign of Amon is only a sort of unimportant and miserable annex to that of his father. As he was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, he must have witnessed the repentance and reforming zeal of his father, if, in spite of all difficulties, we assume that narrative to be historical. In that case, however, the young man was wholly untouched by the latter phase of Manasseh's life, and flung himself headlong into the career of the king's earlier idolatries. "He walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them"—which was the more extraordinary if Manasseh's last acts had been to dethrone and destroy these strange gods. He even "multiplied trespass," so that in his son's reign we find every form of abomination as triumphant as though Manasseh had never attempted to check the tide of evil. We know nothing more of Amon. Apparently he only reigned two years.¶ He is the only Jewish king who bears the name of a foreign—an Egyptian—deity.

For pictures of the state of things in this reign we may look to the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah, and they are forced to use the darkest colours.

* Jer. xv. 1-9.

† The later Jews certainly took no account of his repentance. His name was execrated (see the substitution of Manasseh for Moses in Judg. xviii. 30), and he was denied all part in the world to come. The Apocryphal "Prayer of Manasses" has no authority, though it is interesting (Butler, "Analogy," pt. ii., ch. v.).

‡ In estimating the Chronicler's story, we cannot wholly forget the fact that a number of Haggadic legends clustered thickly round the name of Manasseh in the literature of the later Jews. He is charged with incest, with the murder of Isaiah, the distortion of Scripture, etc., and is represented as having got to heaven, not by real repentance, but by challenging God on His superiority to idols. The Targum, after 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, adds, "And the Chaldees made a copper mule, and pierced it all over with little holes, and put him therein. And when he was in straits, he cried in vain to all his idols. Then he prayed to Jehovah and humbled himself; and the angels shut every window and lattice of heaven, but the angels shut might not enter. But forthwith the pity of the Lord of the world rolled forth, and He made an aperture in heaven, and the mule burst asunder, and the Spirit breathed on him, and he forsook all his idols." "No books," says Dr. Neubauer, "are more subject to additions and various adaptations than popular histories." See Mr. Ball's commentary ("Speaker's Commentary," ii. 309, and "Sanhedrin," f. 99, 2; 101, 1; 103, 2).

§ The name Amon is unusual. Some identify it with the name of the Egyptian sun-god (Nah. iii. 8). If so, we see yet another element of Manasseh's syncretism, and (as some fancy) an attempt to open relations with Psammetichus of Egypt. But perhaps the name may be Hebrew for "Architect" (1 Kings xxii. 26; Neh. vii. 50).

¶ 2 Kings xxi. 19. The LXX. reads "twelve years," but not so Josephus ("Antt.," X. iv. 1), or 2 Chron. xxxiii. 21.

This is Zephaniah's picture:—

"Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city!
She obeyed not the voice; she received not instruction;
She trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God.
Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions;
Her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones on the morrow.
Her prophets are light and treacherous persons:
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law."*

He tells us that Baal and his black-robed *chemarim*† are still prevalent—that men worshipped on their housetops the host of heaven, and swore by "Moloch their king." Therefore would God search Jerusalem with candles, and would visit the men who had sunk, like thick wine on the lees, and who said in their infidel hearts, "Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil." He is an Epicurean God, a cypher, a *fainéant*. "Men make all kinds of fine calculations," says Luther, "but the Lord God says to them, 'For whom, then, do you hold Me? For a cypher? Do I sit here in vain, and to no purpose? You shall know that I will turn their accounts about finely, and make them all false reckonings.'"‡

Not less dark is the view of Jeremiah.† Like Diogenes in Athens, Jeremiah in vain searches Jerusalem for a faithful man. Among the poor he finds brutish obstinacy, among the rich insolent defiance. They are like fed horses in the morning—lecherous and unruly. They are slanderers, adulterers, corrupters, murderers. They worship Baal and strange gods. "They set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit. They are waxen fat, they shine; yea, they overpass in deeds of wickedness."§ "An astonishment and horror is done in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"¶

"From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have treated also the hurt of My people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall."¶¶

The wretched reign ended wretchedly. Amon met the fate of Amaziah and of Joash. He was murdered by conspirators—by some of his own courtiers—in his own palace. He was not the victim of any general rebellion. The people of the land were apparently content with the existent idolatry, which left them free for lives of lust and luxury, of greed and gain. They resented the disorder introduced by an intrigue of eunuchs or court officials. They rose and slew the whole band of conspirators. Amon was buried with his father in the new burial-place

* Zeph. iii. 1-11. Comp. i. 4.

† *Chemarim*, 2 Kings xxiii. 5; Hos. x. 5. The root in Syriac means "to be sad," but Kimchi derives it from a root "to be black." The Vulgate renders it *aditui* and *aruspices*.

‡ We are told in the titles of their books that both these prophets prophesied in the days of Josiah; but such pictures can only apply to the earliest years of his reign.

§ See Jer. v., vi., vii., *passim*.

¶ Jer. v. 30, 31.

¶¶ Jer. vi. 13-15.

of the Kings in the garden of Uzza, and the people placed his son Josiah—a child of eight years old—upon the throne.

CHAPTER XXX.

JOSIAH.

B. C. 639-608.*

2 KINGS xxii., xxiii.

“Τὴν δὲ φύσιν αὐτὸς ἀριστος ὑπῆρχε καὶ πρὸς ἀρετὴν εὖ γεγευῶς.”
Jos., “Antt.,” X. iv. 1.

“In outline dim and vast
Their fearful shadows cast
The giant forms of Empires, on their way
To ruin: one by one
They tower, and they are gone.”

—KEBLE.

IF we are to understand the reign of Josiah as a whole, we must preface it by some allusion to the great epoch-marking circumstances of his age, which explain the references of contemporary prophets, and which, in great measure, determined the foreign policy of the pious king.

The three memorable events of this brief epoch were, (I.) the movement of the Scythians, (II.) the rise of Babylon, and (III.) the humiliation of Nineveh, followed by her total destruction.

I. Many of Jeremiah's earlier prophecies belong to this period, and we seen that both he and Zephaniah—who was probably a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah himself,† and prophesied in this reign ‡—are greatly occupied with a danger from the North which seems to threaten universal ruin.

So overwhelming is the peril that Zephaniah begins with the tremendously sweeping menace, “*I will utterly consume all things off the earth, saith the Lord.*”

Then the curse rushes down specifically upon Judah and Jerusalem; and the state of things which the prophet describes shows that, if Josiah began himself to seek the Lord at eight years old, he did not take—and was, perhaps, unable to take—any active steps towards the extinction of idolatry till he was old enough to hold in his own hand the reins of power.

For Zephaniah denounces the wrath of Jehovah on three classes of idolaters—viz., (1) the remnant of Baal-worshippers with their *chemarim*, or unlawful priests, and the syncretising priests (*kohanim*) of Jehovah, who combine His worship with that of the stars, to whom they burn incense upon the housetops; (2) the waverers, who swear at once by Jehovah and by Malcham, their king; and (3) the open despisers and apostates. For all these the day of Jehovah is near; He has prepared them for sacrifice, and the sacrificers are at hand.§ Gaza, Ashdod, Askelon, Ekron, the Cherethites, Canaan, Philistia, are all threatened

* Kamphausen (“Die Chronologie der hebräischen Könige”) makes Josiah succeed to the throne in 638.

† Otherwise his genealogy would not be mentioned for four generations (Hitzig).

‡ Zeph. i. 1. Jeremiah also was highly connected. He was a priest, and his father Hilkiah may be the high priest who found the book; “for his uncle Shallum, father of his cousin Hanameel, was the husband of Hulda the prophetess” (2 Kings xxii. 14; Jer. xxxii. 7). The fact that Jeremiah's property was at Anathoth, where lived the descendants of Ithamar (1 Kings ii. 26), whereas Hilkiah was of the family of Eleazar (1 Chron. vi. 4-13), does not seem fatal to the view that his father was the high priest.

§ Zeph. ii. 4-7.

by the same impending ruin, as well as Moab and Ammon, who shall lose their lands. Ethiopia, too, and Assyria shall be smitten, and Nineveh shall become so complete a desolation that “pelicans and hedgehogs shall bivouac upon her chapters, the owl shall hoot in her windows, and the crow croak upon the threshold, ‘Crushed! desolated!’ and all that pass by shall hiss and wag their hands.”*

The pictures of the state of society drawn by Jeremiah do not, as we have seen, differ from those drawn by his contemporary.† Jeremiah, too, writing perhaps before Josiah's reformation, complains that God's people have forsaken the fountains of living water, to hew out for themselves broken cisterns. He complains of empty formalism in the place of true righteousness, and even goes so far as to say that backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah (iii. 1-11). He, too, prophesies speedy and terrific chastisement. Let Judah gather herself into fenced cities, and save her goods by flight, for God is bringing evil from the North, and a great destruction.‡

“The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the nations is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant. Behold, he cometh as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind.” Besiegers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. The heart of the kings shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder.

“For thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end”—and, “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved!”§

“I will bring a nation upon you from far, O House of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language”—unlike that of the Assyrians—“thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. They shall batter thy fenced cities, in which thou trustest with weapons of war.”||

“O ye children of Benjamin, save your goods by flight: for evil is imminent from the North, and a great destruction. Behold, a people cometh from the North Country, and a great nation shall be raised from the farthest part of the earth. They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion. We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble.”¶

And the judgment is close at hand. The early blossoming bud of the almond tree is the type of its imminence. The seething caldron, with its front turned from the North, typifies an invasion which shall soon boil over and floor the land.**

* Zeph. ii. 12-15.

† Jer. ii. 1-35. Considering the very great part played by Jeremiah for nearly half a century of the last history of Judah, the non-mention of his name in the Book of Kings is a circumstance far from easy to explain.

‡ Jer. iv. 6, A. V., “retire, stay not.” Comp. Isa. x. 24-31.

§ Jer. iv. 7-27.

|| Jer. v. 15-17.

¶ Jer. vi. 1, 22, 23, 24.

** The almond tree (*shāqād*) “seems to be awake (*shāqād*), whatsoever trees are still sleeping in the torpor

What was the fierce people thus vaguely indicated as coming from the North? The foes indicated in these passages are not the long-familiar Assyrians, but the Scythians and Cimmerians.*

As yet the Hebrews had only heard of them by dim and distant rumour. When Ezekiel prophesied they were still an object of terror, but he foresees their defeat and annihilation. They should be gathered into the confines of Israel, but only for their destruction.† The prophet is bidden to set his face towards Gog, of the land of Magog, the Prince of Rosh,‡ Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him that God would turn him about, and put hooks in his jaws, and drive forth all his army of bucklered and sworded horsemen, the hordes of the uttermost part of the North. They should come like a storm upon the mountains of Israel, and spoil the defenceless villages; but they should come simply for their own destruction by blood and by pestilence. God should smite their bows out of their left hands, and their arrows out of the right, and the ravenous birds of Israel should feed upon the carcases of their warriors. There should be endless bonfires of all the instruments of war, and the place of their burial should be called "the valley of the multitude of Gog."

Much of this is doubtless an ideal picture, and Ezekiel may be thinking of the fall of the Chaldeans. But the terms he uses remind us of the dim Northern nomads, and the names Rosh and Meshech in juxtaposition involuntarily recall those of Russia and Moscow.§

Our chief historical authority respecting this influx of Northern barbarians is Herodotus.¶ He tells us that the nomad Scythians, apparently a Turanian race, who may have been subjected to the pressure of population, swarmed over the Caucasus, dispossessed the Cimmerians (Gomer), and settled themselves in Saccasene, a province of Northern Armenia. From this province the Scythians gained the name of the Saqui. The name of Gog seems to be taken from Gugu, a Scythian prince, who was taken captive by Assurbanipal from the land of the Saqui.¶ Magog is perhaps Mat-gugu, "land of Gog." These

of winter" (Tristram, "Nat. Hist. of the Bible," 332; Jer. i. 11-14).

* The name Kimmerii (on the Assyrian inscriptions Gimirrai) is connected with Gomer. The Persians call them Sakai or Scyths. The nomad Scyths had driven the Kimmerii from the Dniester while Psammetichus was King of Egypt. For allusions to this see Jer. vi. 22 seq., viii. 16, ix. 10. The first notice of them is in an inscription of Esarhaddon. B. C. 677, who says that he defeated "Tiushpa, the Gimirrai, a roving warrior, whose own country was remote." Zephaniah and Jeremiah were certainly thinking of the Scythians (Eichhorn, Hitzig, Ewald; and more recently Kuenen, "Onderzoek," ii. 123; Wellhausen, "Skizzen," 150). In B. C. 626 they could not have consciously had the Chaldeans in view, though, twenty-three years later, Jeremiah may have had.

† See Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix.

‡ Ezek. xxxviii. 2. So Gesenius, Hävernick, etc., and K. V.

§ The form in the Vulgate and the Alexandrian MS. of the LXX. is Mosech; in the Assyrian inscription, Muski. As far back as 1120 Tiglath-Pileser I. had overrun Tubal (the Tublai, Tabareni) and Moschi, between the Black Sea and the Taurus. They were neither Aryans nor Semites. In Gen. x. 2; 1 Chron. i. 5, Gog, Magog, Meshech, and Gomer are sons of Japheth. They are referred to in Rev. xx. 8.

¶ Herod., i. 74, 103-106, iv. 1-22, vii. 64; Pliny, "H. N.," v. 16; Jos., "Antt.," I. vi. 1; Syncellus, "Chronogl.," i. 405.

¶ Sayce, "Ethnology of the Bible"; "Records of the Past," ix. 40; Schrader, "K. A. T.," 159. Some identify Gog with Gyges, King of Lydia, who was killed in battle against the Scythians, but whose name stood for a geographical symbol of Asia Minor, sometimes called Lud. It is said that in 665 Gyges (Gugu) sent two Scythian chiefs as a present to Nineveh.

rude, coarse warriors, like the hordes of Attila, or Zenghis Khan, or Tamerlane—who were descended from them—magnised the imagination of civilised people, as the Huns did in the fourth century.* They overthrew the kingdom of Urartis (Armenia), and drove the all-but exterminated remnant of the Moschi and Tabali to the mountain fortresses by the Black Sea, turning them, as it were, into a nation of ghosts in Sheol.† Then they burst like a thunder-cloud on Mesopotamia, desolating the villages with their arrow-flights, but too unskilled to take fenced towns. They swept down the Shephelah of Palestine, and plundered the rich temple of Aphrodite (Astarte Ourania) at Askelon, thereby incurring the curse of the goddess in the form of a strange disease. But on the borders of Egypt they were diplomatically met by Psammetichus (d. 611) with gifts and prayers. Judah seems only to have suffered indirectly from this invasion. The main army of Scyths poured down the maritime plain, and there was no sufficient booty to tempt any but their straggling bands to the barren hills of Judah.‡ It was the report of this over-flooding from the North which probably evoked the alarming prophecies of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, though they found their clearer fulfilment in the invasion of the Chaldees.

¶ This rush of wild nomads averted for a time the fate of Nineveh.

The Medes, an Aryan people, had settled south of the Caspian, B. C. 790; and in the same century one of these tribes—the Persians—had settled southeast of Elam the northern coast of the Persian Gulf. Cyaxares founded the Median Empire, and attacked Nineveh. The Scythian invasion forced him to abandon the siege, and the Scythians burnt the Assyrian palace and plundered the ruins. But Cyaxares succeeded in intoxicating and murdering the Scythian leaders at a banquet, and bribed the army to withdraw. Then Cyaxares, with the aid of the Babylonians under Nabopolassar their rebel viceroy, besieged and took Nineveh—probably about B. C. 608—while its last king and his captains were revelling at a banquet.§

The fall of Nineveh was not astonishing. The empire had long been "slowly bleeding to death" in consequence of its incessant wars. The city deemed itself impregnable behind walls a hundred feet high, on which three chariots could drive abreast, and mantled with twelve hundred towers; but she perished, and all the nations—whom she had known how to crush, but had with "her stupid and cruel tyranny" never known how to govern—shouted for joy. That joy finds its triumphant expression in more than one of the prophets, but specially in the vivid pæan of Nahum. His date is approximately fixed at about B. C. 660, by his reference to the atrocities inflicted by Assurbanipal on the Egyptian city of No-Amon. "Art thou [Nin-

* Hence, in 2 Macc. iv. 47, 3 Macc. vii. 5, Scythian is used with the modern connotation of "Barbarian."

† Ezek. xxxii. 26, 27; Cheyne, "Jeremiah" ("Men of the Bible"), p. 31.

‡ *Expositor*, 2d series, iv. 203; Cheyne, "Jeremiah," 31. Hitzig and Ewald (erroneously?) refer Psalms lv., lix., to these events, and it seems also to be an error to suppose that the later name of Bethshan—Scythopolis—has anything to do with this incursion. Like the names of Pella, Philadelphia, etc., it is later than the age of Alexander the Great. See 2 Macc. xii. 30; Jos., "B. J.," II. xviii., "Vit.," vi. Perhaps Scythopolis is a corruption of Sikytropolis, the city of Sikkuth; or Scythian may merely stand for "Barbarian," as in 3 Macc. vii. 5; Col. iii. 11 (Cheyne, *l.c.*).

§ Nah. i. 10, ii. 5, iii. 12; Diod. Sic., ii. 26.

evch] better," he asks, "than No-Amon, that was situate among the canals, that had the water round about her, whose rampart was the Nile, and her wall was the waters? Yet she went into captivity! Her young children were dashed to pieces at the head of all the streets: they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains. Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt faint away, thou shalt seek a stronghold because of the enemy."*

All the details of her fall are dim; but Nineveh was, in the language of the prophets, swept with the besom of destruction. Her ruins became stones of emptiness, and the line of confusion was stretched over her. Nahum ends with the cry,—

"There is no assuaging of thy hurt; thy wound is grievous:
All that hear the bruit of this, clap the hands over thee:
For upon whom hath thy wickedness not passed continually?"

In truth, Assyria, the ferocious foe of Israel, of Judah, and all the world, vanished suddenly, like a dream when one awaketh;† and those who passed over its ruins, like Xenophon and his Ten Thousand in B. C. 401, knew not what they were.‡ Her very name had become forgotten in two centuries, "*Etiam periere ruinae!*" The burnt relics and cracked tablets of her former splendour began to be revealed to the world once more in 1842, and it is only during the last quarter of a century that the fragments of her history have been laboriously deciphered.

III. Such were the events witnessed in their germs or in their completion by the contemporaries of Josiah and the prophets who adorned his reign. It was during this period, also, that the power to whom the ultimate ruin and captivity of Jerusalem was due sprang into formidable proportions. The ultimate scourge of God to the guilty people and the guilty city was not to be the Assyrian, nor the Scythian, nor the Egyptian, nor any of the old Canaanite or Semitic foes of Israel, nor the Phœnician, nor the Philistine. With all these she had long contended, and held her own. It was before the Chaldee that she was doomed to fall, and the Chaldee was a new phenomenon of which the existence had hardly been recognised as a danger till the warning prophecy of Isaiah to Hezekiah after the embassy of the rebel viceroy Merodach-Baladan.§

It is to Habakkuk, in prophecies written very shortly after the death of Josiah, that we must look for the impression of terror caused by the Chaldees.

Nabopolassar,|| sent by the successor of Assurbanipal to quell a Chaldean revolt, seized the vicereignty of Babylon, and joined Cyaxares in the overthrow of Nineveh. From that time Babylon became greater and more terrible than Nineveh, whose power it inherited. Habakkuk (ii. 1-19) paints the rapacity, the selfishness, the inflated ambition, the cruelty, the drunkenness, the idolatry of the Chaldeans. He calls them (i. 5-11) a rough and restless nation, frightful and terrible, whose horsemen were swifter than leopards, fiercer than evening wolves, flying to gorge on prey like the vultures, mocking at kings

and princes, and flinging dust over strongholds. Nor has he the least comfort in looking on their resistless fury, except the deeply significant oracle—an oracle which contains the secret of their ultimate doom—

"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright in him:
But the righteous man shall live by his fidelity."

The prophet places absolute reliance on the general principle that "pride and violence dig their own grave."*

CHAPTER XXXI.

JOSIAH'S REFORMATION.

2 KINGS xxii. 8-20, xxiii. 1-25.

"And the works of Josias were upright before his Lord with a heart full of godliness."—1 ESDRAS i. 23.

"From Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."—ISA. ii. 3.

It is from the Prophets—Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Ezekiel—that we catch almost our sole glimpses of the vast world-movements of the nations which must have loomed large on the minds of the King of Judah and of all earnest politicians in that day. As they did not directly affect the destiny of Judah till the end of the reign, they do not interest the historian of the Kings or the latter Chronicler. The things which rendered the reign memorable in their eyes were chiefly two—the finding of "the Book of the Law" in the House of the Lord, and the consequent religious reformation.

It is with the first of these two events that we must deal in the present chapter.

Josiah began to reign as a child of eight, and it may be that the emphatic and honourable mention of his mother—Jedidah ("Beloved"), daughter of Adaiah of Boscath—may be due to the fact that he owed to her training that early proclivity to faithfulness which earns for him the unique testimony, that he not only "walked in the way of David his father," but that "he turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."

At first, of course, as a mere child, he could take no very active steps. The Chronicler says that at sixteen he began to show his devotion, and at twenty set himself the task of purging Judah and Jerusalem from the taint of idols. Things were in a bad condition, as we see from the bitter complaints and denunciations of Zephaniah and Jeremiah. Idolatry of the worst description was still openly tolerated. But Josiah was supported by a band of able and faithful advisers. Shaphan, grandfather of the unhappy Gedaliah—afterwards the Chaldean viceroy over conquered Judah—was scribe; Hilkiah, the son of Shallum and the ancestor of Ezra, was the high priest.‡ By them the king was assisted, first in the obliteration of the prevalent emblems of idolatry, and then in the purification of the Temple. Two centuries and a half had elapsed since it had been last repaired by Joash, and it must have needed serious restoration during long

* Nah. iii. 8-11.

† Strabo, xvi. 1, §: ἡφανισθη παραχρῆμα.

‡ Xen., "Anab.," III. iv. 7.

§ Chaldees, Kardim, Kasdim, Kurds.

|| Nabu-pal-ussur, "Nebo protect the son," B. C. 625-7.

Jos., "Antt.," X. xi. 1: comp. "Ap.," i. 19.

* Newman, "Hebrew Monarchy," p. 315.

† 2 Kings xxiii. 4. We have here the first mention of "the second priest" (if, with Grätz, we read *Colev mishnah*, as in 2 Kings xxv. 18; Jer. lii. 24). In later days he was called "the Sagan." At this time he probably acted as "Captain of the Temple" (Grätz, ii. 310).

years of neglect in the reigns of Ahaz, of Manasseh, and of Amon. Subscriptions were collected from the people by "the keepers of the door," and were freely entrusted to the workmen and their overseers, who employed them faithfully in the objects for which they were designed.*

The repairs led to an event of momentous influence on all future time. During the cleansing of the Temple Hilkiah came to Shaphan, and said, "I have found the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord." Perhaps the copy of the book had been placed by some priest's hand beside the Ark, and had been discovered during the removal of the rubbish which neglect had there accumulated. Shaphan read the book; and when next he had to see the king to tell him about the progress of the repairs, he said to him, "Hilkiah the priest hath handed me a book." Josiah bade him read some of it aloud. It is evident that he read the curses contained in Deut. xxviii. They horrified the pious monarch; for all that they contained, and the laws to which they were appended, were wholly new to him. He might well be amazed that a code so solemn, and purporting to have emanated from Moses, should, in spite of maledictions so fearful, have become an absolute dead letter. In deep alarm he sent the priest, the scribe Shaphan, with his son Ahikam, and Abdon, the son of Micaiah, and Asahiah, a court official, to inquire of Jehovah, whose great anger could not but be kindled against king and people by the obliteration and nullity of His law. They consulted Huldah, the only prophetess mentioned in the Old Testament, except Miriam and Deborah.† She was the wife of Shallum and keeper of the priests' robes,‡ and she lived in the suburbs of the city.§ Her answer was an uncompromising menace. All the curses which the king had heard against the place and people should be pitilessly fulfilled.—only, as the king had showed a tender heart, and had humbled himself before Jehovah, he should go to his own grave in peace.||

Thereupon the king summoned to the Temple a great assembly of priests, prophets, and all the people, and, standing by the pillar (or "on the platform")¶ in the entrance of the inner court, read "all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the House of the Lord" in their ears, and joined with them in "the covenant" to obey the hitherto unknown or totally forgotten laws which were inculcated in the newly discovered volume.

Immediate action followed. The priests were ordered to bring out of the Temple all the vessels made for Baal, for the Asherah, and for the host of heaven; they were burnt outside Jerusalem in the Valley of Kedron, and their ashes

taken to Bethel.* The *chemarim* of the high places were suppressed, as well as all other idolatrous priests who burnt incense to the signs of the Zodiac, the Hyades, and the heavenly bodies.† The Asherah itself was taken out of the Temple, and it is truly amazing that we should find it there so late in Josiah's reign. He burnt it in the Kedron, stamped it to powder, and scattered the powder "on the graves of the common people." The Chronicler says "on the graves of them that had sacrificed" to the idols‡;—but this is an inexplicable statement, since it is (as Professor Lumby says) very improbable that idolaters had a separate burial-place. It is equally shocking, and to us incomprehensible, to read that the houses of the degraded *Qedeshim* still stood, not "by the Temple" (A. V.), but "in the Temple,"§ and that in these houses, or chambers, the women still "wove embroideries|| for the Asherah." What was Hilkiah doing? If the priests of the *high places* were so guilty from Geba to Beersheba, did no responsibility attach to the high priest and other priests of the Temple who permitted the existence of these enormities, not only in the *bamoth* at the city gates,¶ but in the very courts of the mountain of the Lord's House? If the priests of the immemorial shrines were degraded from their prerogatives, and were not allowed to come up to the altar of Jehovah in Jerusalem, by what law of justice were they to be regarded as so immeasurably inferior to the highest members of their own order, who, for years together, had permitted the worship of a wooden phallic emblem, and the existence of the worst heathen abominations within the very Temple of the Lord? Every honest reader must admit that there are inexplicable difficulties and uncertainties in these ancient histories, and that our knowledge of the exact circumstances—especially in all that regards the priests and Levites, who, in the Chronicles, are their own ecclesiastical historians—must remain extremely imperfect.

And what can be meant by the clause that the degraded priests of the old high places, though they were not allowed to serve at the great altar, yet "did eat of the *unleavened bread* among their brethren"? Unleavened bread was only eaten at the Passover; and when there *was* a Passover, was eaten by all alike. Perhaps the reading for "unleavened bread" should be (priestly) "portions"—a reading found by Geiger in an old manuscript.

Continuing his work, Josiah defiled Tophet; **

* 2 Kings xxiii. 4; for "in the fields of Kedron" one version has ἐν τῷ ἐμπυρισμῷ τοῦ χειμάρου, "in the burning-place of the wady,"—perhaps reading *bemisrephoth* for *bishedamoth*, and alluding to lime-kilns 'n the wady. It is surprising that they should carry the ashes "to

Bethel." Thenius suggests the reading בֵּית־אֵל, "place of execution") lit. "house of nothingness").

† Hos. x. 5; Zeph. i. 4 (the only other places where the word occurs). The *delevit* of the Vulgate (2 Kings xxiii. 5) only means that he put them down, and the *κατέκαυσε* of the LXX. should be *κατέπαισε*.

‡ Comp. Jer. ii. 23, where the LXX. has ἐν τῷ πολυανδρίῳ. In 2 Chron. xxxiv. 4, perhaps the true reading is, not *Ben-ha-âm*, but *Bent-hinnom*—which would mean that he scattered the dust in the gehenna of Jerusalem. Comp. 1 Kings xv. 13.

§ For these Galli, see Seneca, "De Vit. Beat.," 27; Pliny, "H. N.," xi. 49.

|| Heb., *bathim*, lit. "tents" or "houses"; Vulg., *quasi domunculas*.

¶ In 2 Kings xxiii. 8, Geiger would read "the high places of the *satyrs*" (שַׁטְרִימִים).

** Usually derived (as by Selden and Milton) from *toph*

* Comp. 2 Kings xii. 15, where we find the same remark. † Exod. xv. 20; Judg. iv. 4; Isa. viii. 3. "The prophetess" seems to mean "prophet's wife." Noadiah was a false prophetess.

‡ Exod. xxviii. 2, etc. § 2 Kings xxii. 14. Heb., *mishneh*, lit. "second"; A. V., "the college"; R. V., "the second quarter." Perhaps it means "the lower city" (Neh. xi. 9; Zeph. i. 10). It puzzled the LXX.: ἐν τῇ μεσση. Vulg., *in secunda*. Jerome says, "*Haud dubium quin urbis partem significet quæ interiori muro vallabatur.*" Comp. Zeph. i. 10, "an howling from the second" (i. e., quarter of the city); Neh. xi. 9, where, for "second over the city" (A. and R. V.), read "over the second part of the city."

|| Another reading is "in Jerusalem," which gets over an historic difficulty.

¶ Comp. 2 Kings xi. 14; LXX., ἐπὶ τοῦ στόλου; Heb., *al-ha-ammud*; Vulg., *super gradum*.

took away the horses given by the kings of Judah to the sun, which were stabled beside the chamber of the eunuch Nathan-Melech in the precincts; * and burnt the sun-chariots in the fire. He removed the altars to the stars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz,† and ground them to powder. He also destroyed those of his grandfather Manasseh in the two Temple courts—which we supposed to have been removed by Manasseh in his repentance—and threw the dust into the Kedron. He defiled the idolatrous shrines reared by Solomon to the deities of Sidon, Ammon and Moloch, broke the pillars, cut down the Asherim, and filled their places with dead men's bones.‡ Travelling northwards, he burnt, destroyed, and stamped to powder the altars and the Asherim at Bethel, and burnt upon the altars the remains found in the sepulchres,§ only leaving undisturbed the remains of the old prophet from Judah, and of the prophet of Samaria.¶ He then destroyed the other Samaritan shrines, exercising an undisputed authority over the Northern Kingdom. The mixed inhabitants did not interfere with his proceedings; and in the declining fortunes of Nineveh, the Assyrian viceroy—if there was one—did not dispute his authority. Lastly, in accordance with the fierce injunction of Deut. xvii. 2-5, "he slew all the priests of the high places" on their own altars, burnt men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

It is very difficult, with the milder notions which we have learnt from the spirit of the gospel, to look with approval on the recrudescence of the Elijah-spirit displayed by the last proceeding. But many centuries were to elapse, even under the Gospel Dispensation, before men learnt the sacred principle of the early Christians that "violence is hateful to God." Josiah must be judged by a more lenient judgment, and he was obeying a mandate found in the new Book of the Law. But the question arises whether the fierce commands of Deuteronomy were ever intended to be taken *au pied de la lettre*. May not Deut. xiii. 6-18 have been intended to express in a concrete but ideal form the spirit of execration to be entertained towards idolatry? Perhaps in thinking so we are only guilty of an anachronism, and are applying to the seventh century before Christ the feelings of the nineteenth century after Christ.

After this Josiah ordered the people to keep a Deuteronomic Passover, such as we are told—and as all the circumstances prove—had not been kept from the days of the Judges. The Chronicler revels in the details of this Passover, and tells us that Josiah gave the people thirty thousand lambs and kids, and three thousand bul-

locks; and his priests gave two thousand six hundred small cattle and three hundred oxen; and the chief of the Levites gave the Levites five thousand small cattle, and five hundred oxen. He goes on to describe the slaying, sprinkling of blood, flaying, roasting, boiling in pots, pans, and caldrons, and attention paid to the burnt-offerings and the fat;* but neither the historians nor the chroniclers, either here or anywhere else, say one word about the Day of Atonement, or seem aware of its existence. It belongs to the Post-Exilic Priestly Code, and is not alluded to in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Continuing his task, he put away them that had familiar spirits (*oboth*), and the wizards, and the *teraphim*, with a zeal shown by no king before or after him; but Jehovah "turned not from the fierceness of His anger, because of all the provocations which Manasseh had provoked Him withal." Evil, alas! is more diffusive, and in some senses more permanent, than good, because of the perverted bias of human nature. Judah and Jerusalem had been radically corrupted by the apostate son of Hezekiah, and it may be that the sudden and high-handed reformation enforced by his grandson depended too exclusively on the external impulse given to it by the king to produce deep effects in the hearts of the people. Certain it is that even Jeremiah—though he was closely connected with the finders of the book, had perhaps been present when the solemn league and covenant was taken in the Temple, and lived through the reformation in which he probably took a considerable part—was profoundly dissatisfied with the results. It is sad and singular that such should have been the case; for in the first flush of the new enthusiasm he had written, "Cursed be the man that heareth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, saying, 'Obey My voice.'"† Nay, it has been inferred that he was even an intinerant preacher of the newly found law; for he writes: "And the Lord said unto me, 'Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them.'"‡

The style of Deuteronomy, as is well known, shows remarkable affinities with the style of Jeremiah. Yet it is clear that after the death of Josiah the prophet became utterly disillusioned with the outcome of the whole movement. It proved itself to be at once evanescent and unreal. The people would not give up their beloved local shrines.§ The law, as Habakkuk says (i.

* 2 Chron. xxxv. 1-19.

† Jer. xi. 3, 4. Since, in this part of my subject, I make frequent reference to the prophecies of Jeremiah which are indispensable to the right understanding of the history, I may here say that modern critics (Cheyne and others) arrange them as follows:—

In the reign of Josiah, Jer. ii. 1-iii. 5, iii. 6-vi. 30, vii. 1-ix.

25, xi. 1-17.

In the reign of Jehoiakim, xxvi. 2-6, xlvi. 2-12, xxv., xxxv., and possibly xvi. 1, xviii. 19-27, xiv., xv., xviii., xi. 18-xii. 17.

In the reign of Jehoiachin, x. 17-23, xiii.

In the reign of Zedekiah, xxii.-xxiv., xxvii.-xxix. 1-11 (?), lii.

In the Exile, xxxix.-xlii.

‡ See Cheyne, "Jeremiah," p. 56. *id.* 6.

§ Canon Cheyne shows that even Mohammed could not persuade the Qurashites wholly to give up their black stone at the Kaaba, and their dolmens and sacred trees (*id.* 103). He left the *auçab*, or sacrificial stones (*matstseboth*), though he warns his followers against them ("Quran." v. 92).

"drum," but perhaps from *tuph* (to *spit* in sign of abhorrence).

* *Parvar*—perhaps "open portico." Renan connects the word with the Greek *περιβολος*. On horses dedicated to the sun, see Xen., "Cyrop.," viii. 3, 5, 12; "Anab.," iv. 5.

† See Zeph. i. 5; Jer. xix. 13, xxxii. 29.

‡ 2 Kings xxiii. 13; "The Mount of Corruption"; Vulg., *Mons offensivus*; LXX., τοῦ ὄρους τοῦ Μοσθαῶ. Some conjecture that *Maschith* may be a derivative change for some word which meant "anointing" (from being the *Oil* mountain, *Har ham-mischchah*).

§ In burning the bones of the dead, he violated all Jewish feeling. Amos (ii. 1) had severely rebuked this form of revenge and insult even in the case of the heathen King of Moab. Bones defiled the touch (Num. xix. 16; Herod., iv. 73). Josiah's question at Bethel was, "What pillar is that?" (*Asiyun*). LXX., σκόπελον. Comp. Gen. xxxv. 20.

¶ 1 Kings xiii. 29-31.

4), became torpid; judgment went not forth to victory; the wicked compassed about the righteous, and judgment was perverted. It was easy to obey the external regulations of Deuteronomy; it was far more difficult to be true to its noble moral precepts. The reformation of Josiah, so violent and radical, proved to be only skin-deep; and Jeremiah, with bitter disappointment, found it to be so. External decency might be improved, but rites and forms are nothing to Him who searcheth the heart.* There was, in fact, an inherent danger in the place assumed by the newly discovered book. "Since it was regarded as a State authority, there early arose a kind of book-science, with its pedantic pride and erroneous learned endeavours to interpret and apply the Scriptures. At the same time there arose also a new kind of hypocrisy and idolatry of the letter, through the new protection which the State gave to the religion of the book acknowledged by the law. Thus scholastic wisdom came into conflict with genuine prophecy."†

How entirely the improvement of outward worship failed to improve men's hearts the prophet testifies.‡ "The sin of Judah," he says, "is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the tablets of their hearts, and upon the horns of their altars, and their Asherim by the green trees§ upon the high hills. O My mountain in the field, I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in Mine eyes, which shall burn for ever." While Josiah lived this apostasy was secret; but as soon as he died the people "turned again to folly,"|| and committed all the old idolatries except the worship of Moloch. There arose a danger lest even the moderate ritualism of Deuteronomy should be perverted and exaggerated into mere formality. In the energy of his indignation against this abuse, Jeremiah has to uplift his voice against any trust even in the most decided injunctions of this newly discovered law. He was "a second Amos upon a higher platform." The Deuteronomic Law did not as yet exhibit the concentrated sacerdotalism and ritualism which mark the Priestly Code, to which it is far superior in every way. It is still prophetic in its tone. It places social interests above rubrics of worship. It expresses the fundamental religious thought "that Jehovah is in no sense inaccessible; that He can be approached immediately by all, and without sacerdotal intervention; that He asks nothing for Himself, but asks it as a religious duty that man should render unto man what is right; that His Will lies not in any known height, but in the moral sphere which is known and understood by all.¶ The book ordained certain sacrifices; yet Jeremiah says with startling emphasis, "To what purpose cometh there to Me frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet calamus from a far country? Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasant unto

Me."* Therefore He bids them, "Put your burnt-offering to your sacrifices and eat them as flesh"—i. e., "Throw all your offerings into a mass, and eat them at your pleasure (regardless of sacerdotal rules): they have neither any inherent sanctity nor any secondary importance from the characters of the offerers,"† And in a still more remarkable passage. "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice.'"‡

Nay, in the most emphatic ordinances of Deuteronomy he found that the people had created a new peril. They were putting a particularistic trust in Jehovah, as though He were a respecter of persons, and they His favourites. They fancied, as in the days of Micah, that it was enough for them to claim His name, and bribe Him with sacrifices.§ Above all, they boasted of and relied upon the possession of His Temple, and placed their trust on the punctual observance of external ceremonies. All these sources of vain confidence it was the duty of Jeremiah rudely to shatter to pieces. Standing at the gates of the Lord's House, he cried: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, 'The Temple of the Lord! the Temple of the Lord! the Temple of the Lord, are these!' Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods; and come and stand before Me in this house, whereupon My name is called, and say, 'We are delivered,' that ye may do all these abominations? Is this house become a den of robbers in your eyes? But go ye now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people. I will do unto this house as I have done to Shiloh; and I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out the whole house of Ephraim."||—Yet all hope was not extinguished for ever. The Scythian might disappear; the Babylonian might come in his place; but one day there should be a new covenant of pardon and restitution; and as had been promised in Deuteronomy, "all should know Jehovah, from the least to the greatest."

At last he even prophesies the entire future annulment of the solemn covenant made on the basis of Deuteronomy, and says that Jehovah will make a new covenant with His people, not according to the covenant which He made with their fathers.¶ And in his final estimate of King Josiah after his death, he does not so much as mention his reformation, his iconoclasm, his sweeping zeal, or his enforcement of the Deuteronomic Law, but only says to Jehoiakim:—

"Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice?—then it was well with

* Jer. vi. 20. The passages of Jeremiah which seem of a different spirit may have been added by later hands—e. g., xxxiii. 18, which is not in the LXX.

† Jer. vii. 21; Ewald; and Cheyne, *l. c.* 120. So the Jews seem to have understood it, for they appoint this passage to be read on the *Haphtara* after the *Parashah* about sacrifices from Leviticus.

‡ Jer. vii. 22, 23. This alone would show that Jeremiah did not (as earlier critics thought) *write* "Deuteronomy," in spite of the numerous close resemblances in phraseology. Thus, Jeremiah often denounces the priests (i. 18, ii. 8-26, iv. 9, v. 31, viii. 1, xiii. 13, xxxii. 32). Cheyne, *p.* 82.

§ Mic. iii. 11.

¶ Jer. vii. 4, 8-15.

¶ Jer. xxxi. 31, 32.

* Jer. xvii. 9-11.

† Ewald, "The Prophets," iii. 63, 64.

‡ Jer. xvii. 1-4.

§ The Qurashites and other heathen Arabs accounted holy a large green tree, and every year had a sacrifice in its honour. "On the way to Hunain we called to God's Messenger (Mohammed) that he should appoint for us such trees. But he was terrified, and said, 'Lord God, Lord God! Ye speak even as the Israelites . . . ye are still in ignorance,—thus are heathen enslaved.'" (Vakidi, "Book of the Campaigns of God's Messenger," quoted by Cheyne, "Jeremiah," p. 103, from Wellhausen).

¶ Psalm lxxxv. 8.

¶ Deut. xxx. 11-14. See Wellhausen, *p.* 165.

him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. *Was not this to know Me?* saith the Lord.*

Whether because his methods were too violent, or because it only affected the surface of men's lives, or because the people were not really ripe for it, or because no reformation can ever succeed which is enforced by autoeracy, not spread by persuasion and conviction, it is certain that the first glamour of Josiah's movement ended in disillusionment. A religion violently imposed from without as a state-religion naturally tends to hypocrisy and externalism. What Jehovah required was, not a changed method of worship, but a changed heart; and this the reformation of Josiah did not produce. It has often been so in human history. Failure seems to be written on many of the most laudable human efforts. Nevertheless, truth ultimately prevails. Isaiah was murdered, and Urijah, and Jeremiah. Savonarola was burnt, and Huss, and many a martyr more; but the might of priestcraft was at last crippled, to be revived, we hope, no more, either by open violence or secret apostasy.

"Then to side with Truth is noble, when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they have denied."

NOTE TO CHAPTER XXXI.

"Jehovah is our Lawgiver."—ISA. xxxiii. 22.

WHAT was the Book of the Law which Hilkiah found in the Temple?

The great majority of eminent modern critics have now come to the conclusion that it was the kernel of the Book of Deuteronomy. Nor is this in any sense a mere modern notion. It occurs as far back as St. Jerome ("Adv. Jovin.," i. 5) and St. Chrysostom ("Hom. in Matt.," ix., p. 135, B. See W. Rob. Smith, p. 258).

It is no part of my immediate duty to argue this question, but I may state that the arguments for this conclusion are partly historical, partly literary, and partly depend on internal evidence.

I. As regards the *literary* argument, it is maintained that—

1. The full, rounded, rhetorical style of Deuteronomy, so widely different from the extreme dryness of other parts of the Torah, could not have been as yet developed in the days of Moses, and required the slow training of centuries for its perfection. It is a new phenomenon, and differs widely from earlier prophetic writings, such as those of Amos and Hosea.

2. The style and language of the Deuteronomist are so marked, that they can scarcely escape an intelligent reader of the English Version. Riehm enumerates sixty-four characteristic words or phrases. Their significance lies in the fact that they express obvious ideas, and are not names for special objects, which force a writer to use peculiar words. The style closely resembles in many phrases and particulars the style of Jeremiah, and of him alone among the prophets. "Even supposing that no historic text," it has been said, "taught us that the articles of Smalkald were the work of Luther, we should still have the right to affirm that these articles closely resemble the ideas of Luther, and could hardly have been published without his cognisance."

II. As regards *historical* evidence, we observe that—

1. No author earlier than Josiah shows any acquaintance with Deuteronomy: after that date proofs of such knowledge abound.

The Book of Deuteronomy insisted with reiterated emphasis on the centralisation of worship. All its ordinances are framed with a view to promote this end. But we have seen that there is not a trace of any belief that local shrines were prohibited earlier than the reign of Hezekiah, who certainly would have defended his boldness by appeal to a written law if he had known of such as existing.

III. As regards *internal* evidence, we see that—

1. Many passages and injunctions of the Book of Deuteronomy differ entirely from those found in the old Book of the Covenant which forms the most ancient nucleus of Exodus (Exod. xx. 22-xxiii. 33).

2. Even the most conservative English critics—even those who, with any pretence to competent knowledge, argue against the more advanced conclusions of the Higher Criticism—cannot help admitting that at least three codes, which in many, and in some fundamental, respects differ widely from each other, and which make no reference to each other, are found in our present Pentateuch—viz., that of the Book of the Covenant, that of the Deuteronomist (D.), and that of the Priestly writer (P.). All three may contain elements as old as the days of Moses; but most critics (with scarcely an exception in Germany) now believe that the Deuteronomic Code, in its present form, is not earlier than the date of Josiah's reformation (*circa* B. C. 621); and the Priestly Codex (whatever older documents may exist in it) not older, in its present form, than about the time of Ezra (B. C. 444). Dillmann, Kittel, and in his later days Delitzsch, have been of necessity compelled to give up the views that, in their present form, D. and P. are as ancient as the days of Moses. The last German critic who held that Moses wrote our present Pentateuch was Keil (*d.* 1838). Canon Cheyne argues for the late date of this misnamed "Deuteronomy," on the grounds that the authors (1) used documents manifestly later than Moses; (2) alluded to events which only occurred long after Moses; and (3) expressed ideas which, in the age of Moses, are not psychologically possible.

The Book of Deuteronomy consists mainly of an historical introduction, probably added later (i. 1-5); Moses' first discourse (i. 6-iv. 40); Moses' second discourse (iv. 44-xxvi.); a section marked specially by blessings and curses (xxvii.-xxix.); a *third* discourse of Moses (xxix. 2-xxx. 20); his farewell (xxxi. 1-13); his song (xxxii. 14-xxxiii. 47); conclusion, narrating his blessing and death (xxxiii. 48-xxxiv. 12).

I have no space here to enter fully into the arguments which seem decisive as to the date of the main part of Deuteronomy. Those who desire to see them must study Colenso, "The Pentateuch," pt. iii.; Reuss, "Hist. Sainte et la Loi," i. 154-211; W. Robertson Smith, "Old Test. in the Jewish Church," lect. xvi.; Kuenen, "The Hexateuch," E. T., 1886; Kittel, "Gesch. d. Hebräer," pp. 43-59; Cheyne, "Jeremiah," pp. 48-86; S. R. Driver, s. v. "Deuteronomy" (Smith's "Dict. of the Bible," new ed.); W. Aldis Wright, "The Documents of the Hexateuch," pp. lvii.-lxxxix. The name "Deuteronomy" (or "second law") arises from the mistaken rendering of the LXX. and Vulgate in Deut. xvii. 18.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DEATH OF JOSIAH.

B. C. 608.

2 KINGS xxiii. 29, 30.

"Howl, O fir tree; for the cedar is fallen."—ZECH. xi. 2.

JOSIAH survived by thirteen years the reformation and covenant which are the chief events of his reign. He lived in prosperity and peace. He did justice and judgment; the poor and needy flourished under his royal protection; and it was well with him. It seemed as if the Deuteronomic blessings on faithfulness to its law were about to be abundantly fulfilled, when "the azure calm of heaven" was suddenly shattered, and "down came the thunderbolt." The great and victorious Assurbanipal of Assyria had died, and left his power to weaker successors. Meanwhile, Egypt was growing in power and splendour under Pharaoh Necho II. (B. C. 612-596), the sixth king of the twenty-fifth or Saitic dynasty. He nearly anticipated M. de Lesseps in making the Suez Canal,* and perhaps actually anticipated Vasco da Gama in rounding the Cabo Tormentoso, or Cape of Good Hope, in a three years' voyage. He was fired by the ambitious dream of succeeding the Assyrians as the chief power in the world, or at any rate of seizing part

* He was forced to desist by a fearful mortality among the labourers.

* Jer. xxii. 15, 16.

of the dominions which they had conquered.* Accordingly, in B. C. 608, he went up against the King of Assyria to the river Euphrates. The Chronicler says that his destination was Carchemish, on the Euphrates, and some have conjectured that the vague phrase "against the King of Assyria" is incorrect, and that, as Josephus states, he was really marching against the Medes and Babylonians after the fall of Nineveh.†

With this expedition Josiah was not greatly concerned. He may have begun his reign as the vassal of Assurbanipal; but if so, it is probable that he had long since ceased to pay tribute to a power which was tottering to its fall under the attacks of Scythians and Babylonians. He had availed himself of the disorganisation of the Assyrian power to re-establish some, at least, of the old authority of the House of David over the Northern Kingdom, and perhaps he only undertook the desperate expedient of withstanding the northward march of the Egyptian host under the notion that either on the march or on his return the Pharaoh intended to subjugate Palestine to Egypt.

Pharaoh Necho II., among his other achievements, had created a powerful fleet,‡ and it is nearly certain that he did not advance along the coast of Palestine, but made his way by sea to Acco or Dor.§ Here he received the news that Josiah meant to block his path at Megiddo, on the plain of Jezreel. That plain has been the great and only possible battle-field of Palestine, from the revolt in which Barak destroyed the host of Jabin,|| to that in which Tryphon met Jonathan the Maccabee,¶ and Kleber in 1799 defeated twenty-five thousand Turks with three thousand French.

The Chronicler here adds a very remarkable incident.** Necho, like Joash of Israel in former days, did not care to fight with the poor little King of Judah—or at any rate did not wish to do so at present, when he was on his way to the greater encounter. He therefore sent an embassy to Josiah, saying, "What have I to do with thee, King of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war.†† For God [Elohim] commanded me [in a dream] to make haste.‡‡ Forebear, then, from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not."

The conjecture "in a dream" is not unlikely, nor is it in disaccord with other events in the annals of the Pharaohs and the Sargonidæ of Assyria.§§ We may indeed be surprised that an Egyptian Pharaoh should profess to deliver to a Jewish king the messages of Elohim, though we have seen something like this in the case of the Rabshakeh.|||| The variation in 1 Esdras i.

* *Circ.* B. C. 611–605. Herod., ii. 158, 159, iv. 42. Psamatik, the father of Necho, was perhaps a Lybian. He established his sway over all Egypt, displacing the Assyrians.

† "Antt.," X. v. 1.

‡ Herod., ii. 158. His father Psamatik had left him an adequate army of natives and mercenaries.

§ Herodotus says of his ships: *Αἱ μὲν ἐπὶ τῇ βορρῆνι θαλάσῃ ἐποιήθησαν.*

|| Judg. iv. 23; 1 Sam. xxix. 1–11; 1 Kings xx. 26; 2 Kings xxiii. 20; 2 Chron. xxxv. 22; Rev. xvi. 16 (Armageddon). Herodotus confuses it with Migdol (*Μάγδολον*).

¶ 1 Macc. xii. 49; Jos., "Antt.," XIII. vii. 2.

** 2 Chron. xxxv. 20–22.

†† According to 1 Esdras i. 25–32, "for upon Euphrates is my war."

‡‡ Klostermann, in 2 Chron. xxxv. 21, reads *bachalôm*, "in a dream," instead of "to make haste."

§§ Gen. xli. 1; Herod., ii. 188; "Records of the Past, ix.

52. || 2 Kings xviii. 25.

26–28 is curious and interesting. We are there told that the message was sent to Josiah, not only by Pharaoh Necho, who had sent to say "The Lord is with me hastening me forward; depart from me, and be not against the Lord," but also by "the prophet Jeremy." Josephus frankly ascribes the error of Josiah to destiny, as though he had been infatuated by the dementia which the Greeks attributed to Atê.*

This, however, is not likely; for it is clear that Jeremiah, though not mentioned in the Book of Kings, must have had a strong influence over the mind of Josiah, whom he loved, whose views he shared, in whose religious revolution he had taken part. Further, we do not read of any warning recorded by the prophet himself; and had he uttered one, it would certainly have been mentioned, when he committed his prophecies to writing twenty-three years after their commencement. A warning of which the neglect had led to fatal issues would have been so decisive a confirmation of Jeremiah's prophetic insight that it could not have been passed over in silence.

Indeed, Jeremiah may have shared the conviction which, founded on imperfect generalisation, perhaps dazzled the unfortunate king to his ruin. Josiah had accepted the Book of Deuteronomy with the whole strength of his belief, and the Book of Deuteronomy had proclaimed to Israel as the reward of faithfulness this promise: "And it shall come to pass that Jehovah, thy God, shall set thee on high above all the nations of the earth. . . Jehovah shall cause thine enemies which rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways."† In the strength of that promise, Josiah was perhaps saying to himself, in the language of the Psalms, that Jehovah could not fail to save His anointed, and dash His enemies to pieces under His feet;‡ in the language, perhaps, of later days, that the sound of a shaken leaf should chase them, and they should flee when none pursued.§

Alas! such passages do not apply invariably to our worldly fortunes! God's promises are general. The individual must be considered apart from the universal in the region of spiritual and eternal blessings. In the affairs of earth the wicked often seem to be in prosperity, while the righteous are overwhelmed by all God's waves and storms. Further, Josiah evidently received a warning—a warning which professed to come, and really came, from God ||—whether uttered by Pharaoh or by Jeremiah. And in this instance Josiah had sought war; he had not been forced into it. It was not for him to go out of his way to champion the cause either of cruel Assyria or vaunting Babylon.

The result was entire disenchantment. No more disheartening and disastrous calamity could have happened to the kingdom, which had just begun to struggle out of the slough of idolatry and humiliation.

Heedless of the message he had received, strong in mistaken hopes, Josiah opposed his poor, weak forces to the powerful host of renovated Egypt. The result was instantaneous

* "Antt.," X. v. 1: *Τῆς πεπωμένης οἴμαι εἰς τοῦτ' αὐτὸν παρορμησάσης.*

† Deut. xxxvi. 1–8.

‡ Psalm xx. 6, xviii. 29–50.

§ Lev. xxvi. 36.

|| 2 Chron. xxxv. 22: "hearkened not to the words of Necho from the mouth of God."

ruin.* Judah was defeated and scattered without a blow.—Necho came, saw, conquered. Josiah, according to the present record of the Chronicles, like Ahab, "disguised himself" † and went into the battle; and as he drove from rank to rank an Egyptian archer drew a bow at a venture, and smote him while he was putting his forces in array. The arrow-point brought conviction too late. Josiah saw his error; he knew that his own death involved the rout of his army. He sounded a retreat, and said to his servants, "Bear me away to my travelling chariot, for I am sore wounded." ‡ He died at Megiddo, where his ancestor Ahaziah had died before him from the arrow-wounds of Jehu's pursuers. His servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo. The famous plain of Esdraelon had already witnessed two great victories—that of Barak over Sisera, and that of Gideon over the Midianites; and one deplorable defeat—that of Saul by the Philistines. It was now darkened by a catastrophe even more sad. §

When that chariot, accompanied by its wailing escort, entered the gates of Jerusalem, with the routed army of Judah behind it, the feeling of the people must have resembled that of the Athenians when the news reached them that Lysander had destroyed their whole fleet at Ægospotami, and the long wail went thrilling up through that sleepless night from the Peiræus all along the Makra Teichè to the Parthenon and the Acropolis. And there followed such a mourning as the land had never known before. It had begun at Megiddo and Hadadrimmon, leaving the sad memory of its hopeless intensity. It was renewed at Jerusalem when they buried the king in his own sepulchre. "The land mourned, every family apart; the family of the House of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the House of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the House of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remained, every family apart, and their wives apart." ¶ "And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations unto this day, and they were made an institution in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the Lamentations." ¶ Not even for heroic David, or royal Solomon, or pious Asa, or prosperous Jehoshaphat had there been so loud a dirge.

But, alas! there was a cause for far deeper sorrow than the loss of a prince, however able,

* "When he had seen him." Comp. 2 Kings xiv. 8.

† 1 Esdras i. 25; and LXX., "firmly resolved," "strengthened himself," as in 2 Chron. xxv. 11.

‡ Jos., "Antt.," X. v. 1; and 2 Chron. xxxv. 23; 1 Esdras i. 30.

§ The fortunes of the Jews again prevailed in this plain in the days of Holofernes (Judith vii. 3); but they were defeated there by Placidus (Jos., "B. J.," IV. i. 8).

¶ Zech; xii. 11-13 (comp. Jer. xxii. 10, 18). No such place as Hadadrimmon is known, though there is a Rummâne not far from Megiddo. Jerome ("Comm. in Zach.") identifies it with a place which he calls Maximianopolis. Wellhausen ("Skizzen," 102) thinks that the mourning is compared to some wail over the god Hadadrimmon, like the wailing for Tammuz. Jonathan and Jarchi say that Hadadrimmon was the son of Tabrimmon, who opposed Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead.

¶ 2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25. Jeremiah's elegy has probably perished. It would have been most interesting had it been preserved. Lam. iv. is too vague to have been this lost poem.

however beloved. The dead was dead. Natural sorrow for the bereavement of the people would soon be healed by time, but behind the passing affliction lay a great fear and a great reaction.

A great fear,—for now a southern foe was added to the northern. Jeremiah and other prophets had warned Israel of the peril from the North. When the Scythian wave "rolled shoreward, struck, and was dissipated," when the source of Assyrian terror seemed to be drying up, worldlings may have felt inclined to laugh at Jeremiah. But now it was evident that, sooner or later, the Chaldeans would be as formidable as their predecessors, and out of the serpent's egg was breaking forth a cockatrice. The uncalled-for attempt of Josiah to bar the path of the new and mighty Pharaoh had also added Egypt to the list of formidable enemies. For the present the Pharaoh had passed on to the Euphrates; but whether he returned victorious or defeated, his troops could not but be a source of danger to the little kingdom, which would henceforth be helpless between the overwhelming forces of its foes.

If such were the fears of the timid and the pessimistic, still deeper was the disheartenment of the faithful. Josiah had been the most obedient, the most religious, of all the kings of Judah from childhood upwards. Where, then, were Jehovah's old loving-kindnesses which He swore unto David in his truth? Had God forgotten to be gracious? Had He hidden away His mercy in displeasure? Where were the blessings of the newly discovered Book of the Law, if the curse fell on its most earnest votary? Where was Huldah's promise that he should be gathered to his fathers in peace, if he was carried back dead from the field of fruitless battle? There can be little doubt that the apparent blight which had fallen on unavailing righteousness hastened the reaction of the subsequent reigns. Many might be inclined to cry out with even Jeremiah in his moments of overwhelming despondency, "Ah, Lord God! surely Thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'Ye shall have peace'; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul."* "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am a derision daily, every one mocketh me. Whenever I speak, I must shout, I must cry violence and spoil; for the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily." †

But man judges partially and judges amiss. God's ways are not as man's ways. God sees the whole; He sees the future; He sees things as they are. Through defeat, through captivity, through multifarious affliction, lay the path to the final deliverance of the nation from the grosser forms of idolatry. When they wept as they remembered Zion, when they took down their harps from the willows by the water-courses of Babylon to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, they turned again—and at last with their whole heart—to God their Saviour, who had done so great things for them:—until the grey secret lingering in the East was brightened by the Morning Star, and there was revealed to the world a true Israel, and a New Jerusalem, wherein the Lord should be King for evermore.

* Jer. iv. 10.

† Jer. xx. 7, 8.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JEHOAHAZ.

B. C. 608.

2 KINGS xxiii. 31-33.

"I went by, and, lo! he was gone: I sought him, but his place could nowhere be found."—PSALM xxxvii. 36.

It was under the disastrous circumstances which attended his father's death at Megiddo that Jehoahaz began to reign. There is some confusion about the four sons of Josiah, whom the Chronicler calls Johanan, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and Shallum.* From Jer. xxii. 11, it appears that Jehoahaz was the royal name taken on his anointing by Shallum, the third son.† If so, he cannot be identified with Johanan, the first-born, as in the margin of our version. Further, it appears from our historians that Jehoahaz was twenty-three at his succession, and was therefore younger than Jehoiakim who (three months later) succeeded him at the age of twenty-five. Jehoahaz was the own brother of Zedekiah, Jehoiakim being his half-brother by another mother (Zebudah).

We do not know for what reason he was preferred by "the people of the land" to his elder brother Eliakim or Jehoiakim. It was probably because they regarded him as a prince of eminent courage and ability. The high hopes which the nation conceived of him may be seen in the pathetic elegy of Ezek. xix.:—

"Moreover take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say,—
What was thy mother? A lioness!
Amidst lions she couched,
In the midst of the young lions she nourished her whelps.
She brought up one of her whelps: he became a young lion;
He learned to catch the prey; he devoured men.
The nations heard of him;
In their pit was he taken,‡
And they brought him with hooks into the land of Egypt."§

We see, too, that he was to an eminent degree the darling of the nation in the still more plaintive wail of Jeremiah which will be quoted later.

The fact that Shallum solemnly changed his name to Jehoahaz ("Jehovah taketh hold"),|| and that the people of the land not only "made him king in his father's stead," but also "anointed him," points to a disputed succession.¶ High hopes were conceived of him; but he hardly had a chance of fulfilling them, for he was only permitted to reign three months. What were the events of those months we do not

* 1 Chron. iii. 15.

† He is named "fourth," but he was older than his brothers Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (2 Kings xxiii. 31, xxiv. 18). The genealogy is as follows:—

Zebudah = JOSIAH = Hamutal.

Nehushta = ELIAKIM ZEDEKIAH JEHOAHAZ
 | | |
 or Jehoiakim. or Mattaniah. or Shallum.

JEHOIACHIN.

‡ An allusion to the Syrian mode of hunting the lion by driving it with cries into a concealed pit (Tristram, "Nat. Hist. of the Bible," 118; Cheyne, 140).

§ Ezek. xix. 1-4.

¶ The name Shallum means "recompense." It may have been regarded as ill-omened, since the King of Israel who bore this rare name had only reigned a month.

¶ The Talmud says that kings were only anointed in special cases ("Kerithoth," f. 5, 2; Grätz, ii. 328).

know. Jehoahaz must have disappointed any hopes which may have been formed of him by the religious party; for dear as he was to them, the historians record of him that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done," although they specify no particular offence. The same sad verdict is passed on all his four successors; but Josephus says even more emphatically of Jehoahaz that he was impious and impure.*

He must have shown some activity in other respects, or else Ezekiel would hardly have said that "the nations heard of him," and that "he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men." Over all his deeds, whatever they may have been, "the iniquity of oblivion has blindly scattered her poppy," and he fell a victim to the great world-movements of those troublous times.

For Pharaoh, after his defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, proceeded to make himself master of Syria and Palestine. He took Cadytis, which Herodotus calls "a large city of Syria,"† and which—since it cannot here mean Gaza, as in Herod., iii. 5—has been identified by some with Kadesh. Thence he marched to Carchemish, on the right bank of the Euphrates;‡ none venturing to check him, till "once more, after the lapse of nine centuries, Egyptian garrisons looked down on that historic stream."§ On his return he stopped at Riblah, on the Orontes,|| to consolidate his Syrian conquests; and there he learnt that, without consulting him, the people of Jerusalem had made Jehoahaz their king. Perhaps he heard enough of the warlike prowess of Jehoahaz to make him resent this act of independence. After his three months' campaign he sent for Jehoahaz to Riblah, and the unhappy prince had no choice but to obey. Possibly the Egyptian party in Jerusalem, headed by his disappointed elder brother Eliakim, may have intrigued against him with Pharaoh Necho. When he reached Riblah, he was unceremoniously deposed; and though we may hope that the expression of Ezekiel, that "they brought him with hooks into the land of Egypt," belongs to the metaphor of the captured lion's whelp, it is certain that he was taken to the banks of the Nile as a fettered captive, never to return. How long his miserable life was protracted, or how he was treated in Egypt, we do not know. The sun of the young prince went down in darkness while it was yet day. No king of Judah before him had died in prison and in exile, and the calamity smote heavily the heart of his people. Egypt was not to escape—shortly thereafter—the doom of violence and pride; but whether the young Jewish king had died meanwhile of a broken heart, or whether he dragged on to hoar hairs his maimed life, or whether he was murdered in his dungeon, no man knew. One thing only was clear to the sad prophet—that he would never return.

"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep ye sore for him that is gone away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith Jehovah concerning Shallum, the son of Josiah, King of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went

* Jos., "Antt.," X. v. 2: 'Ασεβής και μιανός τὸν τρόπον.

† Herod., ii. 150.

‡ Mr. G. Smith identifies Carchemish with Jerablús.

§ Cheyne, "Jeremiah," p. 127.

|| Comp. 2 Kings xxv. 20, 21. The old Hittite capital of Riblah was a convenient halting-place on the road between Babylon and Jerusalem. It was on the northernmost boundary of Palestine towards Damascus (Amos vi. 14).

forth out of this place: 'He shall not return thither any more: but in the place whither they have led him captive there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more.'**

To show his absolute power over Judah and Jerusalem, Pharaoh Necho not only deposed and fettered their king, but put the whole land under a yearly tribute of one hundred talents of silver (about £40,000) and a talent of gold (about £4,000).†

Even this comparatively small sum was a heavy burden for so greatly afflicted and impoverished a country, and Pharaoh further imposed on them a vassal to see that it was duly extorted. This was Eliakim, the eldest living son of Josiah. There was nothing left to plunder in the Temple or the palace, and therefore the exaction had to be borne by the taxed and suffering people.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JEHOIAKIM.

B. C. 608-597.

2 KINGS xxiii. 36-xxiv. 7.

"But those things that are recorded of him, and of his uncleanness and impiety, are written in the Chronicles of the Kings."—1 ESDRAS i. 42.

"When Jehoiakim succeeded to the throne, he said, 'My predecessors knew not how to provoke God.'"—*Sanhedrin*, f. 103, 2.

"There is no strange handwriting on the wall,
Through all the midnight hum no threatening call,
Nor on the marble floor the stealthy fall
Of fatal footsteps. All is safe.—Thou fool,
The avenging deities are shod with wool!"
—W. ALLEN BUTLER.

ELIAKIM succeeded to the throne at the age of twenty-five under very unenviable circumstances—as a nominal king, a helpless nominee and tributary of the Pharaoh. He seems to have been thoroughly distasteful to the people; and if we may judge from the fact that Ezekiel frankly ignores him and passes from Jehoahaz to Jehoachin, he was regarded as a tax-gathering usurper nominated by an alien tyrant. For after speaking of Jehoahaz, Ezekiel says,—

"Now when she [Judah] saw that she had waited [for the restoration of Jehoahaz], and her hope was lost,
Then she took another of her whelps; †
A young lion she made him.
He went up and down among the lions;
He became a young lion." §

The historian says that Necho turned the name of Eliakim ("God will establish") to Jehoiakim ("Jehovah will establish"); but by this can hardly be meant more than that he sanctioned the change of El into Jehovah on Eliakim's installation upon the throne.

Jehoiakim is condemned in the same terms as all the other sons of Josiah. His misdoings are far more definitely recorded in the Prophets, who furnish us with details which are passed over

* Jer. xxii. 10-12.

† 2 Chron. xxxvi. 3; 1 Esdras i. 36. The smallness of the tribute proves the impoverishment of the land. Sennacherib demanded from Hezekiah three hundred talents of silver, and thirty of gold; and Menahem paid one thousand talents of silver to Tiglath-Pileser.

‡ Not Jehoiakim, but Jehoachin, as the sequel shows.

§ Ezek. xix. 5-9. The allusions to Jehoiakim by Jeremiah are numerous, and all unfavourable (xxii. 13-10, xxvii. 20-23, xxxvii. 20-31, etc.).

by the historians. Some of his sins may have been due to the influence of his wife Nehushta, who was a daughter of Elnathan of Achbor, one of the princes of the heathen party. It was this Elnathan whom the king chose as a fitting ambassador to demand the extradition of the prophet Urijah from Egypt. One of the crimes with which Jehoiakim is charged is the building for himself of a sumptuous palace, and thus vainly trying to emulate the splendours of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian kings. In itself the act would not have been more wicked than it was in Solomon, whose architectural parade is dwelt upon with enthusiasm. But the circumstances were now wholly different. Solomon was at that time in all his glory, the possessor of boundless wealth, the ruler of an immense and united territory, the head of a powerful and prosperous people, the successor of an unconquered hero who had gone to his grave in peace; Jehoiakim, on the other hand, had succeeded a father who had died in defeat on the field of battle, and a brother who was hopelessly pining in an Egyptian prison. The Tribes had been carried into captivity by Assyria; the nation was beaten, oppressed, and poor; the king himself possessed but a shadow of royalty. In such a condition of things it would have been his glory to maintain a watchful and strenuous activity, and to devote himself in simplicity and self-denial to the good of his people. It showed a perverted and sensuous mind to insult the misery of his subjects at such a time by feeble attempts to rival heathen potentates in costly æstheticism. But this was not all; he carried out his ignoble selfishness at the cost of oppression and wrong.*

It is possible that the prophet Habakkuk alludes to him in the words:

"Woe to him that getteth an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil! † Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many peoples, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." ‡

The thought of the Jewish king's selfish expensiveness may have crossed the mind of Habakkuk, though the taunt is addressed directly to the Chaldeans, and especially to Nebuchadnezzar, who was at that time revelling in the beautifying of Babylon, and especially of his own royal palace. On the other hand, the rebuke, or rather the denunciation, uttered by Jeremiah against the king for this line of conduct, and for the forced labour which it required, is terribly direct

"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness,

And his chambers by wrong;

That useth his neighbor's service without wages,

And giveth him not his hire;

That saith, "I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers,"

And cutteth out windows;

And it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion.

Shalt thou reign because thou viest with the cedar? §

* Josephus ("Antt.," X. v. 2) is very severe on this king. He says that "he was unjust in disposition, an evil-doer, neither pious towards God nor just towards men."

† Perhaps an allusion to a sort of fortified palace on Ophel.

‡ Hab. ii. 9-11.

§ The text is perhaps corrupt. Two MSS. of the LXX. read "because thou viest with *Ahab*," and the Vatican MSS. has "*with Ahas*." Cheyne adopts the former reading.

Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice?

Then it was well with him!

Was not this to know Me?" saith the Lord.

'But thine heart is not but for thy dishonest gain,

And for to shed innocent blood,

And for oppression and for violence to do it.'"*

Then follows the stern message of doom which we shall quote hereafter. The king's bad example stimulated or perhaps emulated similar folly and want of patriotism on the part of his nobles. They were shepherds who destroyed and scattered the sheep of Jehovah's pastures. But vain was their imagined security, and their ostentation. The judgment was imminent.†

"O inhabitress of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars," exclaims the prophet in bitter mockery, "how greatly wilt thou groan when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail!"‡

But Jehoiakim's offences were deadlier than this. The Chronicler speaks of "the abominations which he did"; and some have therefore supposed that the evil state of things described by Jeremiah (xix.) refers to this reign. If so, he plunged into the idolatry which caused Judah to be shivered like a potter's vessel. Certainly he sinned grievously against God in the person of His prophets.

Jeremiah was not the only prophet who disdained the easy and traitorous popularity which was to be won by prophesying "peace, peace," when there was no peace. He had for his contemporary another messenger of God, no less boldly explicit than himself—Urijah, the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-Jearim. Jeremiah had as yet only prophesied in his humble native village of Anathoth; he had not been called upon to face "the swellings" or "the pride of Jordan."§ Urijah had been in the fuller glare of publicity in the capital, and his bold declaration that Jerusalem should fall before Nebuchadrezzar and the Chaldeans had excited such a fury of indignation that he escaped into Egypt for his life. Surely this should have appeased the rulers, even if they chose to pay no attention to the Divine menace. For the prophets were recognised deliverers of the messages of Jehovah; and with scarcely an exception, even in the most wicked reigns, their persons had been regarded as sacrosanct. But Jehoiakim would not let Urijah escape. He sent an embassy to Necho, headed by his father-in-law Elnathan, son of Achbor, requesting his extradition. Urijah had been dragged back from Egypt, and, to the horror of the people, the king had slain him with the sword, and flung his body into the graves of the common people.|| What made this conduct more monstrous was the precedent of Micah the Morasthite. He, in the days of Hezekiah, had prophesied,—

"Zion shall be ploughed as a field,
And Jerusalem shall become heaps,
And the Mountain of the House as the wooded heights."¶

Yet so far from putting him to death, or even stirring a finger against him, the pious king had only been moved to repentance by the Divine

* Jer. xxii. 13-17.

† Jer. xxiii. 1.

‡ Jer. xxii. 23.

§ Jer. xii. 5.

|| Jer. xxvi. 20-23. So far as I am aware, Bunsen stands alone in identifying Urijah with the "Zechariah" who wrote Zech. xii.-xiv. Others refer Zech. xii. to the murder of Urijah.

¶ Jer. xxvi. 18.

threatenings. Thus the blood of the first martyr-prophet, if we except the case of Zechariah, had been shed by the son of Judah's most pious king. Jeremiah himself only narrowly escaped martyrdom. The precedent of Micah helped to save him, though it had not saved Urijah. He was far more powerfully protected by the patronage of the princes and the people. Standing in the Temple court, he had declared that, unless the nation repented, that house should be like Shiloh, and the city a curse to all the nations of the earth. Maddened by such words of bold rebuke, the priests and the prophets and the people had threatened him with death. But the princes took his part, and some of the people came over to them. His most powerful protector was Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, a member of a family of the utmost distinction.

Meanwhile, we must follow for a time the outward fortunes of the king and of the world.

Necho, after his successful advance, had retired to Egypt, and Jehoiakim continued to be for three years his obsequious servant. An event of tremendous importance for the world changed the entire fortunes of Egypt and of Judah. Nineveh fell with a crash which terrified the nations. We might apply to her the language which Isaiah applies to her successor, Babylon:

"Sheol from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the shades for thee, even the Rephaim of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall answer and say unto thee, 'Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?' . . . All the kings of the nations, all of them, sleep in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast forth away from thy sepulchre like an abominable branch, as the raiment of those that are slain, that are thrust through with the sword, that go down to the stones of the pit. . . They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee . . . and say, 'Is this the man that made the earth to tremble? that did shake kingdoms? that made the world as a wilderness, and overthrew the cities thereof? that let not loose his prisoners to their home?'"*

Yes, Assyria had fallen like some mighty cedar in Libanus, and the nations gazed without pity and with exultation on his torn and scattered branches.

And coincident with the fate of Nineveh had been the rise of the Chaldean power.

Nabupalussur† had been a general of one of the last Assyrian kings, and had been sent by him with an army to quell a Babylonian revolt. Instead of this, he seized the city and made himself king. When the final overthrow and obliteration of Nineveh had secured his power, he sent his brave and brilliant son Nebuchadrezzar‡ (B. C. 605) to secure the provinces which he had wrested from Assyria, and especially to regain

* Isa. xiv., *passim*.

† Nabu-pal-ussur, "Nebo protect the son."

‡ Nabu-kudur-ussur, "Nebo protect the crown" (Schrader, ii. 48), or "the youth" (Oppert). The portrait of Nebuchadrezzar—this is the proper spelling, as generally in Jeremiah—is preserved for us on a black cameo which he presented to the god Merodach. It is now in the Berlin Museum, and shows strong but not cruel or ignoble characteristics. It is copied in Riehm's "Handwörterbuch," ii. 1067. The Jews, as they were fond of doing to their enemies, made insulting puns on his name. Thus in the "Vayyikra Rabba" (Wünsche, "Bibl. Rabb.") the Three Children are represented as saying to him, "You are Nebo-cad-netser; bark [*nabach*], like a dog; swell like a water-jar [*kad*], and chirp like a cricket [*tsersers*],"—in allusion to his madness.

possession of Carchemish, which commanded the river.

Necho marched to protect his conquests, and at Carchemish the hostile forces encountered each other in a tremendous battle,—immemorial Egypt under the representative of its age-long Pharaohs; Babylon, with her independence of yesterday, under a prince hitherto unknown, whose name was to become one of the most famous in the world. The result is described by Jeremiah (xlvi. 1-12). Egypt was hopelessly defeated. Her splendidly arrayed warriors were panic-stricken and routed; her chief heroes were dashed to pieces by the heavy maces of the Babylonians, or fled without so much as looking back. The scene was one of "Magor-missabib"—terror on every side.* Pharaoh's host came up like the Nile in flood with its Ethiopian hoplites and Asiatic archers; but they were driven back. The daughter of Egypt received a wound which no balm of Gilead could cure. The nations heard of her shame, and the prophet pronounced her further chastisement by the hands of Nebuchadrezzar.

Then, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the young Babylonian conqueror swept down upon Syria and Palestine like a bounding leopard, like an avenging eagle (Hab. i. 7, 8). Jehoiakim had no choice but to change his vassalhood to Necho for a vassalage to Nebuchadrezzar.† He might have suffered severe consequences, but tidings came to the young Chaldean that his father had ended his reign of twenty-one years and was dead. For fear lest disturbances might arise in his capital, he at once dashed home across the desert with some light troops by way of Tadmor, while he told his general to follow him home through Syria by the longer route. He seems, however, to have carried away with him some captives, among whom were Daniel, Ananias, Azarias, and Misael,‡ destined hereafter for such memorable fortunes. Jehoiakim himself was thrown into fetters to be carried into Babylon; but the conqueror changed his mind, and probably thought that it would be safer for the present to accept his pledges and assurances, and leave him as his viceroy. "He took an oath of him," says Ezekiel (xvii. 13); "he took also the mighty of the land."§

For three years this frivolous egotist who occupied the throne of Judah remained faithful to his covenant with the King of Babylon, but at the end of that time he rebelled. In this rebellion he was again deluded by the glamour of Egypt, and reliance on the empty promise of "horses and much people." Ezekiel openly disapproved of this policy,|| and reproached the king for his faithlessness to his oath. Jeremiah went further, and declared in the plainest language that "Nebuchadrezzar would certainly come up and destroy this land, and cause to cease from thence both man and beast."¶

Nearer and nearer the danger came. At first the King of Babylon was too busy to do more than send against the Jewish rebel marauding bands of Chaldeans, who acted in concert with the hereditary depredators of Judah—Syrians,

Moabites, and Ammonites. But the prophet knew that the danger would not end there, believing that God would yet "remove Judah out of His sight" for the unforgiven sins of Manasseh and the innocent blood with which he had filled Jerusalem.* At last Nebuchadrezzar had time to turn closer attention to the affairs of Judah, and this became necessary because of the revolt of Tyre under its King Ithobalus. In the stress of the peril Jehoiakim proclaimed a fast and a day of humiliation in the Temple. Jeremiah was at this time "shut up"—either in hiding, or in some sort of custody. As he could not go and preach in person, he dictated his prophecy to Baruch, who wrote it on a scroll, and went in the prophet's place to read it in the Lord's House to the people there assembled from Jerusalem and all Judah in the chamber of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, in the inner court, by the new gate.‡ Gemariah was the brother of Ahikam, the protector of the prophet.

No one was more painfully alarmed by Jeremiah's prophecy than Micaiah, the son of Gemariah, and he thought it his duty to go and tell his father and the other princes what he had heard. They were assembled in the scribe's chamber, and sent a courtier of Ethiopian race—Jehudi, the son of Cushi—bidding him to bring the scroll with him, and to come to them.‡

Baruch was a person of distinction. He was the brother of Seraiah, who is called in our A. V. "a quiet prince," and in the margin "prince of Menucha" or "chief chamberlain," literally "master of the resting-place"; and he was the grandson of Maaseiah, "the governor" of the city.§ The office imposed on him by Jeremiah was so perilous and painful that it nearly broke his heart. He exclaimed to Jeremiah, "Woe is me now! the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow. I am weary with my sighing, and I find no rest." The answer which the prophet was commissioned to give him was very remarkable. It confirmed the terrible doom on his native land, but added, "'And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. For, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh,' saith the Lord: 'but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.'"||

Baruch obeyed the summons of the princes, and at their request sat down with them and read the scroll in their ears. When they had heard the portentous prophecy, they turned shuddering to one another, and said, "We must tell the king of all these words." They asked Baruch how he had written them, and he said he had taken them down at the prophet's dictation. Then, knowing the storm which would burst over the bold offenders, they said, "Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah, and let no man know where ye be."

Not daring to imperil the awful document, they laid it up in the chamber of Elishama, the scribe, but went to the king and told him its contents. He sent Jehudi to fetch it, and to read it in their hearing. Jehoiakim and the illustrious company were seated in the winter-chamber; for it was October, and a fire was burning in

* Jer. xlvi. 5 (vi. 25).

† Jos., "Antt.," X. xi.; Berosus, p. 11. The Chronicler and Josephus show some confusion, caused by the similarity of the names Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin.

‡ Dan. i. 6.

§ We might infer from Ezek. xvii. 12 that Nebuchadrezzar actually took Jehoiakim with him to Babylon.

|| Ezek. xvii. 15.

¶ Jer. xxxvi. 29, xxv. 9, xxvi. 6.

* 2 Kings xxiv. 2-4.

† Grätz thinks that Jeremiah's roll was substantially Jer. xxv.

‡ Jos., "Antt.," IX. ix. 1.

§ Jer. li. 59. Ewald, Hitzig, and others take the title to mean "quartermaster" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 8).

|| Jer. xlv. 1-5.

the brazier, where Jehoiakim sat warming himself in the chilly weather.

As he listened, he was filled not only with fury, but with contempt. Such a message might well have caused him and his worst counsellors to rend their clothes; but instead of this they adopted a tone of defiance. By the time that Jehudi had read three or four columns, Jehoiakim snatched the scribe's knife which hung at his girdle, and began to cut up the scroll, with the intention of burning it. Seeing his purpose, Gemariah, Elnathan, and Seraiah entreated him not to destroy it. But he would not listen. He flung the fragments into the brazier, and they were consumed. He ordered his son Jerahmeel,* with Seraiah and Shelemiah, to seize both Baruch and Jeremiah, and bring them before him for punishment. Doubtless they would have suffered the fate of Urijah, but "the Lord hid them." There were enough persons of power on their side to render their hiding-place secure.

But the king's impious indifference, so far from making any difference in the things that were, only brought down upon his guilt a fearful doom. Truth cannot be cut to pieces, or burnt, or mechanically suppressed.

"Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers:
But error, vanquished, writes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers."

All the former denunciations, and new ones added to them, were rewritten by Jeremiah and his faithful friend in their hiding-place, and among them these words: †—

"Thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, 'He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.'"

A frightful drought added to the misery of this reign, but failed to bring the wretched king to his senses. Jeremiah describes it: ‡—

"Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they bow down mourning unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And the nobles send their menials to the waters: they come to the pits, and find no water; they return with their vessels empty; they are ashamed and confounded, and cover their heads, because of the ground which is chapped, for that no rain hath been in the land. . . Yea, the hind also in the field calveth, and forsaketh her young, because there is no grass. And the wild asses stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals; their eyes fail, because there is no herbage."

Even this affliction, so vividly and pathetically described, failed to waken any repentance. And then the doom fell. Nebuchadnezzar advanced in person against Jerusalem.§ Even the hardy nomad Rechabites had

to fly before the Chaldeans, and to take refuge in the cities which they hated. The sacred historian tells us nothing as to the manner of the death of Jehoiakim, only saying that he "slept with his fathers": his narrative of this period is exceedingly meagre. Josephus says that Nebuchadnezzar slew him and the flower of the citizens, and sent three thousand captives to Babylon.* Some imagine that he was killed by the Babylonians in a raid outside the walls of Jerusalem, or "murdered by his own people, and his body thrown for a time outside the walls." If so, the Babylonians did not war with the dead. His remains, after this "burial of an ass,"† may have been finally suffered to rest in a tomb. The Septuagint says (2 Chron. xxxvi. 8) that he was buried "in Ganosan," by which may be meant the sepulchre of Manasseh in the garden of Uzza.‡ Not for him was the wailing cry "*Hoi, adon! Hoi, hodo!*" ("Ah, Lord! Ah, his glory!").

"The memory of the wicked shall rot." Certainly this was the case with Jehoiakim. The Chronicler mysteriously alludes to "his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him."§ The Rabbis, interpreting this after their manner, say that "the thing found" was the name of the demon Codonazor, to whom he had sold himself, which after his death was discovered legibly written in Hebrew letters on his skin. "Rabbi Johanan and Rabbi Eleazar debated what was meant by 'that which was found on him.' One said that he tattooed the name of an idol upon his body (תַּאֲתוּרָה), and the other said that he had tattooed the name of the god Recreon."||

CHAPTER XXXV.

Jehoiachin.

B. C. 597.

2 KINGS xxiv. 8-16.

"There are times when ancient truths become modern falsehoods, when the signs of God's dispensations are made so clear by the course of natural events as to supersede the revelations of even their most sacred past."—STANLEY, "Lectures," ii. 521.

Jehoiachin—"Jehovah maketh steadfast"—who is also called Coniah, and—perhaps with intentional slight—Coniah, succeeded, at the age of eighteen, to the miserable and distracted heritage of the throne of Judah. The "eight years old" of the Chronicler must be a clerical error, for he had a harem. He only reigned for three months; and the historian pronounces over him, as over all the four kings of the House of Josiah, the stereotyped condemnation of evil-doing. Was there anything in the manner

* For further details of Jehoiakim see 1 Esdras i. 28: "He bound Joakim and the nobles; but Zaraces his brother he apprehended, and brought him out of Egypt." The allusion is entirely obscure, and probably arises from some corruption of the text. The literal rendering is: "And Joakim bound the nobles; but Zaraces his brother he apprehended, and brought him out of Egypt." Zaraces might be a corruption for Zedekiah, who was Jehoiakim's half-brother. Some think that Zaraces is a corruption for Urijah, and "his brother" a clerical error.

† Jer. xxxvi. 30, xxii. 19.

‡ LXX., καὶ ἐκοιμήθη Ἰωακὴμ ἐν Γανωσάν μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ταύτου.

§ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 8.

|| Sanhedrin, f. 104, 2. For another allusion see *id.* 49, 1; Herndon, "Treasures of the Talmud," p. 232.

* Zeph. i. 8; 1 Kings xxii. 26; Jer. xxxvi. 26, A. V., "The son of Hammelech." Comp. xxxviii. 6. *Hammelech* may be a proper name, or a prince of the blood-royal may be intended.

† "The 'Book,' now as afterwards, was to be the death-blow of the old regal, aristocratic, sacerdotal exclusiveness. The 'Scribe,' now first rising into importance in the person of Baruch to supply the defects of the living Prophet, was, as the printing-press in later ages, handing on the words of truth, which else might have irretrievably perished" (Stanley).

‡ Cheyne, "Jeremiah," p. 149; Jer. xiv. 1-xv. 9.

§ Nebuchadnezzar occupies a larger space in the Bible than any other heathen king, being spoken of in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

in which Josiah had trained his family which could account for their unsatisfactoriness? In Jehoiachin's case we do not know what his transgressions were, but perhaps his mother's influence rendered him as little favourable to the prophetic party as his brother Jehoiakim had been. For the *Gebirah* was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. Her name means apparently "Brass," and nothing can be deduced from it; but her father Elnathan was (as we have seen) the envoy who, by order of Jehoiakim, had dragged back from Egypt the martyr-prophet Urijah.*

Brief as was his reign of three months and ten days †—a hundred days, like that of his unhappy uncle Jehoahaz—he is largely alluded to by the contemporary prophets.

Indignant at the sins and apostasies of Judah, and convinced that her retribution was nigh at hand, Jeremiah took with him an earthen pot to the Valley of Hinnom, and there shivered it to pieces at Tophet in the presence of certain elders of the people and of the priests, explaining that his symbolic action indicated the destruction of Jerusalem. On hearing the tenor of these prophecies, the priest Pashur, who was officer of the Temple, smote Jeremiah in the face, and put him in the stocks in a prominent place by the Temple gate.‡ Jeremiah in return prophesied that Pashur and all his family should be carried into captivity, so that his name should be changed from Pashur to Magor-Missabib, "Terror on every side."

Against the king himself he pronounced the doom: "'As I live,' saith the Lord, 'though Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet will I pluck thee thence; and I will give thee into the hands of them that seek thy life, . . . even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar. . . . And I will hurl thee, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country; § . . . and there shall ye die.' . . . Is this man Coniah a despised broken piece of work? is he a vessel wherewith is no pleasure? wherefore are they hurled, he and his seed, and cast into a land which they know not? O land, land, land! hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, 'Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, or ruling any more in Judah.'

Yet there must have been something in Jeconiah which impressed favourably the minds of men. Brief as was his reign, his memory was never forgotten. We learn from the *Mishna* that one of the gates of Jerusalem—probably that by which he left the city—for ever bore his name.¶ Josephus says that his captivity was annually commemorated. Jeremiah writes in the Lamentations:—

"Our pursuers are swifter than the eagles of heaven: they have pursued us upon the mountains, they have laid wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we

said, 'Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.'"

Ezekiel compares him to a young lion:—

"He went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion, and learned to catch the prey. And he knew their palaces, and laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, by the noise of his roaring. Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him: he was taken in their pit. And they put him in ward in hooks, and brought him to the King of Babylon: they brought him into holds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel."*

A prince of whom a contemporary prophet could thus write was obviously no *fainéant*. Indeed, the energetic measures which Nebuchadrezzar adopted against him may have been due to the fact that he had endeavoured to rouse his discouraged people. But what could he do against such a power as that of the Chaldeans? Nebuchadrezzar sent his generals against Jerusalem: and when it was ripe for capture, advanced in person to take possession of it. Resistance had become hopeless; there lay no chance in anything but that complete submission which might possibly avert the worst effects of the destruction of the city. Accordingly, Jeconiah, accompanied by his mother, his court, his princes, and his officers, went out in procession, and threw themselves on the mercy of the King of Babylon. Nebuchadrezzar was far less brutal than the Sargons and Assurbanipals of Assyria; but Judah had twice revolted, and the defection of Tyre showed him that the affairs of Palestine could no longer be neglected. He thoroughly despoiled the Temple and the palace, and carried the spoils to Babylon, as Isaiah had forewarned Hezekiah should be the case.† That he might further weaken and humiliate the city, he stripped it of its king, its royal house, its court, its nobles, its soldiers, even its craftsmen and smiths, and carried ten thousand eight hundred and thirty-two captives to Babylon (Jos., "Antt.," X. vii. 1), among whom was the prophet Ezekiel. He naturally spared Jeremiah, who regarded him as "the sword of Jehovah" (Jer. xlvii. 6), and as "Jehovah's servant, to do His pleasure" (Jer. xxv. 9, xxvii. 6, xliii. 10). On the whole, Nebuchadrezzar is not treated with abhorrence by the Jews. There was something in his character which inspired respect; and the Jews deal with him leniently, both in their records and generally in their traditions. "Nebuchadrezzar," we read in the Talmud ("Taanith," f. 18, 2), "was a worthy king, and deserved that a miracle should be performed through him."

From the allusion of Ezekiel we might infer that Jehoiachin was violent and self-willed; but Josephus speaks of his kindness and gentleness.‡ Was he, as Jeremiah had prophesied, literally "childless"? § It is true that in 1 Chron. iii. 17, 18, eight sons are ascribed to him, and

* Ezek. xix. 6-9. The special allusions are no longer certain.

† 2 Kings xx. 17. The expression "*he cut to pieces* all the vessels of gold which Solomon had made" is hardly consistent with Ezra i. 7-11, unless we understand the word in a loose sense.

‡ He says that he nobly gave himself up to save the city ("Antt.," X. vii. 1). His captivity was made an era from which to date, Ezek. i. 2, viii. 1, xxiv. 1, xxvi. 1, etc. Comp. Susannah 1-4.

§ Jer. xxii. 30 "*ariri*. His "son" Assir (1 Chron. iii. 17) may have been made an eunuch (Isa. xxxix. 7).

* Jer. xxvi. 22.

† 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9.

‡ Jer. xx. 2. There seem to have been special "stocks" and "collars" in the Temple, reserved, by order of the priest Jehoiada, for those whom the priests regarded as unruly prophets (Jer. xxix. 26).

§ Jer. xxii. 24-30. The captivity of the queen-mother struck Meno's imaginations (Jer. xxix. 2).

¶ "Midloth," ii. 6. quoted by Cheyne, p. 163; Jos., "B. J.," VI. ii. 1. Comp. Fzr.

among them Shealtiel, in whom the royal line was continued. But it was far from certain that these sons were not the sons of his brother Neri, of the House of Nathan,* and it seems that they were only adopted by the unhappy captive. The Book of Baruch describes him weeping by the Euphrates.† But if we may trust the story of Susannah, his outward fortunes were peaceful, and he was allowed to live in his own house and gardens in peace, and in a certain degree of splendour.‡

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ZEDEKIAH, THE LAST KING OF JUDAH.

B. C. 597-586.

2 KINGS xxiv. 18-xxv. 7.

“Quand ce grand Dieu a choisi quelqu'un pour être l'instrument de ses desseins rien n'arrête le cours, où il enchaîne, où il aveugle, où il dompte tout ce qui est capable de résistance.”
—BOSSUET, “Oraison funèbre de Henriette Marie.”

WHEN Jehoiachin was carried captive to Babylon, never to return, his uncle Mattaniah (“Jehovah's gift”), the third son of Josiah, was put by Nebuchadrezzar in his place. In solemn ratification of the new king's authority, the Babylonian conqueror sanctioned the change of his name to Zedekiah (“Jehovah's righteousness”).§ He was twenty-one at his accession, and he reigned eleven years.

“Behold,” writes Ezekiel, “the King of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and brought them to him to Babylon; and he took of the seed royal” (i. e., Zedekiah), “and made a covenant with him; he also brought him under an oath: and took away the mighty of the land, that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand.”||

Perhaps by this covenant Zechariah meant to emphasise the meaning of his name, and to show that he would reign in righteousness.

The prophet at the beginning of the chapter describes Nebuchadrezzar and Jehoiachin in “a riddle.”

“A great eagle,” he says, “with great wings and long pinions, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the top of the cedar” (Jehoiachin); “he cropped off the topmost of the young twigs thereof, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. He took also of the seed of the land” (Zedekiah), “and planted it in a fruitful

soil; he placed it beside great waters, he set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned towards him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs.”*

The words refer to the first three years of Zedekiah's reign, and they imply, consistently with the views of the prophets, that, if the weak king had been content with the lowly eminence to which God had called him, and if he had kept his oath and covenant with Babylon, all might yet have been well with him and his land. At first it seemed likely to be so; for Zedekiah wished to be faithful to Jehovah. He made a covenant with all the people to set free their Hebrew slaves. Alas! it was very shortlived. Self-sacrifice cost something, and the princes soon took back the discarded bond-servants.† What made this conduct the more shocking was that their covenant to obey the law had been made in the most solemn manner by “cutting a calf in twain, and passing between the severed halves.”‡ But the weak king was perfectly powerless in the hands of his tyrannous aristocracy.§

The exiles in Babylon were now the best and most important section of the nation. Jeremiah compares them to good figs; while the remnant at Jerusalem were bad and withered. He and Ezekiel raised their voices, as in strophe and antistrophe, for the teaching alike of the exiles and of the remnant left at Jerusalem, for whom the exiles were bidden to entreat God in prayer. Zedekiah himself made at least one journey northward, either voluntarily or under summons, to renew his oath and reassure Nebuchadrezzar of his fidelity.|| He was accompanied by Seraiah, the brother of Baruch, who was privately entrusted by Jeremiah with a prophecy of the fall of Babylon, which he was to fling into the midst of the Euphrates.¶

The last King of Judah seems to have been weak rather than wicked. He was a reed shaken by the wind. He yielded to the influence of the last person who argued with him; and he seems to have dreaded above all things the personal ridicule, danger, and opposition which it was his duty to have defied. Yet we cannot withhold from him our deep sympathy; for he was born in terrible times—to witness the death-throes of his country's agony, and to share in them. It was no longer a question of independence, but only of the choice of servitudes. Judah was like a silly and trembling sheep between two huge beasts of prey.**

Only thus can we account for the strange apostasies—“the abominations of the heathen”—with which he permitted the Temple to be polluted; and for the ill-treatment which he allowed to be inflicted on Jeremiah and other prophets, to whom in his heart he felt inclined to listen.

What these abominations were we read with amazement in the eighth chapter of Ezekiel. The prophet is carried in vision to Jerusalem, and

* Luke iii. 27, 31; Matt. i. 12.

† Baruch, i. 3, 4.

‡ The favorable notice of Nebuchadrezzar in “Taanith” (quoted above) is not found in “Berachoth,” f. 57, 2, where he is called “the wicked.” There are many wild legends about him. In “Nedarim” (f. 65, 2), R. Yitzchak says: “May melted gold be poured into the mouth of the wicked Nebuchadrezzar! Had not an angel struck him on the mouth, he would have outshone all David's songs and praises.” With reference to Isa. xxii. 1, 2, the Rabbis say that Jeconiah went to the Temple roof, and flung up the keys into the air, when Nebuchadrezzar required them; “a hand took them, and they were seen no more” (“Shekalim,” vi. 5). In “Nedarim” (f. 65, 2) we are told that Zedekiah's rebellion consisted in divulging, contrary to his oath, that he had seen Nebuchadrezzar eating a live hare (Hershon, “Treasures of the Talmud.”)

§ Comp. Jer. xxiii. 6: Jehovah-Tsidkenu.

|| Ezek. xvii. 12-14.

* Ezek. xvii. 1-6.

† Jer. xxxiv. 8-11.

‡ Jer. xxxiv. 19. Comp. Gen. xv. 17.

§ This is strikingly shown by his piteous remark to them in Jer. xxxviii. 5.

|| He first sent two of Jeremiah's friends, Elasah and Gemariah, the son of Shaphan.

¶ Some critics have doubted the authenticity of Jer. li., lii.

** 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-21; Stanley, ii. 528; Milman, i. 394.

there he sees the Asherah—"the image which provoketh to jealousy"—which had so often been erected and destroyed and re-erected. Then through a secret door he sees creeping things, and abominable beasts, and the idol-blocks of the House of Israel pourtrayed upon the wall, while several elders of Israel stood before them and adored, with censers in their hands—among whom he must specially have grieved to see Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan,* flattering himself, as did his followers, that in that dark chamber Jehovah saw them not. Next at the northern gate he sees Zion's daughters weeping for Tammuz, or Adonis. Once more, in the inner court of the Temple, between the porch and the altar, he sees about twenty-five men with their backs to the altar, and their faces to the east; and they worshipped the sun towards the east; and, lo! they put the vine branch to their nose.† Were not these crimes sufficient to evoke the wrath of Jehovah, and to alienate His ear from prayers offered by such polluted worshippers? Egypt, Assyria, Syria, Chaldæa, all contributed their idolatrous elements to the detestable syncretism; and the king and the priests ignored, permitted, or connived at it.‡ This must surely be answered for. How could it have been otherwise? The king and the priests were the official guardians of the Temple, and these aberrations could not have gone on without their cognisance. There was another party of sheer formalists, headed by men like the priest Pashur, who thought to make talismans of rites and shibboleths, but had no sincerity of heart-religion.§ To these, too, Jeremiah was utterly opposed. In his opinion Josiah's reformation had failed. Neither Ark, nor Temple, nor sacrifice were anything in the world to him in comparison with true religion. All the prophets with scarcely one exception are anti-ritualists; but none more decidedly so than the prophet-priest. His name is associated in tradition with the hiding of the Ark, and a belief in its ultimate restoration; yet to Jeremiah, apart from the moral and spiritual truths of which it was the material symbol, the Ark was no better than a wooden chest. His message from Jehovah is, "I will give you pastors according to My heart, . . . and they shall say no more, 'The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord': neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they miss it; neither shall it be made any more."||

Doom followed the guilt and folly of king, priests, and people. If political wisdom were insufficient to show Zedekiah that the necessities of the case were an indication of God's will, he had the warnings of the prophets constantly ringing in his ears, and the assurance that he must remain faithful to Nebuchadrezzar. But he was in fear of his own princes and courtiers. A combined embassy reached him from the kings of Edom, Ammon, Moab, Tyre, and Sidon, urging him to join in a league against Babylon.¶

* Shaphan's other sons, Gemariah, Ahikam, Elashah, and his grandson Gedaliah, were friends of Jeremiah.

† Ezek. viii. 17. The allusion seems to be to a custom like that of the Parsees, who hold a branch of tamarisk or pomegranate twigs (called *barsom*) before their mouths when they adore the sacred fire. Strabo, xv. 732; Spiegel, "Zendavesta," ii. p. lxxviii; "Eran. Alterthumsk.," iii. 571 (Orelli, *ad loc.*). Lightfoot explains it, "add fuel to their wrath."

‡ Ezek. xvi. 15-34.

§ Jer. vii. 4, 21-28, viii. 8, xxiii. 31-33, xxxi. 33, 34.

¶ Jer. iii. 15, 16.

¶ Jer. xxvii. 3.

This embassy was supported by a powerful party in Jerusalem. Their solicitations were rendered more plausible by the recent accession (B. C. 590) of the young and vigorous Pharaoh Hophrah—the Apries of Herodotus*—to the throne of Egypt, and by the recrudescence of that incurable disease of Hebrew politics, a confidence in the idle promises of Egypt to supply the confederacy with men and horses.† In vain did Jeremiah and Ezekiel uplift their warning voices. The blind confidence of the king and of the nobles was sustained by the flattering visions and promises of false prophets, prominent among whom was a certain Hananiah, the son of Azur, of Gibeon, "the prophet."‡ To indicate the futility of the contemplated rebellion, Jeremiah had made "thongs and poles" with yokes, and had sent them to the kings, whose embassy had reached Jerusalem, with a message of the most emphatic distinctness, that Nebuchadrezzar was God's appointed servant, and that they must serve him till God's own appointed time. If they obeyed this intimation, they would be left undisturbed in their own lands; if they disobeyed it, they would be scourged into absolute submission by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence. Jeremiah delivered the same oracle to his own king.§

The warning was rendered unavailing by the conduct of Hananiah. He prophesied that within two full years God would break the yoke of the King of Babylon; and that the captive Jeconiah, and the nobles, and the vessels of the House of the Lord would be brought back. Jeremiah, by way of an acted parable, had worn round his neck one of his own yokes. Hananiah, in the Temple, snatched it off, broke it to pieces, and said, "So will I break the yoke of Nebuchadrezzar from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years."||

We can imagine the delight, the applause, the enthusiasm with which the assembled people listened to these bold predictions. Hananiah argued with them, so to speak, in shorthand, for he appealed to their desires and to their prejudices. It is always the tendency of nations to say to their prophets, "Say not unto us hard things; speak smooth things; prophesy deceits."

Against Hananiah personally there seems to have been no charge, except that in listening to the lying spirit of his own desires he could not hear the true message of God. But he did not stand alone.¶ Among the children of the captivity, his promises were echoed by two downright false prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah, the son of Maaseiah, who prophesied lies in God's name. They were men of evil life, and a fearful fate overtook them. Their words against Babylon came to the ears of Nebuchadrezzar, and they were "roasted in the fire," so that the horror of their end passed into a proverb and a curse.** Truly God fed these false prophets with worm-wood, and gave them poisonous water to drink.††

* Herod., ii. 161.

† Psammis, the son of Necho, only reigned six years; Hophrah (B. C. 594) was his son.

‡ The LXX. calls him "the false prophet."

§ Jer. xxvii. 1-8, 12-18. On vv. 16-22 see the LXX.

¶ Here (Jer. xxviii. 11, and in xxxiv. 1, xxxix. 5) the name is written "Nebuchadnezzar"; everywhere else in Jeremiah it is "Nebuchadrezzar."

** Part of his dispute with Jeremiah turned on the recovery or non-recovery of the Temple vessels. Zedekiah is said to have given a set of silver vessels to replace the old ones (Baruch i. 8).

†† Jer. xxix. 21-23.

†† Jer. xxiii. 9-32.

After the action of Hananiah, Jeremiah went home stricken and ashamed: apparently he never again uttered a public discourse in the Temple. It took him by surprise; and he was for the moment, perhaps, daunted by the plausible echo of the multitude to the lying prophet. But when he got home the answer of Jehovah came: "Go and tell Hananiah, Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou hast made for them yokes of iron. I have put a yoke of iron on the necks of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadrezzar. Hear now, Hananiah, The Lord hath not sent thee: thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Behold, this year thou shalt die, because thou hast spoken revolt against the Lord. What hath the chaff to do with the wheat? saith the Lord."*

Two months after Hananiah lay dead, and men's minds were filled with fear. They saw that God's word was indeed as a fire to burn, and as a hammer to dash in pieces.† But meanwhile Zedekiah had been over-persuaded to take the course which the true prophets had forbidden. Misled by the false prophets and mingling prophetesses whom Ezekiel denounced,‡ who daubed men's walls with whitened plaster, he had sent an embassy to Pharaoh Hophrah, asking for an army of infantry and cavalry to support his rebellion from Assyria.§ In the eyes of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the crime did not only consist in defying the exhortations of those whom Zedekiah knew to be Jehovah's accredited messengers. In mitigation of this offence he might have pleaded the extreme difficulty of discriminating the truth amid the ceaseless babble of false pretenders.¶ But, on the other hand, he had broken the solemn oath which he had taken to Nebuchadrezzar in the name of God, and the sacred covenant which he seems to have twice ratified with him.‡ This it was which raised the indignation of the faithful, and led Ezekiel to prophesy:—

"Shall he prosper?
Shall he escape that doeth such things?
Or shall he break the covenant and be believed?
'As I live,' saith the Lord God, 'surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king,
Whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke,
Even with him in the midst of Babylon, shall he die.'"**

Sad close for a dynasty which had now lasted for nearly five centuries!

As for Pharaoh, he too was an eagle, as Nebuchadrezzar was—a great eagle with great wings and many feathers, but not so great. The trailing vine of Judah bent her roots towards him, but it should wither in the furrows when the east wind touched it.††

The result of Zedekiah's alliance with Egypt was the intermission of his yearly tribute to Assyria; and at last, in the ninth year of Zedekiah, Nebuchadrezzar was aroused to put down this Palestinian revolt, supported as it was by the vague magnificence of Egypt. Jeremiah had said, "Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, is but a noise [or desolation]: he hath passed the time appointed."†††

* Jer. xxviii. 13-16, xxiii. 28.

† Jer. xxiii. 29.

‡ Ezek. xiii. 1-23.

§ Ezek. xvii. 25.

¶ Josephus rightly attributes the unfortunate career of Zedekiah to the weakness with which he listened to evil counsellors, and to the insolent multitude.

† 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13; Jer. lii. 3.

** Ezek. xvii. 15, 16, 18, 19.

†† Ezek. xvii. 7-10.

††† Jer. xlvi. 17.

This was about the year 589. In 598 Nebuchadrezzar had carried Jehochin into captivity, and ever since then some of his forces had been engaged in the vain effort to capture Tyre, which still, after a ten years' siege, drew its supplies from the sea, and remained impregnable on her island rock. He did not choose to raise this long-continued siege by diverting the troops to beleaguer so strong a fortress as Jerusalem, and therefore he came in person from Babylon.

In Ezek. xxi. 20-24 we have a singular and vivid glimpse of his march. On his way he came to a spot where two roads branched off before him. One led to Rabbath, the capital of Ammon, on the east of Jordan; the other to Jerusalem, on the west. Which road should he take? Personally, it was a matter of indifference; so he threw the burden of responsibility upon his gods by leaving the decision to the result of *belomancy*.* Taking in his hand a sheaf of brightened arrows, he held them upright, and decided to take the route indicated by the fall of the greater number of arrows. He confirmed his uncertainty by consulting *teraphim*, and by *hepatoscopy*—*i. e.*, by examining the liver of slain victims. Rabbath and the Ammonites were not to be spared, but it was upon the covenant-breaking king and city that the vengeance was to fall.† And this is what the prophet has to say to Zedekiah:—

"And thou, O deadly-wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day is come in the time of the iniquity of the end; thus saith the Lord God, 'Remove the mitre, and take off the crown. This shall be not thus. Exalt the low, and abase that which is high. An overthrow, overthrow, overthrow, will I make it: this also shall be no more, until He come whose right it is: and I will give it Him.'‡

So (B. c. 587) Jerusalem was delivered over to siege, even as Ezekiel had sketched upon a tile.§ It was to be assailed in the old Assyrian manner—as we see it represented in the British Museum bas-relief, where Sennacherib is portrayed in the act of besieging Lachish—with forts, mounds, and battering-rams; and Ezekiel had also been bidden to put up an iron plate between him and his pictured city, to represent the mantelet from behind which the archers shot.

In this dread crisis Zedekiah sent Zephaniah, the son of Maaseiah, the priest, and Jehucal, to Jeremiah, entreating his prayers for the city,‖ for he had not yet been put in prison. Doubtless he prayed, and at first it looked as if deliverance would come. Pharaoh Hophrah put in motion the Egyptian army with its Carian mercenaries and Soudanese negroes, and Nebuchadrezzar was sufficiently alarmed to raise the siege and go to meet the Egyptians. The hopes of the people probably rose high, though multitudes seized the opportunity to fly to the mountains.¶ The circumstances closely resembled those under which Sennacherib had raised the siege of Jerusalem to go to meet Tirhakah the

* Another form of *belomancy* is still commonly practised among the Arabs. Three arrows are placed in a vessel; on one of them is written, "My God permits me"; on another, "My God forbids me"; the third is blank. They are then shaken, and the decision is guided by the one which falls out first. Comp. Homer, "Iliad," iii. 316; "Speaker's Commentary," *ad loc.*

† Ezek. xxi. 28-32.

‡ An allusion to the restoration of Jeconiah or his descendants, and to the far-off Messiah, meek and lowly.

§ Ezek. iv. 1-3.

‖ Jer. xxxvii. 3.

¶ Ezek. vii. 16.

Ethiopian; and perhaps there were some, and the king among them, who looked that such a wonder might be vouchsafed to him through the prayers of Jeremiah as had been vouchsafed to Hezekiah through the prayers of Isaiah. Not for a moment did Jeremiah encourage these vain hopes. To Zephaniah, as to an earlier deputation from the king, when he sent Pashur with him to inquire of the prophet, Jeremiah returned a remorseless answer. It is too late. Pharaoh shall be defeated; even if the Chaldean army were smitten, its wounded soldiers would suffice to besiege and burn Jerusalem, and take into captivity the miserable inhabitants after they had suffered the worst horrors of a besieged city.*

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JEREMIAH AND HIS PROPHECIES.

JEREMIAH i. 1-v. 31.

"Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes—they were souls
that stood alone,
While the men they agonised for hurled the con-
tumelious stone;
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam
incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith
divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's
supreme design."

—LOWELL.

TRULY Jeremiah was a prophet of evil. The king might have addressed him in the words with which Agamemnon reproaches Kalchas.†

"Augur accursed! denouncing mischief still:
Prophet of plagues, for ever boding ill!
Still must that tongue some wounding message bring,
And still thy priestly pride provoke thy king."

Never was there a sadder man †. Like Phocion, he believed in the enemies of his country more than he believed in his own people. He saw "Too late" written upon everything. He saw himself all but universally execrated as a coward, as a traitor, as one who weakened the nerves and damped the courage of those who were fighting against fearful odds for their wives and children, the ashes of their fathers, their altars, and their hearths. It had become his fixed conviction that any prophets—and there were a multitude of them—who prophesied peace were false prophets, and *ipso facto* proved themselves conspirators against the true well-being of the land.§ In point of fact, Jeremiah lived to witness the death-struggle of the idea of religion in its predominantly national character (vii. 8-16, vi. 8). "The continuity of the national faith refused to be bound up with the continuance of the nation. When the nation is dissolved into individual elements, the continuity and ultimate victory of the true faith depends on the relations of Jehovah to individual souls out of which the nation shall be bound up."||

And now a sad misfortune happened to Jeremiah. His home was not at Jerusalem, but at

Anathoth, though he had long been driven from his native village by the murderous plots of his own kindred, and of those who had been infuriated by his incessant prophecies of doom. When the Chaldeans retired from Jerusalem to encounter Pharaoh, he left the distressed city for the land of Benjamin. "to receive his portion from thence in the midst of the people"—apparently, for the sense is doubtful, to claim his dues of maintenance as a priest. But at the city gate he was arrested by Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the captain of the watch, who charged him with the intention of deserting to the Chaldeans. Jeremiah pronounced the charge to be a lie; but Irijah took him before the princes, who hated him, and consigned him to dreary and dangerous imprisonment in the house of Jonathan the scribe. In the vaults of this "house of the pit" he continued many days.* The king sympathised with him: he would gladly have delivered him, if he could, from the rage of the princes; but he did not dare.†

Meanwhile, the siege went on, and the people never forgot the anguish of despair with which they waited the reinvestiture of the city. Ever since that day it has been kept as a fast—the fast of Tebeth. Zedekiah, yearning for some advice, or comfort—if comfort were to be had—from the only man whom he really trusted, sent for Jeremiah to the palace, and asked him in despicable secrecy. "Is there any word from the Lord?" The answer was the old one: "Yes! Thou shalt be delivered into the hands of the King of Babylon." Jeremiah gave it without quailing, but seized the opportunity to ask on what plea he was imprisoned. Was he not a prophet? Had he not prophesied the return of the Chaldean host? Where now were all the prophets who had prophesied peace? Would not the king at least save him from the detestable prison in which he was dying by inches?

The king heard his petition, and he was removed to a better prison in the court of the watch, where he received his daily piece of bread out of the bakers' street until all the bread in the city was spent.

For now utter famine came upon the wretched Jews, to add to the horrors and accidents of the siege. If we would know what that famine was in its appalling intensity, we must turn to the Book of Lamentations. Those elegies, so unutterably plaintive, may not be by the prophet himself, but only by his school; but they show us what was the frightful condition of the people of Jerusalem before and during the last six months of the siege. "The sword of the wilderness"—the roving and plundering Bedouin—made it impossible to get out of the city in any direction. Things were as dreadfully hopeless as they had been in Samaria when it was besieged by Benhadad.‡ Hunger and thirst reduce human nature to its most animal conditions. They obliterate the merest elements of morality. They make men like beasts, and reveal the ferocity which is never quite dead in any but the purest and loftiest souls. They arouse the least human instincts of the aboriginal animal. The day came when

* Jer. xxi. 1-10, xxxvii. 1-17. Josephus says that Pharaoh was defeated ("Ant.", X. vii. 3). Jeremiah merely says that he and his army returned to their own land.

† Homer, "Iliad," i. 106-100.

‡ But it must not be forgotten that Jer. xxxi. 1-34 is so hopeful that it has been called "the Gospel before Christ."

§ Jer. vi. 14, viii. 11; Ezek. xiii. 10.

|| W. R. Smith, "Prophecy" ("Enc. Brit.').

* Jer. xxxvii. 11-15.

† Jer. xxxviii. 5. The Jewish aristocracy consisted, says Grätz, of three classes: the *beni hammelech*, or "king's sons"—i. e., princes of the blood-royal; the *roshei aboth*, "heads of the fathers," or *zeeknim*, "elders"; and the *abodi hammelech*, "king's servants," or "courtiers" (ii. 446).

‡ Lam. v. 4.

there was no more bread left in Jerusalem.* The fair and ruddy Nazarites, who had been purer than snow, whiter than milk, more ruddy than corals, lovely as sapphires, became like withered boughs,† and even their friends did not recognise them in those ghastly and emaciated figures which crept about the streets. The daughters of Zion, more cruel in their hunger than the very jackals, lost the instincts of pity and motherhood. Mothers and fathers devoured their own little unweaned children.‡ There was parricide as well as infanticide in the horrible houses. They seemed to plead that none could blame them, since the lives of many had become an intolerable anguish, and no man had bread for his little ones, and their tongues cleaved to the roof of their mouth. All that happened six centuries later, during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, happened now. Then Martha, the daughter of Nicodemus ben-Gorion, once a lady of enormous wealth, was seen picking the grains of corn from the offal of the streets; now the women who had fed delicately and been brought up in scarlet were seen sitting desolate on heaps of dung.§ And Jehovah did not raise His hand to save His guilty and dying people. It was too late!

And as is always the case in such extremities, there were men who stood defiant and selfish amid the universal misery. Murder, oppression, and luxury continued to prevail. The godless nobles did not intermit the building of their luxurious houses, asserting to themselves and others that, after all, the final catastrophe was not near at hand. The sudden death of one of them—Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah—while Ezekiel was prophesying, terrified the prophet so much that he flung himself on his face and cried with a loud voice, "Ah, Lord God! wilt Thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" But on the others this death by the visitation of God seems to have produced no effect; and the glory of God left the city, borne away upon its cherubim-chariot.||

Even under the stress of these dreadful circumstances the Jews held out with that desperate tenacity which has often been shown by nations fighting behind strong walls for their very existence, but by no nation more decidedly than by the Jews. And if the rebel-party, and the lying prophets who had brought the city to this pass, still entertained any hopes either of a diversion caused by Pharaoh Hophrah, or of some miraculous deliverance such as that which had saved the city from Sennacherib years earlier, it is not unnatural that they should have regarded Jeremiah with positive fury. For he still continued to prophesy the captivity. What specially angered them was his message to the people that all who remained in Jerusalem should die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, but that those who deserted to the Chaldeans should live. It was on the ground of his having said this that they had imprisoned him as a deserter; and when Pashur and his son Gedaliah heard that he was still saying this, they and the other princes entreated Zedekiah to put him to death as a pernicious traitor, who weakened the hands of the patriot soldiers. Jeremiah was not guilty of the

lack of patriotism with which they charged him. The day of independence had passed for ever, and Babylon, not Egypt, was the appointed suzerain. The counselling of submission—as many a victorious chieftain has been forced at last to counsel it, from the days of Hannibal to those of Thiers—is often the true and the only possible patriotism in doomed and decadent nations. Zedekiah timidly abandoned the prophet to the rage of his enemies; but being afraid to murder him openly as Urijah had been murdered, they flung him into a well in the dungeon of Malchiah, the king's son. Into the mire of this pit he sank up to the arms, and there they purposely left him to starve and rot.* But if no Israelite pitied him, his condition moved the compassion of Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian, one of the king's eunuch-chamberlains. He hurried to the king in a storm of pity and indignation. He found him sitting, as a king should do, at the post of danger in the gate of Benjamin; for Zedekiah was not a physical, though he was a moral, coward. Ebed-Melech told the king that Jeremiah was dying of starvation, and Zedekiah bade him take three† men with him and rescue the dying man. The faithful Ethiopian hurried to a cellar under the treasury, took with him some old, worn fragments of robes, and, letting them down by cords, called to Jeremiah to put them under his arm-pits. He did so, and they drew him up into the light of day, though he still remained in prison.

It seems to have been at this time that, in spite of his grim vaticination of immediate retribution, Jeremiah showed his serene confidence in the ultimate future by accepting the proposal of his cousin Hanameel to buy some of the paternal fields at Anathoth, though at that very moment they were in the hands of the Chaldeans. Such an act, publicly performed, must have caused some consolation to the besieged, just as did the courage of the Roman senator who gave a good price for the estate outside the walls of Rome on which Hannibal was actually encamped.

Then Zedekiah once more secretly sent for him, and implored him to tell the unvarnished truth. "If I do," said the prophet, "will you not kill me? and will you in any case hearken to me?" Zedekiah swore not to betray him to his enemies; and Jeremiah told him that, even at that eleventh hour, if he would go out and make submission to the Babylonians, the city should not be burnt, and he should save the lives of himself and of his family. Zedekiah believed him, but pleaded that he was afraid of the mockery of the deserters to whom he might be delivered. Jeremiah assured him that he should not be so delivered, and that, if he refused to obey, nothing remained for the city, and for him and his wives and children, but final ruin. The king was too weak to follow what he must now have felt to be the last chance which God had opened out for him. He could only "attain to half-believe." He entrusted the result to chance, with miserable vacillation of purpose; and the door of hope was closed upon him. His one desire was to conceal the interview; and if it came to the ears of the princes—of whom he was shamefully afraid—he begged Jeremiah to say that he had only entreated the

* Jer. xxxvii. 21, xxxviii. 9, lii. 6.

† Lam. iv. 7, 8.

‡ Lam. iv. 10, ii. 20; Ezek. v. 10; Baruch ii. 3.

§ Lam. iv. 5. See Stanley, "Lectures," ii. 470.

|| Ezek. xi. 22.

* This may possibly be alluded to in Psalm lxxix. 2.

† Jer. xxxviii. 10. A. V., "thirty."

king not to send him back to die in Jonathan's prison.

As he had suspected, it became known that Jeremiah had been summoned to an interview with the king. They questioned the prophet in prison. He told them the story which the king had suggested to him, and the truth remained undiscovered. For this deflection from exact truth it is tolerably certain that, in the state of men's consciences upon the subject of veracity in those days, the prophet's moral sense did not for a moment reproach him. He remained in his prison, guarded probably by the faithful Ebed-Melech, until Jerusalem was taken.

Let us pity the dreadful plight of Zedekiah, aggravated as it was by his weak temperament. "He stands at the head of a people determined to defend itself, but is himself without either hope or courage."*

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

B. C. 586.

2 KINGS xxv. 1-21.

"In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all nations."—ZECH. xii. 3.

"An end is come, the end is come; it awaketh against thee: behold the end is come."—EZEK. vii. 6.

"Behold yon sterile spot
Where now the wandering Arab's tent
Flaps in the desert blast;
There once old Salem's haughty fane
Reared high to heaven its thousand golden domes,
And in the blushing face of day
Exposed its shameful glory."

—SHELLEY.

AFTER the siege had lasted for a year and a half, all but one day, at midnight the besiegers made a breach in the northern city wall.† It was a day of terrible remembrance, and throughout the exile it was observed as a solemn fast.‡

Nebuchadrezzar was no longer in person before the walls. He had other warlike operations and other sieges on hand—the sieges of Tyre, Asekah, and Lachish—as well as Jerusalem. He had therefore established his headquarters at Lachish, and did not superintend the final operations against the city.§ But now that all had become practically hopeless, and the capture of the rest of Jerusalem was only a matter of a few days more, Zedekiah and his few best surviving princes and soldiers fled by night through the opposite quarter of the city. There was a little unwatched postern between two walls near the king's garden, and through this he and his escort fled, hoping to reach the Arabah, and make good his escape, perhaps to the Wady-el-Arish, which he could reach in five hours, through the wilds beyond the Jordan.¶ The heads of the king and his followers were muffled, and they carried on

their shoulders their choicest possessions.* But he was betrayed by some of the mean deserters,† and pursued by the Chaldeans. His movements were doubtless impeded by the presence of his harem and his children. His little band of warriors could offer no resistance, and fled in all directions. Zedekiah, his family, and his attendants were taken prisoners, and carried to Riblah to appear before the mighty conqueror.‡ Nebuchadrezzar showed no pity towards one whom he had elevated to the throne, and who had violated his most solemn assurances by intriguing with his enemies. He brought him to trial, and doomed him to witness with his own eyes the massacre of his two sons and of his attendants. After he had endured this anguish worse than death, his eyes were put out, and, bound in double fetters,§ he was sent to Babylon, where he ended his miserable days. To blind a king deprived him of all hope of recovering the throne, and was therefore in ancient days a common punishment.¶ The LXX. adds that he was sent by the Babylonians to grind a mill—*eis oiklov μλάνov*. This is probably a reminiscence of the blinded Samson. But thus were fulfilled with startling literalness two prophecies which might well have seemed to be contradictory.¶ For Jeremiah had said (xxxiv. 3),—

"Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the King of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon."

Whereas Ezekiel had said (xii. 13),—

"I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there."

Henceforth Zedekiah was forgotten, and his place knew him no more. We can only hope that in his blindness and solitude he was happier than he had been on the throne of Judah, and that before death came to end his miseries he found peace with God.

The conqueror did not come to spoil the city. He left that task to three great officers,—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, or chief executioner; ** Nebushasban, the Rabсарis, or chief of the eunuchs; and Nergalshareser, the Rabmag, or chief of the magicians. They took their station by the Middle Gate, and first gave up the city to pillage and massacre. No horror was spared.†† The sepulchres were rifled for treas-

* Ezek. xii. 12. Perhaps the gate alluded to is the fountain gate of Neh. iii. 15. Ezekiel seems to speak of "digging through the wall." Robinson says that a trace of the outermost wall still exists in the rude pathway which crosses the mouth of the Tyropæon on a mound hard by the old mulberry tree which marks the traditional site of Isaiah's martyrdom.

† Jos., "Antt.," X. viii. 2.

‡ Traces of his presence are found in inscriptions in the Wady of the Dog near Beyrout, and in Wady Brissa. See Sayce, *Proceedings of the Bibl. Arch. Soc.*, November, 1881.

§ 2 Kings xxv. 7. See Layard, "Nineveh," ii. 376.

¶ The blinding was sometimes done by passing a red-hot rod of silver or brass over the open eyes; sometimes by plucking out the eyes (Jer. lii. 11, Vulg. *oculos eruit*; 2 Kings xxv. 7, *effodit*). See a hideous illustration of a yet more brutal process in Botta ("Monum. de Ninéve," Pl. cxviii.), where Sargon with his own hand is thrusting a lance into the eyes of a captive prince, whose head is kept steady by a bridle fastened to a hook, through his lips. See also Judg. xvi. 21; Xen., "Anab.," i. 9, § 13; Procopius, "Bel. Pers.," i. 1; Ammianus, xxvii. 12; Rawlinson, "Ancient Monarchies," i. 307.

¶ Jos., "Antt.," X. viii. 2, 3.

** Nebur-zir-iddina, "Nebo bestowed seed." Jer. xxxix. 9, 13, is in some way corrupt. Ezekiel (ix. 2), however, and Josephus ("Antt.," X. viii. 2) mention six officers. Nebuzaradan was "chief of the executioners" (Gen. xxxvii. 36; 1 Kings ii. 25, 35, 46).

†† Psalm lxxix. 2, 3.

* Van Oort, iv. 52.

† Jos., "Antt.," X. viii. 2; 2 Chron. xxxii. 5, xxxiii. 14. First and last, the siege seems to have lasted one year, five months, and twenty-seven days.

‡ Zech. viii. 10.

§ The inscriptions of Nebuchadrezzar which have been as yet deciphered speak of his sumptuous buildings and of his worship of the gods rather than of his conquests. See "Records of the Past," vii. 60-78.

¶ Robinson, "Bibl. Res.," ii. 536. Some suppose that "the king's garden" was near the mouth of the Tyropæon Valley.

ure; the young Levites were slain in the house of their Sanctuary; women were violated; maidens and hoary-headed men were slain. "Princes were hanged up by the hand, and the faces of elders were dishonoured; priest and prophet were slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord." * till the blood flowed like red wine from the winepress over the desecrated floor.† The guilty city drank at the hand of God the dregs of the cup of His fury.‡ It was the final vengeance. "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion. He will no more carry thee away into captivity."§ And, meanwhile, the little Bedouin principalities were full of savage exultation at the fate of their hereditary foe. || This was felt by the Jews as a culmination of their misery, that they became a derision to their enemies. The callous insults hurled at them by the neighbouring tribes in their hour of shame awoke that implacable wrath against Gebal and Ammon and Amalek which finds its echo in the Prophets and in the Psalms.*

After this the devoted capital was given up to destruction. The Temple was plundered. All that remained of its often-rifled splendours was carried away, such as the ancient pillars Jachin and Boaz, the masterpieces of Hiram's art, the caldron, the brazen sea, and all the vessels of gold, of silver, and of brass. Then the walls of the city were dismantled and broken down. The Temple, and the palace, and all the houses of the princes were committed to the flames. As for the principal remaining inhabitants, Seraiah the chief priest, perhaps the grandson of Hilkiah and the grandfather of Ezra, Zephaniah the second priest, the three Levitic doorkeepers, the secretary of war, five of the greatest nobles who "saw the king's face," ** and sixty of the common people who had been marked out for special punishment, were taken to Riblah, and there massacred by order of Nebuchadrezzar.†† With these Nebuchadrezzar took away as his prisoners a multitude of the wealthier inhabitants, leaving behind him but the humblest artisans. As the craftsmen and smiths had been deported,‡‡ these poor people busied themselves in agriculture, as vine-dressers and husbandmen. The existing estates were divided among them; and being few in number, they found the amplest sustenance in treasures of wheat and barley, and oil and honey, and summer fruits, which they kept concealed for safety, as the fellaheen of Palestine do to this day.§§

According to the historic chapters added to the prophecies of Jeremiah, the whole number of captives carried away from Jerusalem by

* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17; Lam. ii. 21, v. 11, 12.

† To the reminiscences of these scenes are partly due the Talmudic legends about the blood of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, bubbling up to demand vengeance. Nebuchadrezzar slew a holocaust of human victims to appease the shade of the wrathful prophet, until the king himself was terrified, and asked if he wished his whole people to be slaughtered. Then the blood ceased to bubble.

‡ See Rawlinson, "Kings of Israel and Judah," p. 236.

§ Lam. iv. 22.

|| Psalm lxxix. 1.

* Obad. 14-16; Psalm cxxxvii. 7; 1 Esdras iv. 45.

** Comp. Esther i. 14.

†† On these personages see 1 Chron. vi. 13, 14; 2 Kings xxii. 4; Ezra vii. 1; Jer. xxi. 1, xxxvii. 3, etc.

‡‡ Nebuchadrezzar had no doubt needed them for his great buildings at Babylon, and their deportation would render more difficult any attempt to refortify Jerusalem.

§§ Jer. xli. 8, xl. 12.

Nebuchadrezzar in the seventh, the eighteenth, and the twenty-third years of his reign were 4,600.* The completeness of the desolation might well have caused the heartrending outcry of Psalm lxxix.: "O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy Temple have they defiled; they have made Jerusalem a heap of stones. The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of heaven, and the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the land. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was no man to bury them."

Among the remnant of the people was Jeremiah. Nebuzaradan had received from his king the strictest injunctions to treat him honourably; for he had heard from the deserters that he had always opposed the rebellion, and had prophesied the issue of the siege. He was indeed sent in manacles to Ramah;† but there Nebuchadrezzar gave him free choice to do exactly as he liked—either to accompany him to Babylon, where he should be well treated and cared for, or to return to Jerusalem, and live where he liked. This was his desire. Nebuchadrezzar therefore dismissed him with food and a present;‡ and he returned. The LXX. and Vulgate represent him as sitting weeping over the ruins of Jerusalem, and tradition says that he sought for his lamentations a cave still existing near the Damascus Gate. Of this Scripture knows nothing. But the melancholy prophet was only reserved for further tragedies. He had lived one of the most afflicted of human lives. A man of tender heart and shrinking disposition, he had been called to set his face like a flint against kings, and nobles, and mobs. Worse than this, being himself a prophet and priest, naturally led to sympathise with both, he was the doomed antagonist of both—victim of "one of the strongest of human passions, the hatred of priests against a priest who attacks his own order, the hatred of prophets against a prophet who ventures to have a voice and a will of his own." Even his own family had plotted against his life at humble Anathoth;§ and when he retreated to Jerusalem, he found himself at the centre of the storm. Now perhaps he hoped for a gleam of sunset peace. But his hopes were disappointed. He had to tread the path of anguish and hatred to the bitter end, as he had trodden it for nearly fifty years of the troubled life which had followed his call in early boyhood.

"But, in the case of Jerusalem," says Dean Stanley, "both its first and second destruction have the peculiar interest of involving the dissolution of a religious dispensation, combined with the agony of an expiring nation, such as no other people has survived, and, by surviving, carried on the living recollection, first of one, and then of the other, for centuries after the first shock was over." ||

* Jer. lli. 28-30. In his seventh year, 3,023; in his eighteenth, 832; in his twenty-third, 745 = 4,600.

† Ramah was but five miles from Jerusalem, and at first Jeremiah may not have been identified (Jer. xl. 1-6).

‡ The present, if accepted, could only be regarded, under the circumstances, as part of the necessity of life. It does not fall under the head of the presents often offered to prophets (1 Sam. ix. 7; 2 Kings iv. 42; Mic. iii. 5, 11; Amos vii. 12).

§ Jer. xl. 10-21, xii. 6.

|| Stanley, "Lectures," ii. 515.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GEDALIAH.

B. C. 586.

2 KINGS XXV. 22-30.

"Vedi che son un che piango."—DANTE, "Inferno."

"No, rather steel thy melting heart
To act the martyr's sternest part,
To watch with firm, unshrinking eye
Thy darling visions as they die,
Till all bright hopes and hues of day
Have faded into twilight grey."

—KEBLE.

IN deciding that he would not accompany Nebuchadrezzar to Babylon, Jeremiah made the choice of duty. In Chaldæa he would have lived at ease, in plenty, in security, amid universal respect. He might have helped his younger contemporary Ezekiel in his struggle to keep the exiles in Babylon faithful to their duty and their God. He regarded the exiles as representing all that was best and noblest in the nation; and he would have been safe and honoured in the midst of them, under the immediate protection of the great Babylonian king. On the other hand, to return to Judæa was to return to a defenceless and a distracted people, the mere dregs of the true nation, the mere phantom of what they once had been. Surely his life had earned the blessing of repose? But no! The hopes of the Chosen People, the seed of Abraham, God's servant, could not be severed from the Holy Land. Rest was not for him on this side of the grave. His only prayer must be, like that which Senanour had inscribed over his grave, "Eternité, deviens mon asile!" The decision cost him a terrible struggle; but duty called him, and he obeyed. It has been supposed by some critics* that the wild cry of Jer. xv. 10-21 expresses his anguish at the necessity of casting in his lot with the remnant; the sense that they needed his protecting influence and prophetic guidance; and the promise of God that his sacrifice should not be ineffectual for good to the miserable fragment of his nation, even though they should continue to struggle against him.

So with breaking heart he saw Nebuzaradan at Ramah marshalling the throng of captives for their long journey to the waters of Babylon. Before them, and before the little band which returned with him to the burnt Temple, the dismantled city, the desolate house, there lay an unknown future; but in spite of the exiles' doom it looked brighter for them than for him, as with tears and sobs they parted from each other. Then it was that—

"A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refuseth to be comforted, because they are not. Thus saith the Lord, 'Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded,' saith the Lord; 'and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy time to come,' saith the Lord, 'that thy children shall come again to their own border.'"†

Disappointed in the fidelity of the royal house of Judah, Nebuchadrezzar had not attempted to place another of them on the throne. He ap-

pointed Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, his satrap (*pakid*) over the poor remnant who were left in the land. In this appointment we probably trace the influence of Jeremiah. There is no one whom Nebuchadrezzar would have been so likely to consult. Gedaliah was the son of the prophet's old protector,* and his grandfather Shaphan had been a trusted minister of Josiah. He thoroughly justified the confidence reposed in him, and under his wise and prosperous rule there seemed to be every prospect that there would be at least some pale gleam of returning prosperity. The Jews, who during the period of the siege had fled into all the neighbouring countries, no sooner heard of his viceroyalty than they came flocking back from Moab, and Ammon, and Edom. They found themselves, perhaps for the first time in their lives, in possession of large estates, from which the exiles of Babylon had been dispossessed; and favoured by an abundant harvest, "they gathered wine and summer fruits very much."‡

Jerusalem—dismantled, defenceless, burnt—was no longer habitable. It was all but deserted, so that jackals and hyænas prowled even over the mountain of the Lord's House. All attempt to refortify it would have been regarded as rebellion, and such a mere "lodge in a garden of cucumbers" would have been useless to repress the marauding incursions of the envious Moabites and Edomites, who had looked on with shouts at the destruction of the city, and exulted when her carved work was broken down with axes and hammers. Gedaliah therefore fixed his headquarters at Mizpah, about six miles north of Jerusalem, of which the lofty eminence could be easily secured.‡ It was the watchtower from which Titus caught his first glimpses of the Holy City, as many a traveller does to this day, and the point at which Richard I. averted his eyes with tears, saying that he was unworthy to look upon the city which he was unable to save. Here, then, Gedaliah lived, urging upon his subjects the policy which his friend and adviser Jeremiah had always supported, and promising them quietness and peace if they would but accept the logic of circumstances—if they would bow to the inevitable, and frankly acknowledge the suzerainty of Nebuchadrezzar. It was perhaps as a pledge of more independence in better days to come that Nebuzaradan had left Gedaliah in charge of the young daughters of King Zedekiah, who had with them some of their eunuch-attendants. As that unfortunate monarch was only thirty-two years old when he was blinded and carried away, the princesses were probably young girls; and it has been conjectured that it was part of the Chaldean king's plan for the future that in time Gedaliah should be permitted to marry one of them, and re-establish at least a collateral branch of the old royal house of David.

How long this respite continued we do not know. The language of Jeremiah xxxix. 2, xli. 1, compared with 2 Kings xxxv. 8, might seem to imply that it only lasted two months. But since Jeremiah does not mention the year in xli. 1, and as there seems to have been yet another deportation of Jews by Nebuchadrezzar five years later (Jer. lii. 30), which may have been in revenge

* Jer. xxvi. 24.

† Jer. xl. 12.

‡ Some identify it with *Shaphat*, a mile from Jerusalem.

* So Grätz and Cheyne.

† Jer. xxxi. 15-17.

for the murder of his satrap, some have supposed that Gedaliah's rule lasted four years. All is uncertain, and the latter passage is of doubtful authenticity; but it is at least possible that the vengeful atrocity committed by Ishmael followed almost immediately after the Chaldæan forces were well out of sight. Respecting these last days of Jewish independence, "History, leaning semisomnously on her pyramid, muttereth something, but we know not what it is."

However this may be, there seem to have been guerilla bands wandering through the country, partly to get what they could, and partly to watch against Bedouin marauders. Johanan, the son of Kareah, who was one of the chief captains among them,* came with others to Gedaliah, and warned him that Baalis, King of Ammon, was intriguing against him, and trying to induce a certain Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama—who, in some way unknown to us, represented, perhaps on the female side, the seed royal †—to come and murder him. Gedaliah was of a fine, unsuspecting temperament, and with rash generosity he refused to believe in the existence of a plot so ruinous and so useless. Astonished at his noble incredulity, Johanan then had a secret interview with him, and offered to murder Ishmael so secretly that no one should know of it. "Why," he asked, "should this man be suffered to ruin everything, and cause the final scattering of even the struggling handful of colonists at Mizpah and in Judah?" Gedaliah forbade his intervention. "Thou shalt not do this," he said: "thou speakest falsely of Ishmael."

But Johanan's story was only too true. Shortly afterwards, Ishmael, with ten confederates, ‡ came to visit Gedaliah at Mizpah, perhaps on the pretext of seeing his kinswomen, the daughters of Zedekiah. Gedaliah welcomed this ambitious villain and his murderous accomplices with open-handed hospitality. He invited them all to a banquet in the fort of Mizpah; and after eating salt with him, Ishmael and his bravoës first murdered him, and then put promiscuously to the sword his soldiers, and the Chaldæans who had been left to look after him.§ The gates of the fort were closed, and the bodies were flung into a deep well or tank, ¶ which had been constructed by Asa in the middle of the courtyard, when he was fortifying Mizpah against the attacks of Baasha, King of Israel.

For two days there was an unbroken silence, and the peasants at Mizpah remained unaware of the dreadful tragedy. On the third day a sad procession was seen wending its way up the heights. There were scattered Jews in Shiloh and Samaria who still remembered Zion; and eighty pilgrims, weeping as they went, came with shaven beards and rent garments to bring a *minchah* and incense to the ruined shrine at Jerusalem. In the depth of their woe they had even violated a law (Lev. xix. 28, xxi. 5), of which they were perhaps unaware, by cutting

* They are called *sari* ("princes").

† There is no Elishama in the royal genealogy, except a son of David. Ishmael may have been the son or grandson of some Ammonite princess. An Elishama was scribe of Jehoiakim (Jer. xxxvi. 12).

‡ The Hebrew text calls these ten ruffians *rabbî hammelech*, "chief officers of the king" of Ammon.

§ Josephus records or conjectures that the governor was overpowered by wine, and had sunk into slumber ("Antt.," X. ix. 2).

¶ In Jer. xli. 9, for "because of Gedaliah," the better reading is "was a great pit" (LXX. φρέαρ μέγα).

themselves in sign of their misery. Mizpah would be their last halting-place on the way to Jerusalem; and the hypocrite Ishmael came out to them with an invitation to share the hospitality of the murdered satrap. No sooner had the gate of the charnel-house closed upon them,* than Ishmael and his ten ruffians began to murder this unoffending company. Crimes more aimless and more brutal than those committed by this infinitely degenerate scion of the royal house it is impossible to conceive. The place swam with blood. The story "reads almost like a page from the annals of the Indian Mutiny." Seventy of the wretched pilgrims had been butchered and flung into the tank, which must have been choked with corpses, like the fatal well at Cawnpore, † when the ten survivors pleaded for their lives by telling Ishmael that they had large treasures of country produce stored in hidden places, which should be at his disposal if he would spare them. ‡

As it was useless to make any further attempt to conceal his atrocities, Ishmael now took the young princesses and the inhabitants of Mizpah with him, and tried to make good his escape to his patron the King of Ammon. But the watchful eye of Johanan, the son of Kareah, had been upon him, and assembling his band he went in swift pursuit. Ishmael had got no farther than the Pool of Gibeon, when Johanan overtook him, to the intense joy of the prisoners. A scuffle ensued; but Ishmael and eight of his blood-stained desperadoes unhappily managed to make good their escape to the Ammonites. The wretch vanishes into the darkness, and we hear of him no more.

Even now the circumstances were desperate. Nebuchadrezzar could not in honour overlook the frustration of all his plans, and the murder, not only of his viceroy, but even of his Chaldæan commissioners. He would not be likely to accept any excuses. No course seemed open but that of flight. There was no temptation to return to Mizpah with its frightful memories and its corpse-choked tank. From Gibeon the survivors made their way to Bethlehem, which lay on the road to Egypt, and where they could be sheltered in the caravanserai of Chimham. Many Jews had already taken refuge in Egypt. Colonies of them were living in Pathros, and at Migdol and Noph, under the kindly protection of Pharaoh Hophrah. Would it not be well to join them?

In utter perplexity Johanan and the other captains and all the people came to Jeremiah. How he had escaped the massacre at Mizpah we do not know; but now he seemed to be the only man left in whose prophetic guidance they could confide. They entreated him with pathetic earnestness to show them the will of Jehovah; and he promised to pray for insight, while they pledged themselves to obey implicitly his directions.

The anguish and vacillation of the prophet's mind is shown by the fact that for ten whole days no light came to him. It seemed as if Judah was under an irrevocable curse. Whither could they

* Ishmael—a marvel of craft and villainy—put into practice the same stratagem which on a larger scale was employed by Mohammed Ali in his massacre of the Mamelukes at Cairo in 1811 (Grove, s. 2. "Bibl. Dict.") For "the midst of the city" (Jer. xli. 7), we ought to read "courtyard," as in Josephus.

† Comp. Jehu's treatment of the family of Ahaziah (2 Kings x. 14).

‡ The dark deed is still commemorated by a Jewish fast, as in the days of Zechariah (Zech. vii. 3-5, viii. 19).

return? What temptation was there to return? Did not return mean fresh intolerable miseries? Would they not be torn to pieces by the robber bands from across the Jordan? And what could be the end of it but another deportation to Babylon, with perhaps further massacre and starvation?

All the arguments seemed against this course; and he could see very clearly that it would be against all the wishes of the down-trodden fugitives, who longed for Egypt, "where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread."

Yet Jeremiah could only give them the message which he believed to represent the will of God. He bade them return. He assured them that they need have no fear of the King of Babylon, and that God would bless them; whereas if they went to Egypt, they would die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence. At the same time—doomed always to thwart the hopes of the multitude—he reproved the hypocrisy which had sent them to ask God's will when they never intended to do anything but follow their own.

Then their anger broke out against him. He was, as always, the prophet of evil, and they held him more than half responsible for being the cause of the ruin which he invariably predicted. Johanan and "all the proud men" (*śédim*) gave him the lie. They told him that the source of his prophecy was not Jehovah, but the meddling and pernicious Baruch. Perhaps some of them may have remembered the words of Isaiah, that a day should come when five cities, of which one should be called Kir-Cheres ("the City of Destruction")—a play on the name Kir-Heres, "the City of the Sun," On or Heliopolis—should speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts, and there should be an altar in the land of Egypt and a *matstsebah* at its border in witness to Jehovah, and that though Egypt should be smitten she should also be healed.*

So they settled to go to Egypt; and taking with them Jeremiah, and Baruch, and the king's daughters, and all the remnant, they made their way to Tahpanhes or Daphne,† an advanced post to guard the road to Syria. Mr. Flinders Petrie in 1886 discovered the site of the city at Tel Defenneh, and the ruins of the very palace which Pharaoh Hophrah placed at the disposal of the daughters of his ally Zedekiah. It is still known by the name of "The Castle of the Jew's Daughters"—*El Kasr el Bint el Jehudi*.‡

In front of this palace was an elevated platform (*mastaba*) of brick, which still remains. In this brickwork Jeremiah was bidden by the word of Jehovah to place great stones, and to declare that on that very platform, over those very stones, Nebuchadrezzar should pitch his royal tent, when he came to wrap himself in the land of Egypt, as a shepherd wraps himself in his garment, and to burn the pillars of Heliopolis with fire.§

Jeremiah still had to face stormy times. At

some great festival assembly at Tahpanhes he bitterly reproached the exiled Jews for their idolatries. He was extremely indignant with the women who burned incense to the Queen of Heaven. The multitude, and especially the women, openly defied him. "We will not hearken to thee," they said. "We will continue to burn incense, and offer offerings to the Queen of Heaven, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. It is only since we have left off making cakes for her and honouring her that we have suffered hunger and desolation; and our husbands were always well aware of our proceedings."

Never was there a more defiantly ostentatious revolt against God and against His prophet! Remonstrance seemed hopeless. What could Jeremiah do but menace them with the wrath of Heaven, and tell them that in sign of the truth of his words the fate of Pharaoh Hophrah should be the same as the fate of Zedekiah, King of Judah, and should be inflicted by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar.*

So on the colony of fugitives the curtain of revelation rushes down in storm. The prophet went on the troubled path which, if traditor, be true, led him at last to martyrdom. He is said to have been stoned by his infuriated fellow-exiles. But his name lived in the memory of his people. It was he (they believed) who had hidden from the Chaldeans the Ark and the sacred fire, and some day he should return to reveal the place of their concealment.† When Christ asked His disciples six hundred years later, "Whom say the people that I am?" one of the answers was, "Some say Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He became, so to speak, the guardian saint of the land in which he had suffered such cruel persecutions.

But the historian of the Kings does not like to leave the close of his story in unbroken gloom. He wrote during the Exile. He has narrated with tears the sad fate of Jehoiachin; and though he does not care to dwell on the Exile itself, he is glad to narrate one touch of kindness on the part of the King of Babylon, which he doubtless regarded as a pledge of mercies yet to come. Twenty-six years had elapsed since the capture of Jerusalem, and thirty-seven since the captivity of the exiled king, when Evil-Merodach, the son and successor of Nebuchadrezzar, took pity on the imprisoned heir of the House of David.‡ He took Jehoiachin from his dungeon, changed his garments, spoke words of encouragement to him, gave him a place at his own table,§ assigned to him a regular allowance from his own banquet,|| and set his throne above the throne of all the other captive kings who were with him in

* How far the prophecy was fulfilled we do not know. Assyrian and Egyptian fragments of record show that in the thirty-seventh year of his reign Nebuchadrezzar invaded Egypt and advanced to Syene (Ezek. xxix. 10).

† 2 Macc. ii. 1-8; comp. xv. 13-16. The tradition is singular when we recall the small store which Jeremiah set by the Ark (Jer. iii. 16).

‡ Evil-Merodach (Avil-Marduk, "Man of Merodach") only reigned two years, and was then murdered by his brother-in-law Neriglissar (Berosus *ap. Jos.*: comp. "Ap." i. 20). The Rabbis have a story—perhaps founded on that of Gaius and Agrippa I.—that Evil-Merodach had been imprisoned by his father for wishing his death, and in prison formed a friendship for Jehoiachin.

§ "Lifted up his head," Comp. Gen. xl. 13, 20.

|| To be thus *δοιορπάτης*, or *οσιώστως*, of the king was a high honour (Herod., iii. 13, v. 24. Comp. Judg. i. 7; 2 Sam. ix. 13, etc.).

* Isa. xix. 18-22.

† Jer. ii. 16, xlv. 1; Ezek. xxx. 18; Jer. xliii. 7, xlvi. 14; Herod., ii. 30.

‡ Fl. Petrie, "Memoir on Tanis" (Egypt. Explor. Fund, 4th memoir, 1888).

§ Jer. xliii. 13, Beth-shemesh. Only one pillar of the Temple of the Sun is now standing. It is said to be four thousand years old. It is certain that Nebuchadrezzar invaded Egypt and defeated Amasis, the son of Hophrah, B. C. 565, reducing Egypt to "the basest of kingdoms" (Ezek. xxix. 14, 15). Three of Nebuchadrezzar's terracotta cylinders have been found at Tahpanhes.

Babylon. It might seem a trivial act of mercy, yet the Jews remembered in their records the very day of the month on which it had taken place, because they regarded it as a break in the clouds which overshadowed them—as “the first gleam of heaven’s amber in the Eastern grey.”

EPILOGUE.

“On Jordan’s banks the Arab’s camels stray,
On Zion’s hills the False One’s votaries pray,
The Baal-adorer bows on Sinai’s steep;
Yet there—e’en there—O God, Thy thunders sleep.”
—BYRON.

“God, Thou art Love : I build my faith on that.”
—BROWNING.

BEFORE concluding I should like to add a few words (1) on what some may regard as the too favourable attitude towards what is called the “Higher Criticism” adopted in this book; and (2) on the deep essential, eternal lessons which we have found in chapter after chapter of it.

1. As regards the first, I need only say that the one thing I seek, the sole thing I care for, is Truth,—truth, not tradition. Even St. Cyprian, devoted as he was to custom and tradition, warns us that “Custom without Truth is only antiquated error,” and that what we believe must be established by reason, not prescribed by tradition.

And it cannot be laid down too clearly that the old view of Inspiration—which defined it as consisting in verbal dictation, which made the sacred writers “not only the penmen but the pens of the Holy Spirit,” and which spoke of every sentence, word, syllable, and every letter of Scripture as Divine and infallible—was a dangerous and absolutely falsity, and that any attempt in these days to enforce it as binding on the intellect and conscience of mankind could only lead to the utter shipwreck of all sincere and reasonable religion. “Not needlessly,” says the learned author of “Italy and her Invaders”—himself an able opponent of many modern conclusions on the subject—“should I wish to shake even that faith which practically believes that the whole Bible, exactly in its present shape, yes, almost the English Bible just as we have it, came straight down from heaven. But we do want to get away from all mere theories as to the way in which God *might* have revealed Himself, and to learn as much as we can of the way in which He *has* revealed Himself in actual fact, and in real human lives.”*

To do this has been one of my objects in this volume, and in the preceding volume on the First Book of Kings.

2. We have now only to cast one last glance on this book, and on the lessons which it is meant to teach.

Consider, first, its deep and varied interest. It has the combined value of History and of Biography; and, in dealing with both, its aim is to pass over all minor and earthly details, and to show the method of God’s dealings both with nations and with the individual soul.

If we look at the book only as a History, it shows us in the briefest possible compass a series of national events of the greatest importance in the annals of mankind. We become witnesses of the fierce occasional struggles between Israel and Judah, and of the constant warfare of both with those wild surrounding nations—the people

of Moab, and of Edom, Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, the Philistines also, and them that dwell at Tyre. We watch the indomitable resistance of Tyre to Assyria and Babylon. We see the Northern Kingdom of Israel rise into wealth, power, and luxury, only to sink into deep moral corruption, until, at last, the patience of God is exhausted, and He obliterates its very existence in an apparently final and irremediable overthrow. We witness the rise, culmination, and fall of Syria; the culmination and the crashing overthrow of Nineveh; the rise and the splendour of Babylon. We see the surging tide of the nomad Scythians and Cimmerians rise into flood and ebb away with spent and shallow waves. We see the petty fortress of Zion triumph in its defiance of the mighty hosts of Sennacherib because it is strong in reliance upon God, and we see it grow faithless to God until it succumbs to the captains of Nebuchadrezzar. Again and again we observe that the Almighty stills the raging of the sea, the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people.

The conviction is borne upon our soul with overwhelming power, as we read the pages of Amos, of Isaiah, and of Jeremiah, that, in spite of all their rage and tumult, and apparently irresistible dominance, God still sitteth above the water-floods, and God remaineth a King for ever.

Side by side with this spectacle of the dealing of God with nations, in which we see written in large letters, in characters of blood and of fire, His dealing with guilty nations, we have abundantly in these chapters the narrower yet more intense interest which arises from the contemplation of human nature—one and the same in its general elements, but infinitely varied in its conditions—in the lives of individual men. It is revealed to us as in a picture—it is brought home to us, not by didactic inferences, but with the silent conviction which springs from the evidence of facts—that wealth is nothing, and rank nothing, and power nothing, but that the only thing of essential importance in human lives is whether a man does that which is good or that which is evil in the sight of the Lord. Good kings and bad kings pass before us; and though the best kings, like Hezekiah and Josiah, were no more free from earthly misfortune than are any of the saints of God—though Hezekiah had to suffer anguish and humiliation, and Josiah died in defeat on the battle-field,—yet we are irresistibly led to the belief: “Say ye of the righteous that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him; for the work of his hands shall be done to him.”

We all have a guide in life. “We are not left to steer our course even by the stars, which the clouds of earth may dim. The ship has something on board which points towards the spiritual pole of the universe. I will not venture to call it an *infallible* guide. It wavers with tremulous sensitiveness; it may be deflected by disturbing influences; but still in the main it points with mysterious fidelity towards the pole of our spirits, even God. And what is this compass which we have for our guidance? Some would call it Conscience; but we call it by a holier name, and say that even as the needle is acted on by the magnetic current, so our spiritual compass is the spirit of man acted on by

* T. Hodgkin, *Friends’ Quarterly*, September, 1893, p. 401.

the Spirit of the living and infinite God." The lesson of this book—of every book of biography or of history—is that men are noble and useful in proportion as they are true to that law of an enlightened conscience which represents to them the will and the voice of God.

Ahaziah and Jehoram of Judah, tainted with the blood of Jezebel, and perverted by the example of Ahab, live wretchedly, reign contemptibly, and perish miserably; while good Jehoshaphat and pious Josiah are richly blessed. In the vaunting elation of Amaziah, in the blood-stained ferocity of Jehu, in the ruthless examples of usurpation and murder set by king after king in Israel, and in the consequences which befell them, we see that "fruit is seed." Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, Athaliah, have to pay a terrible price for brief spells of troubled royalty; and the slow corruption and disintegration of the people reflects the vile example of their rulers. Like king, like people; like people, like priest. We look on at a succession of thrilling scenes—the horrors of beleaguered cities, the raptures of unexpected deliverance, the insulting vanities of triumph; we hear the wail that rises from long lines of fettered captives as they turn their backs weeping upon their native land. And we are told "strange stories of the death of kings." We see the King of Moab sacrificing his eldest son to Chemosh upon the wall of Kirharaseth in the sight of three invading hosts. We shudder to think of Ahaz and Manasseh passing their children through the fire before the grim bull-headed monster in the valley of the children of Hinnom. We see the two ghastly piles of the heads of young princes on either side the gates of Jezreel. We see Jehu driving his fierce chariot over the body of the painted Tyrian Queen. We catch a glimpse of the sackcloth under the purple of the King of Israel as he rends his clothes at the horrible cry of mothers who have devoured their babes. We see the child Joash standing with the high priest in the Temple amid the blast of trumpets, while the alien murderess is pushed out and hewn to the ground. We see Manasseh dragged with hooks to Babylon. We watch the laggard face of the miserable Zedekiah as his sons are slaughtered before the eyes which thenceforth are blinded for evermore. We burn with indignation to see the villain Ishmael close with corpses the well of Mizpah. But even when the phantasmagoria seems most appalling and most bloody, we watch the Day-star from on high begin to shed its glory over the grey east. In due time that Day-star was to rise in men's hearts and on the world, with healing in His wings; and we feel that somehow, beyond the smoke and stir of earth's anguish,

"God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world."

And like a Greek chorus amid the agonies of destiny stand the prophets, those clearest and greatest of moral teachers. They, in spite of their holiness and faithfulness, are not exempt from the calamities of life. Amos was insulted and expelled by the high priest of Bethel; Urijah was martyred; Hosea's prophecy is one long and almost unbroken wail; Isaiah was mocked and slandered by the priests of Jerusalem, and, if the tradition be true, sawn asunder; Micah, though spared, prophesied under imminent peril; Jeremiah, saddest of mankind, type of the suffer-

ing servant of Jehovah, was smitten in the face by the priest Pashur, thrust into the stocks for the general derision, flung into a deathful prison, let down into a miry well, hurried into exile, defied, denounced, insulted, at last in all probability martyred. Prophets in general were hated and disbelieved. They were the eternal antagonists of priests and mobs. With priests they had so little affinity that, when a prophet was born a priest, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he might count on the undying hatred and antagonism of his order. Priests, with scarcely an exception, under every erring or apostatising king, from Rehoboam to Ahaz, from Ahaz to Zedekiah, with a monotony of meanness, did nothing but acquiesce, careful mainly for their own rights and revenues; prophets did little but raise, against them and their party, an unavailing protest. When, in the days of the priest-regent Jehoiada, the priests had power, he had made a special ordinance that there should be overseers in the Temple whose function it should be to put in the stocks and the collar "every man that is mad, and that maketh himself a prophet";* and Shemaiah was quite indignant that there should be any delay in putting this convenient ordinance into force. Priests were chiefly absorbed in functions and futilities in the exact spirit of their guilty successors in the days of Christ. There could be little sympathy between them and the inspired messengers who spoke of such reliance on observances with almost passionate scorn, and to whom religion meant righteousness towards men and faith in the Living God.

This high lesson of Prophecy came into greater prominence with each succeeding generation. It had been taught by Amos, the first of the literary prophets, with emphatic distinctness. It was summarised by Hosea in words which our Saviour loved to quote: "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." It had been uttered by Micah in an outburst of splendid poetry which summed up all that God requires. It was reiterated in many forms by Isaiah and by Jeremiah in words of richer moral value than all that came from the teaching of the priestly functionaries from the days when Aaron seduced Israel with his golden calf till the days when Caiaphas and Annas goaded the multitude to prefer Barabbas to Jesus, and to shout of their Messiah, "Let Him be crucified."

It was the richest fruit which sprang from the long Divine discipline of the nation,—the knowledge that outward things are of no avail to save any man; that God requires righteousness, that God looketh at the heart.

And the prophets themselves had to learn by the irony of events that no suppression of local sanctuaries under Hezekiah, no multiplication of ceremonies and acceptance of Deuteronomic Codes under Josiah, were deep enough to change men's hearts. Isaiah, like Amos, dwells with anger on the reliance upon vain ritual, which is so cheap a substitute for genuine holiness; and Jeremiah, despairing utterly of that reformation under Josiah of which he had once felt hopeful, had to denounce the new reliance on the Temple and its sacrifices. He ultimately felt no confidence in anything except in a new covenant in which God Himself would write His law upon men's hearts, and all should know Him from the least even to the greatest.

But the History of Prophecy also in this epoch

* Jer. xxix. 25-27.

is marked by events of world-wide importance. In the days of Isaiah we see the change of Israel from a nation into a church of the faithful, for which alone he has any permanent hope. In him, too, we hear the first distinct utterances of the final form in which should be fulfilled the Messianic hope. Under Jeremiah there was still further advance. He points, as Joel does, to the epoch of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and shows that God does not only deal with men as nations, or as churches, or even as families, but as beings with individual souls.

This and much besides we have seen in the foregoing pages, in which we have endeavoured to point the lessons of the Books of Kings. The one main lesson which the narrative is meant to teach is absolute faith and trust in God, as an anchor which holds amid the wildest storms of ruin, and of apparently final failure. Not until we have realised that truth can we hear the words of God, or see the vision of the Almighty. When we have learnt it, we shall not fear, though the hills be moved and carried into the midst of the sea. It is the lesson which gets behind the meaning of failure, and raises us to a height from which we can look down on prosperity as a thing which—except in fatally delusive semblance—cannot exist apart from righteousness and faith. This is the lesson of life, the lesson of lessons. If it does not solve all problems on their intellectual side, it scatters all perplexities in the spiritual sphere. It shows us that duty is the reward of duty, and that there can be no happiness save for those who have learnt that duty and blessedness are one. And thus even by this book of annals—annals of wild deeds and troubled times—we may be taught the truths which find their perfect illustration and proof in the life and teaching of the Son of God. When those truths are our real possession, the work of life is done. Then

"Vigour may fail the towering fantasy,
But yet the Will rolls onward, like a wheel
In even motion by the love impelled
That moves the sun in heaven, and all the stars."

APPENDIX I.

THE KINGS OF ASSYRIA, AND SOME OF THEIR INSCRIPTIONS.

DATES from the "Eponym Canon" and the Assyrian Monuments; Schrader, "Cuneiform Inscriptions, and the Old Testament," E. Tr., 1888, pp. 167-187.

- B. C.
860.—Shalmaneser II.
854.—Battle of Karkar. War with *Ahab* and *Benhadad*.
842.—War with Hazael. Tribute of *Jehu*.
825.—Samsi-Ramman.*
812.—Ramman-Nirari.
783.—Shalmaneser III.
773.—Assur-dan III.
763.—June 15th. Eclipse of the sun.
755.—Assur-Nirari.
745.—Tiglath-Pileser II.
742.—Azariah (Uzziah) heads a league of nineteen Hamathite districts against Assyria (?).
740.—Death of Uzziah (?).

* Up to the time of Tiglath-Pileser II., the Eponym Year (which is not here given) marks the second complete year of each king's reign.

- 738.—Tribute of Menahem, Rezin, and Hiram.
734.—Expedition to Palestine against Pekah. Tribute of Ahaz.
732.—Capture of Damascus. Death of Rezin. First actual collision between Israel and Assyria.
728.—Hoshea refuses tribute.
727.—Shalmaneser IV.
724.—Siege of Samaria begun.
722.—Sargon. Fall of Samaria.
721.—Defeat of Merodach-Baladan.
720.—Battle of Raphia. Defeat of Sabaco, King of Egypt.
715.—Subjugated people deported to Samaria. Accession of Hezekiah.
711.—Capture of Ashdod.
707.—Building of great palace of Dur-Sarrukin.
706.—Sargon expels Merodach-Baladan, and becomes King of Babylon.
705.—Assassination (?) of Sargon.
705.—Sennacherib.
704.—Embassy of Merodach-Baladan to Hezekiah.
703.—Belibus made King of Babylon.
702.—Construction of the Bellino Cylinder.
701.—Siege of Ekron. Defeat of Egypt at Altauq. Siege of Jerusalem. Campaign against Hezekiah and Tirhakah disastrously concluded at Pelusium and Jerusalem.
681.—Murder of Sennacherib.
681.—Esar-haddon.
676.—Manasseh pays tribute.
668.—Assur-bani-pal (Sardanapalus).
608.—Death of Josiah in the battle of Megiddo against Pharaoh Necho.

The dates and names of Assyrian kings as given in "Records of the Past" (ii. 207, 208) do not exactly accord with these in all cases.

	B. C.
Tiglath-Pileser II.	950
Assur-dan II.	930
Rimmon-Nirari II.	911
Tiglath-Uras II.	889
Assur-natzu-pal	883
Shalmaneser II.	858
Assur-dain-pal (a rebel)	825
Samsi-Rimmon II.	823
Rimmon-Nirari III.	810
Shalmaneser III.	781
Assur-dan III.	771
Assur-Nirari	753
Tiglath-Pileser III. (Pul)	745
Shalmaneser IV. (an usurper)	727
Sargon (Jareb?) (usurper)	722
Sennacherib	705
Esar-haddon I.	681
Assur-bani-pal	668
Destruction of Nineveh under Esar-haddon II., or Sarakos	606

I.

INSCRIPTION OF SHALMANESER II. ON THE BLACK OBELISK IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.*

It begins with an invocation to the gods Rimmon, Adar, Merodach, Nergal, Beltis, Istar, and proceeds:—

* This Shalmaneser died about B. C. 825, after a reign of thirty-five years (Sayce in "Records of the Past," v. 27-42; Oppert, "Hist. des Empires de Chaldée et d'Assyrie"; Ménant, "Annales des Rois d'Assyrie," 1874).

"I am Shalmaneser, the strong king, king of all the four Zones of the Sun, the marcher over the whole world, . . . who has laid his yoke upon all lands hostile to him, and has swept them like a whirlwind."

It tells of his campaigns against the Hittites, etc., etc.

The allusion to Jehu runs as follows:—

"The tribute of Yahua, son of Khumri, silver, gold, bowls of gold, vessels of gold, goblets of gold, pitchers of gold, lead, sceptres for the king's hand, staves, I received."

This inscription is supplemented by another on a monolith found at Karkh, twenty miles from Diarbekr ("Records," iii. 81-100), which mentions the battle of Karkar, with its slaughter of fourteen thousand of the enemy, among whom was Akkabhu Sirlai—i. e., Ahab of Israel.

II.

TIGLATH-PILESER II. (CIRC. B. C. 739).

In his Records he mentions no less than five Hebrew kings—Azariah, Jehoahaz (Ahaz), Menahem, Pekah, Hoshea—as well as Rezin of Damascus, Hiram of Tyre, etc. His name perhaps means "He who puts his trust in Adar." See "Records of the Past," v. 45-52; Schrader, "Keilinschr.," pp. 149-151; G. Smith, "Assyrian Discoveries," pp. 254-287.

Unfortunately the inscriptions are very mutilated and fragmentary.

III.

Our chief knowledge of SARGON is from the great inscription in the Palace of Khorsabad. It is translated by Prof. Dr. Jules Oppert, "Records of the Past," ix. 1-21. The king's inscription at Bavian, northeast of Mosul, is in the same volume, pp. 21-28, translated by Dr. T. G. Pinches. See, too, *id.*, vii. 21-56, xi. 15-40.

The Khorsabad inscription has these passages:—

"The great gods have made me happy by the constancy of their affection; they have granted me the exercise of my sovereignty over all things."

He says:—

"I besieged and occupied the town of Samaria; I took twenty-seven thousand two hundred and eighty of its inhabitants captive. I took from them fifty chariots, but left them the rest of their belongings. I placed my lieutenants over them; I renewed the obligations imposed upon them by one of the kings who preceded me." [Tiglath-Pileser, whom Sargon does not choose to name.]

"Hanun, King of Gaza, and Sabaco, Sultan of Egypt, allied themselves at Raphia to oppose me. I put them to flight. Sabaco fled, and no one has seen any trace of him since. I imposed a tribute on Pharaoh, King of Egypt."

He tells us that he defeated the usurper Ilubid of Hamath, who had been a smith; burnt Karkar; and flayed Ilubid alive.

He defeated Azuri and Jaman of Ashdod, and

his most persistent enemy, Merodach-Baladan, son of Jakin, King of Chaldæa.

He ends with a prayer that Assur may bless him.

IV.

Bellino's Cylinder comprises the first two years of SENNACHERIB. It is translated by Mr. H. F. Talbot, "Records of the Past," i. 22-32. It was published by Layard in the first volume of "British Museum Inscriptions," pl. 63. The facsimile of it was made by Bellino.

It begins:—

"SENNACHERIB, the great king, the powerful king, the king of Assyria, the king unrivalled, the pious monarch, the worshipper of the great gods, . . . the noble warrior, the valiant hero, the first of all kings, the great punisher of unbelievers who are breakers of the holy festivals.

"Assur, my lord, has given me an unrivalled monarchy. Over all princes he has raised triumphantly my arms.

"In the beginning of my reign I defeated Marduk-Baladan, King of Babylon, and his allies the Elamites, in the plains near the city of Kish. He fled alone; he got into the marshes full of reeds and rushes, and so saved his life."

(He proceeds to narrate the spoiling of Marduk's camp, and his palace in Babylon, and how he carried off his wife, his harem, his nobles.)

We see here an illustration of the vaunting tones of this king which are so faithfully reproduced in 2 Kings xviii.

His Bull Inscription, chiefly relating to his defeats of Merodach-Baladan, is translated by Rev. J. A. Rodwell ("Records of the Past," vii. 57-64.)

V.

The Taylor Cylinder, so called from its former possessor, is a hexagonal clay prism found at Nineveh in 1830, and now in the British Museum (translated by Mr. H. F. Talbot, "Records of the Past," i. 35-53).

The first two campaigns of Sennacherib are related as on the Bellino Cylinder. The Taylor Cylinder narrates campaigns of his first eight years.

The story of the third campaign narrates the defeat of Elulæus, King of Sidon; the tribute of Menahem, King of Samaria; the defeat of Zidka, King of Askelon; the revolt of Ekron, which deposed the Assyrian vassal Padi, and sent him in iron chains to Hezekiah; the battle of Egypt and Ethiopia at Altaqu (Eltekon, Josh. xv. 59), and the capture of Timnath. Of Hezekiah the king says:—

"And Hezekiah, King of Judah, who had bowed down at my feet, forty-six of his strong cities, castles, and smaller towns, with warlike engines. I captured: 200,500 people, small and great, male and female, horses, sheep, etc., without number, I carried off. Himself I shut up like a bird in a cage inside Jerusalem. Siege-towers against him I constructed. I gave his plundered cities to the kings of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza. I diminished his kingdom; I augmented his tribute. The fearful splendour of my majesty had

overwhelmed him. The horsemen, soldiers, etc., which he had collected for the fortification of Jerusalem his royal city, now carried tribute, thirty talents of gold, eight hundred of silver, scarlet, embroidered woven cloth, large precious stones, ivory couches and thrones, skins, precious woods; his daughters, his harem, his male and female slaves, unto Nineveh, my royal city, after me he sent; and to pay tribute he sent his envoy."

He then narrates his fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh campaigns against Elam, etc. His eighth was against "the children of Babylon, wicked devils," etc. He ends by describing the splendour of the palace which he built.

VI.

An inscription of ESAR-HADDON, found at Kouyunjik, now in the British Museum, mentions his receipt of the intelligence of his father's murder by his unnatural brothers, while he was commanding his father's army on the northern confines.

"From my heart I made a vow. My liver was inflamed with rage. Immediately I wrote letters, saying I assumed the sovereignty of my Father's House." He prayed to the gods and goddesses; they encouraged him, and in spite of a great snowstorm he reached Nineveh, and defeated his brother, because Istar stood by his side and said to their army, "An unsparing deity am I" ("Records of the Past," iii. 100-108).

VII.

A terra-cotta cylinder of ASSUR-BANI-PAL (the Sardanapalus of the Greeks) is now in the British Museum. It is translated by Mr. G. Smith, "Records of the Past," i. 55-106, ix. 37-64; Oppert, "Mémoire sur les Rapports de l'Égypte et l'Assyrie;" and G. Smith, "Annals of Assur-bani-pal."

Its most interesting parts relate to the campaign of his father Esar-haddon against Egypt, and how Tirhakah, King of Egypt and Ethiopia, reoccupied Memphis. He defeated the army of Tirhakah, who, to save his life, fled from Memphis to Thebes. The Assyrians then took Thebes, and restored Necho's father, Psamatik I., to Memphis and Sais, and other Egyptian kings, friends of Assyria, who had fled before Tirhakah. The kings, however, proved ungrateful, and made a league against him. He therefore threw them into fetters, and had them brought to Nineveh, but subsequently released Necho with splendid presents. Tirhakah fled to Ethiopia, where he "went to his place of night"—i. e., died.

APPENDIX II.

INSCRIPTION IN THE TUNNEL OF SILOAM.

The inscription of Siloam is the oldest known Hebrew inscription. "It is engraved on the rocky wall of the subterranean channel which conveys the water of the Virgin's Spring at Jerusalem into the Pool of Siloam. In the summer

of 1880 one of the native pupils of Dr. Schick, a German architect, was playing with other lads in the Pool, and while wading up the subterranean channel slipped and fell into the water. On rising to the surface he noticed, in spite of the darkness, what looked like letters on the rock which formed the southern wall of the channel. Dr. Schick visited the spot, and found that an ancient inscription, concealed for the most part by the water, actually existed there." The level of the water was lowered, but the inscription had been partly filled up with a deposit of lime, and the first intelligible copy was made by Professor Sayce in February, 1881, and six weeks later by Dr. Guthe. Professor Sayce had to sit for hours in the mud and water, working under masonry or earth. There can be little doubt that this work is alluded to in 2 Kings xx. 20; 2 Chron. xxxii. 30; Isa. viii. 6 ("the waters of Shiloah ["the tunnel" ?] which flow softly").

The alphabet is that used by the prophets before the exile, somewhat like that on the Moabite Stone, and on early Israelitish and Jewish seals. The language is pure Hebrew, with only one unknown word—*zadah*, in line three: perhaps "excess" or "obstacle."

Professor Sayce thinks that it proves that "the City of David" (Zion) must have been on the southern hill, the so-called Ophel. If so, the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom must be the rubbish-choked Tyropœon, under which must be the tombs of the kings, and the relics of the Temple and Palace destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar.

The inscription is:—

"The excavation! Now this is the history of the excavation. While the excavators were lifting up the pick each towards his neighbour, and while there were yet three cubits [to excavate], there was heard the voice of one man calling to his neighbour, for there was an excess in the rock on the right hand [and on the left?]. And after that on the day of excavating, the excavators had struck pick against pick, one against another, the water flowed from the spring [*mōtsā*, "exit," 2 Chron. xxxii. 30] to the Pool" (that of Siloam, which therefore was the only one which then existed) "for twelve hundred cubits. And [part] of a cubit was the height of the rock over the head of the excavators" (Sayce, "Records of the Past," i. 169-175).

The letters are on an artificial tablet cut in the wall of rock, nineteen feet from where the subterranean conduit opens on the Pool of Siloam, and on the right-hand side. The conduit is at first sixteen feet high, but lessens in one place to no more than two feet. It is, according to Captain Conder, seventeen hundred and eight yards long, but not in a straight line, as there are two *culs-de-sac*, caused by faulty engineering. The engineers, beginning, as at Mount Cenis, from opposite ends, intended to meet in the middle, but failed. The floor has been rounded to allow the water to flow more easily. It is a splendid piece of engineering for that age.

The Pool of Siloam is at the southeast end of a hill which lies to the south of the Temple hill: the Virgin's Fountain is on the opposite side of the hill, more to the north, and is the only natural spring or "Gihon" near Jerusalem, so that its water was of supreme importance. Being outside the city wall, a conduit was necessary.

Hezekiah "stopped all the fountains" (2 Chron. xxxii. 4)—i. e., concealed them. By providing a subterranean channel for them, he saved them from the enemy and secured the water-supply of the besieged city.

APPENDIX III.

WAS THERE A GOLDEN CALF AT DAN?

THE question might seem absurd, but for its solution I must refer to my paper on the subject in the *Expositor* for October, 1893.

The sole authorities for a calf at Dan are 1 Kings xii. 28-30; 2 Kings x. 29. If in the former passage we alter *one letter*, and read **האפוד** (the "ephod") for **האחד** (the "one")—as Klostermann suggests—we throw light on an obscure and perhaps corrupt passage. The allusion then would be to Micah's old idolatrous image (which may have been a calf) at Dan. The two words "and in Dan" in 2 Kings x. 29 may easily have been (as Klostermann thinks) an exegetical gloss added from the error of one letter in 1 Kings xii. 30.

Dan was a most unlikely place to select: for (1) It was a remote frontier town; and (2) there was no room, and no necessity there, for a new cultus beside the ancient one established some centuries earlier, and still served by priests who were direct lineal descendants of Moses (Judg. xviii. 30, 31).

This would further account for the absolute silence of prophets and historians about any golden calf at Dan; and it adds to the inherent probability, also supported by some evidence, that there were *two* cherubic calves at Bethel.

For further arguments I must refer to my paper.

APPENDIX IV.

DATES OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH, AS GIVEN BY KITTEL AND OTHER MODERN CRITICS.*

ISRAEL.

	B. C.
Ahaziah	855—854
Jehoram	854—842
Jehu	842—814
Jehoahaz	814—797
Joash	797—781
Jeroboam II.	781—740
Zachariah	740
Shallum	740
Menahem	740—737
Pekahiah	737—735
Pekah	735—734
Hoshea	734—725

JUDAH.

	B. C.
Jehoram ben-Jehoshaphat	851—843
Ahaziah ben-Jehoram	843—842
Athaliah	842—836
Joash ben-Ahaziah	836—796
Amaziah	796—783
Amaziah-Uzziah	783—737
Jotham	737—735
Ahaz	735—715
Hezekiah	715—686
Manasseh	686—641
Amos	641—639
Josiah	639—608
Jehoahaz	608
Jehoiakim	608—597
Jehoiachin	597
Zedekiah	597—586

* Many of these dates can only be regarded as uncertain and approximate. Kamphausen dates the commencement of all the latter Kings a year later (*Die Chronologie der hebräischen Könige*, Bonn, 1883.)

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PREFACE.

To expound Chronicles in a series which has dealt with Samuel, Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah is to glean scattered ears from a field already harvested. Sections common to Chronicles with the older histories have therefore been treated as briefly as is consistent with preserving the continuity of the narrative. Moreover, an exposition of Chronicles does not demand or warrant an attempt to write the history of Judah. To recombine with Chronicles matter which its author deliberately omitted would only obscure the characteristic teaching he intended to convey. On the one hand, his selection of material has a religious significance, which must be ascertained by careful comparison with Samuel and Kings; on the other hand, we can only do justice to the chronicler as we ourselves adopt, for the time being, his own attitude towards the history of Hebrew politics, literature, and religion. In the more strictly expository parts of this volume I have sought to confine myself to the carrying out of these principles.

Amongst other obligations to friends, I must specially mention my indebtedness to the Rev. T. H. Darlow, M. A., for a careful reading of the proof-sheets and many very valuable suggestions.

One object I have had in view has been to attempt to show the fresh force and clearness with which modern methods of Biblical study have emphasised the spiritual teaching of Chronicles.

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THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

BY W. H. BENNETT, M. A.

BOOK I.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER I.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP.

CHRONICLES is a curious literary torso. A comparison with Ezra and Nehemiah shows that the three originally formed a single whole. They are written in the same peculiar late Hebrew style; they use their sources in the same mechanical way; they are all saturated with the ecclesiastical spirit; and their Church order and doctrine rest upon the complete Pentateuch, and especially upon the Priestly Code. They take the same keen interest in genealogies, statistics, building operations, Temple ritual, priests and Levites, and most of all in the Levitical door-keepers and singers. Ezra and Nehemiah form an obvious continuation of Chronicles; the latter work breaks off in the middle of a paragraph intended to introduce the account of the return from the Captivity; Ezra repeats the beginning of the paragraph and gives its conclusion. Similarly the register of the high-priests is begun in 1 Chron. vi. 4-15 and completed in Neh. xii. 10, 11.

We may compare the whole work to the image in Daniel's vision whose head was of fine gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Ezra and Nehemiah preserve some of the finest historical material in the Old Testament, and are our only authority for a most important crisis in the religion of Israel. The torso that remains when these two books are removed is of very mixed character, partly borrowed from the older historical books, partly taken down from late tradition, and partly constructed according to the current philosophy of history.

The date* of this work lies somewhere between the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander and the revolt of the Maccabees, *i. e.*, between B. C. 332 and B. C. 166. The register in Neh. xii. 10, 11, closes with Jaddua, the well-known high-priest of Alexander's time; the genealogy of the house of David in 1 Chron. iii. extends to about the same date, or, according to the ancient versions, even down to about B. C. 200. The ecclesiastical system of the Priestly Code, established by Ezra and Nehemiah B. C. 444, was of such old standing to the author of Chronicles that he introduces it as a matter of course into his descriptions of the worship of the monarchy. Another feature which even more clearly indicates a late date is the use of the term "king of Persia" instead of simply "the King" or "the Great King." The latter were the customary designations of the Persian kings while the empire lasted; after its fall, the title needed to be quali-

**Cf.* "Ezra"; "Nehemiah"; "Esther," by Professor Adeney, in "Expositor's Bible."

fied by the name "Persia." These facts, together with the style and language, would be best accounted for by a date somewhere between B. C. 300 and B. C. 250. On the other hand, the Maccabean struggle revolutionised the national and ecclesiastical system which Chronicles everywhere takes for granted, and the silence of the author as to this revolution is conclusive proof that he wrote before it began.

There is no evidence whatever as to the name of the author; but his intense interest in the Levites and in the musical service of the Temple, with its orchestra and choir, renders it extremely probable that he was a Levite and a Temple-singer or musician. We might compare the Temple, with its extensive buildings and numerous priesthood, to an English cathedral establishment, and the author of Chronicles to some vicar-choral, or, perhaps better, to the more dignified precentor. He would be enthusiastic over his music, a cleric of studious habits and scholarly tastes, not a man of the world, but absorbed in the affairs of the Temple, as a monk in the life of his convent or a minor canon in the politics and society of the minster close. The times were uncritical, and so our author was occasionally somewhat easy of belief as to the enormous magnitude of ancient Hebrew armies and the splendour and wealth of ancient Hebrew kings; the narrow range of his interests and experience gave him an appetite for innocent gossip, professional or otherwise. But his sterling religious character is shown by the earnest piety and serene faith which pervade his work. If we venture to turn to English fiction for a rough illustration of the position and history of our chronicler, the name that at once suggests itself is that of Mr. Harding, the precentor in "Barchester Towers." We must however remember that there is very little to distinguish the chronicler from his later authorities; and the term "chronicler" is often used for "the chronicler or one of his predecessors."

CHAPTER II.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

In the previous chapter it has been necessary to deal with the chronicler as the author of the whole work of which Chronicles is only a part, and to go over again ground already covered in the volume on Ezra and Nehemiah; but from this point we can confine our attention to Chronicles and treat it as a separate book. Such a course is not merely justified, it is necessitated, by the different relations of the chronicler to his subject in Ezra and Nehemiah on the one hand and in Chronicles on the other. In the former case he is writing the history of the social and ecclesiastical order to which he himself belonged, but he is separated by a deep and wide gulf from the period of the kingdom of Judah. About three hundred years intervened between the chronicler and the death of the last king of Judah. A similar interval separates us

from Queen Elizabeth; but the course of these three centuries of English life has been an almost unbroken continuity compared with the changing fortunes of the Jewish people from the fall of the monarchy to the early years of the Greek empire. This interval included the Babylonian Captivity and the Return, the establishment of the Law, the rise of the Persian empire, and the conquests of Alexander. The first three of these events were revolutions of supreme importance to the internal development of Judaism; the last two rank in the history of the world with the fall of the Roman empire and the French Revolution. Let us consider them briefly in detail. The Captivity, the rise of the Persian empire, and the Return are closely connected, and can only be treated as features of one great social, political, and religious convulsion, an upheaval which broke the continuity of all the strata of Eastern life and opened an impassable gulf between the old order and the new. For a time, men who had lived through these revolutions were still able to carry across this gulf the loosely twisted strands of memory, but when they died the threads snapped; only here and there a lingering tradition supplemented the written records. Hebrew slowly ceased to be the vernacular language, and was supplanted by Aramaic; the ancient history only reached the people by means of an oral translation. Under this new dispensation the ideas of ancient Israel were no longer intelligible; its circumstances could not be realised by those who lived under entirely different conditions. Various causes contributed to bring about this change. First, there was an interval of fifty years, during which Jerusalem lay a heap of ruins. After the recapture of Rome by Totila the Visigoth in A. D. 546 the city was abandoned during forty days to desolate and dreary solitude. Even this temporary depopulation of the Eternal City is emphasised by historians as full of dramatic interest, but the fifty years' desolation of Jerusalem involved important practical results. Most of the returning exiles must have either been born in Babylon or else have spent all their earliest years in exile. Very few can have been old enough to have grasped the meaning or drunk in the spirit of the older national life. When the restored community set to work to rebuild their city and their temple, few of them had any adequate knowledge of the old Jerusalem, with its manners, customs, and traditions. "The ancient men, that had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice" * when the foundation of the second Temple was laid before their eyes. In their critical and disparaging attitude towards the new building, we may see an early trace of the tendency to glorify and idealise the monarchical period, which culminated in Chronicles. The breach with the past was widened by the novel and striking surroundings of the exiles in Babylon. For the first time since the Exodus, the Jews as a nation found themselves in close contact and intimate relations with the culture of an ancient civilisation and the life of a great city.

Nearly a century and a half elapsed between the first captivity under Jehoiachin (B. C. 598) and the mission of Ezra (B. C. 458); no doubt in the succeeding period Jews still continued to return from Babylon to Judæa, and thus the new community at Jerusalem, amongst whom the chroni-

* Ezra iii. 12.

cler grew up, counted Babylonian Jews amongst their ancestors for two or even for many generations. A Zulu tribe exhibited for a year in London could not return and build their kraal afresh and take up the old African life at the point where they had left it. If a community of Russian Jews went to their old home after a few years' sojourn in Whitechapel, the old life resumed would be very different from what it was before their migration. Now the Babylonian Jews were neither uncivilised African savages nor stupefied Russian helots; they were not shut up in an exhibition or in a ghetto; they settled in Babylon, not for a year or two, but for half a century or even a century; and they did not return to a population of their own race, living the old life, but to empty homes and a ruined city. They had tasted the tree of knowledge, and they could no more live and think as their fathers had done than Adam and Eve could find their way back into paradise. A large and prosperous colony of Jews still remained at Babylon, and maintained close and constant relations with the settlement in Judæa. The influence of Babylon, begun during the Exile, continued permanently in this indirect form. Later still the Jews felt the influence of a great Greek city, through their colony at Alexandria.

Besides these external changes, the Captivity was a period of important and many-sided development of Jewish literature and religion. Men had leisure to study the prophecies of Jeremiah and the legislation of Deuteronomy; their attention was claimed for Ezekiel's suggestions as to ritual, and for the new theology, variously expounded by Ezekiel, the later Isaiah, the book of Job, and the psalmists. The Deuteronomic school systematised and interpreted the records of the national history. In its wealth of Divine revelation the period from Josiah to Ezra is only second to the apostolic age.

Thus the restored Jewish community was a new creation, baptised into a new spirit; the restored city was as much a new Jerusalem as that which St. John beheld descending out of heaven; and, in the words of the prophet of the Restoration, the Jews returned to a "new heaven and a new earth." * The rise of the Persian empire changed the whole international system of Western Asia and Egypt. The robber monarchies of Nineveh and Babylon, whose energies had been chiefly devoted to the systematic plunder of their neighbours, were replaced by a great empire, that stretched out one hand to Greece and the other to India. The organisation of this great empire was the most successful attempt at government on a large scale that the world had yet seen. Both through the Persians themselves and through their dealings with the Greeks, Aryan philosophy and religion began to leaven Asiatic thought; old things were passing away; all things were becoming new.

The establishment of the Law by Ezra and Nehemiah was the triumph of a school whose most important and effective work had been done at Babylon, though not necessarily within the half-century specially called the Captivity. Their triumph was retrospective; it not only established a rigid and elaborate system unknown to the monarchy, but, by identifying this system with the law traditionally ascribed to Moses, it led men very widely astray as to the ancient history of Israel. A later generation naturally assumed

* Isa. lxxvi. 22.

that the good kings must have kept this law, and that the sin of the bad kings was their failure to observe its ordinances.

The events of the century and a half or thereabouts between Ezra and the chronicler have only a minor importance for us. The change of language from Hebrew to Aramaic, the Samaritan schism, the few political incidents of which any account has survived, are all trivial compared to the literature and history crowded into the century after the fall of the monarchy. Even the far-reaching results of the conquests of Alexander do not materially concern us here. Josephus indeed tells us that the Jews served in large numbers in the Macedonian army, and gives a very dramatic account of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem; but the historical value of these stories is very doubtful, and in any case it is clear that between B. C. 333 and B. C. 250 Jerusalem was very little affected by Greek influences, and that, especially for the Temple community to which the chronicler belonged, the change from Darius to the Ptolemies was merely a change from one foreign dominion to another.

Nor need much be said of the relation of the chronicler to the later Jewish literature of the Apocalypses and Wisdom. If the spirit of this literature were already stirring in some Jewish circles, the chronicler himself was not moved by it. Ecclesiastes, as far as he could have understood it, would have pained and shocked him. But his work lay in that direct line of subtle rabbinic teaching which, beginning with Ezra, reached its climax in the Talmud. Chronicles is really an anthology gleaned from ancient historic sources and supplemented by early specimens of Midrash and Hagada.

In order to understand the book of Chronicles, we have to keep two or three simple facts constantly and clearly in mind. In the first place, the chronicler was separated from the monarchy by an aggregate of changes which involved a complete breach of continuity between the old and the new order: instead of a nation there was a Church; instead of a king there were a high-priest and a foreign governor. Secondly, the effects of these changes had been at work for two or three hundred years, effacing all trustworthy recollection of the ancient order and schooling men to regard the Levitical dispensation as their one original and antique ecclesiastical system. Lastly, the chronicler himself belonged to the Temple community, which was the very incarnation of the spirit of the new order. With such antecedents and surroundings, he set to work to revise the national history recorded in Samuel and Kings. A monk in a Norman monastery would have worked under similar but less serious disadvantages if he had undertaken to rewrite the "Ecclesiastical History" of the Venerable Bede.

CHAPTER III.

SOURCES AND MODE OF COMPOSITION.

OUR impressions as to the sources of Chronicles are derived from the general character of its contents, from a comparison with other books of the Old Testament, and from the actual statements of Chronicles itself. To take the last first: there are numerous references to authorities in Chronicles which at first sight seem to

indicate a dependence on rich and varied sources. To begin with, there are "The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel,"* "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah,"† and "The Acts of the Kings of Israel."‡ These, however, are obviously different forms of the title of the same work.

Other titles furnish us with an imposing array of prophetic authorities. There are "The Words" of Samuel the Seer,§ of Nathan the Prophet,|| of Gad the Seer,§ of Shemaiah the Prophet and of Iddo the Seer,¶ of Jehu the son of Hanani,** and of the Seers ††; "The Vision" of Iddo the Seer †† and of Isaiah the Prophet §§; "The Midrash" of the Book of Kings ||| and of the Prophet Iddo ¶¶; "The Acts of Uziah," written by Isaiah the Prophet***; and "The Prophecy" of Ahijah the Shilonite.††† There are also less formal allusions to other works.

Further examination, however, soon discloses the fact that these prophetic titles merely indicate different sections of "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah." On turning to our book of Kings, we find that from Rehoboam onwards each of the references in Chronicles corresponds to a reference by the book of Kings to the "Chronicles ††† of the Kings of Judah." In the case of Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Amon, the reference to an authority is omitted both in the books of Kings and Chronicles. This close correspondence suggests that both our canonical books are referring to the same authority or authorities. Kings refers to the "Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" for Judah, and to the "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" for the northern kingdom; Chronicles, though only dealing with Judah, combines these two titles in one: "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah."

In two instances Chronicles clearly states that its prophetic authorities were found as sections of the larger work. "The Words of Jehu the son of Hanani" were "inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel," §§§ and "The Vision of Isaiah the Prophet, the son of Amoz," is in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. |||| It is a natural inference that the other "Words" and "Visions" were also found as sections of this same "Book of Kings."

These conclusions may be illustrated and supported by what we know of the arrangement of the contents of ancient books. Our convenient modern subdivisions of chapter and verse did not exist, but the Jews were not without some means of indicating the particular section of a book to which they wished to refer. Instead of numbers they used names, derived from the subject of a section or from the most important person men-

* Quoted for *Asa* (2 Chron. xxvi. 11); *Amaziah* (2 Chron. xxv. 26); *Ahaz* (2 Chron. xxviii. 26).

† Quoted for *Jotham* (2 Chron. xxvii. 7); *Josiah* (2 Chron. xxxv. 26, 27).

‡ Quoted for *Manasseh* (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18).

§ Quoted for *David* (1 Chron. xxix. 29).

|| Quoted for *David* (1 Chron. xxix. 29) and *Solomon* (2 Chron. ix. 29).

¶ Quoted for *Rehoboam* (2 Chron. xii. 15).

** Quoted for *Jehoshaphat* (2 Chron. xx. 34).

†† Quoted for *Manasseh* (2 Chron. xxxiii. 19). "Seers," A. V., R. V., Marg., with LXX.; R. V., with Hebrew text, "Hozai." The passage is probably corrupt.

‡‡ Quoted for *Solomon* (2 Chron. ix. 29).

§§ Quoted for *Hezekiah* (2 Chron. xxxii. 32).

||| Quoted for *Joash* (2 Chron. xxiv. 27).

¶¶ Quoted for *Abijah* (2 Chron. xiii. 22).

*** Quoted for *Uzziah* (2 Chron. xxvi. 22).

††† Quoted for *Solomon* (2 Chron. ix. 29).

+++ Cf. pp. 17, 18.

§§§ 2 Chron. xx. 34.

|||| 2 Chron. xxxii. 32.

tioned in it. For the history of the monarchy the prophets were the most important personages, and each section of the history is named after its leading prophet or prophets. This nomenclature naturally encouraged the belief that the history had been originally written by these prophets. Instances of the use of such nomenclature are found in the New Testament, e. g., Rom. xi. 2: "Wot ye not what the Scripture saith in Elijah"—*i. e.*, in the section about Elijah—and Mark xii. 26: "Have ye not read in the book of Moses in the place concerning the bush?" †

While, however, most of the references to "Words," "Visions," etc., are to sections of the larger work, we need not at once conclude that all references to authorities in Chronicles are to this same book. The genealogical register in 1 Chron. v. 17 and the "lamentations" of 2 Chron. xxxv. 25 may very well be independent works. Having recognised the fact that the numerous authorities referred to by Chronicles were for the most part contained in one comprehensive "Book of Kings," a new problem presents itself: What are the respective relations of our Kings and Chronicles to the "Chronicles" and "Kings" cited by them? What are the relations of these original authorities to each other? What are the relations of our Kings to our Chronicles? Our present nomenclature is about as confusing as it well could be; and we are obliged to keep clearly in mind, first, that the "Chronicles" mentioned in Kings is not our Chronicles, and then that the "Kings" referred to by Chronicles is not our Kings. The first fact is obvious; the second is shown by the terms of the references, which state that information not furnished in Chronicles may be found in the "Book of Kings," but the information in question is often not given in the canonical Kings. ‡ And yet the connection between Kings and Chronicles is very close and extensive. A large amount of material occurs either identically or with very slight variations in both books. It is clear that either Chronicles uses Kings, or Chronicles uses a work which used Kings, or both Chronicles and Kings use the same source or sources. Each of these three views has been held by important authorities, and they are also capable of various combinations and modifications.

Reserving for a moment the view which specially commends itself to us, we may note two main tendencies of opinion. First, it is maintained that Chronicles either goes back directly to the actual sources of Kings, citing them, for the sake of brevity, under a combined title, or is based upon a combination of the main sources of Kings made at a very early date. In either case Chronicles as compared with Kings would be an independent and parallel authority on the contents of these early sources, and to that extent would rank with Kings as first-class history. This view, however, is shown to be untenable by the numerous traces of a later age which are almost invariably present wherever Chronicles supplements or modifies Kings.

The second view is that either Chronicles used Kings, or that the "Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah" used by Chronicles was a post-Exilic work, incorporating statistical matter and deal-

ing with the history of the two kingdoms in a spirit congenial to the temper and interests of the restored community. This "post-Exilic" predecessor of Chronicles is supposed to have been based upon Kings itself, or upon the sources of Kings, or upon both; but in any case it was not much earlier than Chronicles and was written under the same influences and in a similar spirit. Being virtually an earlier edition of Chronicles, it could claim no higher authority, and would scarcely deserve either recognition or treatment as a separate work. Chronicles would still rest substantially on the authority of Kings.

It is possible to accept a somewhat simpler view, and to dispense with this shadowy and ineffectual first edition of Chronicles. In the first place, the chronicler does not appeal to the "Words" and "Visions" and the rest of his "Book of Kings" as authorities for his own statements; he merely refers his reader to them for further information which he himself does not furnish. This "Book of Kings" so often mentioned is therefore neither a source nor an authority of Chronicles. There is nothing to prove that the chronicler himself was actually acquainted with the book. Again, the close correspondence already noted between these references in Chronicles and the parallel notes in Kings suggests that the former are simply expanded and modified from the latter, and the chronicler had never seen the book he referred to. The Books of Kings had stated where additional information could be found, and Chronicles simply repeated the reference without verifying it. As some sections of Kings had come to be known by the names of certain prophets, the chronicler transferred these names back to the corresponding sections of the sources used by Kings. In these cases he felt he could give his readers not merely the somewhat vague reference to the original work as a whole, but the more definite and convenient citation of a particular paragraph. His descriptions of the additional subjects dealt with in the original authority may possibly, like other of his statements, have been constructed in accordance with his ideas of what that authority should contain; or more probably they refer to this authority the floating traditions of later times and writers. Possibly these references and notes of Chronicles are copied from the glosses which some scribe had written in the margin of his copy of Kings. If this be so, we can understand why we find references to the Midrash of Iddo and the Midrash of the book of Kings.*

In any case, whether directly or through the medium of a preliminary edition, called "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah," our book of Kings was used by the chronicler. The supposition that the original sources of Kings were used by the chronicler or this immediate predecessor is fairly supported both by evidence and authority, but on the whole it seems an unnecessary complication.

Thus we fail to find in these various references to the "Book of Kings," etc., any clear indication of the origin of matter peculiar to Chronicles; nevertheless it is not difficult to determine the nature of the sources from which this material was derived. Doubtless some of it was

* R. V. marg.

† R. V.

‡ *E. g.*, the wars of Jotham (2 Chron. xxvii. 7).

* 2 Chron. xiii. 22; xxiv. 27. The LXX., however, does not read "Midrash" in either case; and it is quite possible that glosses have attached themselves to the text of Chronicles.

still current in the form of oral tradition when the chronicler wrote, and owed to him its permanent record. Some he borrowed from manuscripts, which formed part of the scanty and fragmentary literature of the later period of the Restoration. His genealogies and statistics suggest the use of public and ecclesiastical archives, as well as of family records, in which ancient legend and anecdote lay embedded among lists of forgotten ancestors. Apparently the chronicler harvested pretty freely from that literary aftermath that sprang up when the Pentateuch and the earlier historical books had taken final shape.

But it is to these earlier books that the chronicler owes most. His work is very largely a mosaic of paragraphs and phrases taken from the older books. His chief sources are Samuel and Kings; he also lays the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ruth under contribution. Much is taken over without even verbal alteration, and the greater part is unaltered in substance; yet, as is the custom in ancient literature, no acknowledgment is made. The literary conscience was not yet aware of the sin of plagiarism. Indeed, neither an author nor his friends took any pains to secure the permanent association of his name with his work, and no great guilt can attach to the plagiarism of one anonymous writer from another. This absence of acknowledgment where the chronicler is plainly borrowing from elder scribes is another reason why his references to the "Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah" are clearly not statements of sources to which he is indebted, but simply what they profess to be: indications of the possible sources of further information.

Chronicles, however, illustrates ancient methods of historical composition, not only by its free appropriation of the actual form and substance of older works, but also by its curious blending of identical reproduction with large additions of quite heterogeneous matter, or with a series of minute but significant alterations. The primitive ideas and classical style of paragraphs from Samuel and Kings are broken in upon by the ritualistic fervour and late Hebrew of the chronicler's additions. The vivid and picturesque narrative of the bringing of the Ark to Zion is interpolated with uninteresting statistics of the names, numbers, and musical instruments of the Levites.* Much of the chronicler's account of the revolution which overthrew Athaliah and placed Joash on the throne is taken word for word from the book of Kings; but it is adapted to the Temple order of the Pentateuch by a series of alterations which substitute Levites for foreign mercenaries, and otherwise guard the sanctity of the Temple from the intrusion, not only of foreigners, but even of the common people.† A careful comparison of Chronicles with Samuel and Kings is a striking object lesson in ancient historical composition. It is an almost indispensable introduction to the criticism of the Pentateuch and the older historical books. The "redactor" of these works becomes no mere shadowy and hypothetical personage when we have watched his successor the chronicler piecing together things new and old and adapting ancient narratives to modern ideas by adding a word in one place and changing a phrase in another.

* Cf. 2 Sam. vi. 12-20 with 1 Chron. xv., xvi.
† Cf. 2 Kings xi.; 2 Chron. xxiii.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRONICLES.

BEFORE attempting to expound in detail the religious significance of Chronicles, we may conclude our introduction by a brief general statement of the leading features which render the book interesting and valuable to the Christian student.

The material of Chronicles may be divided into three parts: the matter taken directly from the older historical books; material derived from traditions and writings of the chronicler's own age; the various additions and modifications which are the chronicler's own work.* Each of these divisions has its special value, and important lessons may be learnt from the way in which the author has selected and combined these materials.

The excerpts from the older histories are, of course, by far the best material in the book for the period of the monarchy. If Samuel and Kings had perished, we should have been under great obligations to the chronicler for preserving to us large portions of their ancient records. As it is, the chronicler has rendered invaluable service to the textual criticism of the Old Testament by providing us with an additional witness to the text of large portions of Samuel and Kings. The very fact that the character and history of Chronicles are so different from those of the older books enhances the value of its evidence as to their text. The two texts, Samuel and Kings on the one hand and Chronicles on the other, have been modified under different influences; they have not always been altered in the same way, so that where one has been corrupted the other has often preserved the correct reading. Probably because Chronicles is less interesting and picturesque, its text has been subject to less alteration than that of Samuel and Kings. The more interested scribes or readers become, the more likely they are to make corrections and add glosses to the narrative. We may note, for example, that the name "Meribbaal" given by Chronicles for one of Saul's sons is more likely to be correct than "Mephibosheth," the form given by Samuel.†

The material derived from traditions and writings of the chronicler's own age is of uncertain historical value, and cannot be clearly discriminated from the author's free composition. Much of it was the natural product of the thought and feeling of the late Persian and early Greek period, and shares the importance which attaches to the chronicler's own work. This material, however, includes a certain amount of neutral matter: genealogies, family histories and anecdotes, and notes on ancient life and custom. We have no parallel authorities to test this material, we cannot prove the antiquity of the sources from which it is derived, and yet it may contain fragments of very ancient tradition. Some of the notes and narratives have an archaic flavour which can scarcely be artificial; their very lack

* The last two classes are not easily distinguished; but the additions which introduce the Levitical system into earlier history are clearly the work of the chronicler or his immediate predecessor, if such a predecessor be assumed, or were found in somewhat late sources. This is also probably true of other explanatory matter.

† Cf. 2 Sam. iv. with 1 Chron. viii. 34, also 2 Sam. vii. 7 with 1 Chron. xvii. 6, and 2 Sam. xvii. 25 with 1 Chron. ii. 17. In both these instances Chronicles preserves the correct text.

of importance is an argument for their authenticity, and illustrates the strange tenacity with which local and domestic tradition perpetuates the most insignificant episodes.*

But naturally the most characteristic, and therefore the most important, section of the contents of Chronicles is that made up of the additions and modifications which are the work of the chronicler or his immediate predecessors. It is unnecessary to point out that these do not add much to our knowledge of the history of the monarchy; their significance consists in the light that they throw upon the period towards whose close the chronicler lived: the period between the final establishment of Pentateuchal Judaism and the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to stamp it out of existence; the period between Ezra and Judas Maccabæus. The chronicler is no exceptional and epoch-making writer, has little personal importance, and is therefore all the more important as a typical representative of the current ideas of his class and generation. He translates the history of the past into the ideas and circumstances of his own age, and thus gives us almost as much information about the civil and religious institutions he lived under as if he had actually described them. Moreover, in stating its estimate of past history, each generation pronounces unconscious judgment upon itself. The chronicler's interpretation and philosophy of history mark the level of his moral and spiritual ideas. He betrays these quite as much by his attitude towards earlier authorities as in the paragraphs which are his own composition; we have seen how his use of materials illustrates the ancient, and for that matter the modern, Eastern methods of historical composition, and we have shown the immense importance of Chronicles to Old Testament criticism. But the way in which the chronicler uses his older sources also indicates his relation towards the ancient morality, ritual, and theology of Israel. His methods of selection are most instructive as to the ideas and interests of his time. We see what was thought worthy to be included in this final and most modern edition of the religious history of Israel. But in truth the omissions are among the most significant features of Chronicles; its silence is constantly more eloquent than its speech, and we measure the spiritual progress of Judaism by the paragraphs of Kings which Chronicles leaves out. In subsequent chapters we shall seek to illustrate the various ways in which Chronicles illuminates the period preceding the Maccabees. Any gleams of light on the Hebrew monarchy are most welcome, but we cannot be less grateful for information about those obscure centuries which fostered the quiet growth of Israel's character and faith and prepared the way for the splendid heroism and religious devotion of the Maccabæan struggle.

BOOK II.

GENEALOGIES.

CHAPTER I.

NAMES.

I CHRONICLES i.-ix.

THE first nine chapters of Chronicles form, with a few slight exceptions, a continuous list

* Cf. Book II., Chap. iv.

of names. It is the largest extant collection of Hebrew names. Hence these chapters may be used as a text for the exposition of any spiritual significance to be derived from Hebrew names either individually or collectively. Old Testament genealogies have often exercised the ingenuity of the preacher, and the student of homiletics will readily recollect the methods of extracting a moral from what at first sight seems a barren theme. For instance, those names of which little or nothing is recorded are held up as awful examples of wasted lives. We are asked to take warning from Mahalalel and Methuselah, who spent their long centuries so ineffectually that there was nothing to record except that they begat sons and daughters and died. Such teaching is not fairly derived from its text. The sacred writers implied no reflection upon the Patriarchs of whom they gave so short and conventional an account. Least of all could such teaching be based upon the lists in Chronicles, because the men who are there merely mentioned by name include Adam, Noah, Abraham, and other heroes of sacred story. Moreover, such teaching is unnecessary and not altogether wholesome. Very few men who are at all capable of obtaining a permanent place in history need to be spurred on by sermons; and for most people the suggestion that a man's life is a failure unless he secures posthumous fame is false and mischievous. The Lamb's book of life is the only record of the vast majority of honourable and useful lives; and the tendency to self-advertisement is sufficiently wide-spread and spontaneous already: it needs no pulpit stimulus. We do not think any worse of a man because his tombstone simply states his name and age, or any better because it catalogues his virtues and mentions that he attained the dignity of alderman or author.

The significance of these lists of names is rather to be looked for in an opposite direction. It is not that a name and one or two commonplace incidents mean so little, but that they suggest so much. A mere parish register is not in itself attractive, but if we consider even such a list, the very names interest us and kindle our imagination. It is almost impossible to linger in a country churchyard reading the half-effaced inscriptions upon the headstones, without forming some dim picture of the character and history and even the outward semblance of the men and women who once bore the names.

"For though a name is neither
... hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man,"

yet, to use a somewhat technical phrase, it *connotes* a man. A name implies the existence of a distinct personality, with a peculiar and unique history, and yet, on the other hand, a being with whom we are linked in close sympathy by a thousand ties of common human nature and everyday experience. In its lists of what are now mere names, the Bible seems to recognise the dignity and sacredness of bare human life.

But the names in these nine chapters have also a collective significance: they stand for more than their individual owners. They are typical and representative, the names of kings, and priests, and captains; they sum up the tribes of Israel, both as a Church and a nation, down all the generations of its history. The inclusion of these names in the sacred record, as the express

introduction to the annals of the Temple, and the sacred city, and the elect house of David, is the formal recognition of the sanctity of the nation and of national life. We are entirely in the spirit of the Bible when we see this same sanctity in all organised societies: in the parish, the municipality, and the state; when we attach a Divine significance to registers of electors and census returns, and claim all such lists as symbols of religious privilege and responsibility.

But names do not merely suggest individuals and communities: the meanings of the names reveal the ideas of the people who used them. It has been well said that "the names of every nation are an important monument of national spirit and manners, and thus the Hebrew names bear important testimony to the peculiar vocation of this nation. No nation of antiquity has such a proportion of names of religious import."* Amongst ourselves indeed the religious meaning of names has almost wholly faded away; "Christian name" is a mere phrase, and children are named after relations, or according to prevailing fashion, or after the characters of popular novels. But the religious motive can still be traced in some modern names; in certain districts of German the name "Ursula" or "Apollonia" is a sure indication that a girl is a Roman Catholic and has been named after a popular saint.† The Bible constantly insists upon this religious significance, which would frequently be in the mind of the devout Israelite in giving names to his children. The Old Testament contains more than a hundred etymologies‡ of personal names, most of which attach a religious meaning to the words explained. The etymologies of the patriarchal names—"Abraham," father of a multitude of nations; "Isaac," laughter; "Jacob," supplanter; "Israel," prince with God—are specially familiar. The Biblical interest in edifying etymologies was maintained and developed by early commentators. Their philology was far from accurate, and very often they were merely playing upon the forms of words. But the allegorising tendencies of Jewish and Christian expositors found special opportunities in proper names. On the narrow foundation of an etymology mostly doubtful and often impossible, Philo, and Origen, and Jerome loved to erect an elaborate structure of theological or philosophical doctrine. Philo has only one quotation from our author: "Manasseh had sons, whom his Syrian concubine bare to him, Machir; and Machir begat Gilead."§ He quotes this verse to show that recollection is associated in a subordinate capacity with memory. The connection is not very clearly made out, but rests in some way on the meaning of Manasseh, the root of which means to forget. As forgetfulness with recollection restores our knowledge, so Manasseh with his Syrian concubine begets Machir. Recollection therefore is a concubine, an inferior and secondary quality.¶ This ingenious trifling has a certain charm in spite of its extravagance, but in less dexterous hands the method becomes clumsy as well as extravagant. It has, however, the advantage of

readily adapting itself to all tastes and opinions, so that we are not surprised when an eighteenth-century author discovers in Old Testament etymology a compendium of Trinitarian theology.* *Ahiah*† is derived from 'ehad, one, and yah, Jehovah, and is thus an assertion of the Divine unity; *Reuel*‡ is resolved into a plural verb with a singular Divine name for its subject: this is an indication of trinity in unity; *Ahilud*§ is derived from 'ehad, one, and galud, begotten, and signifies that the Son is *only-begotten*.

Modern scholarship is more rational in its methods, but attaches no less importance to these ancient names, and finds in them weighty evidence on problems of criticism and theology; and before proceeding to more serious matters, we may note a few somewhat exceptional names. As pointed in the present Hebrew text, *Hazar-maveth*|| and *Azmaveth*|| have a certain grim suggestiveness. *Hazar-maveth*, court of death, is given as the name of a descendant of Shem. It is, however, probably the name of a place transferred to an eponymous ancestor, and has been identified with *Hadramawt*, a district in the south of Arabia. As, however, *Hadramawt* is a fertile district of Arabia Felix, the name does not seem very appropriate. On the other hand, *Azmaveth*, "strength of death," would be very suitable for some strong death-dealing soldier. *Azubah*** "forsaken," the name of Caleb's wife, is capable of a variety of romantic explanations. *Hazel-elponi*†† is remarkable in its mere form; and Ewald's interpretation, "Give shade. Thou who turnest to me Thy countenance," seems rather a cumbrous signification for the name of a daughter of the house of Judah. *Jushab-hesed*‡‡ "Mercy will be renewed," as the name of a son of Zerubbabel, doubtless expresses the gratitude and hope of the Jews on their return from Babylon.§§ *Jashubi-lehem*||| however, is curious and perplexing. The name has been interpreted "giving bread" or "turning back to Bethlehem," but the text is certainly corrupt, and the passage is one of many into which either the carelessness of scribes or the obscurity of the chronicler's sources has introduced hopeless confusion. But the most remarkable set of names is found in 1 Chron. xxv. 4, where *Giddalti* and *Romantiezer*, *Joshbekashah*, *Mallothi*, *Hothir*, *Mahazioth*, are simply a Hebrew sentence meaning, "I have magnified and exalted help; sitting in distress, ¶ I have spoken ¶ visions in abundance." We may at once set aside the cynical suggestion that the author lacked names to complete a genealogy and, to save the trouble of inventing them separately, took the first sentence that came to hand and cut it up into suitable lengths, nor is it likely that a father would spread the same process over several years and adopt it for his family. This remarkable combination of names is probably due to some misunderstanding of his sources on the part of the chronicler. His parchment rolls must often have been torn and fragmentary, the writing blurred and half illegible; and his attempts to piece together obscure and ragged manuscripts naturally resulted at times in mistakes and confusion.

These examples of interesting etymologies

* Oehler, "Old Testament Theology," i. 283 (Eng. trans.).

† Nestle, "Die Israelitischen Eigennamen," p. 27. The present chapter is largely indebted to this standard monograph.

‡ Nestle.

§ 1 Chron. vii. 14.

¶ Philo, "De Cong. Quær. Erud. Grat.," 8.

* Hiller's "Onomasticon," ap. Nestle 11.

† vii. 8.

‡ i. 35.

§ xviii. 15.

|| i. 20.

¶ viii. 36.

** ii. 18.

‡‡ iv. 3.

†† iii. 20.

§§ Bertheau, i. 1.

|| iv. 22.

¶¶ The translation of these words is not quite certain.

might easily be multiplied; they serve, at any rate, to indicate a rich mine of suggestive teaching. It must, however, be remembered that a name is not necessarily a personal name because it occurs in a genealogy; cities, districts, and tribes mingle freely with persons in these lists. In the same connection we note that the female names are few and far between, and that of those which do occur the "sisters" probably stand for allied and related families, and not for individuals.

As regards Old Testament theology, we may first notice the light thrown by personal names on the relation of the religion of Israel to that of other Semitic peoples. Of the names in these chapters and elsewhere, a large proportion are compounded of one or other of the Divine names. *El* is the first element in *Elishama*, *Eliphelet*, *Eliada*, etc.; it is the second in *Othniel*, *Jehaleleel*, *Asareel*, etc. Similarly *Jehovah* is represented by the initial *Jeho-* in *Jehoshaphat*, *Jehoiakim*, *Jehoram*, etc., by the final *-iah* in *Amaziah*, *Azariah*, *Hezekiah*, etc. It has been calculated that there are a hundred and ninety names* beginning or ending with the equivalent of *Jehovah*, including most of the kings of Judah and many of the kings of Israel. Moreover, some names which have not these prefixes and affixes in their extant form are contractions of older forms which began or ended with a Divine name. *Ahaz*, for instance, is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions as *Jahuhazi—i. e., Jehoahaz—*and *Nathan* is probably a contracted form of *Nethaniah*.

There are also numerous compounds of other Divine names. *Zur*, rock, is found in *Pedahzur*, † *Shaddai*, A. V. Almighty, in *Ammishaddai*‡; the two are combined in *Zurishaddai*.§ *Melech* is a Divine name in *Malchi-ram* and *Malchi-shua*. *Baal* occurs as a Divine name in *Eshbaal* and *Meribbaal*. *Abi*, father, is a Divine name in *Abiram*, *Abinadab*, etc., and probably also *Ahi* in *Ahiram* and *Ammi* in *Amminadab*.|| Possibly, too, the apparently simple names *Melech*, *Zur*, *Baal*, are contractions of longer forms in which these Divine names were prefixes or affixes.

This use of Divine names is capable of very varied illustration. Modern languages have *Christian* and *Christopher*, *Emmanuel*, *Theodosius*, *Theodora*, etc.; names like *Hermogenes* and *Heliogabalus* are found in the classical languages. But the practice is specially characteristic of Semitic languages. Mohammedan princes are still called *Abdurrahman*, servant of the Merciful, and *Abdallah*, servant of God; ancient Phœnician kings were named *Ethbaal* and *Abdalonim*, where *alonim* is a plural Divine name, and the *bal* in *Hannibal* and *Hasdrubal = baal*. The Assyrian and Chaldean kings were named after the gods *Sin*, *Nebo*, *Assur*, *Merodach*, e. g., *Sin-akki-irib* (*Sennacherib*); *Nebuchadnezzar*; *Assur-bani-pal*; *Merodach-baladan*.

Of these Divine names *El* and *Baal* are common to Israel and other Semitic peoples, and it has been held that the Hebrew personal names preserve traces of polytheism. In any case, however, the *Baal*-names are comparatively few, and do not necessarily indicate that Israelites worshipped a *Baal* distinct from *Jehovah*; they may be relics of a time when *Baal* (*Lord*) was

a title or equivalent of *Jehovah*, like the later *Adonai*. Other possible traces of polytheism are few and doubtful. In *Baanah* and *Resheph* we may perhaps find the obscure* Phœnician deities *Anath* and *Reshaph*. On the whole, Hebrew names as compared, for instance, with Assyrian afford little or no evidence of the prevalence of polytheism.

Another question concerns the origin and use of the name *Jehovah*. Our lists conclusively prove its free use during the monarchy and its existence under the judges. On the other hand, its apparent presence in *Jochebed*, the name of the mother of *Moses*, seems to carry it back beyond *Moses*. Possibly it was a Divine name peculiar to his family or clan. Its occurrence in *Yahubidi*, a king of *Hamath*, in the time of *Sargon* may be due to direct Israelite influence. *Hamath* had frequent relations with *Israel* and *Judah*.

Turning to matters of practical religion, how far do these names help us to understand the spiritual life of ancient Israel? The Israelites made constant use of *El* and *Jehovah* in their names, and we have no parallel practice. Were they then so much more religious than we are? Probably in a sense they were. It is true that the etymology and even the original significance of a name in common use are for all practical purposes quickly and entirely forgotten. A man may go through a life-time bearing the name of *Christopher* and never know its etymological meaning. At *Cambridge* and *Oxford* sacred names like "*Jesus*" and "*Trinity*" are used constantly and familiarly without suggesting anything beyond the colleges so called. The edifying phrase, "*God encompasseth us*," is altogether lost in the grotesque tavern sign "*The Goat and Compasses*." Nor can we suppose that the Israelite or the Assyrian often dwelt on the religious significance of the *Jeho-* or *-iah*, the *Nebo*, *Sin*, or *Merodach*, of current proper names. As we have seen, the sense of *-iah*, *-el*, or *Jeho-* was often so little present to men's minds that contractions were formed by omitting them. Possibly because these prefixes and affixes were so common, they came to be taken for granted; it was scarcely necessary to write them, because in any case they would be understood. Probably in historic times *Abi-*, *Ahi-*, and *Ammi-* were no longer recognised as Divine names or titles; and yet the names which could still be recognised as compounded of *El* and *Jehovah* must have had their influence on popular feeling. They were part of the religiousness, so to speak, of the ancient East; they symbolised the constant intertwining of religious acts, and words, and thoughts with all the concerns of life. The quality of this ancient religion was very inferior to that of a devout and intelligent modern Christian; it was perhaps inferior to that of Russian peasants belonging to the Greek Church: but ancient religion pervaded life and society more consciously than modern Christianity does; it touched all classes and occasions more directly, if also more mechanically. And, again, these names were not the fossil relics of obsolete habits of thought and feeling, like the names of our churches and colleges; they were the memorials of comparatively recent acts of faith. The name "*Elijah*" commemorated the solemn occasion on which a father professed his own faith and

* Nestle, p. 68.

† Num. i. 10.

‡ Num. i. 12.

§ Num. i. 6.

|| Cf. p. 479.

* xi. 30; vii. 25 (Nestle).

consecrated a new-born child to the true God by naming his boy "Jehovah is my God." This name-giving was also a prayer; the child was placed under the protection of the deity whose name it bore. The practice might be tainted with superstition; the name would often be regarded as a kind of amulet; and yet we may believe that it could also serve to express a parent's earnest and simple-minded faith. Modern Englishmen have developed a habit of almost complete reticence and reserve on religious matters, and this habit is illustrated by our choice of proper names. Mary, and Thomas, and James are so familiar that their Scriptural origin is forgotten, and therefore they are tolerated; but the use of distinctively Scriptural Christian names is virtually regarded as bad taste. This reticence is not merely due to increased delicacy of spiritual feeling: it is partly the result of the growth of science and of literary and historical criticism. We have become absorbed in the wonderful relations of methods and processes; we are fascinated by the ingenious mechanism of nature and society. We have no leisure to detach our thoughts from the machinery and carry them further on to its Maker and Director. Indeed, because there is so much mechanism and because it is so wonderful, we are sometimes asked to believe that the machine made itself. But this is a mere phase in the religious growth of mankind; humanity will tire of some of its new toys, and will become familiar with the rest; deeper needs and instincts will reassert themselves; and men will find themselves nearer in sentiment than they supposed to the ancient people who named their children after their God. In this and other matters the East to-day is the same as of old; the permanence of its custom is no inapt symbol of the permanence of Divine truth, which revolution and conquest are powerless to change.

"The East bowed low before the blast
In patient, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again."

But the Christian Church is mistress of a more compelling magic than even Eastern patience and tenacity: out of the storms that threaten her, she draws new energies for service, and learns a more expressive language in which to declare the glory of God.

Let us glance for a moment at the meanings of the group of Divine names given above. We have said that, in addition to *Melech* in *Malchi*, *Abi*, *Ahi*, and *Ammi* are to be regarded as Divine names. One reason for this is that their use as prefixes is strictly analogous to that of *El* and *Jeho*-. We have *Abijah* and *Ahijah* as well as *Elijah*, *Abiel* and *Ammiel* as well as *Eliel*, *Abiram* and *Ahiram* as well as *Jehoram*; *Ammishaddai* compares with *Zurishaddai*, and *Ammizabad* with *Jehozabad*, nor would it be difficult to add many other examples. If this view be correct, *Ammi* will have nothing to do with the Hebrew word for "people," but will rather be connected with the corresponding Arabic word for "uncle."* As the use of such terms as "brother" and "uncle" for Divine names is not consonant with Hebrew theology in its historic period, the names which contain these prefixes must have come down from earlier ages, and were used in later times without any consciousness of their

*Nestle.

original sense. Probably they were explained by new etymologies more in harmony with the spirit of the times; compare the etymology "father of a multitude of nations" given to Abraham. Even *Abi*-, father, in the early times to which its use as a prefix must be referred, cannot have had the full spiritual meaning which now attaches to it as a Divine title. It probably only signified the ultimate source of life. The disappearance of these religious terms from the common vocabulary and their use in names long after their significance had been forgotten are ordinary phenomena in the development of language and religion. How many of the millions who use our English names for the days of the week ever give a thought to Thor or Freya? Such phenomena have more than an antiquarian interest. They remind us that religious terms, and phrases, and formulæ derive their influence and value from their adaptation to the age which accepts them; and therefore many of them will become unintelligible or even misleading to later generations. Language varies continuously, circumstances change, experience widens, and every age has a right to demand that Divine truth shall be presented in the words and metaphors that give it the clearest and most forcible expression. Many of the simple truths that are most essential to salvation admit of being stated once for all; but dogmatic theology fossilises fast, and the bread of one generation may become a stone to the next.

The history of these names illustrates yet another phenomenon. In some narrow and imperfect sense the early Semitic peoples seem to have called God "Father" and "Brother." Because the terms were limited to a narrow sense, the Israelites grew to a level of religious truth at which they could no longer use them; but as they made yet further progress they came to know more of what was meant by fatherhood and brotherhood, and gained also a deeper knowledge of God. At length the Church resumed these ancient Semitic terms; and Christians call God "Abba, Father," and speak of the Eternal Son as their elder Brother. And thus sometimes, but not always, an antique phrase may for a time seem unsuitable and misleading, and then again may prove to be the best expression for the newest and fullest truth. Our criticism of a religious formula may simply reveal our failure to grasp the wealth of meaning which its words and symbols can contain.

Turning from these obsolete names to those in common use—*El*; *Jehovah*; *Shaddai*; *Zur*; *Melech*—probably the prevailing idea popularly associated with them all was that of strength: *El*, strength in the abstract; *Jehovah*, strength shown in permanence and independence; *Shaddai*, the strength that causes terror, the Almighty from whom cometh destruction*; *Zur*, rock, the material symbol of strength; *Melech*, king, the possessor of authority. In early times the first and most essential attribute of Deity is power, but with this idea of strength a certain attribute of beneficence is soon associated. The strong God is the Ally of His people; His permanence is the guarantee of their national existence; He

* Joel i. 15; Isa. xiii. 6. It is not necessary here to discuss either the etymological or the theological history of these words in their earliest usage, nor need we do more than recall the fact that *Jehovah* was the term in common use as the personal name of the God of Israel, while *El* was rare and sometimes generic.

destroys their enemies. The rock is a place of refuge; and, again, Jehovah's people may rejoice in the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. The King leads them to battle, and gives them their enemies for a spoil.

We must not, however, suppose that pious Israelites would consciously and systematically discriminate between these names, any more than ordinary Christians do between God, Lord, Father, Christ, Saviour, Jesus. Their usages would be governed by changing currents of sentiment very difficult to understand and explain after the lapse of thousands of years. In the year A. D. 3000, for instance, it will be difficult for the historian of dogmatics to explain accurately why some nineteenth-century Christians preferred to speak of "dear Jesus" and others of "the Christ."

But the simple Divine names reveal comparatively little; much more may be learnt from the numerous compounds they help to form. Some of the more curious have already been noticed, but the real significance of this nomenclature is to be looked for in the more ordinary and natural names. Here, as before, we can only select from the long and varied list. Let us take some of the favourite names and some of the roots most often used, almost always, be it remembered, in combination with Divine names. The different varieties of these sacred names rendered it possible to construct various personal names embodying the same idea. Also the same Divine name might be used either as prefix or affix. For instance, the idea that "God knows" is equally well expressed in the names *Ehada* (El-yada'), *Jediael* (Yada'-el), *Jehoiada* (Jehoyada'), and *Jediah* (Yada'-yah). "God remembers" is expressed alike by *Zachariah* and *Jozachar*; "God hears" by *Elishama* (El-shama'), *Samuel* (if for Shama'-el), *Ishmael* (also from Shama'-el), *Shemaiah*, and *Ishmaiah* (both from Shama' and Yah); "God gives" by *Elnathan*, *Nethaneel*, *Jonathan*, and *Nethaniah*; "God helps" by *Eliczer*, *Azareel*, *Joezer*, and *Azariah*; "God is gracious" by *Elhanan*, *Hananeel*, *Johanah*, *Haniah*, *Baal-hanan*, and, for a Carthaginian, *Hannibal*, giving us a curious connection between the Apostle of love, John (Johanah), and the deadly enemy of Rome.

The way in which the changes are rung upon these ideas shows how the ancient Israelites loved to dwell upon them. Nestle reckons that in the Old Testament sixty-one persons have names formed from the root *nathan*, to give; fifty-seven from *shama*, to hear; fifty-six from *azar*, to help; forty-five from *hanan*, to be gracious; forty-four from *zakhar*, to remember. Many persons, too, bear names from the root *yada'*, to know. The favourite name is *Zechariah*, which is borne by twenty-five different persons.

Hence, according to the testimony of names, the Israelites' favourite ideas about God were that He heard, and knew, and remembered; that He was gracious, and helped men, and gave them gifts; but they loved best to think of Him as God the Giver. Their nomenclature recognises many other attributes, but these take the first place. The value of this testimony is enhanced by its utter unconsciousness and naturalness; it brings us nearer to the average man in his religious moments than any psalm or prophetic utterance. Men's chief interest in God was as the Giver. The idea has proved very permanent; St. James amplifies it: God is the Giver of

every good and perfect gift. It lies latent in names: Theodosius, Theodore, Theodora, and Dorothea. The other favorite ideas are all related to this. God hears men's prayers, and knows their needs, and remembers them; He is gracious, and helps them by His gifts. Could anything be more pathetic than this artless self-revelation? Men's minds have little leisure for sin and salvation; they are kept down by the constant necessity of preserving and providing for a bare existence. Their cry to God is like the prayer of Jacob, "If Thou wilt give me bread to eat and raiment to put on!" The very confidence and gratitude that the names express imply periods of doubt and fear, when they said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" times when it seemed to them impossible that God could have heard their prayer or that He knew their misery, else why was there no deliverance? Had God forgotten to be gracious? Did He indeed remember? The names come to us as answers of faith to these suggestions of despair.

Possibly these old-world saints were not more pre-occupied with their material needs than most modern Christians. Perhaps it is necessary to believe in a God who rules on earth before we can understand the Father who is in heaven. Does a man really trust in God for eternal life if he cannot trust Him for daily bread? But in any case these names provide us with very comprehensive formulæ, which we are at liberty to apply as freely as we please: the God who knows, and hears, and remembers, who is gracious, and helps men, and gives them gifts. To begin with, note how in a great array of Old Testament names God is the Subject, Actor, and Worker; the supreme facts of life are God and God's doings, not man and man's doings, what God is to man, not what man is to God. This is a foreshadowing of the Christian doctrines of grace and of the Divine sovereignty. And again we are left to fill in the objects of the sentences for ourselves: God hears, and remembers, and gives—what? All that we have to say to Him and all that we are capable of receiving from Him.

CHAPTER II.

HEREDITY.

I CHRONICLES i.-ix.

It has been said that Religion is the great discoverer of truth, while Science follows her slowly and after a long interval. Heredity, so much discussed just now, is sometimes treated as if its principles were a great discovery of the present century. Popular science is apt to ignore history and to mistake a fresh nomenclature for an entirely new system of truth, and yet the immense and far-reaching importance of heredity has been one of the commonplaces of thought ever since history began. Science has been anticipated, not merely by religious feeling, but by a universal instinct. In the old world political and social systems have been based upon the recognition of the principle of heredity, and religion has sanctioned such recognition. Caste in India is a religious even more than a social institution; and we use the term figuratively in

reference to ancient and modern life, even when the institution has not formally existed. Without the aid of definite civil or religious law the force of sentiment and circumstances suffices to establish an informal system of caste. Thus the feudal aristocracy and guilds of the Middle Ages were not without their rough counterparts in the Old Testament. Moreover, the local divisions of the Hebrew kingdoms corresponded in theory, at any rate, to blood relationships; and the tribe, the clan, and the family had even more fixity and importance than now belong to the parish or the municipality. A man's family history or genealogy was the ruling factor in determining his home, his occupation, and his social position. In the chronicler's time this was especially the case with the official ministers of religion, the Temple establishment to which he himself belonged. The priests, the Levites, the singers, and doorkeepers formed castes in the strict sense of the word. A man's birth definitely assigned him to one of these classes, to which none but the members of certain families could belong.

But the genealogies had a deeper significance. Israel was Jehovah's chosen people, His son, to whom special privileges were guaranteed by solemn covenant. A man's claim to share in this covenant depended on his genuine Israelite descent, and the proof of such descent was an authentic genealogy. In these chapters the chronicler has taken infinite pains to collect pedigrees from all available sources and to construct a complete set of genealogies exhibiting the lines of descent of the families of Israel. His interest in this research was not merely antiquarian; he was investigating matters of the greatest social and religious importance to all the members of the Jewish community, and especially to his colleagues and friends in the Temple service. These chapters, which seem to us so dry and useless, were probably regarded by the chronicler's contemporaries as the most important part of his work. The preservation or discovery of a genealogy was almost a matter of life and death. Witness the episode in Ezra and Nehemiah* : "And of the priests: the children of Hobaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found; therefore they were deemed polluted and put from the priesthood. And the governor said unto them that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim." Cases like these would stimulate our author's enthusiasm. As he turned over dusty receptacles, and unrolled frayed parchments, and painfully deciphered crabbed and faded script, he would be excited by the hope of discovering some mislaid genealogy that would restore outcasts to their full status and privileges as Israelites and priests. Doubtless he had already acquired in some measure the subtle exegesis and minute casuistry that were the glory of later Rabbinism. Ingenious interpretation of obscure writing or the happy emendation of half-obliterated words might lend opportune aid in the recovery of a genealogy. On the other hand, there were vested interests ready to protest against the too easy acceptance of new claims. The priestly families of undoubted descent from Aaron would not thank a chronicler

for reviving lapsed rights to a share in the offices and revenues of the Temple. This part of our author's task was as delicate as it was important.

We will now briefly consider the genealogies in these chapters in the order in which they are given. Chap. i. contains genealogies of the patriarchal period selected from Genesis. The existing races of the world are all traced back through Shem, Ham, and Japheth to Noah, and through him to Adam. The chronicler thus accepts and repeats the doctrine of Genesis that God made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.* All mankind, "Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman," † were alike descended from Noah, who was saved from the Flood by the special care of God; from Enoch, who walked with God; from Adam, who was created by God in His own image and likeness. The Israelites did not claim, like certain Greek clans, to be the descendants of a special god of their own, or, like the Athenians, to have sprung miraculously from sacred soil. Their genealogies testified that not merely Israelite nature, but human nature, is moulded on a Divine pattern. These apparently barren lists of names enshrine the great principles of the universal brotherhood of men and the universal Fatherhood of God. The chronicler wrote when the broad universalism of the prophets was being replaced by the hard exclusiveness of Judaism; and yet, perhaps unconsciously, he reproduces the genealogies which were to be one weapon of St. Paul in his struggle with that exclusiveness. The opening chapters of Genesis and Chronicles are among the foundations of the catholicity of the Church of Christ.

For the antediluvian period only the Sethite genealogy is given. The chronicler's object was simply to give the origin of existing races; and the descendants of Cain were omitted, as entirely destroyed by the Flood.

Following the example of Genesis, the chronicler gives the genealogies of other races at the points at which they diverge from the ancestral line of Israel, and then continues the family history of the chosen race. In this way the descendants of Japheth and Ham, the non-Abrahamic Semites, the Ishmaelites, the sons of Keturah, and the Edomites are successively mentioned.

The relations of Israel with Edom were always close and mostly hostile. The Edomites had taken advantage of the overthrow of the Southern Kingdom to appropriate the south of Judah, and still continued to occupy it. The keen interest felt by the chronicler in Edom is shown by the large space devoted to the Edomites. The close contiguity of the Jews and Idumæans tended to promote mutual intercourse between them, and even threatened an eventual fusion of the two peoples. As a matter of fact, the Idumæan Herods became rulers of Judæa. To guard against such dangers to the separateness of the Jewish people, the chronicler emphasises the historical distinction of race between them and the Edomites.

From the beginning of the second chapter onwards the genealogies are wholly occupied with Israelites. The author's special interest in Judah is at once manifested. After giving the list of the twelve Patriarchs he devotes two and a half

* Ezra ii. 61-63; Neh. vii. 63-65.

† Col. iii. 11.

* Acts xvii. 26.

† Col. iii. 11.

chapters to the families of Judah. Here again the materials have been mostly obtained from the earlier historical books. They are, however, combined with more recent traditions, so that in this chapter matter from different sources is pieced together in a very confusing fashion. One source of this confusion was the principle that the Jewish community could only consist of families of genuine Israelite descent. Now a large number of the returned exiles traced their descent to two brothers, Caleb and Jerahmeel; but in the older narratives Caleb and Jerahmeel are not Israelites. Caleb is a Kenizzite,* and his descendants and those of Jerahmeel appear in close connection with the Kenites.† Even in this chapter certain of the Calebites are called Kenites and connected in some strange way with the Rechabites.‡ Though at the close of the monarchy the Calebites and Jerahmeelites had become an integral part of the tribe of Judah, their separate origin had not been forgotten, and Caleb and Jerahmeel had not been included in the Israelite genealogies. But after the Exile men came to feel more and more strongly that a common faith implied unity of race. Moreover, the practical unity of the Jews with these Kenizzites overbore the dim and fading memory of ancient tribal distinctions. Jews and Kenizzites had shared the Captivity, the Exile, and the Return; they worked, and fought, and worshipped side by side; and they were to all intents and purposes one nation, alike the people of Jehovah. This obvious and important practical truth was expressed as such truths were then wont to be expressed. The children of Caleb and Jerahmeel were finally and formally adopted into the chosen race. Caleb and Jerahmeel are no longer the sons of Jephunneh the Kenizzite; they are the sons of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah.§ A new genealogy was formed as a recognition rather than an explanation of accomplished facts.

Of the section containing the genealogies of Judah, the lion's share is naturally given to the house of David, to which a part of the second chapter and the whole of the third are devoted.

Next follow genealogies of the remaining tribes, those of Levi and Benjamin being by far the most complete. Chap. vi., which is devoted to Levi, affords evidence of the use by the chronicler of independent and sometimes inconsistent sources, and also illustrates his special interest in the priesthood and the Temple choir. A list of high-priests from Aaron to Ahimaaaz is given twice over (vv. 4-8 and 49-53), but only one line of high-priests is recognised, the house of Zadok, whom Josiah's reforms had made the one priestly family in Israel. Their ancient rivals the high-priests of the house of Eli are as entirely ignored as the antediluvian Cainites. The existing high-priestly dynasty had been so long established that these other priests of Saul and David seemed no longer to have any significance for the religion of Israel.

The pedigree of the three Levitical families of Gershom, Kohath, and Merari is also given twice over: in vv. 16-30 and 31-49. The former pedi-

gree begins with the sons of Levi, and proceeds to their descendants; the latter begins with the founders of the guilds of singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, and traces back their genealogies to Kohath, Gershom, and Merari respectively. But the pedigrees do not agree; compare, for instance, the lists of the Kohathites:—

22-24.	36-38.
Kohath	Kohath
<i>Amminadab</i>	<i>Izhar</i>
Korah	Korah
<i>Assir</i>	
<i>Elkanah</i>	
Ebiasaph	Ebiasaph
Assir	Assir
Tahath	Tahath
<i>Uriel</i>	<i>Zephaniah</i>
<i>Uzziah</i>	<i>Azariah</i>
<i>Shaul</i>	etc.

We have here one of many illustrations of the fact that the chronicler used materials of very different value. To attempt to prove the absolute consistency of all his genealogies would be mere waste of time. It is by no means certain that he himself supposed them to be consistent. The frank juxtaposition of varying lists of ancestors rather suggests that he was prompted by a scholarly desire to preserve for his readers all available evidence of every kind.

In reading the genealogies of the tribe of Benjamin, it is specially interesting to find that in the Jewish community of the Restoration there were families tracing their descent through Mephibosheth and Jonathan to Saul.* Apparently the chronicler and his contemporaries shared this special interest in the fortunes of a fallen dynasty, for the genealogy is given twice over. These circumstances are the more striking because in the actual history of Chronicles Saul is all but ignored.

The rest of the ninth chapter deals with the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the ministry of the Temple after the return from the Captivity, and is partly identical with sections of Ezra and Nehemiah. It closes the family history, as it were, of Israel, and its position indicates the standpoint and ruling interests of the chronicler.

Thus the nine opening chapters of genealogies and kindred matter strike the key-notes of the whole book. Some are personal and professional; some are religious. On the one hand, we have the origin of existing families and institutions; on the other hand, we have the election of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, of the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron.

Let us consider first the hereditary character of the Jewish religion and priesthood. Here, as elsewhere, the formal doctrine only recognised and accepted actual facts. The conditions which received the sanction of religion were first imposed by the force of circumstances. In primitive times, if there was to be any religion at all, it had to be national; if God was to be worshipped at all, His worship was necessarily national, and He became in some measure a national God. Sympathies are limited by knowledge and by common interest. The ordinary Israelite knew very little of any other people than his own. There was little international comity in primitive times, and nations were slow

* viii. 33-40; ix. 35-44. We have used Mephibosheth as more familiar, but Chronicles reads Meribbaal, which is more correct.

* Josh. xiv. 6.

† 1 Sam. xxvii. 10.

‡ Ver. 55.

§ The occurrence of Caleb the son of Jephunneh in iv. 15, vi. 56, in no way militates against this view: the chronicler, like other redactors, is simply inserting borrowed material without correcting it. *Chelubai* in ii. 9 stands for *Caleb*: cf. ii. 18.

to recognise that they had common interests. It was difficult for an Israelite to believe that his beloved Jehovah, in whom he had been taught to trust, was also the God of the Arabs and Syrians, who periodically raided his crops, and cattle, and slaves, and sometimes carried off his children, or of the Chaldeans, who made deliberate and complete arrangements for plundering the whole country, rasing its cities to the ground, and carrying away the population into distant exile. By a supreme act of faith, the prophets claimed the enemies and oppressors of Israel as instruments of the will of Jehovah, and the chronicler's genealogies show that he shared this faith; but it was still inevitable that the Jews should look out upon the world at large from the standpoint of their own national interests and experience. Jehovah was God of heaven and earth; but Israelites knew Him through the deliverance He had wrought for Israel, the punishments He had inflicted on her sins, and the messages He had entrusted to her prophets. As far as their knowledge and practical experience went, they knew Him as the God of Israel. The course of events since the fall of Samaria narrowed still further the local associations of Hebrew worship.

"God was wroth,
And greatly abhorred Israel,
So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,
The tent which He placed among men :

He refused the tent of Joseph,
And chose not the tribe of Ephraim,
But chose the tribe of Judah,
The Mount Zion which He loved :
And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
Like the earth, which He hath established for ever.*"

We are doubtless right in criticising those Jews whose limitations led them to regard Jehovah as a kind of personal possession, the inheritance of their own nation, and not of other peoples. But even here we can only blame their negations. Jehovah *was* their inheritance and personal possession; but then He was also the inheritance of other nations. This Jewish heresy is by no means extinct: white men do not always believe that their God is equally the God of the negro; Englishmen are inclined to think that God is the God of England in a more especial way than He is the God of France. When we discourse concerning God in history, we mostly mean our own history. We can see the hand of Providence in the wreck of the Armada and the overthrow of Napoleon; but we are not so ready to recognise in the same Napoleon the Divine instrument that created a new Europe by relieving her peoples from cruel and degrading tyranny. We scarcely realise that God cares as much for the Continent as He does for our island.

We have great and perhaps sufficient excuses, but we must let the Jews have the benefit of them. God is as much the God of one nation as of another; but He fulfils Himself to different nations in different ways, by a various providential discipline. Each people is bound to believe that God has specially adapted His dealings to its needs, nor can we be surprised if men forget or fail to observe that God has done no less for their neighbours. Each nation rightly regards its religious ideas, and life, and literature as a precious inheritance peculiarly its own; and it should not be too severely blamed for being

ignorant that other nations have their inheritance also. Such considerations largely justify the interest in heredity shown by the chronicler's genealogies. On the positive, practical side, religion is largely a matter of heredity, and ought to be. The Christian sacrament of baptism is a continual profession of this truth: our children are "clean"; they are within the covenant of grace; we claim for them the privileges of the Church to which we belong. That was also part of the meaning of the genealogies.

In the broad field of social and religious life the problems of heredity are in some ways less complicated than in the more exact discussions of physical science. Practical effects can be considered without attempting an accurate analysis of causes. Family history not only determines physical constitution, mental gifts, and moral character, but also fixes for the most part country, home, education, circumstances, and social position. All these were a man's inheritance more peculiarly in Israel than with us; and in many cases in Israel a man was often trained to inherit a family profession. Apart from the ministry of the Temple, we read of a family of craftsmen, of other families that were potters, of others who dwelt with the king for his work, and of the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen.* Religion is largely involved in the manifold inheritance which a man receives from his fathers. His birth determines his religious education, the examples of religious life set before him, the forms of worship in which as a child he takes part. Most men live and die in the religion of their childhood; they worship the God of their fathers; Romanist remains Romanist; Protestant remains Protestant. They may fail to grasp any living faith, or may lose all interest in religion; but such religion as most men have is part of their inheritance. In the Israel of the chronicler faith and devotion to God were almost always and entirely inherited. They were part of the great debt which a man owed to his fathers.

The recognition of these facts should tend to foster our humility and reverence, to encourage patriotism and philanthropy. We are the creatures and debtors of the past, though we are slow to own our obligations. We have nothing that we have not received; but we are apt to consider ourselves self-made men, the architects and builders of our own fortunes, who have the right to be self-satisfied, self-assertive, and selfish. The heir of all the ages, in the full vigour of youth, takes his place in the foremost ranks of time, and marches on in the happy consciousness of profound and multifarious wisdom, immense resources, and magnificent opportunity. He forgets or even despises the generations of labour and anguish that have built up for him his great inheritance. The genealogies are a silent protest against such insolent ingratitude. They remind us that in bygone days a man derived his gifts and received his opportunities from his ancestors; they show us men as the links in a chain, tenants for life, as it were, of our estate, called upon to pay back with interest to the future the debt which they have incurred to the past. We see that the chain is a long one, with many links; and the slight estimate we are inclined to put upon the work of individuals in each generation recoils upon our own pride. We also are but individuals of a generation that is

* Psalm lxxviii. 59, 60, 67-69.

* iv. 14, 21-23.

only one of the thousands needed to work out the Divine purpose for mankind. We are taught the humility that springs from a sense of obligation and responsibility.

We learn reverence for the workers and achievements of the past, and most of all for God. We are reminded of the scale of the Divine working:—

“A thousand years in Thy sight
Are but as yesterday when it is past,
And as a watch in the night.”

A genealogy is a brief and pointed reminder that God has been working through all the countless generations behind us. The bare series of names is an expressive diagram of His mighty process. Each name in the earlier lists stands for a generation or even for several generations. The genealogies go back into dim, prehistoric periods; they suggest a past too remote for our imagining. And yet they take us back to Adam, to the very beginning of human life. From that beginning, however, many thousands or tens of thousands of years ago, the life of man has been sacred, the object of the Divine care and love, the instrument of the Divine purpose.

Later on we see the pedigree of our race dividing into countless branches, all of which are represented in this sacred diagram of humanity. The Divine working not only extends over all time, but also embraces all the complicated circumstances and relationships of the families of mankind. These genealogies suggest a lesson probably not intended by the chronicler. We recognise the unique character of the history of Israel, but in some measure we discern in this one full and detailed narrative of the chosen people a type of the history of every race. Others had not the election of Israel, but each had its own vocation. God's power, and wisdom, and love are manifested in the history of one chosen people on a scale commensurate with our limited faculties, so that we may gain some faint idea of the marvellous providence in *all* history of the Father from whom *every* family in heaven and on earth is named.

Another principle closely allied to heredity and also discussed in modern times is the solidarity of the race. Humanity is supposed to possess something akin to a common consciousness, personality, or individuality. Such a quality evidently becomes more intense as we narrow its scope from the race to the nation, the clan, and the family; it has its roots in family relationships. Tribal, national, humanitarian feelings indicate that the larger societies have taken upon themselves something of the character of the family. Thus the common feelings and mutual sympathies of mankind are due ultimately to blood relationship. The genealogies that set forth family histories are the symbols of this brotherhood or solidarity of our race. The chart of converging lines of ancestors in Israel carried men's minds back from the separate families to their common ancestor; again, the ancestry of ancestors led back to a still earlier common origin, and the process continued till all the lines met in Noah. Each stage of the process enlarged the range of every man's kinship, and broadened the natural area of mutual help and affection. It is true that the Jews failed to learn this larger lesson from their genealogies, but within their own community they felt intensely

the bond of kinship and brotherhood. Modern patriotism reproduces the strong Jewish national feeling, and our humanitarianism is beginning to extend it to the whole world. By this time the facts of heredity have been more carefully studied and are better understood. If we drew up typical genealogies now, they would more fully and accurately represent the mutual relationships of our people. As far as they go, the chronicler's genealogies form a clear and instructive diagram of the mutual dependence of man on man and family on family. The value of the diagram does not require the accuracy of the actual names any more than the validity of Euclid requires the actual existence of triangles called A B C, D E F. These genealogies are in any case a true symbol of the facts of family relations; but they are drawn, so to speak, in one dimension only, backwards and forwards in time. Yet the real family life exists in three dimensions. There are numerous cross-relations, cousinship of all degrees, as well as sonship and brotherhood. A man has not merely his male ancestors in the directly ascending line—father, grandfather, great-grandfather, etc.—but he has female ancestors as well. By going back three or four generations a man is connected with an immense number of cousins; and if the complete network of ten or fifteen generations could be worked out, it would probably show some blood bond throughout a whole nation. Thus the ancestral roots of a man's life and character have wide ramifications in the former generations of his people. The further we go back the larger is the element of ancestry common to the different individuals of the same community. The chronicler's genealogies only show us individuals as links in a set of chains. The more complete genealogical scheme would be better illustrated by the ganglia of the nervous system, each of which is connected by numerous nerve fibres with the other ganglia. The Church has been compared to the body, “which is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body.” Humanity, by its natural kinship, is also such a body; the nation is still more truly “one body.” Patriotism and humanity are instincts as natural and as binding as those of the family; and the genealogies express or symbolise the wider family ties, that they may commend the virtues and enforce the duties that arise out of these ties.

Before closing this chapter something may be said on one or two special points. Women are virtually ignored in these genealogies, a fact that rather indicates a failure to recognise their influence than the absence of such influence. Here and there a woman is mentioned for some special reason. For instance, the names of Zeruiah and Abigail are inserted in order to show that Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, together with Amasa, were all cousins of David. The same keen interest in David leads the chronicler to record the names of his wives. It is noteworthy that of the four women who are mentioned in St. Matthew's genealogy of our Lord only two—Tamar and Bath-shua (*i. e.*, Bath-sheba)—are mentioned here. Probably St. Matthew was careful to complete the list because Rahab and Ruth, like Tamar and possibly Bath-sheba, were foreigners, and their names in the genealogy indicated a connection between Christ and the Gentiles, and served to emphasise His mission to be the Saviour of the world.

Again, much caution is necessary in applying any principle of heredity. A genealogy, as we have seen, suggests our dependence in many ways upon our ancestry. But a man's relations to his kindred are many and complicated; a quality, for instance, may be latent for one or more generations and then reappear, so that to all appearance a man inherits from his grandfather or from a more remote ancestor rather than from his father or mother. Conversely the presence of certain traits of character in a child does not show that any corresponding tendency has necessarily been active in the life of either parent. Neither must the influence of circumstances be confounded with that of heredity. Moreover, very large allowance must be made for our ignorance of the laws that govern the human will, an ignorance that will often baffle our attempts to find in heredity any simple explanation of men's characters and actions. Thomas Fuller has a quaint "Scripture observation" that gives an important practical application of these principles:—

"Lord, I find the genealogy of my Saviour strangely chequered with four remarkable changes in four immediate generations:

"1. 'Rehoboam begat Abiam'; that is, a bad father begat a bad son.

"2. 'Abiam begat Asa'; that is, a bad father a good son.

"3. 'Asa begat Jehosaphat'; that is, a good father a good son.

"4. 'Jehosaphat begat Joram'; that is, a good father a bad son.

"I see, Lord, from hence that my father's piety cannot be entailed; that is bad news for me. But I see also that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son."

CHAPTER III.

STATISTICS.

STATISTICS play an important part in Chronicles and in the Old Testament generally. To begin with, there are the genealogies and other lists of names, such as the lists of David's counsellors and the roll of honour of his mighty men. The chronicler specially delights in lists of names, and most of all in lists of Levitical choristers. He gives us lists of the orchestras and choirs who performed when the Ark was brought to Zion* and at Hezekiah's passover,† also a list of Levites whom Jehoshaphat sent out to teach in Judah.‡ No doubt family pride was gratified when the chronicler's contemporaries and friends read the names of their ancestors in connection with great events in the history of their religion. Possibly they supplied him with information from which these lists were compiled. An incidental result of the celibacy of the Romanist clergy has been to render ancient ecclesiastical genealogies impossible; modern clergymen cannot trace their descent to the monks who landed with Augustine. Our genealogies might enable a historian to construct lists of the combatants at Agincourt and Hastings; but the Crusades are the only wars of the Church militant for which modern pedigrees could furnish a muster-roll.

We find also in the Old Testament the speci-

* 1 Chron. xv.

† Cf. 2 Chron. xxix. 12 and xxx. 22.

‡ 2 Chron. xvii. 8.

cations and subscription-lists for the Tabernacle and for Solomon's temple.* These statistics, however, are not furnished for the second Temple, probably for the same reason that in modern subscription-lists the donors of shillings and half-crowns are to be indicated by initials, or described as "friends" and "sympathisers," or massed together under the heading "smaller sums."

The Old Testament is also rich in census returns and statements as to the numbers of armies and of the divisions of which they were composed. There are the returns of the census taken twice in the wilderness and accounts of the numbers of the different families who came from Babylon with Zerubbabel and later on with Ezra; there is a census of the Levites in David's time according to their several families †; there are the numbers of the tribal contingents that came to Hebron to make David king,‡ and much similar information.

Statistics therefore occupy a conspicuous position in the inspired record of Divine revelation, and yet we often hesitate to connect such terms as "inspiration" and "revelation" with numbers, and names, and details of civil and ecclesiastical organisation. We are afraid lest any stress laid on purely accidental details should distract men's attention from the eternal essence of the gospel, lest any suggestion that the certainty of Christian truth is dependent on the accuracy of these statistics should become a stumbling-block and destroy the faith of some. Concerning such matters there have been many foolish questions of genealogies, profane and vain babblings, which have increased unto more ungodliness. Quite apart from these, even in the Old Testament a sanctity attaches to the number seven, but there is no warrant for any considerable expenditure of time and thought upon mystical arithmetic. A symbolism runs through the details of the building, furniture, and ritual alike of the Tabernacle and the Temple, and this symbolism possesses a legitimate religious significance; but its exposition is not specially suggested by the book of Chronicles. The exposition of such symbolism is not always sufficiently governed by a sense of proportion. Ingenuity in supplying subtle interpretations of minute details often conceals the great truths which the symbols are really intended to enforce. Moreover, the sacred writers did not give statistics merely to furnish materials for Cabbala and Gematria or even to serve as theological types and symbols. Sometimes their purpose was more simple and practical. If we knew all the history of the Tabernacle and Temple subscription-lists, we should doubtless find that they had been used to stimulate generous gifts towards the erection of the second Temple. Preachers for building funds can find abundance of suitable texts in Exodus, Kings, and Chronicles.

But Biblical statistics are also examples in accuracy and thoroughness of information, and recognitions of the more obscure and prosaic manifestations of the higher life. Indeed, in these and other ways the Bible gives an anticipatory sanction to the exact sciences.

* Exod. xxv-xxxix.; 1 Kings vi.; 1 Chron. xxix.; 2 Chron. iii. v.

† 1 Chron. xv. 4-10.

‡ 1 Chron. xii. 23-37.

The mention of accuracy in connection with Chronicles may be received by some readers with a contemptuous smile. But we are indebted to the chronicler for exact and full information about the Jews who returned from Babylon; and in spite of the extremely severe judgment passed upon Chronicles by many critics, we may still venture to believe that the chronicler's statistics are as accurate as his knowledge and critical training rendered possible. He may sometimes give figures obtained by calculation from uncertain data, but such a practice is quite consistent with honesty and a desire to supply the best available information. Modern scholars are quite ready to present us with figures as to the membership of the Christian Church under Antoninus Pius or Constantine; and some of these figures are not much more probable than the most doubtful in Chronicles. All that is necessary to make the chronicler's statistics an example to us is that they should be the monument of a conscientious attempt to tell the truth, and this they undoubtedly are.

This Biblical example is the more useful because statistics are often evil spoken of, and they have no outward attractiveness to shield them from popular prejudice. We are told that "nothing is so false as statistics," and that "figures will prove anything"; and the polemic is sustained by works like "Hard Times" and the awful example of Mr. Gradgrind. Properly understood, these proverbs illustrate the very general impatience of any demand for exact thought and expression. If "figures" will prove anything, so will texts.

Though this popular prejudice cannot be altogether ignored, yet it need not be taken too seriously. The opposite principle, when stated, will at once be seen to be a truism. For it amounts to this: exact and comprehensive knowledge is the basis of a right understanding of history, and is a necessary condition of right action. This principle is often neglected because it is obvious. Yet, to illustrate it from our author, a knowledge of the size and plan of the Temple greatly adds to the vividness of our pictures of Hebrew religion. We apprehend later Jewish life much more clearly with the aid of the statistics as to the numbers, families, and settlements of the returning exiles; and similarly the account-books of the bailiff of an English estate in the fourteenth century are worth several hundred pages of contemporary theology. These considerations may encourage those who perform the thankless task of compiling the statistics, subscription-lists, and balance-sheets of missionary and philanthropic societies. The zealous and intelligent historian of Christian life and service will need these dry records to enable him to understand his subject, and the highest literary gifts may be employed in the eloquent exposition of these apparently uninteresting facts and figures. Moreover, upon the accuracy of these records depends the possibility of determining a true course for the future. Neither societies nor individuals, for instance, can afford to live beyond their income without knowing it.

Statistics, too, are the only form in which many acts of service can be recognised and recorded. Literature can only deal with typical instances, and naturally it selects the more dramatic. The missionary report can only tell the story of a few striking conversions; it may give the history of the exceptional self-denial

involved in one or two of its subscription-lists; for the rest we must be content with tables and subscription-lists. But these dry statistics represent an infinitude of patience and self-denial, of work and prayer, of Divine grace and blessing. The city missionary may narrate his experiences with a few inquirers and penitents, but the great bulk of his work can only be recorded in the statement of visits paid and services conducted. We are tempted sometimes to disparage these statements, to ask how many of the visits and services had any result; we are impatient sometimes because Christian work is estimated by any such numerical line and measure. No doubt the method has many defects, and must not be used too mechanically; but we cannot give it up without ignoring altogether much earnest and successful labour.

Our chronicler's interest in statistics lays healthy emphasis on the practical character of religion. There is a danger of identifying spiritual force with literary and rhetorical gifts; to recognise the religious value of statistics is the most forcible protest against such identification. The permanent contribution of any age to religious thought will naturally take a literary form, and the higher the literary qualities of religious writing, the more likely it is to survive. Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan have probably exercised a more powerful direct religious influence on subsequent generations than all the theologians of the seventeenth century. But the supreme service of the Church in any age is its influence on its own generation, by which it moulds the generation immediately following. That influence can only be estimated by careful study of all possible information, and especially of statistics. We cannot assign mathematical values to spiritual effects and tabulate them like Board of Trade returns; but real spiritual movements will before long have practical issues, that can be heard, and seen, and felt, and even admit of being put into tables. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth"*; and yet the boughs and the corn bend before the wind, and the ships are carried across the sea to their desired haven. Tables may be drawn up of the tonnage and the rate of sailing. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. You cannot tell when and how God breathes upon the soul; but if the Divine Spirit be indeed at work in any society, there will be fewer crimes and quarrels, less scandal, and more deeds of charity. We may justly suspect a revival which has no effect; upon the statistical records of national life. Subscription-lists are very imperfect tests of enthusiasm, but any widespread Christian fervour would be worth little if it did not swell subscription-lists.

Chronicles is not the most important witness to a sympathetic relationship between the Bible and exact science. The first chapter of Genesis is the classic example of the appropriation by an inspired writer of the scientific spirit and method. Some chapters in Job show a distinctly scientific interest in natural phenomena. Moreover, the direct concern of Chronicles is in the religious aspects of social science. And yet there is a patient accumulation of data with no obvious dramatic value: names, dates, numbers, specifications, and ritual which do not improve the literary character of the narrative. This conscientious

* John iii. 8.

tious recording of dry facts, this noting down of anything and everything that connects with the subject, is closely akin to the initial processes of the inductive sciences. True, the chronicler's interests are in some directions narrowed by personal and professional feeling; but within these limits he is anxious to make a complete record, which, as we have seen, sometimes leads to repetition. Now inductive science is based on unlimited statistics. The astronomer and biologist share the chronicler's appetite for this kind of mental food. The lists in Chronicles are few and meagre compared to the records of Greenwich Observatory or the volumes which contain the data of biology or sociology; but the chronicler becomes in a certain sense the forerunner of Darwin, Spencer, and Galton. The differences are indeed immense. The interval of two thousand odd years between the ancient annalist and the modern scientists has not been thrown away. In estimating the value of evidence and interpreting its significance, the chronicler was a mere child compared with his modern successors. His aims and interests were entirely different from theirs. But yet he was moved by a spirit which they may be said to inherit. His careful collection of facts, even his tendency to read the ideas and institutions of his own time into ancient history, are indications of a reverence for the past and of an anxiety to base ideas and action upon a knowledge of that past. This foreshadows the reverence of modern science for experience, its anxiety to base its laws and theories upon observation of what has actually occurred. The principle that the past determines and interprets the present and the future lies at the root of the theological attitude of the most conservative minds and the scientific work of the most advanced thinkers. The conservative spirit, like the chronicler, is apt to suffer its inherited prepossessions and personal interests to hinder a true observation and understanding of the past. But the chronicler's opportunities and experience were narrow indeed compared with those of theological students to-day; and we have every right to lay stress on the progress which he had achieved and the onward path that it indicated rather than on the yet more advanced stages which still lay beyond his horizon.

CHAPTER IV.

FAMILY TRADITIONS.

I CHRONICLES i. 10, 19, 46; ii. 3, 7, 34; iv. 9, 10, 18, 22, 27, 34-43; v. 10. 18-22; vii. 21-23; viii. 13.

CHRONICLES is a miniature Old Testament, and may have been meant as a handbook for ordinary people, who had no access to the whole library of sacred writings. It contains nothing corresponding to the books of Wisdom or the apocalyptic literature; but all the other types of Old Testament literature are represented. There are genealogies, statistics, ritual, history, psalms, and prophecies. The interest shown by Chronicles in family traditions harmonises with the stress laid by the Hebrew Scriptures upon family life. The other historical books are largely occupied with the family history of the Patriarchs, of Moses, of Jephthah, Gideon, Samson, Saul, and David. The chronicler intersperses his geneal-

ogies with short anecdotes about the different families and tribes. Some of these are borrowed from the older books; but others are peculiar to our author, and were doubtless obtained by him from the family records and traditions of his contemporaries. The statements that "Nimrod began to be mighty upon the earth"*; that "the name of one" of Eber's sons "was Peleg, because in his days the earth was divided"†; and that Hadad "smote Moab in the field of Midian,"‡ are borrowed from Genesis. As he omits events much more important and more closely connected with the history of Israel, and gives no account of Babel, or of Abraham, or of the conquest of Canaan, these little notes are probably retained by accident, because at times the chronicler copied his authorities somewhat mechanically. It was less trouble to take the genealogies as they stood than to exercise great care in weeding out everything but the bare names.

In one instance,§ however, the chronicler has erased a curious note to a genealogy in Genesis. A certain Anah is mentioned both in Genesis and Chronicles among the Horites, who inhabited Mount Seir before it was conquered by Edom. Most of us, in reading the Authorised Version, have wondered what historical or religious interest secured a permanent record for the fact that "Anah found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father." A possible solution seemed to be that this note was preserved as the earliest reference to the existence of mules, which animals played an important part in the social life of Palestine; but the Revised Version sets aside this explanation by substituting "hot springs" for "mules," and as these hot springs are only mentioned here, the passage becomes a greater puzzle than ever. The chronicler could hardly overlook this curious piece of information, but he naturally felt that this obscure archæological note about the aboriginal Horites did not fall within the scope of his work. On the other hand, the tragic fates of Er and Achar|| had a direct genealogical significance. They are referred to in order to explain why the lists contain no descendants of these members of the tribe of Judah. The notes to these names illustrate the more depressing aspects of history. The men who lived happy, honourable lives can be mentioned one after another without any comment; but even the compiler of pedigrees pauses to note the crimes and misfortunes that broke the natural order of life. The annals of old families dwell with melancholy pride on murders, and fatal duels, and suicides. History, like an ancient mansion, is haunted with unhappy ghosts. Yet our interest in tragedy is a testimony to the blessedness of life; comfort and enjoyment are too monotonously common to be worth recording, but we are attracted and excited by exceptional instances of suffering and sin.

Let us turn to the episodes of family life only found in Chronicles. They may mostly be arranged in little groups of two or three, and some of the groups present us with an interesting contrast.

We learn from ii. 34-41 and iv. 18 that two Jewish families traced their descent from Egyptian ancestors. Sheshan, according to Chroni-

* i. 10.

† i. 19.

‡ i. 46.

§ Cf. Gen. xxxvi. 24 and 1 Chron. i. 40.

|| *i. e.*, Achan (ii. 3, 7).

cles, was eighth in descent from Judah and fifth from Jerahmeel, the brother of Caleb. Having daughters, but no son, he gave one of his daughters in marriage to an Egyptian slave named Jarha. The descendants of this union are traced for thirteen generations. Genealogies, however, are not always complete; and our other data do not suffice to determine even approximately the date of this marriage. But the five generations between Jerahmeel and Sheshan indicate a period long after the Exodus; and as Egypt plays no recorded part in the history of Israel between the Exodus and the reign of Solomon, the marriage may have taken place under the monarchy. The story is a curious parallel to that of Joseph, with the parts of Israelite and Egyptian reversed. God is no respecter of persons; it is not only when the desolate and afflicted in strange lands belong to the chosen people that Jehovah relieves and delivers them. It is true of the Egyptian, as well as of the Israelite, that "the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich."

"He bringeth low, He also lifteth up;
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust:
He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill,
To make them sit with princes
And inherit the throne of glory."*

This song might have been sung at Jarha's wedding as well as at Joseph's.

Both these marriages throw a sidelight upon the character of Eastern slavery. They show how sharply and deeply it was divided from the hopeless degradation of negro slavery in America. Israelites did not recognise distinctions of race and colour between themselves and their bondsmen so as to treat them as worse than pariahs and regard them with physical loathing. An American considers himself disgraced by a slight taint of negro blood in his ancestry, but a noble Jewish family was proud to trace its descent from an Egyptian slave.

The other story is somewhat different, and rests upon an obscure and corrupt passage in iv. 18. The confusion makes it impossible to arrive at any date, even by rough approximation. The genealogical relations of the actors are by no means certain, but some interesting points are tolerably clear. Some time after the conquest of Canaan, a descendant of Caleb married two wives, one a Jewess, the other an Egyptian. The Egyptian was Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh, *i. e.*, of the contemporary king of Egypt. It appears probable that the inhabitants of Eshtemoa traced their descent to this Egyptian princess, while those of Gedor, Soco, and Zanoah claimed Mered as their ancestor by his Jewish wife. † Here again we have the bare outline of a romance, which the imagination is at liberty to fill in. It has been suggested that Bithiah may have been the victim of some Jewish raid into Egypt, but surely a king of Egypt would have either ransomed his daughter or recovered her by force of arms. The story rather suggests that the chiefs of the clans of Judah were semi-independent and possessed of considerable wealth and power, so that the royal family of Egypt could intermarry with them, as with reigning sovereigns. But if so, the pride of Egypt must have

* 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8.

† Vv. 17, 18, as they stand, do not make sense. The second sentence of ver. 18 should be read before "and she bare Miriam" in ver. 17. Mered and Bithiah formed a tempting subject for the rabbis, and gave occasion for some of their usual grotesque fancies. Mered has been identified by them both with Caleb and Moses.

been greatly broken since the time when the Pharaohs haughtily refused to give their daughters in marriage to the kings of Babylon.

Both Egyptian alliances occur among the Kenizzites, the descendants of the brothers Caleb and Jerahmeel. In one case a Jewess marries an Egyptian slave; in the other a Jew marries an Egyptian princess. Doubtless these marriages did not stand alone, and there were others with foreigners of varying social rank. The stories show that even after the Captivity the tradition survived that the clans in the south of Judah had been closely connected with Egypt, and that Solomon was not the only member of the tribe who had taken an Egyptian wife. Now intermarriage with foreigners is partly forbidden by the Pentateuch; and the prohibition was extended and sternly enforced by Ezra and Nehemiah.* In the time of the chronicler there was a growing feeling against such marriages. Hence the traditions we are discussing cannot have originated after the Return, but must be at any rate earlier than the publication of Deuteronomy under Josiah.

Such marriages with Egyptians must have had some influence on the religion of the south of Judah, but probably the foreigners usually followed the example of Ruth, and adopted the faith of the families into which they came. When they said, "Thy people shall be my people," they did not fail to add, "and thy God shall be my God." When the Egyptian princess married the head of a Jewish clan, she became one of Jehovah's people; and her adoption into the family of the God of Israel was symbolised by a new name: "Bithiah," "daughter of Jehovah." Whether later Judaism owed anything to Egyptian influences can only be matter of conjecture; at any rate, they did not pervert the southern clans from their old faith. The Calebites and Jerahmeelites were the backbone of Judah both before and after the Captivity.

The remaining traditions relate to the warfare of the Israelites with their neighbours. The first is a colourless reminiscence, that might have been recorded of the effectual prayer of any pious Israelite. The genealogies of chap. iv. are interrupted by a paragraph entirely unconnected with the context. The subject of this fragment is a certain Jabez never mentioned elsewhere, and, so far as any record goes, as entirely "without father, without mother, without genealogy," as Melchizedek himself. As chap. iv. deals with the families of Judah, and in ii. 55 there is a town Jabez also belonging to Judah, we may suppose that the chronicler had reasons for assigning Jabez to that tribe; but he has neither given these reasons, nor indicated how Jabez was connected therewith. The paragraph runs as follows †: "And Jabez was honoured above his brethren, and his mother called his name Jabez" (*Ya'bec*), "saying, In pain" (*'oceb*) "I bore him. And Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying,—

'If Thou wilt indeed bless me
By enlarging my possessions,
And Thy hand be with me
To provide pasture, ‡ that I be not in distress' (*'oceb*).

And God brought about what he asked." The chronicler has evidently inserted here a broken

* Deut. vii. 3; Josh. xxiii. 12; Ezra ix. 1, x; Neh. xiii. 23.

† iv. 9, 10.

‡ The reading on which this translation is based is obtained by an alteration of the vowels of the Masoretic text; cf. Bertheau, i. l.

and disconnected fragment from one of his sources; and we are puzzled to understand why he gives so much, and no more. Surely not merely to introduce the etymologies of Jabez; for if Jabez were so important that it was worth while to interrupt the genealogies to furnish two derivations of his name, why are we not told more about him? Who was he, when and where did he live, and at whose expense were his possessions enlarged and pasture provided for him? Everything that could give colour and interest to the narrative is withheld, and we are merely told that he prayed for earthly blessing and obtained it. The spiritual lesson is obvious, but it is very frequently enforced and illustrated in the Old Testament. Why should this episode about an utterly unknown man be thrust by main force into an unsuitable context, if it is only one example of a most familiar truth? It has been pointed out that Jacob vowed a similar vow and built an altar to El, the God of Israel*; but this is one of many coincidences. The paragraph certainly tells us something about the chronicler's views on prayer, but nothing that is not more forcibly stated and exemplified in many other passages; it is mainly interesting to us because of the light it throws on his methods of composition. Elsewhere he embodies portions of well-known works and apparently assumes that his readers are sufficiently versed in them to be able to understand the point of his extracts. Probably Jabez was so familiar to the chronicler's immediate circle that he can take for granted that a few lines will suffice to recall all the circumstances to a reader.

We have next a series of much more definite statements about Israelite prowess and success in wars against Moab and other enemies.

In iv. 21, 22, we read, "The sons of Shelah the son of Judah: Er the father of Lecah, and Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen, of the house of Ashbea; and Jokim, and the men of Cozeba, and Jash, and Saraph, who had dominion in Moab and returned to Bethlehem." † Here again the information is too vague to enable us to fix any date, nor is it quite certain who had dominion in Moab. The verb "had dominion" is plural in Hebrew, and may refer to all or any of the sons of Shelah. But, in spite of uncertainties, it is interesting to find chiefs or clans of Judah ruling in Moab. Possibly this immigration took place when David conquered and partly depopulated the country. The men of Judah may have returned to Bethlehem when Moab passed to the Northern Kingdom at the disruption, or when Moab regained its independence.

The incident in iv. 34-43 differs from the preceding in having a definite date assigned to it. In the time of Hezekiah some Simeonite clans had largely increased in number and found themselves straitened for room for their flocks. They accordingly went in search of new pasturage. One company went to Gedor, another to Mount Seir.

The situation of Gedor is not clearly known. It cannot be the Gedor of Josh. xv. 58, which lay in the heart of Judah. The LXX. has Gerar, a town to the south of Gaza, and this may be the right reading; but whether we read Gedor or

Gerar, the scene of the invasion will be in the country south of Judah. Here the children of Simeon found what they wanted, "fat pasture, and good," and abundant, for "the land was wide." There was the additional advantage that the inhabitants were harmless and inoffensive and fell an easy prey to their invaders: "The land was quiet and peaceable, for they that dwelt there aforesaid were of Ham." As Ham in the genealogies is the father of Cainan, these peaceable folk would be Cainanites; and among them were a people called Meunim, probably not connected with any of the Maons mentioned in the Old Testament, but with some other town or district of the same name. So "these written by name came in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and smote their tents, and the Meunim that were found there, and devoted them to destruction as accursed, so that none are left unto this day. And the Simeonites dwelt in their stead."*

Then follows in the simplest and most unconscious way the only justification that is offered for the behaviour of the invaders: "because there was pasture there for their flocks." The narrative takes for granted—

"The good old rule, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can."

The expedition to Mount Seir appears to have been a sequel to the attack on Gedor. Five hundred of the victors emigrated into Edom, and smote the remnant of the Amalekites who had survived the massacre under Saul †; "and they also dwelt there unto this day."

In substance, style, and ideas this passage closely resembles the books of Joshua and Judges, where the phrase "unto this day" frequently occurs. Here, of course, the "day" in question is the time of the chronicler's authority. When Chronicles was written the Simeonites in Gedor and Mount Seir had long ago shared the fate of their victims.

The conquest of Gedor reminds us how in the early days of the Israelite occupation of Palestine "Judah went with Simeon his brother into the same southern lands," and they smote the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and devoted them to destruction as accursed ‡; and how the house of Joseph took Bethel by treachery.§ But the closest parallel is the Danite conquest of Laish.¶ The Danite spies said that the people of Laish "dwelt in security, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure," harmless and inoffensive, like the Gedorites. Nor were they likely to receive succour from the powerful city of Zidon or from other allies, for "they were far from the Zidonians, and had no dealings with any man." Accordingly, having observed the prosperous but defenceless position of this peaceable people, they returned and reported to their brethren, "Arise, and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good; and are ye still? Be not slothful to go and to enter in to possess the land. When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and the land," like that of Gedor, "is large, for God hath given it into your hand, a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth."

* Gen. xxviii. 20; xxxiii. 20.

† This translation is obtained by slightly altering the Masoretic text.

* iv. 41; cf. R. V.

† 1 Sam. xv.

‡ Judges i. 17.

§ Judges i. 22-26.

¶ Judges xviii.

The moral of these incidents is obvious. When a prosperous people is peaceable and defenceless, it is a clear sign that God has delivered them into the hand of any warlike and enterprising nation that knows how to use its opportunities. The chronicler, however, is not responsible for this morality, but he does not feel compelled to make any protest against the ethical views of his source. There is a refreshing frankness about these ancient narratives. The wolf devours the lamb without inventing any flimsy pretext about troubled waters.

But in criticising these Hebrew clans who lived in the dawn of history and religion we condemn ourselves. If we make adequate allowance for the influence of Christ, and the New Testament, and centuries of Christian teaching, Simeon and Dan do not compare unfavourably with modern nations. As we review the wars of Christendom, we shall often be puzzled to find any ground for the outbreak of hostilities other than the defencelessness of the weaker combatant. The Spanish conquest of America and the English conquest of India afford examples of the treatment of weaker races which fairly rank with those of the Old Testament. Even to-day the independence of the smaller European states is mainly guaranteed by the jealousies of the Great Powers. Still there has been progress in international morality; we have got at last to the stage of Æsop's fable. Public opinion condemns wanton aggression against a weak state; and the stronger power employs the resources of civilised diplomacy in showing that not only the absent, but also the helpless, are always wrong. There has also been a substantial advance in humanity towards conquered peoples. Christian warfare even since the Middle Ages has been stained with the horrors of the Thirty Years' War and many other barbarities; the treatment of the American Indians by settlers has often been cruel and unjust; but no civilised nation would now systematically massacre men, women, and children in cold blood. We are thankful for any progress towards better things, but we cannot feel that men have yet realised that Christ has a message for nations as well as for individuals. As His disciples we can only pray more earnestly that the kingdoms of the earth may in deed and truth become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

The next incident is more honourable to the Israelites. "The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh" did not merely surprise and slaughter quiet and peaceable people: they conquered formidable enemies in fair fight.* There are two separate accounts of a war with the Hagrites, one appended to the genealogy of Reuben and one to that of Gad. The former is very brief and general, comprising nothing but a bare statement that there was a successful war and a consequent appropriation of territory. Probably the two paragraphs are different forms of the same narrative, derived by the chronicler from independent sources. We may therefore confine our attention to the more detailed account.

Here, as elsewhere, these Transjordanic tribes are spoken of as "valiant † men," "men able to bear buckler and sword and to shoot with the bow, and skilful in war." Their numbers were considerable. While five hundred Simeonites

were enough to destroy the Amalekites on Mount Seir, these eastern tribes mustered "forty and four thousand seven hundred and threescore that were able to go forth to war." Their enemies were not "quiet and peaceable people," but the wild Bedouin of the desert. "the Hagrites, with Jetur and Naphish and Nodab." Nodab is mentioned only here; Jetur and Naphish occur together in the lists of the sons of Ishmael.* Iturea probably derived its name from the tribe of Jetur. The Hagrites or Hagarenes were Arabs closely connected with the Ishmaelites, and they seem to have taken their name from Hagar. In Psalm lxxxiii. 6-8 we find a similar confederacy on a larger scale:—

"The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagarenes,
Gebel and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre,
Assyria also is joined with them;
They have holpen the children of Lot."

There could be no question of unprovoked aggression against these children of Ishmael, that "wild ass of a man, whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him." † The narrative implies that the Israelites were the aggressors, but to attack the robber tribes of the desert would be as much an act of self-defence as to destroy a hornet's nest. We may be quite sure that when Reuben and Gad marched eastward they had heavy losses to retrieve and bitter wrongs to avenge. We might find a parallel in the campaigns by which robber tribes are punished for their raids within our Indian frontier, only we must remember that Reuben and Gad were not very much more law-abiding or unselfish than their Arab neighbours. They were not engaged in maintaining a *pax Britannica* for the benefit of subject nations; they were carrying on a struggle for existence with persistent and relentless foes. Another partial parallel would be the border feuds on the Northumbrian marches when—

" . . . over border, dale, and fell
Full wide and far was terror spread;
For pathless marsh and mountain cell
The peasant left his lowly shed:
The frightened flocks and herds were pent
Beneath the peel's rude battlement,
And maids and matrons dropped the tear
While ready warriors seized the spear;
 . . . the watchman's eye
Dun wreaths of distant smoke can spy." ‡

But the Israelite expedition was on a larger scale than any "warden raid," and Eastern passions are fiercer and shriller than those sung by the Last Minstrel: the maids and matrons of the desert would shriek and wail instead of "dropping a tear."

In this great raid of ancient times "the war was of God," not, as at Laish, because God found for them helpless and easy victims, but because He helped them in a desperate struggle. When the fierce Israelite and Arab borderers joined battle, the issue was at first doubtful; and then "they cried to God, and He was entreated of them, because they put their trust in Him," "and they were helped against" their enemies; "and the Hagrites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them, and there fell many slain, because the war was of God"; "and they took away their cattle: of their camels

* Vv. 7-10, 18-22.

† Deut. xxxiii. 20; 1 Chron. xii. 8, 21.

* Gen. xxv. 15.

† Gen. xvi. 12.

‡ Lay of the Last Minstrel," iv. 3.

fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of asses two thousand, and of slaves a hundred thousand." "And they dwelt in their stead until the captivity."

This "captivity" is the subject of another short note. The chronicler apparently was anxious to distribute his historical narratives equally among the tribes. The genealogies of Reuben and Gad each conclude with a notice of a war, and a similar account follows that of Eastern Manasseh:—"And they trespassed against the God of their fathers, and went a-whoring after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God destroyed before them. And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river of Gozan, unto this day."* And this war also was "of God." Doubtless the descendants of the surviving Hagrites and Ishmaelites were among the allies of the Assyrian king, and saw in the ruin of Eastern Israel a retribution for the sufferings of their own people; but the later Jews and probably the exiles in "Halah, Habor, and Hara," and by "the river of Gozan," far away in Northeastern Mesopotamia, found the cause of their sufferings in too great an intimacy with their heathen neighbours: they had gone a-whoring after their gods.

The last two incidents which we shall deal with in this chapter serve to illustrate afresh the rough-and-ready methods by which the chronicler has knotted together threads of heterogeneous tradition into one tangled skein. We shall see further how ready ancient writers were to represent a tribe by the ancestor from whom it traced its descent. We read in vii. 20, 21, "The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tahath his son, and Eleadah his son, and Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in the land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle."

Ezer and Elead are apparently brothers of the second Shuthelah; at any rate, as six generations are mentioned between them and Ephraim, they would seem to have lived long after the Patriarch. Moreover, they came down to Gath, so that they must have lived in some hill-country not far off, presumably the hill-country of Ephraim. But in the next two verses (22 and 23) we read, "And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him. And he went in to his wife, and she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house."

Taking these words literally, Ezer and Elead were the actual sons of Ephraim; and as Ephraim and his family were born in Egypt and lived there all their days, these patriarchal cattle-lifters did not come down from any neighbouring highlands, but must have come up from Egypt, all the way from the land of Goshen, across the desert and past several Philistine and Canaanite towns. This literal sense is simply impossible. The author from whom the chronicler borrowed this narrative is clearly using a natural and beautiful figure to describe the distress in the tribe of Ephraim when two of its clans were cut off, and

the fact that a new clan named Beriah was formed to take their place. Possibly we are not without information as to how this new clan arose. In viii. 13 we read of two Benjamites, "Beriah and Shema, who were heads of fathers' houses of the inhabitants of Aijalon, who put to flight the inhabitants of Gath." Beriah and Shema probably, coming to the aid of Ephraim, avenged the defeat of Ezer and Elead; and in return received the possessions of the clans, who been cut off, and Beriah was thus reckoned among the children of Ephraim.*

The language of ver. 22 is very similar to that of Gen xxxvii. 34, 35: "And Jacob mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him"; and the personification of the tribe under the name of its ancestor may be paralleled from Judges xxi. 6: "And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother."

Let us now reconstruct the story and consider its significance. Two Ephraimite clans, Ezer and Elead, set out to drive the cattle "of the men of Gath, who were born in the land," i. e., of the aboriginal Avvites, who had been dispossessed by the Philistines, but still retained some of the pasture-lands. Falling into an ambush or taken by surprise when encumbered with their plunder, the Ephraimites were cut off, and nearly all the fighting men of the clans perished. The Avvites, reinforced by the Philistines of Gath, pressed their advantage, and invaded the territory of Ephraim, whose border districts, stripped of their defenders, lay at the mercy of the conquerors. From this danger they were rescued by the Benjamite clans Shema and Beriah, then occupying Aijalon †; and the men of Gath in their turn were defeated and driven back. The grateful Ephraimites invited their allies to occupy the vacant territory and in all probability to marry the widows and daughters of their slaughtered kinsmen. From that time onwards Beriah was reckoned as one of the clans of Ephraim.

The account of this memorable cattle foray is a necessary note to the genealogies to explain the origin of an important clan and its double connection with Ephraim and Benjamin. Both the chronicler and his authority recorded it because of its genealogical significance, not because they were anxious to perpetuate the memory of the unfortunate raid. In the ancient days to which the episode belonged, a frontier cattle foray seemed as natural and meritorious an enterprise as it did to William of Deloraine. The chronicler does not think it necessary to signify any disapproval—it is by no means certain that he did disapprove—of such spoiling of the uncircumcised; but the fact that he gives the record without comment does not show that he condoned cattle-stealing. Men to-day relate with pride the lawless deeds of noble ancestors, but they would be dismayed if their own sons proposed to adopt the moral code of mediæval barons or Elizabethan buccaneers.

In reviewing the scanty religious ideas involved in this little group of family traditions, we have to remember that they belong to a period of Israelite history much older than that of

* Cf. Bertheau, i. l.

† In Josh. xix. 42, xxi. 24, Aijalon is given to Dan; in Judges i. 34 it is given to Dan, but we are told that Amorites retained possession of it, but became tributary to the house of Joseph; in 2 Chron. xi. 10 it is given to "Judah and Benjamin." As a frontier town, it frequently changed hands.

* Vv. 25, 26. Note the curious spelling *Tilgath-pilneser* for the more usual *Tiglath-pileser*.

the chronicler; in estimating their value, we have to make large allowance for the conventional ethics of the times. Religion not only serves to raise the standard of morality, but also to keep the average man up to the conventional standard; it helps and encourages him to do what he believes to be right as well as gives him a better understanding of what right means. Primitive religion is not to be disparaged because it did not at once convert the rough Israelite clansmen into Havelocks and Gordons. In those early days, courage, patriotism, and loyalty to one's tribesmen were the most necessary and approved virtues. They were fostered and stimulated by the current belief in a God of battles, who gave victory to His faithful people. Moreover, the idea of Deity implied in these traditions, though inadequate, is by no means unworthy. God is benevolent; He enriches and succours His people; He answers prayer, giving to Jabez the land and pasture for which he asked. He is a righteous God; He responds to and justifies His people's faith: "He was entreated of the Reubenites and Gadites because they put their trust in Him." On the other hand, He is a jealous God; He punishes Israel when "they trespass against the God of their fathers and go a-whoring after the gods of the peoples of the land." But the feeling here attributed to Jehovah is not merely one of personal jealousy. Loyalty to him meant a great deal more than a preference for a god called Jehovah over a god called Chemosh. It involved a special recognition of morality and purity, and gave a religious sanction to patriotism and the sentiment of national unity. Worship of Moabite or Syrian gods weakened a man's enthusiasm for Israel and his sense of fellowship with his countrymen, just as allegiance to an Italian prince and prelate has seemed to Protestants to deprive the Romanist of his full inheritance in English life and feeling. He who went astray after other gods did not merely indulge his individual taste in doctrine and ritual: he was a traitor to the social order, to the prosperity and national union, of Israel. Such disloyalty broke up the nation, and sent Israel and Judah into captivity piecemeal.

CHAPTER V.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE TIME OF THE CHRONICLER.

We have already referred to the light thrown by Chronicles on this subject. Besides the direct information given in Ezra and Nehemiah, and sometimes in Chronicles itself, the chronicler by describing the past in terms of the present often unconsciously helps us to reconstruct the picture of his own day. We shall have to make occasional reference to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the age of the chronicler is later than the events which they describe, and we shall be traversing different ground from that covered by the volume of the "Expositor's Bible" which deals with them.

Chronicles is full of evidence that the civil and ecclesiastical system of the Pentateuch had become fully established long before the chronicler wrote. Its gradual origin had been forgotten, and it was assumed that the Law in its final and complete form had been known and ob-

served from the time of David onwards. At every stage of the history Levites are introduced, occupying the subordinate position and discharging the menial duties assigned to them by the latest documents of the Pentateuch. In other matters small and great, especially those concerning the Temple and its sanctity, the chronicler shows himself so familiar with the Law that he could not imagine Israel without it. Picture the life of Judah as we find it in 2 Kings and the prophecies of the eighth century, put this picture side by side with another of the Judaism of the New Testament, and remember that Chronicles is about a century nearer to the latter than to the former. It is not difficult to trace the effect of this absorption in the system of the Pentateuch. The community in and about Jerusalem had become a Church, and was in possession of a Bible. But the hardening, despiritualising processes which created later Judaism were already at work. A building, a system of ritual, and a set of officials were coming to be regarded as the essential elements of the Church. The Bible was important partly because it dealt with these essential elements, partly because it provided a series of regulations about washings and meats, and thus enabled the layman to exalt his everyday life into a round of ceremonial observances. The habit of using the Pentateuch chiefly as a handbook of external and technical ritual seriously influenced the current interpretation of the Bible. It naturally led to a hard literalism and a disingenuous exegesis. This interest in externals is patent enough in the chronicler, and the tendencies of Biblical exegesis are illustrated by his use of Samuel and Kings. On the other hand, we must allow for great development of this process in the interval between Chronicles and the New Testament. The evils of later Judaism were yet far from mature, and religious life and thought in Palestine were still much more elastic than they became later on.

We have also to remember that at this period the zealous observers of the Law can only have formed a portion of the community, corresponding roughly to the regular attendants at public worship in a Christian country. Beyond and beneath the pious legalists were "the people of the land," those who were too careless or too busy to attend to ceremonial; but for both classes the popular and prominent ideal of religion was made up of a magnificent building, a dignified and wealthy clergy, and an elaborate ritual, alike for great public functions and for the minutiae of daily life.

Besides all these the Jewish community had its sacred writings. As one of the ministers of the Temple, and, moreover, both a student of the national literature and himself an author, the chronicler represents the best literary knowledge of contemporary Palestinian Judaism; and his somewhat mechanical methods of composition make it easy for us to discern his indebtedness to older writers. We turn his pages with interest to learn what books were known and read by the most cultured Jews of his time. First and foremost, and overshadowing all the rest, there appears the Pentateuch. Then there is the whole array of earlier Historical Books: Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings. The plan of Chronicles excludes a direct use of Judges, but it must have been well known to our author. His appreciation of the Psalms is shown by his inserting in

his history of David a cento of passages from Psalms xcvi., cv., and cvi.; on the other hand, Psalm xviii. and other lyrics given in the books of Samuel are omitted by the chronicler. The later Exilic Psalms were more to his taste than ancient hymns, and he unconsciously carries back into the history of the monarchy the poetry as well as the ritual of later times. Both omissions and insertions indicate that in this period the Jews possessed and prized a large collection of psalms.

There are also traces of the Prophets. Hanani the seer in his address to Asa* quotes Zech. iv. 10: "The eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." Jehoshaphat's exhortation to his people, "Believe in the Lord your God; so shall ye be established,"† is based on Isa. vii. 9: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Hezekiah's words to the Levites, "Our fathers . . . have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs,"‡ are a significant variation of Jer. ii. 27: "They have turned their back unto Me, and not their face." The Temple is substituted for Jehovah.

There are of course references to Isaiah and Jeremiah and traces of other prophets; but when account is taken of them all, it is seen that the chronicler makes scanty use, on the whole, of the Prophetical Books. It is true that the idea of illustrating and supplementing information derived from annals by means of contemporary literature not in narrative form had not yet dawned upon historians; but if the chronicler had taken a tithe of the interest in the Prophets that he took in the Pentateuch and the Psalms, his work would show many more distinct marks of their influence.

An apocalypse like Daniel and works like Job, Proverbs, and the other books of Wisdom lay so far outside the plan and subject of Chronicles that we can scarcely consider the absence of any clear trace of them a proof that the chronicler did not either know them or care for them.

Our brief review suggests that the literary concern of the chronicler and his circle was chiefly in the books most closely connected with the Temple; viz., the Historical Books, which contained its history, the Pentateuch, which prescribed its ritual, and the Psalms, which served as its liturgy. The Prophets occupy a secondary place, and Chronicles furnishes no clear evidence as to other Old Testament books.

We also find in Chronicles that the Hebrew language had degenerated from its ancient classical purity, and that Jewish writers had already come very much under the influence of Aramaic.

We may next consider the evidence supplied by the chronicler as to the elements and distribution of the Jewish community in his time. In Ezra and Nehemiah we find the returning exiles divided into the men of Judah, the men of Benjamin, and the priests, Levites, etc. In Ezra ii. we are told that in all there returned 42,360, with 7,337 slaves and 200 "singing men and singing women." The priests numbered 4,289; there were 74 Levites, 128 singers of the children of Asaph, 139 porters, and 392 Nethinim and children of Solomon's servants. The singers, porters, Nethinim, and children of Solomon's servants are not reckoned among the Levites, and there is only one guild of singers: "the

children of Asaph." The Nethinim are still distinguished from the Levites in the list of those who returned with Ezra, and in various lists which occur in Nehemiah. We see from the Levitical genealogies and the Levites in 1 Chron. vi., ix., etc., that in the time of the chronicler these arrangements had been altered. There were now three guilds of singers, tracing their descent to Heman, Asaph, and Ethan* or Jeduthun, and reckoned by descent among the Levites. The guild of Heman seems to have been also known as "the sons of Korah."† The porters and probably eventually the Nethinim were also reckoned among the Levites.‡

We see therefore that in the interval between Nehemiah and the chronicler the inferior ranks of the Temple ministry had been reorganised, the musical staff had been enlarged and doubtless otherwise improved, and the singers, porters, Nethinim, and other Temple servants had been promoted to the position of Levites. Under the monarchy many of the Temple servants had been slaves of foreign birth; but now a sacred character was given to the humblest menial who shared in the work of the house of God. In after-times Herod the Great had a number of priests trained as masons, in order that no profane hand might take part in the building of his temple.

Some details have been preserved of the organisation of the Levites. We read how the porters were distributed among the different gates, and of Levites who were over the chambers and the treasures, and of other Levites how—

"They lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and to them pertained the opening thereof morning by morning.

"And certain of them had charge of the vessels of service; for by tale were they brought in, and by tale were they taken out.

"Some of them also were appointed over the furniture, and over all the vessels of the sanctuary, and over the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices.

"And some of the sons of the priests prepared the confection of the spices.

"And Mattithiah, one of the Levites who was the first-born of Shallum the Korahite, had the set office over the things that were baked in pans.

"And some of their brethren, of the sons of Kohathites, were over the shewbread to prepare it every sabbath."§

This account is found in a chapter partly identical with Neh. xi., and apparently refers to the period of Nehemiah; but the picture in the latter part of the chapter was probably drawn by the chronicler from his own knowledge of Temple routine. So, too, in his graphic accounts of the sacrifices by Hezekiah and Josiah,|| we seem to have an eyewitness describing familiar scenes. Doubtless the chronicler himself had often been one of the Temple choir "when the burnt-offering began, and the song of Jehovah began also, together with the instruments of David, king of Israel; and all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; and all this continued till the burnt-offering was finished."¶ Still the scale of these sacrifices, the hundreds of oxen and thousands of sheep, may

* 1 Chron. vi. 31-48, xv. 16-20; cf. psalm titles.

† 1 Chron. vi. 33, 37; cf. Psalm lxxxviii. (title).

‡ 1 Chron. xvii. 38, 42.

§ 1 Chron. ix. 26-32; cf. 1 Chron. xxiii. 24-32.

|| 2 Chron. xxix.-xxxi; xxxiv; xxxv.

¶ 2 Chron. xxix. 27, 28.

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

† 2 Chron. xx. 20.

‡ 2 Chron. xxix. 6.

have been fixed to accord with the splendour of the ancient kings. Such profusion of victims probably represented rather the dreams than the realities of the chronicler's Temple.

Our author's strong feeling for his own Levitical order shows itself in his narrative of Hezekiah's great sacrifices. The victims were so numerous that there were not priests enough to slay them; to meet the emergency the Levites were allowed on this one occasion to discharge a priestly function and to take an unusually conspicuous part in the national festival. In zeal they were even superior to the priests: "The Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests." Possibly here the chronicler is describing an incident which he could have paralleled from his own experience. The priests of his time may often have yielded to a natural temptation to shirk the laborious and disagreeable parts of their duty; they would catch at any plausible pretext to transfer their burdens to the Levites, which the latter would be eager to accept for the sake of a temporary accession of dignity. Learned Jews were always experts in the art of evading the most rigid and minute regulations of the Law. For instance, the period of service appointed for the Levites in the Pentateuch was from the age of thirty to that of fifty.* But we gather from Ezra and Nehemiah that comparatively few Levites could be induced to throw in their lot with the returning exiles; there were not enough to perform the necessary duties. To make up for paucity of numbers, this period of service was increased; and they were required to serve from twenty years old and upward.† As the former arrangement had formed part of the law attributed to Moses, in course of time the later innovation was supposed to have originated with David.

There were, too, other reasons for increasing the efficiency of the Levitical order by lengthening their term of service and adding to their numbers. The establishment of the Pentateuch as the sacred code of Judaism imposed new duties on priests and Levites alike. The people needed teachers and interpreters of the numerous minute and complicated rules by which they were to govern their daily life. Judges were needed to apply the laws in civil and criminal cases. The Temple ministers were the natural authorities on the Torah; they had a chief interest in expounding and enforcing it. But in these matters also the priests seem to have left the new duties to the Levites. Apparently the first "scribes," or professional students of the Law, were mainly Levites. There were priests among them, notably the great father of the order, "Ezra the priest, the scribe," but the priestly families took little share in this new work. The origin of the educational and judicial functions of the Levites had also come to be ascribed to the great kings of Judah. A Levitical scribe is mentioned in the time of David.‡ In the account of Josiah's reign we are expressly told that "of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters"; and they are described as "the Levites that taught all Israel."§ In the same context we have the traditional authority and justification for this new departure. One of the chief duties imposed upon the Levites by the Law was the

care and carriage of the Tabernacle and its furniture during the wanderings in the wilderness. Josiah, however, bids the Levites "put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, did build; there shall no more be a burden upon your shoulders; now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel."* In other words, "You are relieved of a large part of your old duties, and therefore have time to undertake new ones." The immediate application of this principle seems to be that a section of the Levites should do all the menial work of the sacrifices, and so leave the priests, and singers, and porters free for their own special service; but the same argument would be found convenient and conclusive whenever the priests desired to impose any new functions on the Levites.

Still the task of expounding and enforcing the Law brought with it compensations in the shape of dignity, influence, and emolument; and the Levites would soon be reconciled to their work as scribes, and would discover with regret that they could not retain the exposition of the Law in their own hands. Traditions were cherished in certain Levitical families that their ancestors had been "officers and judges" under David †; and it was believed that Jehoshaphat had organised a commission largely composed of Levites to expound and administer the Law in country districts.‡ This commission consisted of five princes, nine Levites, and two priests; "and they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; and they went about throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people." As the subject of their teaching was the Pentateuch, their mission must have been rather judicial than religious. With regard to a later passage, it has been suggested that "probably it is the organisation of justice as existing in his own day that he" (the chronicler) "here carries back to Jehoshaphat, so that here most likely we have the oldest testimony to the synedrium of Jerusalem as a court of highest instance over the provincial synedria, as also to its composition and presidency."§ We can scarcely doubt that the form the chronicler has given to the tradition is derived from the institutions of his own age, and that his friends the Levites were prominent among the doctors of the law, and not only taught and judged in Jerusalem, but also visited the country districts.

It will appear from this brief survey that the Levites were very completely organised. There were not only the great classes, the scribes, officers, porters, singers, and the Levites proper, so to speak, who assisted the priests, but special families had been made responsible for details of service: "Mattithiah had the set office over the things that were baked in pans; and some of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread, to prepare it every sabbath."||

The priests were organised quite differently. The small number of Levites necessitated careful arrangements for using them to the best advantage; of priests there were enough and to spare. The four thousand two hundred and eighty-nine priests who returned with Zerubbabel

* Num. iv. 3, 23, 35.

† 1 Chron. xxiii. 24, 27. Probably "twenty" should be read for "thirty" in ver. 3.

‡ 1 Chron. xxiv. 6.

§ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 12; xxxv. 3.

* 2 Chron. xxxv. 3; cf. 1 Chron. xxiii. 26.

† 1 Chron. xxvi. 29.

‡ 2 Chron. xvii. 7, 9.

§ Wellhausen, "History of Israel," p. 191; cf. 2 Chron. xix. 4-11.

|| 1 Chron. ix. 31, 32.

were an extravagant and impossible allowance for a single temple, and we are told that the numbers increased largely as time went on. The problem was to devise some means by which all the priests should have some share in the honours and emoluments of the Temple, and its solution was found in the "courses." The priests who returned with Zerubbabel are registered in four families: "the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua; . . . the children of Immer; . . . the children of Pashhur; . . . the children of Harim."* But the organisation of the chronicler's time is, as usual, to be found among the arrangements ascribed to David, who is said to have divided the priests into their twenty-four courses.† Amongst the heads of the courses we find Jedaiah, Jeshua, Harim, and Immer, but not Pashhur. Post-Biblical authorities mention twenty-four courses in connection with the second Temple. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, belonged to the course of Abijah‡; and Josephus mentions a course "Eniakim."§ Abijah was the head of one of David's courses; and Eniakim is almost certainly a corruption of Eliakim, of which name Jakim in Chronicles is a contraction.

These twenty-four courses discharged the priestly duties each in its turn. One was busy at the Temple while the other twenty-three were at home, some perhaps living on the profits of their office, others at work on their farms. The high-priest, of course, was always at the Temple; and the continuity of the ritual would necessitate the appointment of other priests as a permanent staff. The high-priest and the staff, being always on the spot, would have great opportunities for improving their own position at the expense of the other members of the courses, who were only there occasionally for a short time. Accordingly we are told later on that a few families had appropriated nearly all the priestly emoluments.

Courses of the Levites are sometimes mentioned in connection with those of the priests, as if the Levites had an exactly similar organisation.¶ Indeed, twenty-four courses of the singers are expressly named.¶ But on examination we find that "course" for the Levites in all cases where exact information is given** does not mean one of a number of divisions which took work in turn, but a division to which a definite piece of work was assigned, e. g., the care of the shewbread or of one of the gates. The idea that in ancient times there were twenty-four alternating courses of Levites was not derived from the arrangements of the chronicler's age, but was an inference from the existence of priestly courses. According to the current interpretation of the older history, there must have been under the monarchy a very great many more Levites than priests, and any reasons that existed for organising twenty-four priestly courses would apply with equal force to the Levites. It is true that the names of twenty-four courses of singers are given, but in this list occurs the remarkable and impossible group of names already discussed:—

"I-have-magnified, I-have-exalted-help; Sitting-

*in-distress, I-have-spoken In-abundance Visions,"** which are in themselves sufficient proof that these twenty-four courses of singers did not exist in the time of the chronicler.

Thus the chronicler provides material for a fairly complete account of the service and ministers of the Temple; but his interest in other matters was less close and personal, so that he gives us comparatively little information about civil persons and affairs. The restored Jewish community was, of course, made up of descendants of the members of the old kingdom of Judah. The new Jewish state, like the old, is often spoken of as "Judah"; but its claim to fully represent the chosen people of Jehovah is expressed by the frequent use of the name "Israel." Yet within this new Judah the old tribes of Judah and Benjamin are still recognised. It is true that in the register of the first company of returning exiles the tribes are ignored, and we are not told which families belonged to Judah or which to Benjamin; but we are previously told that the chiefs of Judah and Benjamin rose up to return to Jerusalem. Part of this register arranges the companies according to the towns in which their ancestors had lived before the Captivity, and of these some belong to Judah and some to Benjamin. We also learn that the Jewish community included certain of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh.† There may also have been families from the other tribes; St. Luke, for instance, describes Anna as of the tribe of Asher.‡ But the mass of genealogical matter relating to Judah and Benjamin far exceeds what is given as to the other tribes,§ and proves that Judah and Benjamin were co-ordinate members of the restored community, and that no other tribe contributed any appreciable contingent, except a few families from Ephraim and Manasseh. It has been suggested that the chronicler shows special interest in the tribes which had occupied Galilee—Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun, and Issachar—and that this special interest indicates that the settlement of Jews in Galilee had attained considerable dimensions at the time when he wrote. But this special interest is not very manifest; and later on, in the time of the Maccabees, the Jews in Galilee were so few that Simon took them all away with him, together with their wives and their children and all that they had, and brought them into Judæa.

The genealogies seem to imply that no descendants of the Transjordanic tribes or of Simeon were found in Judah in the age of the chronicler.

Concerning the tribe of Judah, we have already noted that it included two families which traced their descent to Egyptian ancestors, and that the Kenizzite clans of Caleb and Jerahmeel had been entirely incorporated in Judah and formed the most important part of the tribe. A comparison of the parallel genealogies of the house of Caleb gives us important information as to the territory occupied by the Jews. In ii. 42-49 we find the Calebites at Hebron and other towns of the south country, in accordance with the older history; but in ii. 50-55 they occupy Bethlehem and

* Recently a complaint was received at the General Post-office that some newspapers sent from France had failed to arrive. It was stated that the names of the papers were—*Il me manque; Plusieurs; Journaux; i. e.*

† I am short of "Several" "Papers."

‡ I Chron. ix. 3.

§ Luke ii. 36.

§ Levi of course excepted.

* Ezra ii. 36-39.

† I Chron. xxiv. 1-19.

‡ Luke i. 5.

§ "Bell. Jud.," IV. iii. 8.

¶ I Chron. xxiv. 20-31; 2 Chron. xxxi. 2.

¶ I Chron. xxv.

** I Chron. xxvi.; Ezra vi. 18; Neh. xi. 36.

Kirjath-jearim and other towns in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. The two paragraphs are really giving their territory before and after the Exile; during the Captivity Southern Judah had been occupied by the Edomites. It is indeed stated in Neh. xi. 25-30 that the children of Judah dwelt in a number of towns scattered over the whole territory of the ancient tribe; but the list concludes with the significant sentence, "So they *encamped* from Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom." We are thus given to understand that the occupation was not permanent.

We have already noted that much of the space allotted to the genealogies of Judah is devoted to the house of David.* The form of this pedigree for the generations after the Captivity indicates that the head of the house of David was no longer the chief of the state. During the monarchy only the kings are given as heads of the family in each generation: "Solomon's son was Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son," etc., etc.; but after the Captivity the first-born no longer occupied so unique a position. We have all the sons of each successive head of the family.

The genealogies of Judah include one or two references which throw a little light on the social organisation of the times. There were "families of scribes which dwelt at Jabez"† as well as the Levitical scribes. In the appendix ‡ to the genealogies of chap. iv. we read of a house whose families wrought fine linen, and of other families who were porters to the king and lived on the royal estates. The immediate reference of these statements is clearly to the monarchy, and we are told that "the records are ancient"; but these ancient records were probably obtained by the chronicler from contemporary members of the families, who still pursued their hereditary calling.

As regards the tribe of Benjamin, we have seen that there was a family claiming descent from Saul.

The slight and meagre information given about Judah and Benjamin cannot accurately represent their importance as compared with the priests and Levites, but the general impression conveyed by the chronicler is confirmed by our other authorities. In his time the supreme interests of the Jews were religious. The one great institution was the Temple; the highest order was the priesthood. All Jews were in a measure servants of the Temple; Ephesus indeed was proud to be called the temple-keeper of the great Diana, but Jerusalem was far more truly the temple-keeper of Jehovah. Devotion to the Temple gave to the Jews a unity which neither of the older Hebrews states had ever possessed. The kernel of this later Jewish territory seems to have been a comparatively small district of which Jerusalem was the centre. The inhabitants of this district carefully preserved the records of their family history, and loved to trace their descent to the ancient clans of Judah and Benjamin; but for practical purposes they were all Jews, without distinction of tribe. Even the ministry of the Temple had become more homogeneous; the

non-Levitical descent of some classes of the Temple servants was first ignored and then forgotten, so that assistants at the sacrifices, singers, musicians, scribes, and porters, were all included in the tribe of Levi. The Temple conferred its own sanctity upon all its ministers.

In a previous chapter the Temple and its ministry were compared to a mediæval monastery or the establishment of a modern cathedral. In the same way Jerusalem might be compared to cities, like Ely or Canterbury, which exist mainly for the sake of their cathedrals, only both the sanctuary and city of the Jews came to be on a larger scale. Or, again, if the Temple be represented by the great abbey of St. Edmundsbury, Bury St. Edmunds itself might stand for Jerusalem, and the wide lands of the abbey for the surrounding districts, from which the Jewish priests derived their free-will offerings, and first-fruits, and tithes. Still in both these English instances there was a vigorous and independent secular life far beyond any that existed in Judæa.

A closer parallel to the temple on Zion is to be found in the immense establishments of the Egyptian temples. It is true that these were numerous in Egypt, and the authority and influence of the priesthood were checked and controlled by the power of the kings; yet on the fall of the twentieth dynasty the high-priest of the great temple of Amen at Thebes succeeded in making himself king, and Egypt, like Judah, had its dynasty of priest-kings.

The following is an account of the possessions of the Theban temple of Amen, supposed to be given by an Egyptian living about B. C. 1350* :—

"Since the accession of the eighteenth dynasty, Amen has profited more than any other god, perhaps even more than Pharaoh himself, by the Egyptian victories over the peoples of Syria and Ethiopia. Each success has brought him a considerable share of the spoil collected upon the battle-fields, indemnities levied from the enemy, prisoners carried into slavery. He possesses lands and gardens by the hundred in Thebes and the rest of Egypt, fields and meadows, woods, hunting-grounds, and fisheries; he has colonies in Ethiopia or in the oases of the Libyan desert, and at the extremity of the land of Canaan there are cities under vassalage to him, for Pharaoh allows him to receive the tribute from them. The administration of these vast properties requires as many officials and departments as that of a kingdom. It includes innumerable bailiffs for the agriculture; overseers for the cattle and poultry; treasurers of twenty kinds for the gold, silver, and copper, the vases and valuable stuffs; foremen for the workshops and manufactures; engineers; architects; boatmen; a fleet and an army which often fight by the side of Pharaoh's fleet and army. It is really a state within the state."

Many of the details of this picture would not be true for the temple of Zion; but the Jews were even more devoted to Jehovah than the Thebans to Amen, and the administration of the Jewish temple was more than "a state within the state": it was the state itself.

* 1 Chron. iii.

† ii. 55.

‡ iv. 21-23.

* Maspero, "Ancient Egypt and Assyria," p. 60.

CHAPTER VI.

TEACHING BY ANACHRONISM.

I CHRONICLES ix. (*cf.* xv., xvi., xxiii.-xxvii., etc.).

"And David the king said, . . . Who then offereth willingly? . . . And they gave for the service of the house of God . . . ten thousand darics."—I CHRON. xxix. 1, 5, 7.

TEACHING by anachronism is a very common and effective form of religious instruction; and Chronicles, as the best Scriptural example of this method, affords a good opportunity for its discussion and illustration.

All history is more or less guilty of anachronism; every historian perforce imports some of the ideas and circumstances of his own time into his narratives and pictures of the past: but we may distinguish three degrees of anachronism. Some writers or speakers make little or no attempt at archæological accuracy; others temper the generally anachronistic character of their compositions by occasional reference to the manners and customs of the period they are describing; and, again, there are a few trained students who succeed in drawing fairly accurate and consistent pictures of ancient life and history.

We will briefly consider the last two classes before returning to the first, in which we are chiefly interested.

Accurate archæology is, of course, part of the ideal of the scientific historian. By long and careful study of literature and monuments and by the exercise of a lively and well-trained imagination, the student obtains a vision of ancient societies. Nineveh and Babylon, Thebes and Memphis, rise from their ashes and stand before him in all their former splendour; he walks their streets and mixes with the crowds in the market-place and the throng of worshippers at the temple, each "in his habit as he lived." Rameses and Sennacherib, Ptolemy and Antiochus, all play their proper parts in this drama of his fancy. He can not only recall their costumes and features; he can even think their thoughts and feel their emotions; he actually lives in the past. In "Marius the Epicurean," in Ebers's "Uarda," in Maspero's "Sketches of Assyrian and Egyptian Life," and in other more serious works we have some of the fruits of this enlightened study of antiquity, and are enabled to see the visions at second hand and in some measure to live at once in the present and the past, to illustrate and interpret the one by the other, to measure progress and decay, and to understand the Divine meaning of all history. Our more recent histories and works on life and manners and even our historical romances, especially those of Walter Scott, have rendered a similar service to students of English history. And yet at its very best such realisation of the past is imperfect; the gaps in our information are unconsciously filled in from experience, and the ideas of the present always colour our reproduction of ancient thought and feeling. The most accurate history is only a rough approximation to exact truth; but, like many other rough approximations, it is exact enough for many important practical purposes.

But scholarly familiarity with the past has its drawbacks. The scholar may come to live so much amongst ancient memories that he loses

touch with his own present. He may gain large stores of information about ancient Israelite life, and yet not know enough of his own generation to be able to make them sharers of his knowledge. Their living needs and circumstances lie outside his practical experience; he cannot explain the past to them because he does not sympathise with their present; he cannot apply its lessons to difficulties and dangers which he does not understand.

Nor is the usefulness of the archæologist merely limited by his own lack of sympathy and experience. He may have both, and yet find that there are few of his contemporaries who can follow him in his excursions into bygone time. These limitations and drawbacks do not seriously diminish the value of archæology, but they have to be taken into account in discussing teaching by anachronism, and they have an important bearing on the practical application of archæological knowledge. We shall return to these points later on.

The second degree of anachronism is very common. We are constantly hearing and reading descriptions of Bible scenes and events in which the centuries before and after Christ are most oddly blended. Here and there will be a costume after an ancient monument, a Biblical description of Jewish customs, a few Scriptural phrases; but these are embedded in paragraphs which simply reproduce the social and religious ideas of the nineteenth century. For instance, in a recent work, amidst much display of archæological knowledge, we have the very modern ideas that Joseph and Mary went up to Bethlehem at the census, because Joseph and perhaps Mary also had property in Bethlehem, and that when Joseph died "he left her a small but independent fortune." Many modern books might be named in which Patriarchs and Apostles hold the language and express the sentiments of the most recent schools of devotional Christianity; and yet an air of historical accuracy is assumed by occasional touches of archæology. Similarly in mediæval miracle-plays characters from the Bible appeared in the dress of the period, and uttered a grotesque mixture of Scriptural phrases and vernacular jargon. Much of such work as this may for all practical purposes be classed under the third degree of anachronism. Sometimes, however, the spiritual significance of a passage or an incident turns upon a simple explanation of some ancient custom, so that the archæological detail makes a clear addition to its interest and instructiveness. But in other cases a little archæology is a dangerous thing. Scattered fragments of learned information do not enable the reader in any way to revive the buried past; they only remove the whole subject further from his interest and sympathy. He is not reading about his own day, nor does he understand that the events and personages of the narrative ever had anything in common with himself and his experience. The antique garb, the strange custom, the unusual phrase, disguise that real humanity which the reader shares with these ancient worthies. They are no longer men of like passions with himself, and he finds neither warning nor encouragement in their story. He is like a spectator of a drama played by poor actors with a limited stock of properties. The scenery and dresses show that the play does not belong to his own time, but they fail to suggest that it ever belonged to any period. He has a

languid interest in the performance as a spectacle, but his feelings are not touched, and he is never carried away by the acting.

We have laid so much stress on the drawbacks attaching to a little archæology because they will emphasise what we have to say about the use of pure anachronism. Our last illustration, however, reminds us that these drawbacks detract but little from the influence of earnest men. If the acting be good, we forget the scenery and costumes; the genius of a great preacher more than atones for poor archæology, because, in spite of dress and custom, he makes his hearers feel that the characters of the Bible were instinct with rich and passionate life. We thus arrive at our third degree of pure anachronism.

Most people read their Bible without any reference to archæology. If they dramatise the stories, they do so in terms of their own experience. The characters are dressed like the men and women they know: Nazareth is like their native village, and Jerusalem is like the county town; the conversations are carried on in the English of the Authorised Version. This reading of Scripture is well illustrated by the description in a recent writer of a modern prophet in Tennessee: *

"There was nought in the scene to suggest to a mind familiar with the facts an Oriental landscape—nought akin to the hills of Judæa. It was essentially of the New World, essentially of the Great Smoky Mountains. Yet ignorance has its license. It never occurred to Teck Jepson that his Bible heroes had lived elsewhere. Their history had to him an intimate personal relation, as of the story of an ancestor, in the homestead ways and closely familiar. He brooded upon these narratives, instinct with dramatic interest, enriched with poetic colour, and localised in his robust imagination, till he could trace Hagar's wild wanderings in the fastnesses, could show where Jacob slept and piled his altar of stones, could distinguish the bush, of all others on the 'bald,' that blazed with fire from heaven when the angel of the Lord stood within it. Somehow, even in their grotesque variation, they lost no dignity in their transmission to the modern conditions of his fancy. Did the facts lack significance because it was along the gullied red clay roads of Piomingo Cove that he saw David, the smiling stripling, running and holding high in his hand the bit of cloth cut from Saul's garments while the king had slept in a cave at the base of Chilhowie Mountain? And how was the splendid miracle of translation discredited because Jepson believed that the chariot of the Lord had rested in scarlet and purple clouds upon the towering summit of Thunderhead, that Elijah might thence ascend into heaven?"

Another and more familiar example of "singular alterations in date and circumstances" is the version in "Ivanhoe" of the war between Benjamin and the other tribes:—

"How long since in Palestine a deadly feud arose between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the Israelitish nation; and how they cut to pieces well-nigh all the chivalry of that tribe; and how they swore by our blessed Lady that they would not permit those who remained to marry in their lineage; and how they became

grieved for their vow, and sent to consult his Holiness the Pope how they might be absolved from it; and how, by the advice of the Holy Father, the youth of the tribe of Benjamin carried off from a superb tournament all the ladies who were there present, and thus won them wives without the consent either of their brides or their brides' families."

It is needless to say that the chronicler was not thus hopelessly at sea about the circumstances of ancient Hebrew history; but he wrote in the same simple, straightforward, childlike spirit. Israel had always been the Israel of his own experience, and it never occurred to him that its institutions under the kings had been other than those with which he was familiar. He had no more hesitation in filling up the gaps in the book of Kings from what he saw round about him than a painter would have in putting the white clouds and blue waters of to-day into a picture of skies and seas a thousand years ago. He attributes to the pious kings of Judah the observance of the ritual of his own times. Their prophets use phrases taken from post-Exilic writings. David is regarded as the author of the existing ecclesiastical system in almost all matters that do not date back to Moses, and especially as the organiser of the familiar music of the Temple. David's choristers sing the hymns of the second Temple. Amongst the contributions of his nobles towards the building of the Temple, we read of ten thousand darics, the daric being a coin introduced by the Persian king Darius.

But we must be careful to recognise that the chronicler writes in perfect good faith. These views of the monarchy were common to all educated and thoughtful men of his time; they were embodied in current tradition, and were probably already to be met with in writing. To charge him with inventing them is absurd; they already existed, and did not need to be invented. He cannot have coloured his narrative in the interests of the Temple and the priesthood. When he lived, these interests were guaranteed by ancient custom and by the authoritative sanction of the Pentateuchal Law. The chronicler does not write with the strong feeling of a man who maintains a doubtful cause; there is no hint of any alternative view which needs to be disproved and rejected in favour of his own. He expatiates on his favourite themes with happy, leisurely serenity, and is evidently confident that his treatment of them will meet with general and cordial approval.

And doubtless the author of Chronicles "served his own generation by the will of God," and served them in the way he intended. He made the history of the monarchy more real and living to them, and enabled them to understand better that the reforming kings of Judah were loyal servants of Jehovah and had been used by Him for the furtherance of true religion. The pictures drawn by Samuel and Kings of David and the best of his successors would not have enabled the Jews of his time to appreciate these facts. They had no idea of any piety that was not expressed in the current observances of the Law, and Samuel and Kings did not ascribe such observances to the earlier kings of Judah. But the chronicler and his authorities were able to discern in the ancient Scriptures the genuine piety of David and Hezekiah and other kings, and drew what seemed to them the ob-

* Craddock, "Despot of Bromsgrove Edge." Teck Jepson is, of course, an imaginary character, but none the less representative.

vious conclusion that these pious kings observed the Law. They then proceeded to re-write the history in order that the true character of the kings and their relation to Jehovah might be made intelligible to the people. The only piety which the chronicler could conceive was combined with observance of the Law; naturally therefore it was only thus that he could describe piety. His work would be read with eager interest, and would play a definite and useful part in the religious education of the people. It would bring home to them, as the older histories could not, the abiding presence of Jehovah with Israel and its leaders. Chronicles interpreted history to its own generation by translating older records into the circumstances and ideas of its own time.

And in this it remains our example. Chronicles may fall very far short of the ideal and yet be superior to more accurate histories which fail to make themselves intelligible to their own generation. The ideal history no doubt would tell the story with archaeological precision, and then interpret it by modern parallels; the historian would show us what we should actually have seen and heard if we had lived in the period he is describing; he would also help our weak imagination by pointing us to such modern events or persons as best illustrate those ancient times. No doubt Chronicles fails to bring before our eyes an accurate vision of the history of the monarchy; but, as we have said, all history fails somewhat in this respect. It is simply impossible to fulfil the demand for history that shall have the accuracy of an architect's plans of a house or an astronomer's diagrams of the orbit of a planet. Chronicles, however, fails more seriously than most history, and on the whole rather more than most commentaries and sermons.

But this lack of archaeological accuracy is far less serious than a failure to make it clear that the events of ancient history were as real and as interesting as those of modern times, and that its personages were actual men and women, with a full equipment of body, mind, and soul. There have been many teachers and preachers, innocent of archaeology, who have yet been able to apply Bible narratives with convincing power to the hearts and consciences of their hearers. They may have missed some points and misunderstood others, but they have brought out clearly the main, practical teaching of their subject; and we must not allow amusement at curious anachronisms to blind us to their great gifts in applying ancient history to modern circumstances. For instance, the little captive maid in the story of Naaman has been described by a local preacher as having illuminated texts hung up in her bedroom, and (perambulators not being then in use) as having constructed a go-cart for the baby out of an old tea-chest and four cotton reels. We feel inclined to smile; but, after all, such a picture would make children feel that the captive maid was a girl whom they could understand and might even imitate. A more correct version of the story, told with less human interest, might leave the impression that she was a mere animated doll in a quaint costume, who made impossibly pious remarks.

Enlightened and well-informed Christian teachers may still learn something from the example of the chronicler. The uncritical character of his age affords no excuse to them for shutting their eyes to the fuller light which

God has given to their generation. But we are reminded that permanently significant stories have their parallels in every age. There are always prodigal sons, and foolish virgins, importunate widows, and good Samaritans. The ancient narratives are interesting as quaint and picturesque stories of former times; but it is our duty as teachers to discover the modern parallels of their eternal meaning; their lessons are often best enforced by telling them afresh as they would have been told if their authors had lived in our time, in other words by a frank use of anachronism.

It may be objected that the result in the case of Chronicles is not encouraging. Chronicles is far less interesting than Kings, and far less useful in furnishing materials for the historian. These facts, however, are not inconsistent with the usefulness of the book for its own age. Teaching by anachronism simply seeks to render a service to its own generation; its purpose is didactic, and not historical. How many people read the sermons of eighteenth-century divines? But each generation has a right to this special service. The first duty of the religious teacher is for the men and women that look to him for spiritual help and guidance. He may incidentally produce literary work of permanent value for posterity; but a Church whose ministry sacrificed practical usefulness in the attempt to be learned and literary would be false to its most sacred functions. The noblest self-denial of Christian service may often lie in putting aside all such ambition and devoting the ability which might have made a successful author to making Divine truth intelligible and interesting to the uncultured and the unimaginative. Authors themselves are sometimes led to make a similar sacrifice; they write to help the many to-day when they might have written to delight men of literary taste in all ages. Few things are so ephemeral as popular religious literature; it is as quickly and entirely forgotten as last year's sunsets; but it is as necessary and as useful as the sunshine and the clouds, which are being always spent and always renewed. Chronicles is a specimen of this class of literature, and its presence in the canon testifies to the duty of providing a special application of the sacred truths of ancient history for each succeeding generation.

BOOK III.

MESSIANIC AND OTHER TYPES.

CHAPTER I.

TEACHING BY TYPES.

A MORE serious charge has been brought against Chronicles than that dealt with in the last chapter. Besides anachronisms, additions, and alterations, the chronicler has made omissions that give an entirely new complexion to the history. He omits, for instance, almost everything that detracts from the character and achievements of David and Solomon; he almost entirely ignores the reigns of Saul and Ishbosheth, and of all the northern kings. These facts are obvious to the most casual reader, and a mo-

ment's reflection shows that David as we should know him if we had only Chronicles is entirely different from the historical David of Samuel and Kings. The latter David has noble qualities, but displays great weakness and falls into grievous sin; the David of Chronicles is almost always an hero and a blameless saint.

All this is unquestionably true, and yet the purpose and spirit of Chronicles are honest and praiseworthy. Our judgment must be governed by the relation which the chronicler intended his work to sustain towards the older history. Did he hope that Samuel and Kings would be altogether superseded by this new version of the history of the monarchy, and so eventually be suppressed and forgotten? There were precedents that might have encouraged such a hope. The Pentateuch and the books from Joshua to Kings derived their material from older works; but the older works were superseded by these books, and entirely disappeared. The circumstances, however, were different when the chronicler wrote: Samuel and Kings had been established for centuries. Moreover, the Jewish community in Babylon still exercised great influence over the Palestinian Jews. Copies of Samuel and Kings must have been preserved at Babylon, and their possessors could not be eager to destroy them, and then to incur the expense of replacing them by copies of a history written at Jerusalem from the point of view of the priests and Levites. We may therefore put aside the theory that Chronicles was intended altogether to supersede Samuel and Kings. Another possible theory is that the chronicler, after the manner of mediæval historians, composed an abstract of the history of the world from the Creation to the Captivity as an introduction to his account in Ezra and Nehemiah of the more recent post-Exilic period. This theory has some truth in it, but does not explain the fact that Chronicles is disproportionately long if it be merely such an introduction. Probably the chronicler's main object was to compose a text-book, which could safely and usefully be placed in the hands of the common people. There were obvious objections to the popular use of Samuel and Kings. In making a selection from his material, the chronicler had no intention of falsifying history. Scholars, he knew, would be acquainted with the older books, and could supplement his narrative from the sources which he himself had used. In his own work he was anxious to confine himself to the portions of the history which had an obvious religious significance, and could readily be used for purposes of edification. He was only applying more thoroughly a principle that had guided his predecessors. The Pentateuch itself is the result of a similar selection, only there and in the other earlier histories a very human interest in dramatic narrative has sometimes interfered with an exclusive attention to edification.

Indeed, the principles of selection adopted by the chronicler are common to many historians. A school history does not dwell on the domestic vices of kings or on the private failings of statesmen. It requires no great stretch of imagination to conceive of a Royalist history of England, that should entirely ignore the Commonwealth. Indeed, historians of Christian missions sometimes show about the same interest in the work of other Churches than their own that Chronicles takes in the Northern Kingdom. The work of the chronicler may also be compared to mono-

graphs which confine themselves to some special aspect of their subject. We have every reason to be thankful that the Divine providence has preserved for us the richer and fuller narrative of Samuel and Kings, but we cannot blame the chronicler because he has observed some of the ordinary canons for the composition of historical text-books.

The chronicler's selective method, however, is carried so far that the historical value of his work is seriously impaired; yet in this respect also he is kept in countenance by very respectable authorities. We are more concerned, however, to point out the positive results of the method. Instead of historical portraits, we are presented with a gallery of ideals, types of character which we are asked either to admire or to condemn. On the one hand, we have David and Solomon, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, and the rest of the reforming kings of Judah; on the other hand, there are Jeroboam, and Ahab, and Ahaz, the kings of Israel, and the bad kings of Judah. All these are very sharply defined in either white or black. The types of Chronicles are ideals, and not studies of ordinary human character, with its mingled motives and subtle gradations of light and shade. The chronicler has nothing in common with the authors of modern realistic novels or anecdotal memoirs. His subject is not human nature as it is so much as human nature as it ought to be. There is obviously much to be learnt from such ideal pictures, and this form of inspired teaching is by no means the least effective; it may be roughly compared with our Lord's method of teaching by parables, without, however, at all putting the two upon the same level.

Before examining these types in detail, we may devote a little space to some general considerations upon teaching by types. For the present we will confine ourselves to a non-theological sense of type, using the word to mean any individual who is representative or typical of a class. But the chronicler's individuals do not represent classes of actual persons, but good men as they seem to their most devoted admirers and bad men as they seem to their worst enemies. They are ideal types. Chronicles is not the only literature in which such ideal types are found. They occur in the funeral sermons and obituary notices of popular favourites, and in the pictures which politicians draw in election speeches of their opponents, only in these there is a note of personal feeling from which the chronicler is free.

In fact, all biography tends to idealise; human nature as it is has generally to be looked for in the pages of fiction. When we have been blessed with a good and brave man, we wish to think of him at his best; we are not anxious to have thrust upon our notice the weaknesses and sins which he regretted and for the most part controlled. Some one who loved and honoured him is asked to write the biography, with a tacit understanding that he is not to give us a picture of the real man in the *deshabille*, as it were, of his own inner consciousness. He is to paint us a portrait of the man as he strove to fashion himself after his own high ideal. The true man, as God knows him and as his fellows should remember him, was the man in his higher nature and nobler aspirations. The rest, surely, was but the vanishing remnant of a repudiated self. The biographer idealises, because he believes that the ideal best represents the real man.

This is what the chronicler, with a large faith and liberal charity, has done for David and Solomon.

Such an ideal picture appeals to us with pathetic emphasis. It seems to say, "In spite of temptation, and sin, and grievous falls, this is what I ever aimed at and desired to be. Do not thou content thyself with any lower ideal. My higher nature had its achievements as well as its aspirations. Remember that in thy weakness thou mayest also achieve."

"What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me;

All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God. . . ."

But we may take these ideals as types, not only in a general sense, but also in a modification of the dogmatic meaning of the word. We are not concerned here with the type as the mere external symbol of truth yet to be revealed; such types are chiefly found in the ritual of the Pentateuch. The circumstances of a man's life may also serve as a type in the narrower sense, but we venture to apply the theological idea of type to the significance of the higher nature in a good man. It has been said in reference to types in the theological sense that "a type is neither a prophecy, nor a symbol, nor an allegory, yet it has relations with each of these. A prophecy is a prediction in words, a type a prediction in things. A symbol is a sensuous representation of a thing; a type is such a representation having a distinctly predictive aspect; . . . a type is an enacted prophecy, a kind of prophecy by action."* We cannot, of course, include in our use of the term type "sensuous representation" and some other ideas connected with "type" in a theological sense. Our type is a prediction in persons rather than in things. But the use of the term is justified as including the most essential point: that "a type is an enacted prophecy, a kind of prophecy by action." These personal types are the most real and significant; they have no mere arbitrary or conventional relation to their antitype. The enacted prophecy is the beginning of its own fulfilment, the first-fruits of the greater harvest that is to be. The better moments of the man who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness are a type, a promise, and prophecy of his future satisfaction. They have also a wider and deeper meaning; they show what is possible for humanity, and give an assurance of the spiritual progress of the world. The elect remnant of Israel were the type of the great Christian Church; the spiritual aspirations and persistent faith of a few believers were a prophecy that "the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, . . . which is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree." When therefore the chronicler ignores the evil in David and Solomon and only records the good, he treats them as types. He takes what was best in them and sets it forth as a standard and prophecy for the future, a pattern in the mould to be realised hereafter in the structure of God's spiritual temple upon earth.

* Cave, "Scripture Doctrine of Sacrifice," p. 163.

But the Holy Spirit guided the hopes and intuitions of the sacred writers to a special fulfilment. We can see that their types have one antitype in the growth of the Church and the progress of mankind; but the Old Testament looked for their chief fulfilment in a Divine Messenger and Deliverer: its ideals are types of the Messiah. The higher life of a good man was a revelation of God and a promise of His highest and best manifestation in Christ. We shall endeavor to show in subsequent chapters how Chronicles served to develop the idea of the Messiah.

But the chronicler's types are not all prophecies of future progress or Messianic glory. The brighter portions of his picture are thrown into relief by a dark background. The good in Jeroboam is as completely ignored as the evil in David. Apart from any question of historical accuracy, the type is unfortunately a true one. There is a leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, as well as a leaven of the kingdom. If the base leaven be left to work by itself, it will leaven the whole mass; and in a final estimate of the character of those who do evil "with both hands earnestly," little allowance needs to be made for redeeming features. Even if we are still able to believe that there is a seed of goodness in things evil, we are forced to admit that the seed has remained dead and unfertilised, has had no growth and borne no fruit. But probably most men may sometimes be profitably admonished by considering the typical sinner—the man in whose nature evil has been able to subdue all things to itself.

The strange power of teaching by types has been well expressed by one who was herself a great mistress of the art: "Ideas are often poor ghosts; our sunfilled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapour, and cannot make themselves felt; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft, responsive hands; they look at us with sad, sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul; . . . their presence is a power."*

CHAPTER II.

DAVID—I. HIS TRIBE AND DYNASTY.

KING and kingdom were so bound up in ancient life that an ideal for the one implied an ideal for the other; all distinction and glory possessed by either was shared by both. The tribe and kingdom of Judah were exalted by the same of David and Solomon; but, on the other hand, a specially exalted position is accorded to David in the Old Testament because he is the representative of the people of Jehovah. David himself had been anointed by Divine command to be king of Israel, and he thus became the founder of the only legitimate dynasty of Hebrew kings. Saul and Ishbosheth had no significance for the later religious history of the nation. Apparently to the chronicler the history of true religion in Israel was a blank between Joshua and David; the revival began when the Ark was brought to Zion, and the first steps were taken to rear the Temple in succession to the Mosaic tabernacle. He therefore omits the history of the Judges and Saul. But the battle of Gilboa is given to in-

* George Eliot, "Janet's Repentance," chap. xix.

roduce the reign of David, and incidental condemnation is passed on Saul: "So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the Lord, because of the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for that he asked counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire thereby, and inquired not of the Lord; therefore He slew him and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

The reign of Saul had been an unsuccessful experiment; its only real value had been to prepare the way for David. At the same time the portrait of Saul is not given at full length, like those of the wicked kings, partly perhaps because the chronicler had little interest for anything before the time of David and the Temple, but partly, we may hope, because the record of David's affection for Saul kept alive a kindly feeling towards the founder of the monarchy.

Inasmuch as Jehovah had "turned the kingdom unto David," the reign of Ishbosheth was evidently the intrusion of an illegitimate pretender; and the chronicler treats it as such. If we had only Chronicles, we should know nothing about the reign of Ishbosheth, and should suppose that, on the death of Saul, David succeeded at once to an undisputed sovereignty over all Israel. The interval of conflict is ignored because, according to the chronicler's views, David was, from the first, king *de jure* over the whole nation. Complete silence as to Ishbosheth was the most effective way of expressing this fact.

The same sentiment of hereditary legitimacy, the same formal and exclusive recognition of a *de jure* sovereign, has been shown in modern times by titles like Louis XVIII. and Napoleon III. For both schools of Legitimists the absence of *de facto* sovereignty did not prevent Louis XVII. and Napoleon II. from having been lawful rulers of France. In Israel, moreover, the Divine right of the one chosen dynasty had religious as well as political importance. We have already seen that Israel claimed a hereditary title to its special privileges; it was therefore natural that a hereditary qualification should be thought necessary for the kings. They represented the nation; they were the Divinely appointed guardians of its religion; they became in time the types of the Messiah, its promised Saviour. In all this Saul and Ishbosheth had neither part nor lot; the promise to Israel had always descended in a direct line, and the special promise that was given to its kings and through them to their people began with David. There was no need to carry the history further back.

We have already noticed that, in spite of this general attitude towards Saul, the genealogy of some of his descendants is given twice over in the earlier chapters. No doubt the chronicler made this concession to gratify friends or to conciliate an influential family. It is interesting to note how personal feeling may interfere with the symmetrical development of a theological theory. At the same time we are enabled to discern a practical reason for rigidly ignoring the kingship of Saul and Ishbosheth. To have recognised Saul as the Lord's anointed, like David, would have complicated contemporary dogmatics, and might possibly have given rise to jealousies between the descendants of Saul and those of David. Within the narrow limits of the Jewish community such quarrels might have been inconvenient and even dangerous.

The reasons for denying the legitimacy of the northern kings were obvious and conclusive. Successful rebels who had destroyed the political and religious unity of Israel could not inherit "the sure mercies of David" or be included in the covenant which secured the permanence of his dynasty.

The exclusive association of Messianic ideas with a single family emphasises their antiquity, continuity, and development. The hope of Israel had its roots deep in the history of the people; it had grown with their growth and maintained itself through their changing fortunes. As the hope centred in a single family, men were led to expect an individual personal Messiah; they were being prepared to see in Christ the fulfilment of all righteousness.

But the choice of the house of David involved the choice of the tribe of Judah and the rejection of the kingdom of Samaria. The ten tribes, as well as the kings of Israel, had cut themselves off both from the Temple and the sacred dynasty, and therefore from the covenant into which Jehovah had entered with "the man after his own heart." Such a limitation of the chosen people was suggested by many precedents. Chronicles, following the Pentateuch, tells how the call came to Abraham, but only some of the descendants of one of his sons inherited the promise. Why should not a selection be made from among the sons of Jacob? But the twelve tribes had been explicitly and solemnly included in the unity of Israel, largely through David himself. The glory of David and Solomon consisted in their sovereignty over a united people. The national recollection of this golden age loved to dwell on the union of the twelve tribes. The Pentateuch added legal sanction to ancient sentiment. The twelve tribes were associated together in national lyrics, like the "Blessing of Jacob" and the "Blessing of Moses." The song of Deborah told how the northern tribes "came to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It was simply impossible for the chronicler to absolutely repudiate the ten tribes; and so they are formally included in the genealogies of Israel, and are recognised in the history of David and Solomon. Then the recognition stops. From the time of the disruption the Northern Kingdom is quietly but persistently ignored. Its prophets and sanctuaries were as illegitimate as its kings. The great struggle of Elijah and Elisha for the honour of Jehovah is omitted, with all the rest of their history. Elijah is only mentioned as sending a letter to Jehoram, king of Judah; Elisha is never even named.

On the other hand, it is more than once implied that Judah, with the Levites, and the remnants of Simeon and Benjamin, are the true Israel. When Rehoboam "was strong he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him." After Shishak's invasion, "the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves."* The annals of Manasseh, king of Judah, are said to be "written among the acts of the kings of Israel."† The register of the exiles who returned with Zerubbabel is headed "The number of the men of the people of Israel."‡ The chronicler tacitly anticipates the position of St. Paul: "They are not all Israel which are of Israel"; and the Apostle might have appealed to Chronicles to show that the majority of Israel might

* 2 Chron. xii. 1, 6.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 18.

‡ Ezra ii. 2.

fail to recognise and accept the Divine purpose for Israel, and that the true Israel would then be found in an elect remnant. The Jews of the second Temple naturally and inevitably came to ignore the ten tribes and to regard themselves as constituting this true Israel. As a matter of history, there had been a period during which the prophets of Samaria were of far more importance to the religion of Jehovah than the temple at Jerusalem; but in the chronicler's time the very existence of the ten tribes was ancient history. Then, at any rate, it was true that God's Israel was to be found in the Jewish community, at and around Jerusalem. They inherited the religious spirit of their fathers, and received from them the sacred writings and traditions, and carried on the sacred ritual. They preserved the truth and transmitted it from generation to generation, till at last it was merged in the mightier stream of Christian revelation.

The attitude of the chronicler towards the prophets of the Northern Kingdom does not in any way represent the actual importance of these prophets to the religion of Israel; but it is a very striking expression of the fact that after the Captivity the ten tribes had long ceased to exercise any influence upon the spiritual life of their nation.

The chronicler's attitude is also open to criticism on another side. He is dominated by his own surroundings, and in his references to the Judaism of his own time there is no formal recognition of the Jewish community in Babylon; and yet even his own casual allusions confirm what we know from other sources, namely that the wealth and learning of the Jews in Babylon were an important factor in Judaism until a very late date. This point perhaps rather concerns Ezra and Nehemiah than Chronicles, but it is closely connected with our present subject, and is most naturally treated along with it. The chronicler might have justified himself by saying that the true home of Israel must be in Palestine, and that a community in Babylon could only be considered as subsidiary to the nation in its own home and worshipping at the Temple. Such a sentiment, at any rate, would have met with universal approval amongst Palestinian Jews. The chronicler might also have replied that the Jews in Babylon belonged to Judah and Benjamin and were sufficiently recognised in the general prominence given to these tribes. In all probability some Palestinian Jews would have been willing to class their Babylonian kinsmen with the ten tribes. Voluntary exiles from the Temple, the Holy City, and the Land of Promise had in great measure cut themselves off from the full privileges of the people of Jehovah. If, however, we had a Babylonian book of Chronicles, we should see both Jerusalem and Babylon in another light.

The chronicler was possessed and inspired by the actual living present round about him; he was content to let the dead past bury its dead. He was probably inclined to believe that the absent are mostly wrong, and that the men who worked with him for the Lord and His temple were the true Israel and the Church of God. He was enthusiastic in his own vocation and loyal to his brethren. If his interests were somewhat narrowed by the urgency of present circumstances, most men suffer from the same limitations. Few Englishmen realise that the battle

of Agincourt is part of the history of the United States, and that Canterbury Cathedral is a monument of certain stages in the growth of the religion of New England. We are not altogether willing to admit that these voluntary exiles from our Holy Land belong to the true Anglo-Saxon Israel.

Churches are still apt to ignore their obligations to teachers who, like the prophets of Samaria, seem to have been associated with alien or hostile branches of the family of God. A religious movement which fails to secure for itself a permanent monument is usually labelled heresy. If it has neither obtained recognition within the Church nor yet organised a sect for itself, its services are forgotten or denied. Even the orthodoxy of one generation is sometimes contemptuous of the older orthodoxy which made it possible; and yet Gnostics, Arians and Athanasians, Arminians and Calvinists, have all done something to build up the temple of faith.

The nineteenth century prides itself on a more liberal spirit. But Romanist historians are not eager to acknowledge the debt of their Church to the Reformers; and there are Protestant partisans who deny that we are the heirs of the Christian life and thought of the mediæval Church and are anxious to trace the genealogy of pure religion exclusively through a supposed succession of obscure and half-mythical sects. Limitations like those of the chronicler still narrow the sympathies of earnest and devout Christians.

But it is time to return to the more positive aspects of the teaching of Chronicles, and to see how far we have already traced its exposition of the Messianic idea. The plan of the book implies a spiritual claim on behalf of the Jewish community of the Restoration. Because they believed in Jehovah, whose providence had in former times controlled the destinies of Israel, they returned to their ancestral home that they might serve and worship the God of their fathers. Their faith survived the ruin of Judah and their own captivity; they recognised the power, and wisdom, and love of God alike in the prosperity and in the misfortunes of their race. "They believed God, and it was counted unto them for righteousness." The great prophet of the Restoration had regarded this new Israel as itself a Messianic people, perhaps even "a light to the Gentiles" and "salvation unto the ends of the earth."* The chronicler's hopes were more modest; the new Jerusalem had been seen by the prophet as an ideal vision; the historian knew it by experience as an imperfect human society; but he believed none the less in its high spiritual vocation and prerogatives. He claimed the future for those who were able to trace the hand of God in their past.

Under the monarchy the fortunes of Jerusalem had been bound up with those of the house of David. The chronicler brings out all that was best in the history of the ancient kings of Judah, that this ideal picture of the state and its rulers might encourage and inspire to future hope and effort. The character and achievements of David and his successors were of permanent significance. The grace and favour accorded to them symbolised the Divine promise for the future, and this promise was to be realised through a Son of David.

* Isa. xlix. 6.

CHAPTER III.

DAVID—II. HIS PERSONAL HISTORY.

IN order to understand why the chronicler entirely recasts the graphic and candid history of David given in the book of Samuel, we have to consider the place that David had come to fill in Jewish religion. It seems probable that among the sources used by the author of the book of Samuel was a history of David, written not long after his death, by some one familiar with the inner life of the court. "No one," says the proverb, "is an hero to his valet"; very much what a valet is to a private gentleman courtiers are to a king: their knowledge of their master approaches to the familiarity which breeds contempt. Not that David was ever a subject for contempt or less than an hero even to his own courtiers; but they knew him as a very human hero, great in his vices as well as in his virtues, daring in battle and wise in counsel, sometimes also reckless in sin, yet capable of unbounded repentance, loving not wisely, but too well. And as they knew him, so they described him; and their picture is an immortal possession for all students of sacred life and literature. But it is not the portrait of a Messiah; when we think of the "Son of David," we do not want to be reminded of Bath-sheba.

During the six or seven centuries that elapsed between the death of David and the chronicler, the name of David had come to have a symbolic meaning, which was largely independent of the personal character and career of the actual king. His reign had become idealised by the magic of antiquity; it was a glory of "the good old times." His own sins and failures were obscured by the crimes and disasters of later kings. And yet, in spite of all its shortcomings, the "house of David" still remained the symbol alike of ancient glory and of future hopes. We have seen from the genealogies how intimate the connection was between the family and its founder. Ephraim and Benjamin may mean either patriarchs or tribes. A Jew was not always anxious to distinguish between the family and the founder. "David" and "the house of David" became almost interchangeable terms.

Even the prophets of the eighth century connect the future destiny of Israel with David and his house. The child, of whom Isaiah prophesied, was to sit "upon the throne of David" and be "over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever."* And, again, the king who is to "sit . . . in truth, . . . judging, and seeking judgment, and swift to do righteousness," is to have "his throne . . . established in mercy in the tent of David." † When Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem, the city was defended ‡ for Jehovah's own sake and for His servant David's sake. In the word of the Lord that came to Isaiah for Hezekiah, David supersedes, as it were, the sacred fathers of the Hebrew race; Jehovah is not spoken of as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but "the God of David." § As founder of the dynasty, he takes rank with the founders of the race and religion of Israel: he is "the patriarch David." || The northern prophet Hosea looks forward to

the time when "the children of Israel shall return, and seek the Lord their God and David their king" **; when Amos wishes to set forth the future prosperity of Israel, he says that the Lord "will raise up the tabernacle of David" †; in Micah "the ruler in Israel" is to come forth from Bethlehem Ephrathah, the birthplace of David ‡; in Jeremiah such references to David are frequent, the most characteristic being those relating to the "righteous branch, whom the Lord will raise up unto David," who "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land, in whose days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely" §; in Ezekiel "My servant David" is to be the shepherd and prince of Jehovah's restored and reunited people ||; Zechariah, writing at what we may consider the beginning of the chronicler's own period, follows the language of his predecessors: he applies Jeremiah's prophecy of "the righteous branch" to Zerubbabel, the prince of the house of David ¶: similarly in Haggai Zerubbabel is the chosen of Jehovah **; in the appendix to Zechariah it is said that when "the Lord defends the inhabitants of Jerusalem" "the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." †† In the later literature, Biblical and apocryphal, the Davidic origin of the Messiah is not conspicuous till it reappears in the Psalms of Solomon ††† and the New Testament, but the idea had not necessarily been dormant meanwhile. The chronicler and his school studied and meditated on the sacred writings, and must have been familiar with this doctrine of the prophets. The interest in such a subject would not be confined to scholars. Doubtless the downtrodden people cherished with evergrowing ardour the glorious picture of the Davidic king. In the synagogues it was not only Moses, but the Prophets, that were read; and they could never allow the picture of the Messianic king to grow faint and pale. §§

David's name was also familiar as the author of many psalms. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would often hear them sung at the Temple, and they were probably used for private devotion. In this way especially the name of David had become associated with the deepest and purest spiritual experiences.

This brief survey shows how utterly impossible it was for the chronicler to transfer the older narrative bodily from the book of Samuel to his own pages. Large omissions were absolutely necessary. He could not sit down in cold blood to tell his readers that the man whose name they associated with the most sacred memories and the noblest hopes of Israel had been guilty of treacherous murder, and had offered himself to the Philistines as an ally against the people of Jehovah.

From this point of view let us consider the chronicler's omissions somewhat more in detail. In the first place, with one or two slight exceptions, he omits the whole of David's life before

* Hos. iii. 5.

† Amos ix. 11.

‡ Micah v. 2.

§ Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; cf. xxxiii. 15 and Isa. iv. 2, xi. 1. The Hebrew word used in the last passage is different from that in the preceding.

|| Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24, 25.

¶ Zech. iii. 8; the text in vi. 12 is probably corrupt.

** Hag. ii. 23.

†† Zech. xii. 8.

††† Written after the death of Pompey.

§§ Schultz, "Old Testament Theology," ii. 444.

* Isa. ix. 7.

† Isa. xvi. 5.

‡ Isa. xxxvii. 35.

§ Isa. xxxviii. 5.

|| Acts ii. 29.

his accession to the throne, for two reasons: partly because he is anxious that his readers should think of David as king, the anointed of Jehovah, the Messiah; partly that they may not be reminded of his career as an outlaw and a freebooter and of his alliance with the Philistines.* It is probably only an unintentional result of this omission that it enables the chronicler to ignore the important services rendered to David by Abiathar, whose family were rivals of the house of Zadok in the priesthood.

We have already seen that the events of David's reign at Hebron and his struggle with Ishbosheth are omitted because the chronicler does not recognise Ishbosheth as a legitimate king. The omission would also commend itself because this section contains the account of Joab's murder of Abner and David's inability to do more than protest against the crime. "I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me," † are scarcely words that become an ideal king.

The next point to notice is one of those significant alterations that mark the chronicler's industry as a redactor. In 2 Sam. v. 21 we read that after the Philistines had been defeated at Baal-perazim they left their images there, and David and his men took them away. Why did they take them away? What did David and his men want with images? Missionaries bring home images as trophies, and exhibit them triumphantly, like soldiers who have captured the enemy's standards. No one, not even an unconverted native, supposes that they have been brought away to be used in worship. But the worship of images was no improbable apostasy on the part of an Israelite king. The chronicler felt that these ambiguous words were open to misconception; so he tells us what he assumes to have been their ultimate fate: "And they left their gods there; and David gave commandment, and they were burnt with fire." ‡

The next omission was obviously a necessary one; it is the incident of Uriah and Bath-sheba. The name Bath-sheba never occurs in Chronicles. When it is necessary to mention the mother of Solomon, she is called Bath-shua, possibly in order that the disgraceful incident might not be suggested even by the use of the name. The New Testament genealogies differ in this matter in somewhat the same way as Samuel and Chronicles. St. Matthew expressly mentions Uriah's wife as an ancestress of our Lord, but St. Luke does not mention her or any other ancestress.

The next omission is equally extensive and important. It includes the whole series of events connected with the revolt of Absalom, from the incident of Tamar to the suppression of the rebellion of Sheba the son of Bichri. Various motives may have contributed to this omission. The narrative contains unedifying incidents, which are passed over as lightly as possible by modern writers like Stanley. It was probably a relief to the chronicler to be able to omit them altogether. There is no heinous sin like the murder of Uriah, but the story leaves a general impression of great weakness on David's part. Joab murders Amasa as he had murdered Abner, and this time there is no record of any protest even on the

part of David. But probably the main reason for the omission of this narrative is that it mars the ideal picture of David's power and dignity and the success and prosperity of his reign.

The touching story of Rizpah is omitted; the hanging of her sons does not exhibit David in a very amiable light. The Gibeonites propose that "they shall hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord," and David accepts the proposal. This punishment of the children for the sin of their father was expressly against the Law*; and the whole incident was perilously akin to human sacrifice. How could they be hung up before Jehovah in Gibeah unless there was a sanctuary of Jehovah in Gibeah? And why should Saul at such a time and in such a connection be called emphatically "the chosen of Jehovah"? On many grounds, it was a passage which the chronicler would be glad to omit.

In 2 Sam. xxi. 15-17 we are told that David waxed faint and had to be rescued by Abishai. This is omitted by Chronicles probably because it detracts from the character of David as the ideal hero. The next paragraph in Samuel also tended to depreciate David's prowess. It stated that Goliath was slain by Elhanan. The chronicler introduces a correction. It was not Goliath whom Elhanan slew, but Lahmi, the brother of Goliath. However, the text in Samuel is evidently corrupt; and possibly this is one of the cases in which Chronicles has preserved the correct text. †

Then follow two omissions that are not easily accounted for. 2 Sam. xxii., xxiii., contain two psalms, Psalm xviii. and "the Last Words of David," the latter not included in the Psalter. These psalms are generally considered a late addition to the book of Samuel, and it is barely possible that they were not in the copy used by the chronicler; but the late date of Chronicles makes against this supposition. The psalms may be omitted for the sake of brevity, and yet elsewhere a long cento of passages from post-Exilic psalms is added to the material derived from the book of Samuel. Possibly something in the omitted section jarred upon the theological sensibilities of the chronicler, but it is not clear what. He does not as a rule look below the surface for obscure suggestions of undesirable views. The grounds of his alterations and omissions are usually sufficiently obvious; but these particular omissions are not at present susceptible of any obvious explanation. Further research into the theology of Judaism may perhaps provide us with one hereafter.

Finally, the chronicler omits the attempt of Adonijah to seize the throne, and David's dying commands to Solomon. The opening chapters of the book of Kings present a graphic and pathetic picture of the closing scenes of David's life. The king is exhausted with old age. His authoritative sanction to the coronation of Solomon is only obtained when he has been roused and directed by the promptings and suggestions of the women of his harem. The scene is partly a parallel and partly a contrast to the last days of Queen Elizabeth; for when *her* bodily strength failed, the obstinate Tudor spirit refused to be guided by the suggestions of her courtiers. The chronicler was depicting a person of almost Divine dignity, in whom incidents of human

* An incidental reference is made to these facts in 1 Chron. xii. 19.

† 2 Sam. iii. 39.

‡ 2 Sam. v. 21; 1 Chron. xiv. 12.

* Deut. xxiv. 16, quoted in 2 Chron. xxv. 4.

† 2 Sam. xxi. 19; 1 Chron. xx. 5.

weakness would have been out of keeping; and therefore they are omitted.

David's charge to Solomon is equally human. Solomon is to make up for David's weakness and undue generosity by putting Joab and Shimei to death; on the other hand, he is to pay David's debt of gratitude to the son of Barzillai. But the chronicler felt that David's mind in those last days must surely have been occupied with the temple which Solomon was to build, and the less edifying charge is omitted.

Constantine is reported to have said that, for the honour of the Church, he would conceal the sin of a bishop with his own imperial purple. David was more to the chronicler than the whole Christian episcopate to Constantine. His life of David is compiled in the spirit and upon the principles of lives of saints generally, and his omissions are made in perfect good faith.

Let us now consider the positive picture of David as it is drawn for us in Chronicles. Chronicles would be published separately, each copy written out on a roll of its own. There may have been Jews who had Chronicles, but not Samuel and Kings, and who knew nothing about David except what they learned from Chronicles. Possibly the chronicler and his friends would recommend the work as suitable for the education of children and the instruction of the common people. It would save its readers from being perplexed by the religious difficulties suggested by Samuel and Kings. There were many obstacles, however, to the success of such a scheme; the persecutions of Antiochus and the wars of the Maccabees took the leadership out of the hands of scholars and gave it to soldiers and statesmen. The latter perhaps felt more drawn to the real David than to the ideal, and the new priestly dynasty would not be anxious to emphasise the Messianic hopes of the house of David. But let us put ourselves for a moment in the position of a student of Hebrew history who reads of David for the first time in Chronicles and has no other source of information.

Our first impression as we read the book is that David comes into the history as abruptly as Elijah or Melchizedek. Jehovah slew Saul "and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."* Apparently the Divine appointment is promptly and enthusiastically accepted by the nation; all the twelve tribes come at once in their tens and hundreds of thousands to Hebron to make David king. They then march straight to Jerusalem and take it by storm, and forthwith attempt to bring up the Ark to Zion. An unfortunate accident necessitates a delay of three months, but at the end of that time the Ark is solemnly installed in a tent at Jerusalem.†

We are not told who David the son of Jesse was, or why the Divine choice fell upon him, or how he had been prepared for his responsible position, or how he had so commended himself to Israel as to be accepted with universal acclaim. He must, however, have been of noble family and high character; and it is hinted that he had had a distinguished career as a soldier.‡ We should expect to find his name in the introductory genealogies; and if we have read these lists of names with conscientious attention, we shall remember that there are sundry inci-

dental references to David, and that he was the seventh son of Jesse,* who was descended from the Patriarch Judah, though Boaz, the husband of Ruth.

As we read further we come to other references which throw some light on David's early career, and at the same time somewhat mar the symmetry of the opening narrative. The wide discrepancy between the chronicler's idea of David and the account given by his authorities prevents him from composing his work on an entirely consecutive and consistent plan. We gather that there was a time when David was in rebellion against his predecessor, and maintained himself at Ziklag and elsewhere, keeping "himself close, because of Saul the son of Kish," and even that he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle, but was prevented by the jealousy of the Philistine chiefs from actually fighting against Saul. There is nothing to indicate the occasion or circumstances of these events.† But it appears that even at this period, when David was in arms against the king of Israel and an ally of the Philistines, he was the chosen leader of Israel. Men flocked to him from Judah and Benjamin, Manasseh and Gad, and doubtless from the other tribes as well: "From day to day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God."‡

This chapter partly explains David's popularity after Saul's death; but it only carries the mystery a stage further back. How did this outlaw, and apparently unpatriotic rebel, get so strong a hold on the affections of Israel?

Chap. xii. also provides material for plausible explanations of another difficulty. In chap. x. the army of Israel is routed, the inhabitants of the land take to flight, and the Philistines occupy their cities; in xi. and xii. 23-40 all Israel come straightway to Hebron in the most peaceful and unconcerned fashion to make David king. Are we to understand that his Philistine allies, mindful of that "great host, like the host of God," all at once changed their minds and entirely relinquished the fruits of their victory?

Elsewhere, however, we find a statement that renders other explanations possible. David reigned seven years in Hebron,§ so that our first impression as to the rapid sequence of events at the beginning of his reign is apparently not correct, and there was time in these seven years for a more gradual expulsion of the Philistines. It is doubtful, however, whether the chronicler intended his original narrative to be thus modified and interpreted.

The main thread of the history is interrupted here and later on|| to insert incidents which illustrate the personal courage and prowess of David and his warriors. We are also told how busily occupied David was during the three months' sojourn of the Ark in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. He accepted an alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre; he added to his harem; he successfully repelled two inroads of the Philistines, and made him houses in the city of David.*

The narrative returns to its main subject: the

* 1 Chron. ii. 15.

† 1 Chron. xii. 1, 19. There is no certain indication of the date of the events in xi. 10-25. The fact that a "host" is mentioned in xi. 16, as in xii. 8, 16, is not conclusive proof that they refer to the same period.

‡ xii. 20.

§ 1 Chron. xxix. 27.

|| xi. 10-47; xx. 4-8.

¶ xiii. 14-xvii.

* 1 Chron. x. 14.

† Cf. xi. 1-9; xii. 23-xiii. 14; xv.

‡ 1 Chron. xi. 2.

history of the sanctuary at Jerusalem. As soon as the Ark was duly installed in its tent, and David was established in his new palace, he was struck by the contrast between the tent and the palace: "Lo, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord dwelleth under curtains." He proposed to substitute a temple for the tent, but was forbidden by his prophet Nathan, through whom God promised him that his son should build the Temple, and that his house should be established for ever.*

Then we read of the wars, victories, and conquests of David. He is no longer absorbed in the defence of Israel against the Philistines. He takes the aggressive and conquers Gath; he conquers Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Amalek; he and his armies defeat the Syrians in several battles, the Syrians become tributary, and David occupies Damascus with a garrison. "And the Lord gave victory to David whithersoever he went." The conquered were treated after the manner of those barbarous times. David and his generals carried off much spoil, especially brass, and silver, and gold; and when he conquered Rabbath, the capital of Ammon, "he brought forth the people that were therein, and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. And thus did David unto all the cities of the children of Ammon." Meanwhile his home administration was as honourable as his foreign wars were glorious: "He executed judgment and justice unto all his people"; and the government was duly organised with commanders of the host and the bodyguard, with priests and scribes.†

Then follows a mysterious and painful dispensation of Providence, which the historian would gladly have omitted, if his respect for the memory of his hero had not been overruled by his sense of the supreme importance of the Temple. David, like Job, was given over for a season to Satan, and while possessed by this evil spirit displeased God by numbering Israel. His punishment took the form of a great pestilence, which decimated his people, until, by Divine command, David erected an altar in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite and offered sacrifices upon it, whereupon the plague was stayed. David at once perceived the significance of this incident: Jehovah had indicated the site of the future Temple. "This is the house of Jehovah Elohim,‡ and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel."§

This revelation of the Divine will as to the position of the Temple led David to proceed at once with preparations for its erection by Solomon, which occupied all his energies for the remainder of his life.|| He gathered funds and materials, and gave his son full instructions about the building; he organised the priests and Levites, the Temple orchestra and choir, the doorkeepers, treasurers, officers, and judges; he also organised the army, the tribes, and the royal exchequer on the model of the corresponding arrangements for the Temple.

Then follows the closing scene of David's life. The sun of Israel sets amid the flaming glories of the western sky. No clouds or mists rob him of accustomed splendour. David calls a great assembly of princes and warriors; he addresses a solemn exhortation to them and to

Solomon; he delivers to his son instructions for "all the works" which "I have been made to understand in writing from the hand of Jehovah." It is almost as though the plans of the Temple had shared with the first tables of stone the honour of being written with the very finger of God Himself, and David were even greater than Moses. He reminds Solomon of all the preparations he had made, and appeals to the princes and the people for further gifts; and they render willingly—thousands of talents of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron. David offers prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord: "And David said to all the congregation, Now bless Jehovah our God. And all the congregation blessed Jehovah, the God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped Jehovah and the king. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto Jehovah, and offered burnt offerings unto Jehovah, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their drink offerings and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel, and did eat and drink before Jehovah on that day with great gladness. And they made Solomon king; . . . and David died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour, and Solomon his son reigned in his stead."*

The Roman expressed his idea of a becoming death more simply: "An emperor should die standing." The chronicler has given us the same view at greater length; this is how the chronicler would have wished to die if he had been David, and how, therefore, he conceives that God honoured the last hours of the man after His own heart.

It is a strange contrast to the companion picture in the book of Kings. There the king is bedridden, dying slowly of old age; the life-blood creeps coldly through his veins. The quiet of the sick-room is invaded by the shrill outcry of an aggrieved woman, and the dying king is roused to hear that once more eager hands are clutching at his crown. If the chronicler has done nothing else, he has helped us to appreciate better the gloom and bitterness of the tragedy that was enacted in the last days of David.

What idea does Chronicles give us of the man and his character? He is first and foremost a man of earnest piety and deep spiritual feeling. Like the great religious leaders of the chronicler's own time, his piety found its chief expression in ritual. The main business of his life was to provide for the sanctuary and its services; that is, for the highest fellowship of God and man, according to the ideas then current. But David is no mere formalist: the psalm of thanksgiving for the return of the Ark to Jerusalem is a worthy tribute to the power and faithfulness of Jehovah.† His prayer after God had promised to establish his dynasty is instinct with devout confidence and gratitude.‡ But the most gracious and appropriate of these Davidic utterances is his last prayer and thanksgiving for the liberal gifts of the people for the Temple.§

Next to David's enthusiasm for the Temple, his most conspicuous qualities are those of a general and soldier: he has great personal strength and courage, and is uniformly successful in wars against numerous and powerful ene-

* xvii.

† xviii.; xx. 3.

‡ I e., virtually Jehovah our God and the only true God.

§ For a more detailed treatment of this incident see chap. ix.

|| xxi.-xxix.

* xxix. 20-22, 28.

† xvi. 8-36.

‡ xvii. 16-27.

§ For a short exposition of this passage see Book IV. Chap. i.

mies; his government is both able and upright; his great powers as an organiser and administrator are exercised both in secular and ecclesiastical matters; in a word, he is in more senses than one an ideal king.

Moreover, like Alexander, Marlborough, Napoleon, and other epoch-making conquerors, he had a great charm of personal attractiveness; he inspired his officers and soldiers with enthusiasm and devotion to himself. The pictures of all Israel flocking to him in the first days of his reign and even earlier, when he was an outlaw, are forcible illustrations of this wonderful gift; and the same feature of his character is at once illustrated and partly explained by the romantic episode at Adullam. What greater proof of affection could outlaws give to their captain than to risk their lives to get him a draught of water from the well of Bethlehem? How better could David have accepted and ratified their devotion than by pouring out this water as a most precious libation to God? But the chronicler gives most striking expression to the idea of David's popularity when he finally tells us in the same breath that the people worshipped Jehovah and the king.†

In drawing an ideal picture, our author has naturally omitted incidents that might have revealed the defects of his hero. Such omissions deceive no one, and are not meant to deceive any one. Yet David's failings are not altogether absent from this history. He has those vices which are characteristic alike of his own age and of the chronicler's, and which indeed are not yet wholly extinct. He could treat his prisoners with barbarous cruelty. His pride led him to number Israel, but his repentance was prompt and thorough; and the incident brings out alike both his faith in God and his care for his people. When the whole episode is before us, it does not lessen our love and respect for David. The reference to his alliance with the Philistines is vague and incidental. If this were our only account of the matter, we should interpret it by the rest of his life, and conclude that if all the facts were known, they would justify his conduct.

In forming a general estimate of David according to Chronicles, we may fairly neglect these less satisfactory episodes. Briefly David is perfect saint and perfect king, beloved of God and man.

A portrait reveals the artist as well as the model, and the chronicler in depicting David gives indications of the morality of his own times. We may deduce from his omissions a certain progress in moral sensitiveness. The book of Samuel emphatically condemns David's treachery towards Uriah, and is conscious of the discreditable nature of many incidents connected with the revolts of Absalom and Adonijah; but the silence of Chronicles implies an even severer condemnation. In other matters, however, the chronicler "judges himself in that which he approveth."‡ Of course the first business of an ancient king was to protect his people from their enemies and to enrich them at the expense of their neighbours. The urgency of these duties may excuse, but not justify, the neglect of the more peaceful departments of the administration. The modern reader is struck by the little stress laid by the narrative upon good government at home; it is just mentioned, and that is about all. As the sentiment of international mo-

ality is even now only in its infancy, we cannot wonder at its absence from Chronicles; but we are a little surprised to find that cruelty towards prisoners is included without comment in the character of the ideal king.* It is curious that the account in the book of Samuel is slightly ambiguous and might possibly admit of a comparatively mild interpretation; but Chronicles, according to the ordinary translation, says definitely, "He cut them with saws." The mere reproduction of this passage need not imply full and deliberate approval of its contents; but it would not have been allowed to remain in the picture of the ideal king, if the chronicler had felt any strong conviction as to the duty of humanity towards one's enemies. Unfortunately we know from the book of Esther and elsewhere that later Judaism had not attained to any wide enthusiasm of humanity.

CHAPTER IV.

DAVID—III. HIS OFFICIAL DIGNITY.

IN estimating the personal character of David, we have seen that one element of it was his ideal kingship. Apart from his personality his name is significant for Old Testament theology as that of the typical king. From the time when the royal title "Messiah" began to be a synonym for the hope of Israel, down to the period when the Anglican Church taught the Divine right of kings, and Calvinists insisted on the Divine sovereignty or royal authority of God, the dignity and power of the King of kings have always been illustrated by, and sometimes associated with, the state of an earthly monarch—whereof David is the most striking example.

The times of the chronicler were favourable to the development of the idea of the perfect king of Israel, the prince of the house of David. There was no king in Israel; and, as far as we can gather, the living representatives of the house of David held no very prominent position in the community. It is much easier to draw a satisfactory picture of the ideal monarch when the imagination is not checked and hampered by the faults and failings of an actual Ahaz or Hezekiah. In earlier times the prophetic hopes for the house of David had often been rudely disappointed, but there had been ample space to forget the past and to revive the old hopes in fresh splendour and magnificence. Lack of experience helped to commend the idea of the Davidic king to the chronicler. Enthusiasm for a benevolent despot is mostly confined to those who have not enjoyed the privilege of living under such autocratic government.

On the other hand, there was no temptation to flatter any living Davidic king, so that the semi-Divine character of the kingship of David is not set forth after the gross and almost blasphemous style of Roman emperors or Turkish sultans. It is indeed said that the people worshipped Jehovah and the king; but the essential character of Jewish thought made it impossible that the ideal king should sit "in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." David and Solomon could not share with the pagan emperors the honours of Divine worship in their life-time and apotheosis after their death. Nothing addressed to any Hebrew king parallels the panegyric to

* 1 Chron. xi. 15-19.

† xxix. 20.

‡ Rom. xiv. 22.

* 2 Sam. xii. 31; 1 Chron. xx. 3.

the Christian emperor Theodosius, in which allusion is made to his "sacred mind," and he is told that "as the Fates are said to assist with their tablets that *God who is the partner in your majesty*, so does some Divine power serve your bidding, which writes down and in due time suggests to your memory the promises which you have made."* Nor does Chronicles adorn the kings of Judah with extravagant Oriental titles, such as "King of kings of kings." Devotion to the house of David never oversteps the bounds of a due reverence, but the Hebrew idea of monarchy loses nothing by this salutary reserve.

Indeed, the title of the royal house of Judah rested upon Divine appointment. "Jehovah . . . turned the kingdom unto David; . . . and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of Jehovah by the hand of Samuel."† But the Divine choice was confirmed by the cordial consent of the nation; the sovereigns of Judah, like those of England, ruled by the grace of God and the will of the people. Even before David's accession the Israelites had flocked to his standard; and after the death of Saul a great array of the twelve tribes came to Hebron to make David king, "and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king."‡ Similarly Solomon is the king "whom God hath chosen," and all the congregation make him king and anoint him to be prince.§ The double election of David by Jehovah and by the nation is clearly set forth in the book of Samuel, and in Chronicles the omission of David's early career emphasises this election. In the book of Samuel we are shown the natural process that brought about the change of dynasty; we see how the Divine choice took effect through the wars between Saul and the Philistines and through David's own ability and energy. Chronicles is mostly silent as to secondary causes, and fixes our attention on the Divine choice as the ultimate ground for David's elevation.

The authority derived from God and the people continued to rest on the same basis. David sought Divine direction alike for the building of the Temple and for his campaigns against the Philistines. At the same time, when he wished to bring up the Ark to Jerusalem, he "consulted with the captains of thousands and of hundreds, even with every leader; and David said unto all the assembly of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and if it be of Jehovah our God, . . . let us bring again the ark of our God to us: . . . and all the assembly said that they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people."|| Of course the chronicler does not intend to describe a constitutional monarchy, in which an assembly of the people had any legal status. Apparently in his own time the Jews exercised their measure of local self-government through an informal oligarchy, headed by the high-priest; and these authorities occasionally appealed to an assembly of the people. The administration under the monarchy was carried on in a somewhat similar fashion, only the king had greater authority than the high-priest, and the oligarchy of notables were not so influential as the colleagues of the latter. But apart from any formal constitution the chronicler's description of these

incidents involves a recognition of the principle of popular consent in government as well as the doctrine that civil order rests upon a Divine sanction.

It is interesting to see how a member of a great ecclesiastical community, imbued, as we should suppose, with all the spirit of priestcraft, yet insists upon the royal supremacy both in state and Church. But to have done otherwise would have been to go in the teeth of all history; even in the Pentateuch the "king in Jeshurun" is greater than the priest. Moreover the chronicler was not a priest, but a Levite; and there are indications that the Levites' ancient jealousy of the priests had by no means died out. In Chronicles, at any rate, there is no question of priests interfering with the king's secular administration. They are not even mentioned as obtaining oracles for David as Abiathar did before his accession.* This was doubtless implied in the original account of the Philistine raids in chap. xiv., but the chronicler may not have understood that "inquiring of God" meant obtaining an oracle from the priests.

The king is equally supreme also in ecclesiastical affairs; we might even say that the civil authorities generally shared this supremacy. Somewhat after the fashion of Cromwell and his major-generals, David utilised "the captains of the host" as a kind of ministry of public worship; they joined with him in organising the orchestra and choir for the services of the sanctuary†: probably Napoleon and his marshals would have had no hesitation in selecting anthems for Notre Dame if the idea had occurred to them. David also consulted his captains,‡ and not the priests, about bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. When he gathered the great assembly to make his final arrangements for the building of the Temple, the princes and captains, the rulers and mighty men, are mentioned, but no priests.§ And, last, all the congregation apparently anoint || Zadok to be priest. The chronicler was evidently a pronounced Erastian.¶ David is no mere nominal head of the Church; he takes the initiative in all important matters, and receives the Divine commands either directly or through his prophets Nathan and Gad. Now these prophets are not ecclesiastical authorities; they have nothing to do with the priesthood, and do not correspond to the officials of an organised Church. They are rather the domestic chaplains or confessors of the king, differing from modern chaplains and confessors in having no ecclesiastical superiors. They were not responsible to the bishop of any diocese or the general of any order; they did not manipulate the royal conscience in the interests of any party in the Church; they served God and the king, and had no other masters. They did not beard David before his people, as Ambrose confronted Theodosius or as Chrysostom rated Eudoxia; they delivered their message to David in private, and on occasion he communicated it to the people.** The king's spiritual dignity is rather enhanced than otherwise by this reception of prophetic messages specially delivered to himself. There is another aspect of the royal supremacy in religion. In this particular instance its object is largely the exaltation of David; to arrange for

* Hodgkin, "Italy and her Invaders," i. 205.

† 1 Sam. xiii. 1.

‡ 1 Sam. xiii. 1.

§ 1 Sam. xiii. 1.

|| 1 Sam. xiii. 1.

* 1 Sam. xxiii. 9-13; xxx. 7, 8.

† xxv. i. 2.

‡ xiii. i.

§ xxviii. 1.

|| xxix. 22.

¶ But cf. 2 Chron. xxvi.

** Cf. xvii. 4-15 and xxviii. 2-10.

public worship is the most honourable function of the ideal king. At the same time the care of the sanctuary is his most sacred duty, and is assigned to him that it may be punctually and worthily discharged. State establishment of the Church is combined with a very thorough control of the Church by the state.

We see then that the monarchy rested on Divine and national election, and was guided by the will of God and of the people. Indeed, in bringing up the Ark * the consent of the people is the only recorded indication of the will of God. "Vox populi vox Dei." The king and his government are supreme alike over the state and the sanctuary, and are entrusted with the charge of providing for public worship. Let us try to express the modern equivalents of these principles. Civil government is of Divine origin, and should obtain the consent of the people; it should be carried on according to the will of God, freely accepted by the nation. The civil authority is supreme both in Church and state, and is responsible for the maintenance of public worship.

One at least of these principles is so widely accepted that it is quite independent of any Scriptural sanction from Chronicles. The consent of the people has long been accepted as an essential condition of any stable government. The sanctity of civil government and the sacredness of its responsibilities are coming to be recognised, at present perhaps rather in theory than in practice. We have not yet fully realised how the truth underlying the doctrine of the Divine right of kings applies to modern conditions. Formerly the king was the representative of the state, or even the state itself; that is to say, the king directly or indirectly maintained social order, and provided for the security of life and property. The Divine appointment and authority of the king expressed the sanctity of law and order as the essential conditions of moral and spiritual progress. The king is no longer the state. His Divine right, however, belongs to him, not as a person or as a member of a family, but as the embodiment of the state, the champion of social order against anarchy. The "Divinity that doth hedge a king" is now shared by the sovereign with all the various departments of government. The state—that is to say, the community organised for the common good and for mutual help—is now to be recognised as of Divine appointment and as wielding a Divine authority. "The Lord has turned the kingdom to" the people.

This revolution is so tremendous that it would not be safe to apply to the modern state the remaining principles of the chronicler. Before we could do so we should need to enter into a discussion which would be out of place here, even if we had space for it.

In one point the new democracies agree with the chronicler: they are not inclined to submit secular affairs to the domination of ecclesiastical officials.

The questions of the supremacy of the state over the Church and of the state establishment of the Church involve larger and more complicated issues than existed in the mind or experience of the chronicler. But his picture of the ideal king suggests one idea that is in harmony with some modern aspirations. In Chronicles the king, as the representative of the state, is the special agent in providing for the highest spirit-

ual needs of the people. May we venture to hope that out of the moral consciousness of a nation united in mutual sympathy and service there may arise a new enthusiasm to obey and worship God? Human cruelty is the greatest stumbling-block to belief and fellowship; when the state has somewhat mitigated the misery of "man's inhumanity to man," faith in God will be easier.

CHAPTER V.

SOLOMON.

THE chronicler's history of Solomon is constructed on the same principles as that of David, and for similar reasons. The builder of the first Temple commanded the grateful reverence of a community whose national and religious life centred in the second Temple. While the Davidic king became the symbol of the hope of Israel, the Jews could not forget that this symbol derived much of its significance from the widespread dominion and royal magnificence of Solomon. The chronicler, indeed, attributes great splendour to the court of David, and ascribes to him a lion's share in the Temple itself. He provided his successor with treasure and materials and even the complete plans, so that on the principle, "Qui facit per alium, facit per se," David might have been credited with the actual building. Solomon was almost in the position of a modern engineer who puts together a steamer that has been built in sections. But, with all these limitations, the clear and obvious fact remained that Solomon actually built and dedicated the Temple. Moreover, the memory of his wealth and grandeur kept a firm hold on the popular imagination; and these conspicuous blessings were received as certain tokens of the favour of Jehovah.

Solomon's fame, however, was threefold: he was not only the Divinely appointed builder of the Temple and, by the same Divine grace, the richest and most powerful king of Israel: he had also received from Jehovah the gift of "wisdom and knowledge." In his royal splendour and his sacred buildings he only differed in degree from other kings; but in his wisdom he stood alone, not only without equal, but almost without competitor. Herein he was under no obligation to his father, and the glory of Solomon could not be diminished by representing that he had been anticipated by David. Hence the name of Solomon came to symbolise Hebrew learning and philosophy.

In religious significance, however, Solomon cannot rank with David. The dynasty of Judah could have only one representative, and the founder and eponym of the royal house was the most important figure for the subsequent theology. The interest that later generations felt in Solomon lay apart from the main line of Jewish orthodoxy, and he is never mentioned by the prophets.*

Moreover, the darker aspects of Solomon's reign made more impression upon succeeding generations than even David's sins and misfortunes. Occasional lapses into vices and cruelty might be forgiven or even forgotten; but the systematic oppression of Solomon ranked for

* The casual reference in Jer. lii. 20 is only an apparent exception. The passage is really historical, and not prophetic.

long generations in the hearts of the people, and the prophets always remembered his wanton idolatry. His memory was further discredited by the disasters which marked the close of his own reign and the beginning of Rehoboam's. Centuries later these feelings still prevailed. The prophets who adopted the Mosaic law for the closing period of the monarchy exhort the king to take warning by Solomon, and to multiply neither horses, nor wives, nor gold and silver.*

But as time went on Judah fell into growing poverty and distress, which came to a head in the Captivity and were renewed with the Restoration. The Jews were willing to forget Solomon's faults in order that they might indulge in fond recollections of the material prosperity of his reign. Their experience of the culture of Babylon led them to feel greater interest and pride in his wisdom, and the figure of Solomon began to assume a mysterious grandeur, which has since become the nucleus for Jewish and Mohammedan legends. The chief monument of his fame in Jewish literature is the book of Proverbs, but his growing reputation is shown by the numerous Biblical and apocryphal works ascribed to him. His name was no doubt attached to Canticles because of a feature in his character which the chronicler ignores. His supposed authorship of Ecclesiastes and of the Wisdom of Solomon testifies to the fame of his wisdom, while the titles of the "Psalms of Solomon" and even of some canonical psalms credit him with spiritual feeling and poetic power.†

When the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach proposes to "praise famous men," it dwells upon Solomon's temple and his wealth, and especially upon his wisdom; but it does not forget his failings.‡ Josephus celebrates his glory at great length. The New Testament has comparatively few notices of Solomon; but these include references to his wisdom.§ his splendour,|| and his temple.¶ The Koran, however, far surpasses the New Testament in its interest in Solomon; and his name and his seal play a leading part in Jewish and Arabian magic. The bulk of this literature is later than the chronicler, but the renewed interest in the glory of Solomon must have begun before his time. Perhaps, by connecting the building of the Temple as far as possible with David, the chronicler marks his sense of Solomon's unworthiness. On the other hand, there were many reasons why he should welcome the aid of popular sentiment to enable him to include Solomon among the ideal Hebrew kings. After all, Solomon had built and dedicated the Temple; he was the "pious founder," and the beneficiaries of the foundation would wish to make the most of his piety. "Jehovah" had "magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel."** "King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom; and all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."†† The chronicler would naturally wish to set forth the better side of Solomon's character as an ideal of royal wisdom and

splendour, devoted to the service of the sanctuary. Let us briefly compare Chronicles and Kings to see how he accomplished his purpose.

The structure of the narrative in Kings rendered the task comparatively easy; it could be accomplished by removing the opening and closing sections and making a few minor changes in the intermediate portion. The opening section is the sequel to the conclusion of David's reign; the chronicler omitted this conclusion, and therefore also its sequel. But the contents of this section were objectionable in themselves. Solomon's admirers willingly forgot that his reign was inaugurated by the execution of Shimei, of his brother Adonijah, and of his father's faithful minister Joab, and by the deposition of the high-priest Abiathar. The chronicler narrates with evident approval the strong measures of Ezra and Nehemiah against foreign marriages, and he is therefore not anxious to remind his readers that Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter. He does not, however, carry out his plan consistently. Elsewhere he wishes to emphasise the sanctity of the Ark and tells us that "Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her, for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel, because the places are holy whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come."*

In Kings the history of Solomon closes with a long account of his numerous wives and concubines, his idolatry and consequent misfortunes. All this is omitted by the chronicler; but later on, with his usual inconsistency, he allows Nehemiah to point the moral of a tale he has left untold: "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? . . . Even him did strange women cause to sin."† In the intervening section he omits the famous judgment of Solomon, probably on account of the character of the women concerned. He introduces sundry changes which naturally follow from his belief that the Levitical law was then in force.‡ His feeling for the dignity of the chosen people and their king comes out rather curiously in two minor alterations. Both authorities agree in telling us that Solomon had recourse to forced labour for his building operations: in fact, after the usual Eastern fashion from the Pyramids down to the Suez Canal, Solomon's temple and palaces were built by the *corvée*. According to the oldest narrative, he "raised a levy out of all Israel."§ This suggests that forced labour was exacted from the Israelites themselves, and it would help to account for Jeroboam's successful rebellion. The chronicler omits this statement as open to an interpretation derogatory to the dignity of the chosen people, and not only inserts a later explanation which he found in the book of Kings, but also another express statement that Solomon raised his levy of the "strangers that were in the land of Israel."|| These statements may have been partly suggested by the existence of a class of Temple slaves called Solomon's servants.

The other instance relates to Solomon's alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre. In the book

* Deut. xvii. 16, 17; cf. 2 Chron. i. 14-17 and 1 Kings xi. 3-8.

† Psalms lxxvii. and cxxvii. are attributed to him, the latter, however, only in the Hebrew Bible.

‡ Eccles. xlvii. 12-21.

§ Matt. xii. 42.

|| Matt. vi. 29.

¶ Acts vii. 47.

** 1 Chron. xxix. 25.

†† 2 Chron. ix. 22, 23.

* 2 Chron. viii. 11.

† Neh. xiii. 26.

‡ Such changes occur throughout, and need not be further noticed unless some special interest attaches to them.

§ 1 Kings v. 13; ix. 22, which seems to contradict this, is an editorial note.

|| 2 Chron. ii. 2, 17, 18; viii. 7-10.

of Kings we are told that "Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee."* There were indeed redeeming features connected with the transaction; the cities were not a very valuable possession for Hiram: "they pleased him not"; yet he "sent to the king six score talents of gold." However, it seemed incredible to the chronicler that the most powerful and wealthy of the kings of Israel should either cede or sell any portion of Jehovah's inheritance. He emends the text of his authority so as to convert it into a causal reference to certain cities which Hiram had given to Solomon.†

We will now reproduce the story of Solomon as given by the chronicler. Solomon was the youngest of four sons born to David at Jerusalem by Bath-shua, the daughter of Ammiel. Besides these three brothers, he had at least six other elder brothers. As in the cases of Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David himself, the birthright fell to a younger son. In the prophetic utterance which foretold his birth, he was designated to succeed to his father's throne and to build the Temple. At the great assembly which closed his father's reign he received instructions as to the plans and services of the Temple,‡ and was exhorted to discharge his duties faithfully. He was declared king according to the Divine choice, freely accepted by David and ratified by popular acclamation. At David's death no one disputed his succession to the throne: "All Israel obeyed him; and all the princes and the mighty men and all the sons likewise of King David submitted themselves unto Solomon the king."§

His first act after his accession was to sacrifice before the brazen altar of the ancient Tabernacle at Gideon. That night God appeared unto him "and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon chose wisdom and knowledge to qualify him for the arduous task of government. Having thus "sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," all other things—"riches, wealth, and honour"—were added unto him.||

He returned to Jerusalem, gathered a great array of chariots and horses by means of traffic with Egypt, and accumulated great wealth, so that silver, and gold, and cedars became abundant at Jerusalem.¶

He next proceeded with the building of the Temple, collected workmen, obtained timber from Lebanon and an artificer from Tyre. The Temple was duly erected and dedicated, the king taking the chief and most conspicuous part in all the proceedings. Special reference, however, is made to the presence of the priests and Levites at the dedication. On this occasion the ministry of the sanctuary was not confined to the course whose turn it was to officiate, but "all the priests that were present had sanctified themselves and did not keep their courses; also the Levites, which were the singers, all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brethren, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, and psalteries, and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets."**

Solomon's dedication prayer concludes with special petitions for the priests, the saints, and the king: "Now therefore arise, O Jehovah Elohim, into Thy resting-place, Thou and the ark

of Thy strength; let Thy priests, O Jehovah Elohim, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness. O Jehovah Elohim, turn not away the face of Thine anointed; remember the mercies of David Thy servant."*

When David sacrificed at the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, the place had been indicated as the site of the future Temple by the descent of fire from heaven; and now, in token that the mercy shown to David should be continued to Solomon, the fire again fell from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Jehovah "filled the house of Jehovah,"† as it had done earlier in the day, when the Ark was brought into the Temple. Solomon concluded the opening ceremonies by a great festival: for eight days the Feast of Tabernacles was observed according to the Levitical law, and seven days more were specially devoted to a dedication feast.‡

Afterwards Jehovah appeared again to Solomon, as He had before at Gibeon, and told him that this prayer was accepted. Taking up the several petitions that the king had offered, He promised, "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I send pestilence among My people; if My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent, unto the prayer that is made in this place." Thus Jehovah, in His gracious condescension, adopts Solomon's own words§ to express His answer to the prayer. He allows Solomon to dictate the terms of the agreement, and merely appends His signature and seal.

Besides the Temple, Solomon built palaces for himself and his wife, and fortified many cities, among the rest Hamath-zobah, formerly allied to David.|| He also organised the people for civil and military purposes.

As far as the account of his reign is concerned, the Solomon of Chronicles appears as "the husband of one wife"; and that wife is the daughter of Pharaoh. A second, however, is mentioned later on as the mother of Rehoboam; she too was a "strange woman," an Ammonitess, Naamah by name.

Meanwhile Solomon was careful to maintain all the sacrifices and festivals ordained in the Levitical law, and all the musical and other arrangements for the sanctuary commanded by David, the man of God.¶

We read next of his commerce by sea and land, his great wealth and wisdom, and the romantic visit of the queen of Sheba.**

And so the story of Solomon closes with this picture of royal state,—

"The wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold."

* vi. 41, 42, peculiar to Chronicles, apparently based on Psalm cxxxii. 8-10.

† 1 Chron. xxi. 26; 2 Chron. vii. 1-3, both peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ vii. 8-10, mostly peculiar to Chronicles. The text in 1 Kings viii. 65 has been interpolated from Chronicles.

§ vii. 13-15, peculiar to Chronicles.

¶ viii. 3, 4, peculiar to Chronicles. Hamath is apparently referred to as a possession of Judah in 2 Kings xiv. 28.

** viii. 12-16, peculiar in this form to Chronicles, but based upon 1 Kings ix. 25.

** ix., as in 1 Kings x. 1-13.

* 1 Kings ix. 11, 12, § 1 Chron. xxix. 23, 24.
† 2 Chron. viii. 1, 2, R. V. † 2 Chron. i. 7-13.
‡ 1 Chron. xxii. 9. † 2 Chron. i. 14-17.

** v. 11, 12, peculiar to Chronicles.

Wealth was combined with imperial power and Divine wisdom. Here, as in the case of Plato's own pupils Dionysius and Dion of Syracuse, Plato's dream came true; the prince was a philosopher, and the philosopher a prince.

At first sight it seems as if this marriage of authority and wisdom had happier issue at Jerusalem than at Syracuse. Solomon's history closes as brilliantly as David's, and Solomon was subject to no Satanic possession and brought no pestilence upon Israel. But testimonials are chiefly significant in what they omit; and when we compare the conclusions of the histories of David and Solomon, we note suggestive differences.

Solomon's life does not close with any scene in which his people and his heir assemble to do him honour and to receive his last injunctions. There are no "last words" of the wise king; and it is not said of him that "he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour." "Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead"*; that is all. When the chronicler, the professed panegyrist of the house of David, brings his narrative of this great reign to so lame and impotent a conclusion, he really implies as severe a condemnation upon Solomon as the book of Kings does by its narrative of his sins.

Thus the Solomon of Chronicles shows the same piety and devotion to the Temple and its ritual which were shown by his father. His prayer at the dedication of the Temple is parallel to similar utterances of David. Instead of being a general and a soldier, he is a scholar and a philosopher. He succeeded to the administrative abilities of his father; and his prayer displays a deep interest in the welfare of his subjects. His record—in Chronicles—is even more faultless than that of David. And yet the careful student with nothing but Chronicles, even without Ezra and Nehemiah, might somehow get the impression that the story of Solomon, like that of Cambuscan, had been "left half told." In addition to the points suggested by a comparison with the history of David, there is a certain abruptness about its conclusion. The last fact noted of Solomon, before the formal statistics about "the rest of his acts" and the years of his reign, is that horses were brought for him "out of Egypt and out of all lands." Elsewhere the chronicler's use of his materials shows a feeling for dramatic effect. We should not have expected him to close the history of a great reign by a reference to the king's trade in horses.†

Perhaps we are apt to read into Chronicles what we know from the book of Kings; yet surely this abrupt conclusion would have raised a suspicion that there were omissions, that facts had been suppressed because they could not bear the light. Upon the splendid figure of the great king, with his wealth and wisdom, his piety and devotion, rests the vague shadow of unnamed sins and unrecorded misfortunes. A suggestion of unhallowed mystery attaches itself to the name of the builder of the Temple, and Solomon is already on the way to become the Master of the Genii and the chief of magicians.‡

* ix. 31.

† ix. 28.

‡ It is not suggested that the chronicler intended to convey this impression, or that it would be felt by most of his readers.

CHAPTER VI.

SOLOMON (continued).

WHEN we turn to consider the spiritual significance of this ideal picture of the history and character of Solomon, we are confronted by a difficulty that attends the exposition of any ideal history. An author's ideal of kingship in the early stages of literature is usually as much one and indivisible as his ideal of priesthood, of the office of the prophet, and of the wicked king. His authorities may record different incidents in connection with each individual; but he emphasises those which correspond with his ideal, or even anticipates the higher criticism by constructing incidents which seem required by the character and circumstances of his heroes. On the other hand, where the priest, or the prophet, or the king departs from the ideal, the incidents are minimised or passed over in silence. There will still be a certain variety because different individuals may present different elements of the ideal, and the chronicler does not insist on each of his good kings possessing all the characteristics of royal perfection. Still the tendency of the process is to make all the good kings alike. It would be monotonous to take each of them separately and deduce the lessons taught by their virtues, because the chronicler's intention is that they shall all teach the same lessons by the same kind of behaviour described from the same point of view. David has a unique position, and has to be taken by himself; but in considering the features that must be added to the picture of David in order to complete the picture of the good king, it is convenient to group Solomon with the reforming kings of Judah. We shall therefore defer for more consecutive treatment the chronicler's account of their general characters and careers. Here we shall merely gather up the suggestions of the different narratives as to the chronicler's ideal Hebrew king.

The leading points have already been indicated from the chronicler's history of David. The first and most indispensable feature is devotion to the temple at Jerusalem and the ritual of the Pentateuch. This has been abundantly illustrated from the account of Solomon. Taking the reforming kings in their order:—

Asa removed the high places which were rivals of the Temple,* renewed the altar of Jehovah, gathered the people together for a great sacrifice,† and made munificent donations to the Temple treasury.‡

Similarly Jehoshaphat took away the high places,§ and sent out a commission to teach the Law.||

Joash repaired the Temple¶; but, curiously enough, though Jehoram had restored the high places** and Joash was acting under the direction of the high-priest Jehoiada, it is not stated that the high places were done away with. This is one of the chronicler's rather numerous oversights. Perhaps, however, he expected that so obvious a reform would be taken for granted.

Amaziah was careful to observe "the law in

* xiv. 3, 5, contradicting 1 Kings xv. 14 and apparently 2 Chron. xv. 17.

† xv. 8-14, peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ xv. 18, 19.

§ xvii. 6, contradicts 1 Kings xxii. 43 and 2 Chron. xx. 33.

|| xvii. 7-9, peculiar to Chronicles.

¶ xxiv. 1-14.

** xxi. 11, peculiar to Chronicles.

the book of Moses" that "the children should not die for the fathers,"* but Amaziah soon turned away from following Jehovah. This is perhaps the reason why in his case also nothing is said about doing away with the high places.

Hezekiah had a special opportunity of showing his devotion to the Temple and the Law. The Temple had been polluted and closed by Ahaz, and its services discontinued. Hezekiah purified the Temple, reinstated the priests and Levites, and renewed the services; he made arrangements for the payment of the Temple revenues according to the provisions of the Levitical law, and took away the high places. He also held a re-opening festival and a passover with numerous sacrifices.†

Manasseh's repentance is indicated by the restoration of the Temple ritual.‡

Josiah took away the high places, repaired the Temple, made the people enter into a covenant to observe the rediscovered Law, and, like Hezekiah, held a great passover.§

The reforming kings, like David and Solomon, are specially interested in the music of the Temple and in all the arrangements that have to do with the porters and doorkeepers and other classes of Levites. Their enthusiasm for the exclusive rights of the one Temple symbolises their loyalty to the one God, Jehovah, and their hatred of idolatry.

Zeal for Jehovah and His temple is still combined with uncompromising assertion of the royal supremacy in matters of religion. The king, and not the priest, is the highest spiritual authority in the nation. Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah control the arrangements for public worship as completely as Moses or David. Solomon receives Divine communications without the intervention of either priest or prophet; he himself offers the great dedication prayer, and when he makes an end of praying, fire comes down from heaven. Under Hezekiah the civil authorities decide when the passover shall be observed: "For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month."¶ The great reforms of Josiah are throughout initiated and controlled by the king. He himself goes up to the Temple and reads in the ears of the people all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Jehovah. The chronicler still adheres to the primitive idea of the theocracy, according to which the chief, or judge, or king is the representative of Jehovah.

The title to the crown rests throughout on the grace of God and the will of the people. In Judah, however, the principle of hereditary succession prevails throughout. Athaliah is not really an exception; she reigned as the widow of a Davidic king. The double election of David by Jehovah and by Israel carried with it the election of his dynasty. The permanent rule of the house of David was secured by the Divine promise to its founder. Yet the title is not allowed to rest on mere hereditary right. Divine choice and popular recognition are recorded in the case of Solomon and other kings. "All Israel came to Shechem to make Rehoboam king," and yet revolted from

him when he refused to accept their conditions; but the obstinacy which caused the disruption "was brought about of God, that Jehovah might establish His word which He spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite."

Ahaziah, Joash, Uzziah, Josiah, Jehoahaz, were all set upon the throne by the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.* After Solomon the Divine appointment of kings is not expressly mentioned; Jehovah's control over the tenure of the throne is chiefly shown by the removal of unworthy occupants.

It is interesting to note that the chronicler does not hesitate to record that of the last three sovereigns of Judah two were appointed by foreign kings: Jehoiakim was the nominee of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt; and the last king of all, Zedekiah, was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In like manner, the Herods, the last rulers of the restored kingdom of Judah, were the nominees of the Roman emperors. Such nominations forcibly illustrate the degradations and ruin of the theocratic monarchy. But yet, according to the teaching of the prophets, Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar were tools in the hand of Jehovah; and their nomination was still an indirect Divine appointment. In the chronicler's time, however, Judah was thoroughly accustomed to receive her governors from a Persian or Greek king; and Jewish readers would not be scandalised by a similar state of affairs in the closing years of the earlier kingdom.

Thus the reforming kings illustrate the ideal kingship set forth in the history of David and Solomon: the royal authority originates in, and is controlled by, the will of God and the consent of the people; the king's highest duty is the maintenance of the worship of Jehovah; but the king and people are supreme both in Church and state.

The personal character of the good kings is also very similar to that of David and Solomon. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah are men of spiritual feeling as well as careful observers of correct ritual. None of the good kings, with the exception of Joash and Josiah, are unsuccessful in war; and good reasons are given for the exceptions. They all display administrative ability by their buildings, the organisation of the Temple services and the army, and the arrangements for the collection of the revenue, especially the dues of the priests and Levites.

There is nothing, however, to indicate that the personal charm of David's character was inherited by his descendants; but when biography is made merely a means of edification, it often loses those touches of nature which make the whole world kin, and are capable of exciting either admiration or disgust.

The later narrative affords another illustration of the absence of any sentiment of humanity towards enemies. As in the case of David, the chronicler records the cruelty of a good king as if it were quite consistent with loyalty to Jehovah. Before he turned away from following Jehovah, Amaziah defeated the Edomites and smote ten thousand of them. Others were treated like some of the Malagasy martyrs: "And other ten thousand did the children of Judah carry away alive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in

* xxv. 4.

† Chron. xxviii. 24-xxxii. mostly peculiar to Chronicles; but compare 2 Kings xviii. 4-7, which mentions the taking away of the high places.

‡ xxxiii. 16.

§ xxxiv.; xxxv.

¶ xxx. 2.

* xxii. 1; xxiii. 1-15; xxvi. 1; xxxiii. 25; xxxvi. 1.

pieces."* In this case, however, the chronicler is not simply reproducing Kings; he has taken the trouble to supplement his main authority from some other source, probably local tradition. His insertion of this verse is another testimony to the undying hatred of Israel for Edom.

But in one respect the reforming kings are sharply distinguished from David and Solomon. The record of their lives is by no means blameless, and their sins are visited by condign chastisement. They all, with the single exception of Jotham, come to a bad end. Asa consulted physicians, and was punished by being allowed to die of a painful disease.† The last event of Jehoshaphat's life was the ruin of the navy, which he had built in unholy alliance with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did very wickedly.‡ Joash murdered the prophet Zechariah, the son of the high-priest Jehoiada; his great host was routed by a small company of Syrians, and Joash himself was assassinated by his servants.§ Amaziah turned away from following Jehovah, and "brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them." He was accordingly defeated by Joash, king of Israel, and assassinated by his own people.|| Uziah insisted on exercising the priestly function of burning incense to Jehovah, and so died a leper.¶ "Even Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up in the business of ambassadors of the princes of Babylon; therefore there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Jehovah came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah." But yet the last days of Hezekiah were clouded by the thought that he was leaving the punishment of his sin as a legacy to Judah and the house of David.** Josiah refused to heed the warning sent to him by God through the king of Egypt: "He hearkened not unto the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo"; and so Josiah died like Ahab: he was wounded by the archers, carried out of the battle in his chariot, and died at Jerusalem.††

The melancholy record of the misfortunes of the good kings in their closing years is also found in the book of Kings. There too Asa in his old age was diseased in his feet, Jehoshaphat's ships were wrecked, Joash and Amaziah were assassinated, Uziah became a leper, Hezekiah was rebuked for his pride, and Josiah slain at Megiddo. But, except in the case of Hezekiah, the book of Kings says nothing about the sins which, according to Chronicles, occasioned these sufferings and catastrophes. The narrative in the book of Kings carries upon the face of it the lesson that piety is not usually rewarded with unbroken prosperity, and that a pious career does not necessarily ensure a happy deathbed. The significance of the chronicler's additions will be considered elsewhere; what concerns us here is his departure from the principles he observed in dealing with the lives of David and Solomon. They also sinned and suffered; but the chronicler omits their sins and sufferings, especially in the

case of Solomon. Why does he pursue an opposite course with other good kings and blacken their characters by perpetuating the memory of sins not mentioned in the book of Kings, instead of confining his record to the happier incidents of their career? Many considerations may have influenced him. The violent deaths of Joash, Amaziah, and Josiah could neither be ignored nor explained away. Hezekiah's sin and repentance are closely parallel to David's in the matter of the census. Although Asa's disease, Jehoshaphat's alliance with Israel, and Uziah's leprosy might easily have been omitted, yet, if some reformers must be allowed to remain imperfect, there was no imperative necessity to ignore the infirmities of the rest. The great advantage of the course pursued by the chronicler consisted in bringing out a clearly defined contrast between David and Solomon on the one hand and the reforming kings on the other. The piety of the latter is conformed to the chronicler's ideal; but the glory and devotion of the former are enhanced by the crimes and humiliation of the best of their successors. Hezekiah, doubtless, is not more culpable than David, but David's pride was the first of a series of events which terminated in the building of the Temple; while the uplifting of Hezekiah's heart was a precursor of its destruction. Besides, Hezekiah ought to have profited by David's experience.

By developing this contrast, the chronicler renders the position of David and Solomon even more unique, illustrious, and full of religious significance.

Thus as illustrations of ideal kingship the accounts of the good kings of Judah are altogether subordinate to the history of David and Solomon. While these kings of Judah remained loyal to Jehovah, they further illustrated the virtues of their great predecessors by showing how these virtues might have been exercised under different circumstances: how David would have dealt with an Ethiopian invasion and what Solomon would have done if he had found the Temple desecrated and its services stopped. But no essential feature is added to the earlier pictures.

The lapses of kings who began to walk in the law of the Lord and then fell away serve as foils to the undimmed glory of David and Solomon. Abrupt transitions within the limits of the individual lives of Asa, Joash, and Amaziah bring out the contrast between piety and apostasy with startling, dramatic effect.

We return from this brief survey to consider the significance of the life of Solomon according to Chronicles. Its relation to the life of David is summed up in the name Solomon, the Prince of peace. David is the ideal king, winning by force of arms for Israel empire and victory, security at home and tribute from abroad. Utterly subdued by his prowess, the natural enemies of Israel no longer venture to disturb her tranquillity. His successor inherits wide dominion, immense wealth, and assured peace. Solomon, the Prince of peace, is the ideal king, administering a great inheritance for the glory of Jehovah and His temple. His history in Chronicles is one of unbroken calm. He has a great army and many strong fortresses, but he never has occasion to use them. He implores Jehovah to be merciful to Israel when they suffer from the horrors of war; but he is interceding, not for his

* xxv. 11.

† xvi. 12.

‡ xx. 37.

§ xxiv. 20-27.

xxv. 14-27.

¶ xxvi. 16-23.

** xxxii. 25-33.

†† xxxv. 20-27.

own subjects, but for future generations. In his time—

"No war or battle's sound
Was heard the world around ;
The idle spear and shield were high uphung ;
The hookèd chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood ;
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng."*

Perhaps, to use a paradox, the greatest proof of Solomon's wisdom was that he asked for wisdom. He realised at the outset of his career that a wide dominion is more easily won than governed, that to use great wealth honourably requires more skill and character than are needed to amass it. To-day the world can boast half a dozen empires surpassing not merely Israel, but even Rome, in extent of dominion; the aggregate wealth of the world is far beyond the wildest dreams of the chronicler: but still the people perish for lack of knowledge. The physical and moral foulness of modern cities taints all the culture and tarnishes all the splendour of our civilisation; classes and trades, employers and employed, maim and crush one another in blind struggles to work out a selfish salvation; newly devised organisations move their unwieldy masses—

" . . . like dragons of the prime
That tare each other."

They have a giant's strength, and use it like a giant. Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers; and the world waits for the reign of the Prince of peace who is not only the wise king, but the incarnate wisdom of God.

Thus one striking suggestion of the chronicler's history of Solomon is the special need of wisdom and Divine guidance for the administration of a great and prosperous empire.

Too much stress, however, must not be laid on the twofold personality of the ideal king. This feature is adopted from the history, and does not express any opinion of the chronicler that the characteristic gifts of David and Solomon could not be combined in a single individual. Many great generals have also been successful administrators. Before Julius Cæsar was assassinated he had already shown his capacity to restore order and tranquillity to the Roman world; Alexander's plans for the civil government of his conquests were as far-reaching as his warlike ambition; Diocletian reorganised the empire which his sword had re-established; Cromwell's schemes of reform showed an almost prophetic insight into the future needs of the English people; the glory of Napoleon's victories is a doubtful legacy to France compared with the solid benefits of his internal reforms.

But even these instances, which illustrate the union of military genius and administrative ability, remind us that the assignment of success in war to one king and a reign of peace to the next is, after all, typical. The limits of human life narrow its possibilities. Cæsar's work had to be completed by Augustus; the great schemes of Alexander and Cromwell fell to the ground because no one arose to play Solomon to their David.

The chronicler has specially emphasised the indebtedness of Solomon to David. According to his narrative, the great achievement of Solomon's reign, the building of the Temple, has

* Milton, "Hymn to the Nativity"

been rendered possible by David's preparations. Quite apart from plans and materials, the chronicler's view of the credit due to David in this matter is only reasonable recognition of service rendered to the religion of Israel. Whoever provided the timber and stone, the silver and gold, for the Temple, David won for Jehovah the land and the city that were the outer courts of the sanctuary, and roused the national spirit that gave to Zion its most solemn consecration. Solomon's temple was alike the symbol of David's achievements and the coping-stone of his work.

By compelling our attention to the dependence of the Prince of Peace upon the man who "had shed much blood," the chronicler admonishes us against forgetting the price that has been paid for liberty and culture. The splendid courtiers whose "apparel" specially pleased the feminine tastes of the queen of Sheba might feel all the contempt of the superior person for David's war-worn veterans. The latter probably were more at home in the "store cities" than at Jerusalem. But without the blood and toil of these rough soldiers Solomon would have had no opportunity to exchange riddles with his fair visitor and to dazzle her admiring eyes with the glories of his temple and palaces.

The blessings of peace are not likely to be preserved unless men still appreciate and cherish the stern virtues that flourish in troubled times. If our own times become troubled, and their serenity be invaded by fierce conflict, it will be ours to remember that the rugged life of "the hold in the wilderness" and the struggles with the Philistines may enable a later generation to build its temple to the Lord and to learn the answers to "hard questions."* Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon, remind us again how the Divine work is handed on from generation to generation: Moses leads Israel through the wilderness, but Joshua brings them into the Land of Promise: David collects the materials, but Solomon builds the Temple. The settlement in Palestine and the building of the Temple were only episodes in the working out of the "one increasing purpose," but one leader and one lifetime did not suffice for either episode. We grow impatient of the scale upon which God works: we want it reduced to the limits of our human faculties and of our earthly lives; yet all history preaches patience. In our demand for Divine interventions whereby—

" . . . sudden in a minute
All is accomplished, and the work is done,"

we are very Esaus, eager to sell the birthright of the future for a mess of pottage to-day.

And the continuity of the Divine purpose is only realised through the continuity of human effort. We must indeed serve our own generation; but part of that service consists in providing that the next generation shall be trained to carry on the work, and that after David shall come Solomon—the Solomon of Chronicles, and not the Solomon of Kings—and that, if possible, Solomon shall not be succeeded by Rehoboam. As we attain this larger outlook, we shall be less tempted to employ doubtful means, which are supposed to be justified by their end; we shall be less enthusiastic for processes that bring "quick returns," but give very "small profits" in the long

* 2 Chron ix. 1.

run. Christian workers are a little too fond of spiritual jerry-building, as if sites in the kingdom of heaven were let out on ninety-nine-year leases; but God builds for eternity, and we are fellow-workers together with Him.

To complete the chronicler's picture of the ideal king, we have to add David's warlike prowess and Solomon's wisdom and splendour to the piety and graces common to both. The result is unique among the many pictures that have been drawn by historians, philosophers, and poets. It has a value of its own, because the chronicler's gifts in the way of history, philosophy, and poetry were entirely subordinated to his interest in theology; and most theologians have only been interested in the doctrine of the king when they could use it to gratify the vanity of a royal patron.

The full-length portrait in Chronicles contrasts curiously with the little vignette preserved in the book which bears the name of Solomon. There, in the oracle which King Lemuel's mother taught him, the king is simply admonished to avoid strange women and strong drink, to "judge righteously, and minister judgment to the poor and needy."*

To pass to more modern theology, the theory of the king that is implied in Chronicles has much in common with Wyclif's doctrine of dominion: they both recognise the sanctity of the royal power and its temporal supremacy, and they both hold that obedience to God is the condition of the continued exercise of legitimate rule. But the priest of Lutterworth was less ecclesiastical and more democratic than our Levite.

A more orthodox authority on the Protestant doctrine of the king would be the Thirty-nine Articles. These, however, deal with the subject somewhat slightly. As far as they go, they are in harmony with the chronicler. They assert the unqualified supremacy of the king, both ecclesiastical and civil. Even "general councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes." † On the other hand, princes are not to imitate Uzziah in presuming to exercise the priestly function of offering incense: they are not to minister God's word or sacraments.

Outside theology the ideal of the king has been stated with greater fulness and freedom, but not many of the pictures drawn have much in common with the chronicler's David and Solomon. Machiavelli's Prince and Bolingbroke's Patriot King belong to a different world; moreover, their method is philosophical, and not historical: they state a theory rather than draw a picture. Tennyson's Arthur is, what he himself calls him, an "ideal knight" rather than an ideal king. Perhaps the best parallels to David are to be found in the Cyrus of the Greek historians and philosophers and the Alfred of English story. Alfred indeed combines many of the features both of David and Solomon: he secured English unity, and was the founder of English culture and literature; he had a keen interest in ecclesiastical affairs, great gifts of administration, and much personal attractiveness. Cyrus, again, specially illustrates what we may call the posthumous fortunes of David: his name stood for the ideal of kingship with both Greeks and Persians, and in the "Cyrupædia" his life and char-

acter are made the basis of a picture of the ideal king.

Many points are of course common to almost all such pictures; they portray the king as a capable and benevolent ruler and a man of high personal character. The distinctive characteristic of Chronicles is the stress laid on the piety of the king, his care for the honour of God and the spiritual welfare of his subjects. If the practical influence of this teaching has not been altogether beneficent, it is because men have too invariably connected spiritual profit with organisation, and ceremonies, and forms of words, sound or otherwise.

But to-day the doctrine of the state takes the place of the doctrine of the king. Instead of *Cyrupædias* we have *Utopias*. We are asked sometimes to look back, not to an ideal king, but to an ideal commonwealth, to the age of the Antonines or to some happy century of English history when we are told that the human race or the English people were "most happy and prosperous"; oftener we are invited to contemplate an imaginary future. We may add to those already made one or two further applications of the chronicler's principles to the modern state. His method suggests that the perfect society will have the virtues of our actual life without its vices, and that the possibilities of the future are best divined from a careful study of the past. The devotion of his kings to the Temple symbolises the truth that the ideal state is impossible without recognition of a Divine presence and obedience to a Divine will.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WICKED KINGS.

2 CHRONICLES XXVIII., etc.

THE type of the wicked king is not worked out with any fulness in Chronicles. There are wicked kings, but no one is raised to the "bad eminence" of an evil counterpart to David; there is no anti-David, so to speak, no prototype of antichrist. The story of Ahaz, for instance, is not given at the same length and with the same wealth of detail as that of David. The subject was not so congenial to the kindly heart of the chronicler. He was not imbued with the unhappy spirit of modern realism, which loves to dwell on all that is foul and ghastly in life and character; he lingered affectionately over his heroes, and contented himself with brief notices of his villains. In so doing he was largely following his main authority: the books of Samuel and Kings. There too the stories of David and Solomon, of Elijah and Elisha, are told much more fully than those of Jeroboam and Ahab.

But the mention of these names reminds us that the chronicler's limitation of his subject to the history of Judah excludes much of the material that might have been drawn from the earlier history for a picture of the wicked king. If it had been part of the chronicler's plan to tell the story of Ahab, he might have been led to develop his material and moralise upon the king's career till the narrative assumed proportions that would have rivalled the history of David. Over against the great scene that closed David's life might have been set another, summing up in one dramatic moment the guilt and ruin of Ahab.

* Prov. xxxi. 1-9.

† Articles XXI. and XXXVII.

But these schismatic kings were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* The disobedient sons of the house of David were still children within the home, who might be rebuked and punished; but the Samaritan kings, as the chronicler might style them, were outcasts, left to the tender mercies of the dogs, and sorcerers, and murderers that were without the Holy City, Cains without any protecting mark upon their forehead.

Hence the wicked kings in Chronicles are of the house of David. Therefore the chronicler has a certain tenderness for them, partly for the sake of their great ancestor, partly because they are kings of Judah, partly because of the sanctity and religious significance of the Messianic dynasty. These kings are not Esaus, for whom there is no place of repentance. The chronicler is happy in being able to discover and record the conversion, as we should term it, of some kings whose reigns began in rebellion and apostasy. By a curious compensation, the kings who begin well end badly, and those who begin badly end well; they all tend to about the same average. We read of Rehoboam † that "when he humbled himself the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether; and, moreover, in Judah there were good things found"; the wickedness of Abijah, which is plainly set forth in the book of Kings, ‡ is ignored in Chronicles; Manasseh "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers," and turned altogether from the error of his ways §; the unfavourable judgment on Jehoahaz recorded in the book of Kings, "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done," ¶ is omitted in Chronicles.

There remain seven wicked kings of whom nothing but evil is recorded: Jehoram, Ahaziah, Ahaz, Amon, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Of these we may take Ahaz as the most typical instance. As in the cases of David and Solomon, we will first see how the chronicler has dealt with the material derived from the book of Kings; then we will give his account of the career of Ahaz; and finally, by a brief comparison of what is told of Ahaz with the history of the other wicked kings, we will try to construct the chronicler's idea of the wicked king and to deduce its lessons.

The importance of the additions made by the chronicler to the history in the book of Kings will appear later on. In his account of the attack made upon Ahaz by Rezin, king of Damascus, and Pekah, king of Israel, he emphasises the incidents most discreditably to Ahaz. The book of Kings simply states that the two allies "came up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him" ¶; Chronicles dwells upon the sufferings and losses inflicted on Judah by this invasion. The book of Kings might have conveyed the impression that the wicked king had been allowed to triumph over his enemies; Chronicles guards against this dangerous error by detailing the disasters that Ahaz brought upon his country.

The book of Kings also contains an interesting account of alterations made by Ahaz in the Temple and its furniture. By his orders the high-priest Urijah made a new brazen altar for the Temple after the pattern of an altar that Ahaz had seen in Damascus. As Chronicles narrates the closing of the Temple by Ahaz, it naturally omits these previous alterations. Moreover, Urijah appears in the book of Isaiah as a friend of the prophet, and is referred to by him as a "faithful witness."* The chronicler would not wish to perplex his readers with the problem, How could the high-priest, whom Isaiah trusted as a faithful witness, become the agent of a wicked king, and construct an altar for Jehovah after a heathen pattern?

The chronicler's story of Ahaz runs thus. This wicked king had been preceded by three good kings: Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham. Amaziah indeed had turned away from following Jehovah at the end of his reign, but Uzziah had been zealous for Jehovah throughout, not wisely, but too well; and Jotham shares with Solomon the honour of a blameless record. Without counting Amaziah's reign, king and people had been loyal to Jehovah for sixty or seventy years. The court of the good kings would be the centre of piety and devotion. Ahaz, no doubt, had been carefully trained in obedience to the law of Jehovah, and had grown up in the atmosphere of true religion. Possibly he had known his grandfather Uzziah in the days of his power and glory; but at any rate, while Ahaz was a child, Uzziah was living as a leper in his "several house," and Ahaz must have been familiar with this melancholy warning against presumptuous interference with the Divine ordinances of worship.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he came to the throne, so that he had time to profit by a complete education, and should scarcely have found opportunity to break away from its influence. His mother's name is not mentioned, so that we cannot say whether, as may have been the case with Rehoboam, some Ammonite woman led him astray from the God of his fathers. As far as we can learn from our author, Ahaz sinned against light and knowledge; with every opportunity and incentive to keep in the right path, he yet went astray.

This is a common feature in the careers of the wicked kings. It has often been remarked that the first great specialist on education failed utterly in the application of his theories to his own son. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah were the most distinguished and the most virtuous of the reforming kings, yet Jehoshaphat was succeeded by Jehoram, who was almost as wicked as Ahaz; Hezekiah's son "Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, so that they did evil more than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel"; † Josiah's son and grandsons "did evil in the sight of the Lord." ‡

Many reasons may be suggested for this too familiar spectacle: the impious son of a godly father, the bad successor of a good king. Heirs-apparent have always been inclined to head an opposition to their fathers' policy, and sometimes on their accession they have reversed that policy. When the father himself has been a zealous reformer, the interests that have been harassed by reform are eager to encourage his successor in

* Eph. ii. 12.

† 2 Chron. xii. 12, peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ 1 Kings xv. 3.

§ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11-20, peculiar to Chronicles.

¶ 2 Kings xxiii. 24.

¶ 2 Kings xvii. 5.

* Isa. viii. 2.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 5, 8, 11.

a retrograde policy; and reforming zeal is often tinged with an inconsiderate harshness that provokes the opposition of younger and brighter spirits. But, after all, this atavism in kings is chiefly an illustration of the slow growth of the higher nature in man. Practically each generation starts afresh with an unregenerate nature of its own, and often nature is too strong for education.

Moreover, a young king of Judah was subject to the evil influence of his northern neighbour. Judah was often politically subservient to Samaria, and politics and religion have always been very intimately associated. At the accession of Ahaz the throne of Samaria was filled by Pekah, whose twenty years' tenure of authority indicates ability and strength of character. It is not difficult to understand how Ahaz was led "to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel" and "to make molten images for the Baals."

Nothing is told us of the actual circumstances of these innovations. The new reign was probably inaugurated by the dismissal of Jotham's ministers and the appointment of the personal favourites of the new king. The restoration of old idolatrous cults would be a natural advertisement of a new departure in the government. So when the establishment of Christianity was a novelty in the empire, and men were not assured of its permanence, Julian's accession was accompanied by an apostasy to paganism; and later aspirants to the purple promised to follow his example. But the worship of Jehovah was not at once suppressed. He was not deposed from His throne as the Divine King of Judah; He was only called upon to share His royal authority with the Baals of the neighbouring peoples.

But although the Temple services might still be performed, the king was mainly interested in introducing and observing a variety of heathen rites. The priesthood of the Temple saw their exclusive privileges disregarded and the rival sanctuaries of the high places and the sacred trees taken under royal patronage. But the king's apostasy was not confined to the milder forms of idolatry. His weak mind was irresistibly attracted by the morbid fascination of the cruel rites of Moloch: "He burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel."

The king's devotions to his new gods were rudely interrupted. The insulted majesty of Jehovah was vindicated by two disastrous invasions. First, Ahaz was defeated by Rezin, king of Syria, who carried away a great multitude of captives to Damascus; the next enemy was one of those kings of Israel in whose idolatrous ways Ahaz had chosen to walk. The delicate flattery implied by Ahaz becoming Pekah's proselyte failed to conciliate that monarch. He too defeated the Jews with great slaughter. Amongst his warriors was a certain Zichri, whose achievements recalled the prowess of David's mighty men: he slew Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam, the ruler of the house, the Lord High Chamberlain, and Elkanah, that was next unto the king, the Prime Minister. With these notables, there perished in a single day a hundred and twenty thousand Jews, all of them valiant men. Their wives and children, to the number of two hundred thousand, were carried captive to Samaria. All these misfortunes happened to Judah "because

they had forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers."

And yet Jehovah in wrath remembered mercy. The Israelite army approached Samaria with their endless train of miserable captives, women and children, ragged and barefoot, some even naked, filthy, and footsore with forced marches, left hungry and thirsty after prisoners' scanty rations. Multiply a thousandfold the scenes depicted on Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, and you have the picture of this great slave caravan. The captives probably had no reason to fear the barbarities which the Assyrians loved to inflict upon their prisoners, but yet their prospects were sufficiently gloomy. Before them lay a life of drudgery and degradation in Samaria. The more wealthy might hope to be ransomed by their friends; others, again might be sold to the Phœnician traders, to be carried by them to the great slave marts of Nineveh and Babylon or even over sea to Greece. But in a moment all was changed. "There was a prophet of Jehovah, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army and said unto them, Behold, because Jehovah, the God of your fathers, was wroth with Judah, He hath delivered them into your hand; and ye have slain them in a rage which hath reached up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep the children of Judah and of Jerusalem for male and female slaves; but are there not even with you trespasses of your own against Jehovah your God? Now hear me therefore, and send back the captives, for the fierce wrath of Jehovah is upon you."

Meanwhile "the princes and all the congregation of Samaria" were waiting to welcome their victorious army, possibly in "the void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria." Oded's words, at any rate, had been uttered in their presence. The army did not at once respond to the appeal; the two hundred thousand slaves were the most valuable part of their spoil, and they were not eager to make so great a sacrifice. But the princes made Oded's message their own. Four heads of the children of Ephraim are mentioned by name as the spokesmen of the "congregation," the king being apparently absent on some other warlike expedition. These four were Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai. Possibly among the children of Ephraim who dwelt in Jerusalem after the Return there were descendants of these men, from whom the chronicler obtained the particulars of this incident. The princes "stood up against them that came from the war," and forbade their bringing the captives into the city. They repeated and expanded the words of the prophet: "Ye purpose that which will bring upon us a trespass against Jehovah, to add unto our sins and to our trespass, for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel." The army were either convinced by the eloquence or overawed by the authority of the prophet and the princes: "They left the captives and the spoil before all the princes and the congregation." And the four princes "rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto their brethren; then they returned to Samaria."

Apart from incidental allusions, this is the last reference in Chronicles to the Northern Kingdom. The long history of division and hostility closes with this humane recognition of the brotherhood of Israel and Judah. The sun, so to speak, did not go down upon their wrath. But the king of Israel had no personal share in this gracious act. At the first it was Jeroboam that made Israel to sin; throughout the history the responsibility for the continued division would specially rest upon the kings, and at the last there is no sign of Pekah's repentance and no prospect of his pardon.

The various incidents of the invasions of Rezin and Pekah were alike a solemn warning and an impressive appeal to the apostate king of Judah. He had multiplied to himself gods of the nations round about, and yet had been left without an ally, at the mercy of a hostile confederation, against whom his new gods either could not or would not defend him. The wrath of Jehovah had brought upon Ahaz one crushing defeat after another, and yet the only mitigation of the sufferings of Judah had also been the work of Jehovah. The returning captives would tell Ahaz and his princes how in schismatic and idolatrous Samaria a prophet of Jehovah had stood forth to secure their release and obtain for them permission to return home. The princes and people of Samaria had hearkened to his message, and the two hundred thousand captives stood there as the monument of Jehovah's compassion and of the obedient piety of Israel. Sin was to bring punishment; and yet Jehovah waited to be gracious. Wherever there was room for mercy, He would show mercy. His wrath and His compassion had alike been displayed before Ahaz. Other gods could not protect their worshippers against him; He only could deliver and restore His people. He had not even waited for Ahaz to repent before He had given him proof of His willingness to forgive.*

Such Divine goodness was thrown away upon Ahaz; there was no token of repentance, no promise of amendment; and so Jehovah sent further judgments upon the king and his unhappy people. The Edomites came and smote Judah, and carried away captives; the Philistines also invaded the cities of the lowland and of the south of Judah, and took Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, Gimzo, and their dependent villages, and dwelt in them; and Jehovah brought Judah low because of Ahaz. And the king hardened his heart yet more against Jehovah, and cast away all restraint, and trespassed sore against Jehovah. Instead of submitting himself, he sought the aid of the kings of Assyria, only to receive another proof of the vanity of all earthly help so long as he remained unconciliated to Heaven. Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, welcomed this opportunity of interfering in the affairs of Western Asia, and saw attractive prospects of levying blackmail impartially on his ally and his enemies. He came unto Ahaz, "and distressed him, but strengthened him not." These new troubles were the occasion of fresh wickedness on the part of the king: to pay the price of this worse than useless intervention, he took away a portion not only from his own treasury and from the princes, but also from the

treasury of the Temple, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Thus betrayed and plundered by his new ally, he trespassed "yet more against Jehovah, this same king Ahaz." It is almost incredible that one man could be guilty of so much sin; the chronicler is anxious that his readers should appreciate the extraordinary wickedness of this man, this same king Ahaz. In him the chastening of the Lord yielded no peaceable fruit of righteousness; he would not see that his misfortunes were sent from the offended God of Israel. With perverse ingenuity, he found in them an incentive to yet further wickedness. His pantheon was not large enough. He had omitted to worship the gods of Damascus. These must be powerful deities, whom it would be worth while to conciliate, because they had enabled the kings of Syria to overrun and pillage Judah. Therefore Ahaz sacrificed to the gods of Syria, that they might help him. "But," says the chronicler, "they were the ruin of him and of all Israel." Still Ahaz went on consistently with his policy of comprehensive eclecticism. He made Jerusalem a very Athens for altars, which were set up at every street corner; he discovered yet other gods whom it might be advisable to adore: "And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods."

Hitherto Jehovah had still received some share of the worship of this most religious king, but apparently Ahaz came to regard Him as the least powerful of his many supernatural allies. He attributed his misfortunes, not to the anger, but to the helplessness, of Jehovah. Jehovah was specially the God of Israel; if disaster after disaster fell upon His people. He was evidently less potent than Baal, or Moloch, or Rimmon. It was a useless expense to maintain the worship of so impotent a deity. Perhaps the apostate king was acting in the blasphemous spirit of the savage who flogs his idol when his prayers are not answered. Jehovah, he thought, should be punished for His neglect of the interests of Judah. "Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of Jehovah";* he had filled up the measure of his iniquities.

And thus it came to pass that in the Holy City, "which Jehovah had chosen to cause His name to dwell there," almost the only deity who was not worshipped was Jehovah. Ahaz did homage to the gods of all the nations before whom he had been humiliated; the royal sacrifices smoked upon a hundred altars, but no sweet savour of burnt offering ascended to Jehovah. The fragrance of the perpetual incense no longer filled the holy place morning and evening; the seven lamps of the golden candlestick were put out, and the Temple was given up to darkness and desolation. Ahaz had contented himself with stripping the sanctuary of its treasures; but the building itself, though closed, suffered no serious injury. A stranger visiting the city, and finding it full of idols, could not fail to notice the great pile of the Temple and to inquire what image, splendid above all others, occupied that magnificent shrine. Like Pompey, he would learn with surprise that it was not the dwelling-place of any image, but the symbol of an al-

*2 Chron. xxviii. 5-15, peculiar to Chronicles; cf. 2 Kings xvi. 5, 6.

*2 Chron. xxviii. 16-25, peculiar to Chronicles; cf. 2 Kings xvi. 7-18.

mighty and invisible presence. Even if the stranger were some Moabite worshipper of Chemosh, he would feel dismay at the wanton profanity with which Ahaz had abjured the God of his fathers and desecrated the temple built by his great ancestors. The annals of Egypt and Babylon told of the misfortunes which had befallen those monarchs who were unfaithful to their national gods. The pious heathen would anticipate disaster as the punishment of Ahaz's apostasy.

Meanwhile the ministers of the Temple shared its ruin and degradation; but they could feel the assurance that Jehovah would yet recall His people to their allegiance and manifest Himself once more in the Temple. The house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi possessed their souls in patience till the final judgment of Jehovah should fall upon the apostate. They had not long to wait: after a reign of only sixteen years, Ahaz died at the early age of thirty-six. We are not told that he died in battle or by the visitation of God. His health may have been broken by his many misfortunes, or by vicious practices that would naturally accompany his manifold idolatries; but in any case his early death would be regarded as a Divine judgment. The breath was scarcely out of his body before his religious innovations were swept away by a violent reaction. The people at once passed sentence of condemnation on his memory: "They brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel."* His successor inaugurated his reign by reopening the Temple, and brought back Judah to the obedience of Jehovah. The monuments of the impious worship of the wicked king, his multitudinous idols, and their ritual passed away like an evil dream, like "the track of a ship in the sea or a bird in the air."

The leading features of this career are common to most of the wicked kings and to the evil days of the good kings. "Walking in the ways of the kings of Israel" was the great crime of Jehoshaphat and his successors Jehoram and Ahaziah. Other kings, like Manasseh, built high places and followed after the abominations of the heathen whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. Asa's lapse into wickedness began by plundering the Temple treasury to purchase an alliance with a heathen king, the king of Syria, against whose successor Ahaz in his turn hired the king of Assyria. Amaziah adopted the gods of Edom, as Ahaz the gods of Syria, but with less excuse, for Amaziah had conquered Edom. Other crimes are recorded among the evil doings of the kings: Asa had recourse to physicians, that is, probably to magic; Jehoram slew his brethren; Joash murdered the son of his benefactor Jehoiada; but the supreme sin was disloyalty to Jehovah and the Temple, and of this sin the chronicler's brief history of Ahaz is the most striking illustration. Ahaz is the typical apostate; he hardens his heart alike against the mercy of Jehovah and against His repeated judgment. He is a very Pharaoh among the kings of Judah. The discipline that should have led to repentance is continually perverted to be the occasion of new sin, and at last the apostate dies in his iniquity. The effect of the picture is heightened by its insistence on this one sin of apostasy; other sins are illustrated and condemned elsewhere, but here the chronicler would have us concentrate our attention on

* xxviii. 27, peculiar to Chronicles.

the rise, progress, and ruin of the apostate. Indeed, this one sin implied and involved all others; the man who suppressed the worship of Jehovah, and revelled in the obscene superstitions of heathen cults, was obviously capable of any enormity. The chronicler is not indifferent to morality as compared with ritual, and he sees in the neglect of Divinely appointed ritual an indication of a character rotten through and through. In his time neglect of ritual on the part of the average man or the average king implied neglect of religion, or rather adherence to an alien and immoral faith.

Thus the supreme sin of the wicked kings naturally contrasts with the highest virtue of the good kings. The standing of both is determined by their attitude towards Jehovah. The character of the good kings is developed in greater detail than that of their wicked brethren; but we should not misrepresent the chronicler's views, if we ascribed to the wicked kings all the vices antithetic to the virtues of his royal ideal. Nevertheless the picture actually drawn fixes our attention upon their impious denial of the God of Israel. Much Church history has been written on the same principle: Constantine is a saint because he established Christianity; Julian is an incarnation of wickedness because he became an apostate; we praise the orthodox Theodosius, and blame the Arian Valens. Protestant historians have canonised Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, and have prefixed an unholy epithet to the name of their kinswoman, while Romanist writers interchange these verdicts. But underlying even such opposite judgments there is the same valid principle, the principle that was in the mind of the chronicler: that the king's relation to the highest and purest truth accessible to him, whatever that truth may be, is a just criterion of his whole character. The historian may err in applying the criterion, but its general principle is none the less sound.

For the character of the wicked nation we are not left to the general suggestions that may be derived from the wicked king. The prophets show us that it was by no vicarious condemnation that priests and people shared the ruin of their sovereign. In their pages the subject is treated from many points of view: Israel and Judah, Edom and Tyre, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, serve in their turn as models for the picture of the wicked nation. In the Apocalypse the ancient city is adapted to new circumstances, and the City of the Seven Hills takes the place of Babylon. Modern prophets have further adapted the treatment of the subject to their own times, and for the most part to their own people. With stern and uncompromising patriotism, Carlyle and Ruskin have sought righteousness for England even at the expense of its reputation: they have emphasised its sin and selfishness in order to produce repentance and reform. For other teachers the history of foreign peoples has furnished the picture of the wicked nation, and the France of the Revolution or the "unspeakable" Turk has been held up as an example of all that is abominable in national life.

Any detailed treatment of this theme in Scripture would need an exposition, not merely of Chronicles, but of the whole Bible. We may, however, make one general application of the chronicler's principle that the wicked nation is the nation that forgets God. We do not now

measure a people's religion by the number and magnificence of its priests and churches, or by the amount of money devoted to the maintenance of public worship. The most fatal symptoms of national depravity are the absence of a healthy public opinion, indifference to character in politics, neglect of education as a means of developing character, and the stifling of the spirit of brotherhood in a desperate struggle for existence. When God is thus forgotten, and the gracious influences of His Spirit are no longer recognised in public and private life, a country may well be degraded into the ranks of the wicked nations.

The perfectly general terms in which the doings and experiences of Ahaz are described facilitate the application of their warnings to the ordinary individual. His royal station only appears in the form and scale of his wickedness, which in its essence is common to him with the humblest sinner. Every young man enters, like Ahaz, upon a royal inheritance; character and career are as all-important to a peasant or a shopgirl as they are to an emperor or a queen. When a girl of seventeen or a youth of twenty succeeds to some historic throne, we are moved to think of the heavy burden of responsibility laid upon inexperienced shoulders and of the grave issues that must be determined during the swiftly passing years of their early manhood and womanhood. Alas, this heavy burden and these grave issues are but the common lot. The young sovereign is happy in the fierce light that beats upon his throne, for he is not allowed to forget the dignity and importance of life. History, with its stories of good and wicked kings, has obviously been written for his instruction; if the time be out of joint, as it mostly is, he has been born to set it right. It is all true, yet it is equally true for every one of his subjects. His lot is only the common lot set upon a hill, in the full sunlight, to illustrate, interpret, and influence lower and obscurer lives. People take such eager interest in the doings of royal families, their christenings, weddings, and funerals, because therein the common experience is, as it were, glorified into adequate dignity and importance.

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem"; but most men and women begin to reign before they are twenty. The history of Judah for those sixteen years was really determined long before Ahaz was invested with crown and sceptre. Men should all be educated to reign, to respect themselves and appreciate their opportunities. We do in some measure adopt this principle with promising lads. Their energies are stimulated by the prospect of making a fortune or a name, or the more soaring imagination dreams of a seat on the woollen sack or on one of the Front Benches. Gifted girls are also encouraged, as becomes their gifts, to achieve a brilliant marriage or a popular novel. We need to apply the principle more consistently and to recognise the royal dignity of the average life and of those whom the superior person is pleased to call commonplace people. It may then be possible to induce the ordinary young man to take a serious interest in his own future. The stress laid on the sanctity and supreme value of the individual soul has always been a vital element of evangelical teaching; like most other evangelical truths, it is capable of

deeper meaning and wider application than are commonly recognised in systematic theology.

We have kept our sovereign waiting too long on the threshold of his kingdom; his courtiers and his people are impatient to know the character and intentions of their new master. So with every heir who succeeds to his royal inheritance. The fortunes of millions may depend upon the will of some young Czar or Kaiser; the happiness of a hundred tenants or of a thousand workmen may rest on the disposition of the youthful inheritor of a wide estate or a huge factory; but none the less in the poorest cottage mother and father and friends wait with trembling anxiety to see how the boy or girl will "turn out" when they take their destinies into their own hands and begin to reign. Already perhaps some tender maiden watches in hope and fear, in mingled pride and misgiving, the rapidly unfolding character of the youth to whom she has promised to commit all the happiness of a life-time.

And to each one in turn there comes the choice of Hercules; according to the chronicler's phrase, the young king may either "do right in the eyes of Jehovah, like David his father," or he may walk "in the ways of the kings of Israel, and make molten images for the Baals."

The "right doings of David his father" may point to family traditions, which set a high standard of noble conduct for each succeeding generation. The teaching and influence of the pious Jotham are represented by the example of godliness set in many a Christian home, by the wise and loving counsel of parents and friends. And Ahaz has many modern parallels, sons and daughters upon whom every good influence seems spent in vain. They are led astray into the ways of the kings of Israel, and make molten images for the Baals. There were several dynasties of the kings of Israel, and the Baals were many and various; there are many tempters who deliberately or unconsciously lay snares for souls, and they serve different powers of evil. Israel was for the most part more powerful, wealthy, and cultured than Judah. When Ahaz came to the throne as a mere youth, Pekah was apparently in the prime of life and the zenith of power. He is no inapt symbol of what the modern tempter at any rate desires to appear: the showy, pretentious man of the world, who parades his knowledge of life, and impresses the inexperienced youth with his shrewdness and success, and makes his victim eager to imitate him, to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel.

Moreover, the prospect of making molten images for the Baals is an insidious temptation. Ahaz perhaps found the decorous worship of the one God dull and monotonous. Baals mean new gods and new rites, with all the excitement of novelty and variety. Jotham may not have realised that this youth of twenty was a man; the heir-apparent may have been treated as a child and left too much to the women of the harem. Responsible activity might have saved Ahaz. The Church needs to recognise that healthy, vigorous youth craves interesting occupation and even excitement. If a father wishes to send his son to the devil, he cannot do better than make that son's life, both secular and religious, a routine of monotonous drudgery. Then any pinchbeck king of Israel will seem a marvel of wit and good fellowship, and the making of molten images a most pleasing diversion. A molten image is something solid, permanent, and con-

spicuous, a standing advertisement of the enterprise and artistic taste of the maker; he engraves his name on the pedestal, and is proud of the honourable distinction. Many of our modern molten images are duly set forth in popular works, for instance the reputation for impure life, or hard drinking, or reckless gambling, to achieve which some men have spent their time, and money, and toil. Other molten images are dedicated to another class of Baals: Mammon the respectable and Belial the polite.

The next step in the history of Ahaz is also typical of many a rake's progress. The king of Israel, in whose ways he has walked, turns upon him and plunders him; the experienced man of the world gives his pupil painful proof of his superiority, and calls in his confederates to share the spoil. Now surely the victim's eyes will be opened to the life he is leading and the character of his associates. By no means. Ahaz has been conquered by Syria, and therefore he will worship the gods of Syria, and he will have a confederate of his own in the Assyrian king. The victim tries to master the arts by which he has been robbed and ill-treated; he will become as unscrupulous as his masters in wickedness. He seeks the profit and distinction of being the accomplice of bold and daring sinners, men as pre-eminent in evil as Tilgath-pileser in Western Asia; and they, like the Assyrian king, take his money and accept his flattery; they use him and then cast him off more humiliated and desperate than ever. He sinks into a prey of meaner scoundrels: the Edomites and Philistines of fast life; and then, in his extremity, he builds new high places and sacrifices to more new gods; he has recourse to all the shifty expedients and sordid superstitions of the devotees of luck and chance.

All this while he has still paid some external homage to religion; he has observed the conventions of honour and good breeding. There have been services, as it were, in the temple of Jehovah. Now he begins to feel that this deference has not met with an adequate reward; he has been no better treated than the flagrantly disreputable: indeed, these men have often got the better of him. "It is vain to serve God; what profit is there in keeping His charge and in walking mournfully before the Lord of hosts? The proud are called happy; they that work wickedness are built up; they tempt God, and are delivered." His moods vary; and, with reckless inconsistency, he sometimes derides religion as worthless and unmeaning, and sometimes seeks to make God responsible for his sins and misfortunes. At one time he says he knows all about religion and has seen through it; he was brought up to pious ways, and his mature judgment has shown him that piety is a delusion; he will no longer countenance its hypocrisy and cant: at another time he complains that he has been exposed to special temptations and has not been provided with special safeguards; the road that leads to life has been made too steep and narrow, and he has been allowed without warning and remonstrance to tread "the primrose path that leads to the everlasting bonfire"; he will cast off altogether the dull formalities and irksome restraints of religion; he will work wickedness with a proud heart and a high hand. His happiness and success have been hindered by pedantic scruples; now he will be built up and delivered from his troubles. He gets rid of the

few surviving relics of the old honourable life. The service of prayer and praise ceases; the lamp of truth is put out; the incense of holy thought no longer perfumes the soul; and the temple of the Spirit is left empty, and dark, and desolate.

At last, in what should be the prime of manhood, the sinner, broken-hearted, worn out in mind and body, sinks into a dishonoured grave.

The career and fate of Ahaz may have other parallels besides this, but it is sufficiently clear that the chronicler's picture of the wicked king is no mere antiquarian study of a vanished past. It lends itself with startling facility to illustrate the fatal downward course of any man who, entering on the royal inheritance of human life, allies himself with the powers of darkness and finally becomes their slave.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRIESTS.

THE Israelite priesthood must be held to include the Levites. Their functions and status differed from those of the house of Aaron in degree, and not in kind. They formed a hereditary caste set apart for the services of the sanctuary, and as such they shared the revenues of the Temple with the sons of Aaron. The priestly character of the Levites is more than once implied in Chronicles. After the disruption, we are told that "the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to Rehoboam," because "Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not exercise the priest's office unto Jehovah." On an emergency, as at Hezekiah's great feast at the reopening of the Temple, the Levites might even discharge priestly functions. Moreover, the chronicler seems to recognise the priestly character of the whole tribe of Levi by retaining in a similar connection the old phrase "the priests the Levites."*

The relation of the Levites to the priests, the sons of Aaron, was not that of laymen to clergy, but of an inferior clerical order to their superiors. When Charlotte Brontë has occasion to devote a chapter to curates, she heads it "Levitical." The Levites, again, like deacons in the Church of England, were forbidden to perform the most sacred ritual of Divine service. Technically their relation to the sons of Aaron might be compared to that of deacons to priests or of priests to bishops. From the point of view of numbers,† revenues, and social standing, the sons of Aaron might be compared to the dignitaries of the Church: archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, deans, and incumbents of livings with large incomes and little work; while the Levites would correspond to the more moderately paid and fully occupied clergy. Thus the nature of the distinction between the priests and the Levites shows that they were essentially only two grades of the same order; and this corresponds roughly to what has been generally denoted by the term "priesthood." Priesthood, however, had a more limited meaning in Israel than in later times. In some branches of the Christian Church, the priests exercise or claim to exercise functions

* 2 Chron. xi. 13, 14, xxix. 34, xxx. 27, all peculiar to Chronicles. In xxx. 27 the text is doubtful; many authorities have "the priests and the Levites."

† *I. e.*, in the view given us by the chronicler of the period of the monarchy, after the Return the priests were far more numerous than the Levites.

which in Israel belonged to the prophets or the king.

Before considering the central and essential idea of the priest as a minister of public worship, we will notice some of his minor duties. We have seen that the sanctity of civil government is emphasised by the religious supremacy of the king; the same truth is also illustrated by the fact that the priests and Levites were sometimes the king's officers for civil affairs. Under David, certain Levites of Hebron are spoken of as having the oversight of all Israel, both east and west of Jordan, not only "for all the business of Jehovah," but also "for the service of the king."* The business of the law-courts was recognised by Jehoshaphat as the judgment of Jehovah, and accordingly amongst the judges there were priests and Levites.† Similarly the mediæval governments often found their most efficient and trustworthy administrators in the bishops and clergy, and were glad to reinforce their secular authority by the sanction of the Church; and even to-day bishops sit in Parliament, incumbents preside over vestries, and sometimes act as county magistrates. But the interest of religion in civil government is most manifest in the moral influence exercised unofficially by earnest and public-spirited ministers of all denominations.

The chronicler refers more than once to the educational work of the priests, and especially of the Levites. The English version probably gives his real meaning when it attributes to him the phrase "teaching priest."‡ Jehoshaphat's educational commission was largely composed of priests and Levites, and Levites are spoken of as scribes. Jewish education was largely religious, and naturally fell into the hands of the priesthood, just as the learning of Egypt and Babylon was chiefly in the hands of priests and magi. The Christian ministry maintained the ancient traditions; the monasteries were the homes of mediæval learning, and till recently England and Scotland mainly owed their schools to the Churches, and almost all schoolmasters of any position were in holy orders—priests and Levites. Under our new educational system the free choice of the people places many ministers of religion on the school boards.

The next characteristic of the priesthood is not so much in accordance with Christian theory and practice. The house of Aaron and the tribe Levi were a Church militant in a very literal sense. In the beginning of their history the tribe of Levi earned the blessing of Jehovah by the pious zeal with which they flew to arms in His cause and executed His judgment upon their guilty fellow-countrymen.§ Later on, when "Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor, and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel,"|| then stood up Phinehas, "the ancestor of the house of Zadok," and executed judgment.

"And so the plague was stayed,
And that was counted unto him for righteousness
Unto all generations for evermore."¶

But the militant character of the priesthood was not confined to its early history. Amongst

those who "came armed for war to David to Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of Jehovah," were four thousand six hundred of the children of Levi and three thousand seven hundred of the house of Aaron, "and Zadok, a young man mighty of valour, and twenty-two captains of his father's house."* "The third captain of David's army for the third month was Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest."†

David's Hebronite overseers were all "mighty men of valour." When Judah went out to war, the trumpets of the priests gave the signal for battle ‡; when the high-priest Jehoiada recovered the kingdom of Joash, the Levites compassed the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand §; when Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, "every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon," || and amongst the rest the priests. Later on, when Jehovah delivered Israel from the hand of Antiochus Epiphanes, the priestly family of the Maccabees, in the spirit of their ancestor Phinehas, fought and died for the Law and the Temple. There were priestly soldiers as well as priestly generals, for we read how "at that time certain priests, desirous to show their valour, were slain in battle, for that they went out to fight inadvisedly."¶ In the Jewish war the priest Josephus was Jewish commander in Galilee.

Christianity has aroused a new sentiment with regard to war. We believe that the servant of the Lord must not strive in earthly battles. Arms may be lawful for the Christian citizen, but it is felt to be unseemly that the ministers who are the ambassadors of the Prince of Peace should themselves be men of blood. Even in the Middle Ages fighting prelates like Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, were felt to be exceptional anomalies; and the prince-bishops and electoral archbishops were often ecclesiastics only in name. To-day the Catholic Church in France resents the conscription of its seminarists as an act of vindictive persecution.

And yet the growth of Christian sentiment in favour of peace has not prevented the occasional combination of the soldier and the ecclesiastic. If Islam has had its armies of dervishes, Cyril's monks fought for orthodoxy at Alexandria and at Constantinople with all the ferocity of wild beasts. The Crusaders, the Templars, the Knights of St. John, were in varying degrees partly priests and partly soldiers. Cromwell's Ironsides, when they were wielding carnal weapons in their own defence or in any other good cause, were as expert as any Levites at exhortations and psalms and prayers; and in our own day certain generals and admirals are fond of playing the amateur ecclesiastic. In this, as in so much else, while we deny the form of Judaism, we retain its spirit. Havelock and Gordon were no unworthy successors of the Maccabees.

The characteristic function, however, of the Jewish priesthood was their ministry in public worship, in which they represented the people before Jehovah. In this connection public worship does not necessarily imply that the public

* 1 Chron. xxvi. 30-32.

† 1 Chron. xix. 4-11.

‡ 2 Chron. xv. 3. In the older literature the phrase would bear a more special and technical meaning.

§ Exod. xxxii. 26-35.

|| Num. xxv. 3.

¶ Psalm cvi. 30, 31.

* 1 Chron. xii. 23-28.

† 1 Chron. xxvii. 5; cf., however, R. V. marg.

‡ 2 Chron. xiii. 12.

§ 2 Chron. xxiii. 7. All the passages referred to in this paragraph are peculiar to Chronicles.

|| Neh. iv. 17.

¶ 1 Macc. v. 67.

were present, or that the worship in question was the united act of a great assembly. Such worshipping assemblies were not uncommon, especially at the feasts; but ordinary public worship was worship on behalf of the people, not by the people. The priests and Levites were part of an elaborate system of symbolic ritual. Worshippers might gather in the Temple courts, but the Temple itself was not a place in which public meetings for worship were held, and the people were not admitted into it. The Temple was Jehovah's house, and His presence there was symbolised by the Ark. In this system of ritual the priests and Levites represented Israel; their sacrifices and ministrations were the acceptable offerings of the nation to God. If the sacrifices were duly offered by the priests "according to all that was written in the law of Jehovah, and if the priests with trumpets and the Levites with psalteries, and harps, and cymbals duly ministered before the ark of Jehovah to celebrate, and thank, and praise Jehovah, the God of Israel," then the Divine service of Israel was fully performed. The whole people could not be regularly present at a single sanctuary, nor would they be adequately represented by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and casual visitors from the rest of the country. Three times a year the nation was fully and naturally represented by those who came up to the feasts, but usually the priests and Levites stood in their place.

When an assembly gathered for public worship at a feast or any other time, the priests and Levites expressed the devotion of the people. They performed the sacrificial rites, they blew the trumpets and played upon the psalteries, and harps, and cymbals, and sang the praises of Jehovah. The people were dismissed by the priestly blessing. When an individual offered a sacrifice as an act of private worship, the assistance of the priests and Levites was still necessary. At the same time the king as well as the priesthood might lead the people in praise and prayer, and the Temple psalmody was not confined to the Levitical choir. When the Ark was brought away from Kirjath-jearim, "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, even with songs, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets"; and when at last the Ark had been safely housed in Jerusalem, and the due sacrifices had all been offered, David dismissed the people in priestly fashion by blessing them in the name of Jehovah.* At the two solemn assemblies which celebrated the beginning and the close of the great enterprise of building the Temple, public prayer was offered, not by the priests, but by David† and Solomon.‡ Similarly Jehoshaphat led the prayers of the Jews when they gathered to seek deliverance from the invading Moabites and Ammonites. Hezekiah at his great passover both exhorted the people and interceded for them, and Jehovah accepted his intercession; but on this occasion, when the festival was over, it was not the king, but "the priests the Levites,"§ who "arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even unto heaven." In the descriptions of Hezekiah's and Josiah's festivals, the orchestra and choir, of course, are busy with the music and singing;

otherwise the main duty of the priests and Levites is to sacrifice. In his graphic account of Josiah's passover, the chronicler no doubt reproduces on a larger scale the busy scenes in which he himself had often taken part. The king, the princes, and the chiefs of the Levites had provided between them thirty-seven thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three thousand eight hundred oxen for sacrifices; and the resources of the establishment of the Temple were taxed to the utmost. "So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites by the courses, according to the king's commandment. And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of their hand, and the Levites flayed the sacrifices. And they removed the burnt offerings, that they might give them according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the children of the people to offer unto Jehovah, as it is written in the law of Moses; and so they did with the oxen. And they roasted the passover according to the ordinance; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, and caldrons, and pans, and carried them quickly to all the children of the people. And afterward they prepared for themselves and for the priests, because the priests the sons of Aaron were busied in offering the burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests the sons of Aaron. And the singers were in their place, and the porters were at their several gates; they needed not to depart from their service, for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. So all the service of Jehovah was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of Jehovah."* Thus even in the accounts of great public gatherings for worship the main duty of the priests and Levites is to perform the sacrifices. The music and singing naturally fall into their hands, because the necessary training is only possible to a professional choir. Otherwise the now symbolic portions of the service, prayer, exhortation, and blessing, were not exclusively reserved to ecclesiastics.

The priesthood, like the Ark, the Temple, and the ritual, belonged essentially to the system of religious symbolism. This was their peculiar domain, into which no outsider might intrude. Only the Levites could touch the Ark. When the unhappy Uzzah "put forth his hand to the Ark," "the anger of Jehovah was kindled against him; and he smote Uzzah so that he died there before God."† The king might offer up public prayer; but when Uzziah ventured to go into the Temple to burn incense upon the altar of incense, leprosy broke forth in his forehead, and the priests thrust him out quickly from the Temple.‡

Thus the symbolic and representative character of the priesthood and ritual gave the sacrifices and other ceremonies a value in themselves, apart alike from the presence of worshippers and the feelings or "intention" of the officiating minister. They were the provision made by Israel for the expression of its prayer, its penitence and thanksgiving. When sin had estranged Jehovah from His people, the sons of Aaron made atonement for Israel; they performed the Divinely appointed ritual by which the nation made submission to its offended King and cast itself

* 1 Chron. xiii. 8; xvi. 2.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 10-19.

‡ 2 Chron. vi.

§ 2 Chron. xx. 4-13; xxx. 6-9, 18-21, 27.

* 2 Chron. xxxv.

† 1 Chron. xiii. 10.

‡ 2 Chron. xxvi. 16-23.

upon His mercy. The Jewish sacrifices had features which have survived in the sacrifice of the Mass, and the multiplication of sacrifices arose from motives similar to those that lead to the offering up of many masses.

One would expect, as has happened in the Christian Church, that the ministrants of the symbolic ritual would annex the other acts of public worship, not only praise, but also prayer and exhortation. Considerations of convenience would suggest such an amalgamation of functions; and among the priests, while the more ambitious would see in preaching a means of extending their authority, the more earnest would be anxious to use their unique position to promote the spiritual life of the people. Chronicles, however, affords few traces of any such tendency; and the great scene in the book of Nehemiah in which Ezra and the Levites expound the Law had no connection with the Temple and its ritual. The development of the Temple service was checked by its exclusive privileges; it was simply impossible that the single sanctuary should continue to provide for all the religious wants of the Jews, and thus supplementary and inferior places of worship grew up to appropriate the non-ritual elements of service. Probably even in the chronicler's time the division of religious services between the Temple and the synagogue had already begun, with the result that the representative and symbolic character of the priesthood is almost exclusively emphasised.

The representative character of the priesthood has another aspect. Strictly the priest represented the nation before Jehovah; but in doing so it was inevitable that he should also in some measure represent Jehovah to the nation. He could not be the channel of worship offered to God without being also the channel of Divine grace to man. From the priest the worshipper learnt the will of God as to correct ritual, and received the assurance that the atoning sacrifice was duly accepted. The high-priest entered within the veil to make atonement for Israel; he came forth as the bearer of Divine forgiveness and renewed grace, and as he blessed the people he spoke in the name of Jehovah. We have been able to discern the presence of these ideas in Chronicles, but they are not very conspicuous. The chronicler was not a layman; he was too familiar with priests to feel any profound reverence for them. On the other hand he was not himself a priest, but was specially preoccupied with the musicians, the Levites, and the door-keepers; so that probably he does not give us an adequate idea of the relative dignity of the priests and the honour in which they were held by the people. Organists and choirmasters, it is said, seldom take an exalted view of their minister's office.

The chronicler deals more fully with a matter in which priests and Levites were alike interested: the revenues of the Temple. He was doubtless aware of the bountiful provision made by the Law for his order, and loved to hold up this liberality of kings, princes, and people in ancient days for his contemporaries to admire and imitate. He records again and again the tens of thousands of sheep and oxen provided for sacrifice, not altogether unmindful of the rich dues that must have accrued to the priests out of all this abundance; he tells us how Hezekiah first set the good example of appointing "a portion of his substance for the burnt offerings,"

and then "commanded the people that dwelt at Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites that they might give themselves to the law of the Lord. And as soon as the commandment came abroad the children of Israel gave in abundance the first-fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly."* These were the days of old, the ancient years when the offering of Judah and Jerusalem was pleasant to Jehovah; when the people neither dared nor desired to offer on God's altar a scanty tale of blind, lame, and sick victims; when the tithes were not kept back, and there was meat in the house of God †; when, as Hezekiah's high-priest testified, they could eat and have enough and yet leave plenty. ‡ The manner in which the chronicler tells the tale of ancient abundance suggests that his days were like the days of Malachi. He was no pampered ecclesiastic, revelling in present wealth and luxury, but a man who suffered hard times, and looked back wistfully to the happier experiences of his predecessors.

Let us now restore the complete picture of the chronicler's priest from his scattered references to the subject. The priest represents the nation before Jehovah, and in a less degree represents Jehovah to the nation; he leads their public worship, especially at the great festal gatherings; he teaches the people the Law. The high character, culture, and ability of the priests and Levites occasion their employment as judges and in other responsible civil offices. If occasion required, they could show themselves mighty men of valour in their country's wars. Under pious kings, they enjoyed ample revenues which gave them independence, added to their importance in the eyes of the people, and left them at leisure to devote themselves exclusively to their sacred duties.

In considering the significance of this picture, we can pass over without special notice the exercise by priests and Levites of the functions of leadership in public worship, teaching, and civil government. They are not essential to the priesthood, but are entirely consistent with the tenure of the priestly office, and naturally become associated with it. Warlike prowess was certainly no part of the priesthood; but, whatever may be true of Christian ministers, it is difficult to charge the priests of the Lord of hosts with inconsistency because, like Jehovah Himself, they were men of war § and went forth to battle in the armies of Israel. When a nation was continually fighting for its very existence, it was impossible for one tribe out of the twelve to be non-combatant.

With regard to the representative character of the priests, it would be out of place here to enter upon the burning questions of sacerdotalism; but we may briefly point out the permanent truth underlying the ancient idea of the priesthood. The ideal spiritual life in every Church is one of direct fellowship between God and the believer.

"Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit
can meet;
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and
feet."

And yet a man may be truly religious and not realise this ideal, or only realise it very imper-

* 2 Chron. xxxi. 3-5.

† Mal. i. 8; iii. 4, 10.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxi. 10.

§ Exod. xv. 3.

fectly. The gift of an intense and real spiritual life may belong to the humblest and poorest, to men of little intellect and less learning; but, none the less, it is not within the immediate reach of every believer, or indeed of any believer at every time. The descendants of Mr. Littlefaith and Mr. Ready-to-halt are amongst us still, and there is no immediate prospect of their race becoming extinct. Times come when we are all glad to put ourselves under the safe conduct of Mr. Great-heart. There are many whose prayers seem to themselves too feebly winged to rise to the throne of grace; they are encouraged and helped when their petitions are borne upwards on the strong pinions of another's faith. George Eliot has pictured the Florentines as awed spectators of Savonarola's audiences with Heaven. To a congregation sometimes the minister's prayers are a sacred and solemn spectacle; his spiritual feeling is beyond them; he intercedes for blessings they neither desire nor understand; they miss the heavenly vision which stirs his soul. He is not their spokesman, but their priest; he has entered the holy place, bearing with him the sins that crave forgiveness, the fears that beg for deliverance, the hopes that yearn to be fulfilled. Though the people may remain in the outer court, yet they are fully assured that he has passed into the very presence of God. They listen to him as to one who has had actual speech with the King and received the assurance of His goodwill towards them. When the vanguard of the Ten Thousand first sighted the Euxine, the cry of "Thalassa! Thalassa!" ("The sea! the sea!") rolled backward along the line of march; the rearguard saw the long-hoped-for sight with the eyes of the pioneers. Much unnecessary self-reproach would be avoided if we accepted this as one of God's methods of spiritual education, and understood that we all have in a measure to experience this discipline in humanity. The priesthood of the believer is not merely his right to enter for himself into the immediate presence of God: it becomes his duty and privilege to represent others. But times will also come when he himself will need the support of a priestly intercession in the Divine presence-chamber, when he will seek out some one of quick sympathy and strong faith and say, "Brother, pray for me." Apart from any ecclesiastical theory of the priesthood, we all recognise that there are God-ordained priests, men and women, who can inspire dull souls with a sense of the Divine presence and bring to the sinful and the struggling the assurance of Divine forgiveness and help. If one in ten among the official priests of the historic Churches had possessed these supreme gifts, the world would have accepted the most extravagant sacerdotalism without a murmur. As it is, every minister, every one who leads the worship of a congregation, assumes for the time being functions and should possess the corresponding qualifications. In his prayers he speaks for the people; he represents them before God; on their behalf he enters into the Divine presence; they only enter with him, if, as their spokesman and representative, he has grasped their feelings and raised them to the level of Divine fellowship. He may be an untutored labourer in his working garments; but if he can do this, this spiritual gift makes him a priest of God. But this Christian priesthood is not confined to public service; as the priest offered sacrifice for the individual Jew, so the man of

spiritual sympathies helps the individual to draw near his Maker. "To pray with people" is a well-known ministry of Christian service, and it involves this priestly function of presenting another's prayers to God. This priesthood for individuals is exercised by many a Christian who has no gifts of public utterance.

The ancient priest held a representative position in a symbolic ritual, a position partly independent of his character and spiritual powers. Where symbolic ritual is best suited for popular needs, there may be room for a similar priesthood to-day. Otherwise the Christian priesthood is required to represent the people not in symbol, but in reality, to carry not the blood of dead victims into a material Holy of holies, but living souls into the heavenly temple.

There remains one feature of the Jewish priestly system upon which the chronicler lays great stress: the endowments and priestly dues. In the case of the high-priest and the Levites, whose whole time was devoted to sacred duties, it was obviously necessary that those who served the altar should live by the altar. The same principle would apply, but with much less force, to the twenty-four courses of priests, each of which in its turn officiated at the Temple. But, apart from the needs of the priesthood, their representative character demanded that they should be able to maintain a certain state. They were the ambassadors of Israel to Jehovah. Nations have always been anxious that the equipment and suite of their representative at a foreign court should be worthy of their power and wealth; moreover, the splendour of an embassy should be in proportion to the rank of the sovereign to whom it is accredited. In former times, when the social symbols were held of more account, a first-rate power would have felt itself insulted if asked to receive an envoy of inferior rank, attended by only a meagre train. Israel, by her lavish endowment of the priesthood, consulted her own dignity and expressed her sense of the homage due to Jehovah. The Jews could not express their devotion in the same way as other nations. They had to be content with a single sanctuary, and might not build a multitude of magnificent temples or adorn their cities with splendid, costly statues in honour of God. There were limits to their expenditure upon the sacrifices and buildings of the Temple; but the priesthood offered a large opportunity for pious generosity. The chronicler felt that loyal enthusiasm to Jehovah would always use this opportunity, and that the priests might consent to accept the distinction of wealth and splendour for the honour alike of Israel and Jehovah. Their dignity was not personal to themselves, but rather the livery of a self-effacing servitude. For the honour of the Church, Thomas a Becket kept up a great establishment, appeared in his robes of office, and entertained a crowd of guests with luxurious fare; while he himself wore a hair shirt next his skin and fasted like an ascetic monk. When the Jews stinted the ritual or the ministrants of Jehovah, they were doing what they could to put Him to open shame before the nations. Julian's experience in the grove of Daphne at Antioch was a striking illustration of the collapse of paganism: the imperial champion of the ancient gods must have felt his heart sink within him when he was welcomed to that once splendid sanctuary by one shabby priest dragging a solitary and reluctant goose to the deserted

altar. Similarly Malachi saw that Israel's devotion to Jehovah was in danger of dying out when men chose the refuse of their flocks and herds and offered them grudgingly at the shrine.

The application of these principles leads directly to the question of a paid ministry; but the connection is not so close as it appears at first sight, nor are we yet in possession of all the data which the chronicler furnishes for its discussion. Priestly duties form an essential, but not predominant, part of the work of most Christian ministers. Still the loyal believer must always be anxious that the buildings, the services, and the men which, for himself and for the world, represent his devotion to Christ, should be worthy of their high calling. But his ideas of the symbolism suitable for spiritual realities are not altogether those of the chronicler: he is less concerned with number, size, and weight, with tens of thousands of sheep and oxen, vast quantities of stone and timber, brass and iron, and innumerable talents of gold and silver. Moreover, in this special connection the secondary priestly function of representing God to man has been expressly transferred by Christ to the least of His brethren. Those who wish to honour God with their substance in the person of His earthly representatives are enjoined to seek for them in hospitals, and workhouses, and prisons, to find these representatives in the hungry, the thirsty, the friendless, the naked, the captives. No doubt Christ is dishonoured when those who dwell in "houses of cedar" are content to worship Him in a mean, dirty church, with a half-starved minister; but the most disgraceful proof of the Church's disloyalty to Christ is to be seen in the squalor and misery of men, and women, and children whose bodies were ordained of God to be the temples of His Holy Spirit.

This is only one among many illustrations of the truth that in Christ the symbolism of religion took a new departure. His Church enjoys the spiritual realities prefigured by the Jewish temple and its ministry. Even where Christian symbols are parallel to those of Judaism, they are less conventional and richer in their direct spiritual suggestiveness.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROPHETS.

ONE remarkable feature of Chronicles as compared with the book of Kings is the greater interest shown by the former in the prophets of Judah. The chronicler, by confining his attention to the Southern Kingdom, was compelled to omit almost all reference to Elijah and Elisha, and thus excluded from his work some of the most thrilling chapters in the history of the prophets of Israel. Nevertheless the prophets as a whole play almost as important a part in Chronicles as in the book of Kings. Compensation is made for the omission of the two great northern prophets by inserting accounts of several prophets whose messages were addressed to the kings of Judah.

The chronicler's interest in the prophets was very different from the interest he took in the priests and Levites. The latter belonged to the institutions of his own time, and formed his own immediate circle. In dealing with their past, he was reconstructing the history of his own order;

he was able to illustrate and supplement from observation and experience the information afforded by his sources.

But when the chronicler wrote, prophets had ceased to be a living institution in Judah. The light that had shone so brightly in Isaiah and Jeremiah burned feebly in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and then went out. Not long after the chronicler's time the failure of prophecy is expressly recognised. The people whose synagogues have been burnt up complain,—

"We see not our signs;
There is no more any prophet."*

When Judas Maccabæus appointed certain priests to cleanse the Temple after its pollution by the Syrians, they pulled down the altar of burnt offerings because the heathen had defiled it, and laid up the stones in the mountain of the Temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them.† This failure of prophecy was not merely brief and transient. It marked the disappearance of the ancient order of prophets. A parallel case shows how the Jews had become aware that the high-priest no longer possessed the special gifts connected with the Urim and Thummim. When certain priests could not find their genealogies, they were forbidden "to eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim."‡ We have no record of any subsequent appearance of "a priest with Urim and with Thummim" or of any prophet of the old order.

Thus the chronicler had never seen a prophet; his conception of the personality and office of the prophet was entirely based upon ancient literature, and he took no professional interest in the order. At the same time he had no prejudice against them; they had no living successors to compete for influence and endowments with the priests and Levites. Possibly the Levites, as the chief religious teachers of the people, claimed some sort of apostolic succession from the prophets; but there are very slight grounds for any such theory. The chronicler's information on the whole subject was that of a scholar with a taste for antiquarian research.

Let us briefly examine the part played by the prophets in the history of Judah as given by Chronicles. We have first, as in the book of Kings, the references to Nathan and Gad: they make known to David the will of Jehovah as regards the building of the Temple and the punishment of David's pride in taking the census of Israel. David unhesitatingly accepts their messages as the word of Jehovah. It is important to notice that when Nathan is consulted about building the Temple he first answers, apparently giving a mere private opinion, "Do all that is in thine heart, for God is with thee"; but when "the word of God comes" to him, he retracts his former judgment and forbids David to build the Temple. Here again the plan of the chronicler's work leads to an important omission: his silence as to the murder of Uriah prevents him from giving the beautiful and instructive account on the way in which Nathan rebuked the guilty king. Later narratives exhibit other prophets in the act of rebuking most of the kings of Judah.

* Psalm lxxiv. 3, 6. This psalm is commonly regarded as Maccabæan, but may be as early as the chronicler or even earlier.

† 1 Macc. iv. 46.

‡ Ezra ii. 63.

but none of these incidents are equally striking and pathetic. At the end of the histories of David and of most of the later kings we find notes which apparently indicate that, in the chronicler's time, the prophets were credited with having written the annals of the kings with whom they were contemporary. In connection with Hezekiah's reformation we are incidentally told that Nathan and Gad were associated with David in making arrangements for the music of the Temple: "He set the Levites in the house of Jehovah, with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was of Jehovah by His prophets."*

In the account of Solomon's reign, the chronicler omits the interview of Ahijah the Shilonite with Jeroboam, but refers to it in the history of Rehoboam. From this point, in accordance with his general plan, he omits almost all missions of prophets to the northern kings.

In Rehoboam's reign, we have recorded, as in the book of Kings, a message from Jehovah by Shemaiah forbidding the king and his two tribes of Judah and Benjamin to attempt to compel the northern tribes to return to their allegiance to the house of David. Later on, when Shishak invaded Judah, Shemaiah was commissioned to deliver to the king and princes the message, "Thus saith Jehovah: Ye have forsaken Me; therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak." † But when they repeated and humbled themselves before Jehovah, Shemaiah announced to them the mitigation of their punishment.

Asa's reformation was due to the inspired exhortations of a prophet called both Oded and Azariah the son of Oded. Later on Hanani the seer rebuked the king for his alliance with Benhadad, king of Syria. "Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in the prison-house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing." ‡

Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab and his consequent visit to Samaria enabled the chronicler to introduce from the book of Kings the striking narrative of Micaiah the son of Imlah; but this alliance with Israel earned for the king the rebukes of Jehu the son of Hanani the seer and Eliezar the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah. However, on the occasion of the Moabite and Ammonite invasion Jehoshaphat and his people received the promise of Divine deliverance from "Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah the Levite, of the sons of Asaph." §

The punishment of the wicked king Jehoram was announced to him by "a writing from Elijah the prophet." ¶ His son Ahaziah apparently perished without any prophetic warning; but when Joash and his princes forsook the house of Jehovah and served the Asherim and the idols, "He sent prophets to them to bring them again to Jehovah," among the rest Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest. Joash turned a deaf ear to the message, and put the prophet to death. ¶¶

When Amaziah bowed down before the gods of Edom and burned incense unto them, Jehovah

sent unto him a prophet whose name is not recorded. His mission failed, like that of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada; and Amaziah, like Joash, showed no respect for the person of the messenger of Jehovah. In this case the prophet escaped with his life. He began to deliver his message, but the king's patience soon failed, and he said unto the prophet, "Have we made thee of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldst thou be smitten?" The prophet, we are told, "forbare"; but his forbearance did not prevent his adding one brief and bitter sentence: "I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this and hast not hearkened unto my counsel."* Then apparently he departed in peace and was not smitten.

We have now reached the period of the prophets whose writings are extant. We learn from the headings of their works that Isaiah saw his "vision," and that the word of Jehovah came unto Hosea, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; that the word of Jehovah came to Micah in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; and that Amos "saw" his "words" in the days of Uzziah. But the chronicler makes no reference to any of these prophets in connection with either Uzziah, Jotham, or Ahaz. Their writings would have afforded the best possible materials for his history, yet he entirely neglected them. In view of his anxiety to introduce into his narrative all missions of prophets of which he found any record, we can only suppose that he was so little interested in the prophetic writings that he neither referred to them nor recollected their dates.

To Ahaz in Chronicles, in spite of all his manifold and persistent idolatry, no prophet was sent. The absence of Divine warning marks his extraordinary wickedness. In the book of Samuel the culmination of Jehovah's displeasure against Saul is shown by his refusal to answer him either by dreams, by Urim, or by prophets. He sends no prophet to Ahaz, because the wicked king of Judah is utterly reprobate. Prophecy, the token of the Divine presence and favour, has abandoned a nation given over to idolatry, and has even taken a temporary refuge in Samaria. Jerusalem was no longer worthy to receive the Divine messages, and Oded was sent with his words of warning and humane exhortation to the children of Ephraim. There he met with a prompt and full obedience, in striking contrast to the reception accorded by Joash and Amaziah to the prophets of Jehovah.

The chronicler's history of the reign of Hezekiah further illustrates his indifference to the prophets whose writings are extant. In the book of Kings great prominence is given to Isaiah. In the account of Sennacherib's invasion his messages to Hezekiah are given at considerable length. † He announces to the king his approaching death and Jehovah's gracious answers to Hezekiah's prayer for a respite and his request for a sign. When Hezekiah, in his pride of wealth, displayed his treasures to the Babylonian ambassadors, Isaiah brought the message of Divine rebuke and judgment. Chronicles characteristically devotes three long chapters to ritual and Levites, and dismisses Isaiah in half a sentence: "And Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the

* 2 Chron. xxix. 25, peculiar to Chronicles.

† 2 Chron. xii. 5-8, peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ 2 Chron. xv. -xvi. 10, peculiar to Chronicles.

§ 2 Chron. xix. 2, 3, xx. 14-18, 37, all peculiar to Chronicles.

¶ xxi. 12-15, peculiar to Chronicles.

¶¶ xxi. 18-22, peculiar to Chronicles.

* xxv. 15, 16, peculiar to Chronicles.

† 2 Kings xix. 5-7, 20-24.

prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this"—i. e., the threatening language of Sennacherib—"and cried to Heaven."* In the accounts of Hezekiah's sickness and recovery and of the Babylonian embassy the references to Isaiah are entirely omitted. These omissions may be due to lack of space, so much of which had been devoted to the Levites that there was none to spare for the prophet.

Indeed, at the very point where prophecy began to exercise a controlling influence over the religion of Judah the chronicler's interest in the subject altogether flags. He tells us that Jehovah spake to Manasseh and to his people, and refers to "the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel";† but he names no prophet and does not record the terms of any Divine message. In the case of Manasseh his sources may have failed him, but we have seen that in Hezekiah's reign he deliberately passes over most of the references to Isaiah.

The chronicler's narrative of Josiah's reign adheres more closely to the book of Kings. He reproduces the mission from the king to the prophetess Huldah and her Divine message of present forbearance and future judgment. The other prophet of this reign is the heathen king Pharaoh Necho, through whose mouth the Divine warning is given to Josiah. Jeremiah is only mentioned as lamenting over the last good king.‡ In the parallel text of this passage in the apocryphal book of Esdras Pharaoh's remonstrance is given in a somewhat expanded form; but the editor of Esdras shrank from making the heathen king the mouthpiece of Jehovah. While Chronicles tells us that Josiah "hearkened not unto the words of Neco from the mouth of God," Esdras, glaringly inconsistent both with the context and the history, tells us that he did not regard "the words of the prophet Jeremiah spoken by the mouth of the Lord."§ This amended statement is borrowed from the chronicler's account of Zedekiah, who "humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of Jehovah." But this king was not alone in his disobedience. As the inevitable ruin of Jerusalem drew near, the whole nation, priests and people alike, sank deeper and deeper in sin. In these last days, "where sin abounded, grace did yet more abound." Jehovah exhausted the resources of His mercy: "Jehovah, the god of their fathers, sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling-place." It was all in vain: "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people, till there was no remedy." There are two other references in the concluding paragraphs of Chronicles to the prophecies of Jeremiah; but the history of prophecy in Judah closes with this last great unavailing manifestation of prophetic activity.

Before considering the general idea of the prophet that may be collected from the various notices in Chronicles, we may devote a little space to the chronicler's curious attitude towards our canonical prophets. For the most part he simply follows the book of Kings in making no reference to them; but his almost entire silence

as to Isaiah suggests that his imitation of his authority in other cases is deliberate and intentional, especially as we find him inserting one or two references to Jeremiah not taken from the book of Kings. The chronicler had much more opportunity of using the canonical prophets than the author or authors of the book of Kings. The latter wrote before Hebrew literature had been collected and edited; but the chronicler had access to all the literature of the monarchy, Captivity, and even later times. His numerous extracts from almost the entire range of the Historical Books, together with the Pentateuch and Psalms, show that his plan included the use of various sources, and that he had both the means and ability to work out his plan. He makes two references to Haggai and Zechariah,* so that if he ignores Amos, Hosea, and Micah, and all but ignores Isaiah, we can only conclude that he does so of set purpose. Hosea and Amos might be excluded on account of their connection with the Northern Kingdom; possibly the strictures of Isaiah and Micah on the priesthood and ritual made the chronicler unwilling to give them special prominence. Such an attitude on the part of a typical representative of the prevailing school of religious thought has an important bearing on the textual and other criticism of the early prophets. If they were neglected by the authorities of the Temple in the interval between Ezra and the Maccabees, the possibility of late additions and alterations is considerably increased.

Let us now turn to the picture of the prophets drawn for us by the chronicler. Both prophet and priest are religious personages, otherwise they differ widely in almost every particular; we cannot even speak of them as both holding religious offices. The term "office" has to be almost unjustifiably strained in order to apply it to the prophet, and to use it thus without explanation would be misleading. The qualifications, status, duties, and rewards of the priests are all fully prescribed by rigid and elaborate rules; but the prophets were the children of the Spirit: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The priest was bound to be a physically perfect male of the house of Aaron: the prophet might be of any tribe and of either sex. The warlike Deborah found a more peaceful successor in Josiah's counsellor Huldah, and among the degenerate prophets of Nehemiah's time a prophetess Noadiah† is specially mentioned. The priestly or Levitical office did not exclude its holder from the prophetic vocation. The Levite Jahaziel delivered the message of Jehovah to Jehoshaphat; and the prophet Zechariah, whom Joash put to death, was the son of the high-priest Jehoiada, and therefore himself a priest. Indeed, upon occasion the prophetic gift was exercised by those whom we should scarcely call prophets at all. Pharaoh Necho's warning to Jehoshaphat is exactly parallel to the prophetic exhortations addressed to other kings. In the crisis of David's fortunes at Ziklag, when Judah and Benjamin came out to meet him with apparently doubtful intentions, their adhesion to the future king was decided by a prophetic word given to the mighty warrior Amasai: "Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, who was one of the

* xxxii. 20.

† xxxiii. 10, 18.

‡ xxxv. 21, 22, 25, peculiar to Chronicles.

§ 1 Esdras i. 28.

* Ezra v. 1; vi. 14.

† Neh. vi. 14.

thirty, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace, be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee.* In view of this wide distribution of the prophetic gift we are not surprised to find it frequently exercised by the pious kings. They receive and communicate to the nation direct intimations of the Divine will. David gives to Solomon and the people instructions which God has given him with regard to the Temple; God's promises are personally addressed to Solomon, without the intervention of either prophet or priest; Abijah rebukes and exhorts Jeroboam and the Israelites very much as other prophets address the wicked kings; the speeches of Hezekiah and Josiah might equally well have been delivered by one of the prophets. David indeed is expressly called a prophet by St. Peter;† and though the immediate reference is to the Psalms, the chronicler's history both of David and of other kings gives them a valid claim to rank as prophets.

The authority and status of the prophets rested on no official or material conditions, such as hedged in the priestly office on every side. Accordingly their ancestry, previous history, and social standing are matters with which the historian has no concern. If the prophet happens also to be a priest or Levite, the chronicler, of course, knows and records his genealogy. It is essential that the genealogy of a priest should be known, but there are no genealogies of the prophets; their order was like that of Melchizedek, standing on the page of history "without father, without mother, without genealogy"; they appear abruptly, with no personal introduction, they deliver their message, and then disappear with equal abruptness. Sometimes not even their names are given. They had the one qualification compared with which birth and sex, rank and reputation, were trivial and meaningless things. The living word of Jehovah was on their lips; the power of His Spirit controlled their hearers; messenger and message were alike their own credentials. The supreme religious authority of the prophet testified to the subordinate and accidental character of all rites and symbols. On the other hand, the combination of priest and prophet in the same system proved the loftiest spirituality, the most emphatic recognition of the direct communion of the soul with God, to be consistent with an elaborate and rigid system of ritual. The services and ministry of the Temple were like lamps whose flame showed pale and dim when earth and heaven were lit up by the lightnings of prophetic inspiration.

The gifts and functions of the prophets did not lend themselves to any regular discipline or organisation; but we can roughly distinguish between two classes of prophets. One class seem to have exercised their gifts more systematically and continuously than others. Gad and Nathan, Isaiah and Jeremiah, became practically the domestic chaplains and spiritual advisers of David, Hezekiah, and the last kings of Judah. Others are only mentioned as delivering a single message; their ministry seems to have been occasional, perhaps confined to a single period of their lives. The Divine Spirit was free to take the whole life or to take a part only; He was not to be conditioned or even by gifts of His own bestowal.

Human organisation naturally attempted to classify the possessors of the prophetic gift, to set them apart as a regular order, perhaps even to provide them with a suitable training, and, still more impossible task, to select the proper recipients of the gift and to produce and foster the prophetic inspiration. We read elsewhere of "schools of the prophets" and "sons of the prophets." The chronicler omits all reference to such institutions or societies; he declines to assign them any place in the prophetic succession in Israel. The gift of prophecy was absolutely dependent on the Divine will, and could not be claimed as a necessary appurtenance of the royal court at Jerusalem or a regular order in the kingdom of Judah. The priests are included in the list of David's ministers, but not the prophets Gad and Nathan. Abijah mentions among the special privileges of Judah "priests ministering unto Jehovah, even the sons of Aaron and the Levites in their work"; it does not occur to him to name prophets among the regular and permanent ministers of Jehovah.

The chronicler, in fact, does not recognise the professional prophet. The fifty sons of the prophets that watched Elisha divide the waters in the name of the God of Elijah were no more prophets for him than the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah that ate at Jezebel's table. The true prophet, like Amos, need not be either a prophet or the son of a prophet in the professional sense. Long before the chronicler's time the history and teaching of the great prophets had clearly established the distinction between the professional prophet, who was appointed by man or by himself, and the inspired messenger, who received a direct commission from Jehovah.

In describing the prophet's sole qualification we have also stated his function. He was the messenger of Jehovah, and declared His will. The priest in his ministrations represented Israel before God, and in a measure represented God to Israel. The rites and ceremonies over which he presided symbolised the permanent and unchanging features of man's religious experience and the eternal righteousness and mercy of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. From generation to generation men received the good gifts of God, and brought the offerings of their gratitude; they sinned against God and came to seek forgiveness; and the house of Aaron met them generation after generation in the same priestly robes, with the same rites, in the one Temple, in token of the unchanging willingness of Jehovah to accept and forgive His children.

The prophet, too, represented God to man; his words were the words of God; through him the Divine presence and the Divine Spirit exerted their influence over the hearts and consciences of his hearers. But while the priestly ministrations symbolised the fixity and permanence of God's eternal majesty, the prophets expressed the infinite variety of His Divine nature and its continual adaptation to all the changes of human life. They came to the individual and to the nation in each crisis of history with the Divine message that enabled them to suit themselves to altered circumstances, to grapple with new difficulties, and to solve new problems. The priest and the prophet together set forth the great paradox that the unchanging God is the source of all change.

* 1 Chron. xii. 18, peculiar to Chronicles.

† Acts ii. 30.

"Lord God, by whom all change is wrought,
By whom new things to birth are brought,
In whom no change is known,

To Thee we rise, in Thee we rest ;
We stay at home, we go in quest,
Still Thou art our abode :
The rapture swells, the wonder grows,
As full on us new life still flows
From our unchanging God."

The prophetic utterances recorded by the chronicler illustrate the work of the prophets in delivering the message that met the present needs of the people. There is nothing in Chronicles to encourage the unspiritual notion that the main object of prophecy was to give exact and detailed information as to the remote future. There is prediction necessarily; it was impossible to declare the will of God without stating the punishment of sin and the victory of righteousness; but prediction is only part of the declaration of God's will. In Gad and Nathan prophecy appears as a means of communication between the inquiring soul and God; it does not, indeed, gratify curiosity, but rather gives guidance in perplexity and distress. The later prophets constantly intervene to initiate reform or to hinder the carrying out of an evil policy. Gad and Nathan lent their authority to David's organisation of the Temple music; Asa's reform originated in the exhortation of Oded the prophet; Jehoshaphat went out to meet the Moabite and Ammonite invaders in response to the inspiring utterance of Jahaziel the Levite; Josiah consulted the prophetess Huldah before carrying out his reformation; the chiefs of Ephraim sent back the Jewish captives in obedience to another Oded. On the other hand, Shemaiah prevented Rehoboam from fighting against Israel; Micaiah warned Ahab and Jehoshaphat not to go up against Ramoth-gilead.

Often, however, the prophetic message gives the interpretation of history, the Divine judgment upon conduct, with its sentence of punishment or reward. Hanani the seer, for instance, comes to Asa to show him the real value of his apparently satisfactory alliance with Benhadad, king of Syria: "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and hast not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. . . Herein thou hast done foolishly; for from henceforth thou shalt have wars." Jehoshaphat is told why his ships were broken: "Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, Jehovah hath destroyed thy works." Thus the prophetic declaration of Divine judgment came to mean almost exclusively rebuke and condemnation. The witness of a good conscience may be left to speak for itself; God does not often need to send a prophet to His obedient servants in order to signify His approval of their righteous acts. But the censures of conscience need both the stimulus of external suggestion and the support of external authority. Upon the prophets was constantly laid the unwelcome task of rousing and bracing the conscience for its stern duty. They became the heralds of Divine wrath, the precursors of national misfortune. Often, too, the warnings that should have saved the people were neglected or resented, and thus became the occasion of new sin and severer punishment. We must not, however, lay too much stress on this aspect of the prophets' work. They were no mere Cassandra, announcing inevitable ruin at the hands of

a blind destiny; they were not always, or even chiefly, the messengers of coming doom. If they declared the wrath of God, they also vindicated His justice; in the day of the Lord which they so often foretold, mercy and grace tempered and at last overcame judgment. They taught, even in their sternest utterances, the moral government of the world and the benevolent purpose of its Ruler. These are man's only hope, even in his sin and suffering, the only ground for effort, and the only comfort in misfortune.

There are; however, one or two elements in the chronicler's notices of the prophets that scarcely harmonise with this general picture. The scanty references of the books of Samuel and Kings to the "schools" and the sons of the prophets have suggested the theory that the prophets were the guardians of national education, culture, and literature. The chronicler expressly assigns the function to the Levites, and does not recognise that the "schools of the prophets" had any permanent significance for the religion of Israel, possibly because they chiefly appear in connection with the Northern Kingdom. At the same time, we find this idea of the literary character of the prophets in Chronicles in a new form. The authorities referred to in the subscriptions to each reign bear the names of the prophets who flourished during the reign. The primary significance of the tradition followed by the chronicler is the supreme importance of the prophet for his period; he, and not the king, gives it a distinctive character. Therefore the prophet gives his name to his period, as the consuls at Rome, the Archon Basileus at Athens, and the Assyrian priests gave their own names to their year of office. Probably by the time Chronicles was written the view had been adopted which we know prevailed later on, and it was supposed that the prophets wrote the Historical Books which bore their names. The ancient prophets had given the Divine interpretation of the course of events and pronounced the Divine judgment on history. The Historical Books were written for religious edification; they contained a similar interpretation and judgment. The religious instincts of later Judaism rightly classed them with the prophetic Scriptures.

The striking contrast we have been able to trace between the priests and the prophets in their qualifications and duties extends also to their rewards. The book of Kings gives us glimpses of the way in which the reverent gratitude of the people made some provision for the maintenance of the prophets. We are all familiar with the hospitality of the Shunammite, and we read how "a man from Baal-shalishah" brought first-fruits to Elisha.* But the chronicler omits all such references as being connected with the Northern Kingdom, and does not give us any similar information as to the prophets of Judah. He is not usually indifferent as to ways and means. He devotes some space to the revenues of the kings of Judah, and delights to dwell on the sources of priestly income. But it never seems to occur to him that the prophets have any wants to be provided for. To use George MacDonald's phrase, he is quite content to leave them "on the lily and sparrow footing." The priesthood and the Levites must be richly endowed; the honour of Israel and of Jehovah is concerned in their having cities, tithes, first-fruits, and offerings. Prophets are

* 2 Kings iv. 42.

sent to reproach the people when the priestly dues are withheld; but for themselves the prophets might have said with St. Paul, "We seek not yours, but you." No one supposed that the authority and dignity of the prophets needed to be supported by ecclesiastical status, splendid robes, and great incomes. Spiritual force so manifestly resided in them that they could afford to dispense with the most impressive symbols of power and authority. On the other hand, they received an honour that was never accorded to the priesthood: they suffered persecution for the cause of Jehovah. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was put to death, and Micaiah the son of Imlah was imprisoned. We are never told that the priest as priest suffered persecution. Ahaz closed the Temple, Manasseh set up an idol in the house of God, but we do not read of either Ahaz or Manasseh that they slew the priests of Jehovah. The teaching of the prophets was direct and personal, and thus eminently calculated to excite resentment and provoke persecution; the priestly services, however, did not at all interfere with concurrent idolatry, and the priests were accustomed to receive and execute the orders of the kings. There is nothing to suggest that they sought to obtrude the worship of Jehovah upon unwilling converts; and it is not improbable that some, at any rate, of the priests allowed themselves to be made the tools of the wicked kings. On the eve of the Captivity we read that "the chiefs of the priests and the people trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the heathen, and they polluted the house of Jehovah." No such disloyalty is recorded of the prophets in Chronicles. The most splendid incomes cannot purchase loyalty. It is still true that "the hireling fleeth because he is a hireling"; men's most passionate devotion is for the cause in which they have suffered.

We have seen that the modern ministry presents certain parallels to the ancient priesthood. Where are we to look for an analogue to the prophet? If the minister be, in a sense, a priest when he leads the worship of the people, is he also a prophet when he preaches to them? Preaching is intended to be—perhaps we may venture to say that it mostly is—a declaration of the will of God. Moreover, it is not the exposition of a fixed and unchangeable ritual or even of a set of rigid theological formulæ. The preacher, like the prophet, seeks to meet the demands for new light that are made by constantly changing circumstances; he seeks to adapt the eternal truth to the varying needs of individual lives. So far he is a prophet, but the essential qualifications of the prophet are still to be sought after. Isaiah and Jeremiah did not declare the word of Jehovah as they had learnt it from a Bible or any other book, nor yet according to the traditions of a school or the teaching of great authorities; such declaration might be made by the scribes and rabbis in later times. But the prophets of Chronicles received their message from Jehovah Himself: while they mused upon the needs of the people, the fire of inspiration burned within them; then they spoke. Moreover, like their great antitype, they spoke with authority, and not as the scribes; their words carried with them conviction even when they did not produce obedience. The reality of men's conviction of their Divine authority was shown by the persecution to which they were subjected. Are these tokens of the prophet also

the notes of the Christian ministry of preaching? Prophets were found among the house of Aaron and from the tribe of Levi, but not every Levite or priest was a prophet. Every branch of the Christian Church has numbered among its official ministers men who delivered their message with an inspired conviction of its truth; in them the power and presence of the Spirit have compelled a belief in their authority to speak for God: this belief has received the twofold attestation of hearts and consciences submitted to the Divine will on the one hand or of bitter and rancorous hostility on the other. In every Church we find the record of men who have spoken, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth." Such were Wyclif and Latimer, Calvin and Luther, George Whitefield and the Wesleys; such, too, were Moffat and Livingstone. Nor need we suppose that in the modern Christian Church the gift of prophecy has been confined to men of brilliant genius who have been conspicuously successful. In the sacred canon Haggai and Obadiah stand side by side with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The chronicler recognises the prophetic calling of men too obscure to be mentioned by name. He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, not necessarily the orator whom men crowd to hear and whose name is recorded in history; and God giveth not the Spirit by measure. Many of the least distinguished of His servants are truly His prophets, speaking, by the conviction He has given them, a message which comes home with power to some hearts at any rate, and is a savour of life unto life and of death unto death. The seals of their ministry are to be found in redeemed and purified lives, and also only too often in the bitter and vindictive ill-will of those whom their faithfulness has offended.

We naturally expect to find that the official ministry affords the most suitable sphere for the exercise of the gift of prophecy. Those who are conscious of a Divine message will often seek the special opportunities which the ministry affords. But our study of Chronicles reminds us that the vocation of the prophet cannot be limited to any external organisation; it was not confined to the official ministry of Israel: it cannot be conditioned by recognition by bishops, presbyteries, conferences, or Churches; it will often find its only external credential in a gracious influence over individual lives. Nay, the prophet may have his Divine vocation and be entirely rejected of men. In Chronicles we find prophets, like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, whose one Divine message is received with scorn and defiance.

In practice, if not in theory, the Churches have long since recognised that the prophetic gift is found outside any official ministry, and that they may be taught the will of God by men and women of all ranks and callings. They have provided opportunities for the free exercise of such gifts in lay preaching, missions, Sunday-schools, meetings of all kinds.

We have here stumbled upon another modern controversy: the desirability of women preaching. Chronicles mentions prophetesses as well as prophets; on the other hand, there were no Jewish priestesses. The modern minister combines some priestly duties with the opportunity, at least, of exercising the gift of prophecy. The mention of only two or three prophetesses in the

Old Testament shows that the possession of the gift by women was exceptional. These few instances, however, are sufficient to prove that God did not in old times limit the gift to men; they suggest at any rate the possibility of its being possessed by women now, and when women have a Divine message the Church will not venture to quench the Spirit. Of course the application of these broad principles would have to be adapted to the circumstances of individual Churches. Huldah, for instance, is not described as delivering any public address to the people; the king sent his ministers to consult her in her own house. Whatever hesitation may be felt about the public ministry of women, no one will question their Divine commission to carry the messages of God to the bedsides of the sick and the homes of the poor. Most of us have known women to whom men have gone, as Josiah's ministers went to Huldah, to "inquire of the Lord."

Another practical question, the payment of the ministers of religion, has already been raised by the chronicler's account of the revenues of the priests. What more do we learn on the subject from his silence as to the maintenance of the prophets? The silence is, of course, eloquent as to the extent to which even a pious Levite may be preoccupied with his own worldly interests and quite indifferent to other people's; but it would not have been possible if the idea of revenues and endowments for the prophets had ever been very familiar to men's minds. It has been said that to-day the prophet sells his inspiration, but the gift of God can no more be bought and sold with money now than in ancient Israel. The purely spiritual character of true prophecy, its entire dependence on Divine inspiration, makes it impossible to hire a prophet at a fixed salary regulated by the quality and extent of his gifts. By the grace of God there is an intimate practical connection between the work of the official ministry and the inspired declaration of the Divine will; and this connection has its bearing upon the payment of ministers. Men's gratitude is stirred when they have received comfort and help through the spiritual gifts of their minister, but in principle there is no connection between the gift of prophecy and the payment of the ministry. A Church can purchase the enjoyment of eloquence, learning, intellect, and industry; a high character has a pecuniary value for ecclesiastical as well as for commercial purposes. The prophet may be provided with leisure, society, and literature so that the Divine message may be delivered in its most attractive form; he may be installed in a large and well-appointed building, so that he may have the best possible opportunity of delivering his message; he will naturally receive a larger income when he surrenders obscure and limited opportunities to minister in some more suitable sphere. But when we have said all, it is still only the accessories that have to do with payment, not the Divine gift of prophecy itself. When the prophet's message is not comforting, when his words grate upon the theological and social prejudices of his hearers, especially when he is invited to curse and is Divinely compelled to bless, there is no question of payment for such ministry. It has been said of Christ, "For the minor details necessary to secure respect, and obedience, and the enthusiasm of the vulgar, for the tact, the finesse, the compromising faculty, the judicious

ostentation of successful politicians—for these arts He was not prepared."* Those who imitate their Master often share His reward.

The slight and accidental connection of the payment of ministers with their prophetic gifts is further illustrated by the free exercise of such gifts by men and women who have no ecclesiastical status and do not seek any material reward. Here again any exact adoption of ancient methods is impossible; we may accept from the chronicler the great principle that loyal believers will make all adequate provision for the service and work of Jehovah, and that they will be prepared to honour Him in the persons of those whom they choose to represent them before Him, and also of those whom they recognise as delivering to them His messages. On the other hand, the prophet—and for our present purpose we may extend the term to the humblest and least gifted Christian who in any way seeks to speak for Christ—the prophet speaks by the impulse of the Spirit and from no meaner motive.

With regard to the functions of the prophet, the Spirit is as entirely free to dictate His own message as He is to choose His own messenger. The chronicler's prophets were concerned with foreign politics—alliances with Syria and Assyria, wars with Egypt and Samaria—as well as with the ritual of the Temple and the worship of Jehovah. They discerned a religious significance in the purely secular matter of a census. Jehovah had His purposes for the civil government and international policy of Israel as well as for its creed and services. If we lay down the principle that politics, whether local or national, are to be kept out of the pulpit, we must either exclude from the official ministry all who possess any measure of the prophetic gift, or else carefully stipulate that, if they be conscious of any obligation to declare the Lord's will in matters of public righteousness, they shall find some more suitable place than the Lord's house and some more suitable time than the Lord's day. When we suggest that the prophet should mind his own business by confining himself to questions of doctrine, worship, and the religious experiences of the individual, we are in danger of denying God's right to a voice in social and national affairs.

Turning, however, to more directly ecclesiastical affairs, we have noted that Asa's reformation received its first impulse from the utterances of the prophet Azariah or Oded, and also that one feature of the prophet's work is to provide for the fresh needs developed by changing circumstances. A priesthood or any other official ministry is often wanting in elasticity; it is necessarily attached to an established organisation and trammelled by custom and tradition. The Holy Spirit in all ages has commissioned prophets as the free agents in new movements in the Divine government of the world. They may be ecclesiastics, like many of the Reformers and like the Wesleys; but they are not dominated by the official spirit. The initial impulse that moves such men is partly one of recoil from their environment; and the environment in return casts them out. Again, prophets may become ecclesiastics, like the tinker to whom English-speaking Christians owe one of their great religious classics and the cobbler who stirred up the Churches to missionary enthusiasm. Or they may remain from beginning to end without

* Abbott, "Through Nature to Christ," p. 295.

official status in any Church, like the apostle of the anti-slavery movement. In any case the impulse to a larger, purer, and nobler standard of life than that consecrated by long usage and ancient tradition does not come from the ecclesiastical official because of his official training and experience; the living waters that go out of Jerusalem in the day of the Lord are too wide, and deep, and strong to flow in the narrow rock-hewn aqueducts of tradition: they make new channels for themselves; and these channels are the men who do not demand that the Spirit shall speak according to familiar formulæ and stereotyped ideas, but are willing to be the prophets of strange and even uncongenial truth. Or, to use the great metaphor of St. John's Gospel, with such men, both for themselves and for others, the water that the Lord gives them becomes a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

But the chronicler's picture of the work of the prophets has its darker side. Few were privileged to give the signal for an immediate and happy reformation. Most of the prophets were charged with messages of rebuke and condemnation, so that they were ready to cry out with Jeremiah, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have not lent on usury, neither have men lent to me on usury, yet every one of them doth curse me."*

Perhaps even to-day the prophetic spirit often charges its possessors with equally unwelcome duties. We trust that the Christian conscience is more sensitive than that of ancient Israel, and that the Church is more ready to profit by the warnings addressed to it; but the response to the sterner teaching of the Spirit is not always accompanied by a kindly feeling towards the teacher, and even where there is progress, the progress is slow compared to the eager longing of the prophet for the spiritual growth of his hearers. And yet the sequel of the chronicler's history suggests some relief to the gloomier side of the picture. Prophet after prophet utters his unavailing and seemingly useless rebuke, and delivers his announcement of coming ruin, and at last the ruin falls upon the nation. But that is not the end. Before the chronicler wrote there had arisen a restored Israel, purified from idolatry and delivered from many of its former troubles. The Restoration was only rendered possible through the continued testimony of the prophets to the Lord and His righteousness. However barren of immediate results such testimony may seem to-day, it is still the word of the Lord that cannot return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleaseth and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sent it.

The chronicler's conception of the prophetic character of the historian, whereby his narrative sets forth God's will and interprets His purposes, is not altogether popular at present. The teleological view of history is somewhat at a discount. Yet the prophetic method, so to speak, of Carlyle and Ruskin is largely historical; and even

in so unlikely a quarter as the works of George Eliot we can find an example of didactic history. "Romola" is largely taken up with the story of Savonarola, told so as to bring out its religious significance. But teleological history is sometimes a failure even from the standpoint of the Christian student, because it defeats its own ends. He who is bent on deducing lessons from history may lay undue stress on part of its significance and obscure the rest. The historian is perhaps most a prophet when he leaves history to speak for itself. In this sense, we may venture to attribute a prophetic character to purely scientific history; accurate and unbiassed narrative is the best starting-point for the study of the religious significance of the course of events.

In concluding our inquiry as to how far modern Church life is illustrated by the work of the prophets, one is tempted to dwell for a moment on the methods they did not use and the subjects not dealt with in their utterances. This theme, however, scarcely belongs to the exposition of Chronicles; it would be more appropriate to a complete examination of the history and writings of the prophets. One point, however, may be noticed. Their utterances in Chronicles lay less direct stress on moral considerations than the writings of the canonical prophets, not because of any indifference to morality, but because, seen in the distance of a remote past, all other sins seemed to be summed up in faithlessness to Jehovah. Perhaps we may see in this a suggestion of a final judgment of history, which should be equally instructive to the religious man who has any inclination to disparage morality and to the moral man who wishes to ignore religion.

Our review and discussion of the varied references of Chronicles to the prophets bring home to us with fresh force the keen interest felt in them by the chronicler and the supreme importance he attached to their work. The reverent homage of a Levite of the second Temple centuries after the golden age of prophecy is an eloquent testimony to the unique position of the prophets in Israel. His treatment of the subject shows that the lofty ideal of their office and mission had lost nothing in the course of the development of Judaism; his selection from the older material emphasises the independence of the true prophet of any professional status or consideration of material reward; his sense of the importance of the prophets to the state and Church in Judah is an encouragement to those "who look for redemption in Jerusalem," and who trust the eternal promise of God that in all times of His people's need He "will raise up a prophet from among their brethren, . . . and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command them."* "The memorial of the prophets was blessed, . . . for they comforted Jacob, and delivered them by assured hope."† Many prophets of the Church have also left a blessed memorial of comfort and deliverance, and God ever renews this more than apostolic succession.

* Jer. xv. 10.

* Deut. xviii. 18.

† Ecclus. xlix. 10.

CHAPTER X.

SATAN.

I CHRONICLES xxi.-xxii. 1.

"And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them saying, Go, number Israel and Judah."—2 SAM. xxiv. 1.

"And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel."—1 CHRON. xxi. 1.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed."—JAMES i. 13, 14.

THE census of David is found both in the book of Samuel and in Chronicles, in very much the same form; but the chronicler has made a number of small but important alterations and additions. Taken together, these changes involve a new interpretation of the history, and bring out lessons that cannot so easily be deduced from the narrative in the book of Samuel. Hence it is necessary to give a separate exposition of the narrative in Chronicles.

As before, we will first review the alterations made by the chronicler and then expound the narrative in the form in which it left his hand, or rather in the form in which it stands in the Masoretic text. Any attempt to deal with the peculiarly complicated problem of the textual criticism of Chronicles would be out of place here. Probably there are no corruptions of the text that would appreciably affect the general exposition of this chapter.

At the very outset the chronicler substitutes Satan for Jehovah, and thus changes the whole significance of the narrative. This point is too important to be dealt with casually, and must be reserved for special consideration later on. In ver. 2 there is a slight change that marks the different points of the views of the Chronicler and the author of the narrative in the book of Samuel. The latter had written that Joab numbered the people from Dan to Beersheba, a merely conventional phrase indicating the extent of the census. It might possibly, however, have been taken to denote that the census began in the north and was concluded in the south. To the chronicler, whose interests all centred in Judah, such an arrangement seemed absurd; and he carefully guarded against any mistake by altering "Dan to Beersheba" into "Beersheba to Dan." In ver. 3 the substance of Joab's words is not altered, but various slight touches are added to bring out more clearly and forcibly what is implied in the book of Samuel. Joab had spoken of the census as being the king's pleasure.* It was scarcely appropriate to speak of David "taking pleasure in" a suggestion of Satan. In Chronicles Joab's words are less forcible, "Why doth my lord require this thing?" Again, in the book of Samuel Joab protests against the census without assigning any reason. The context, it is true, readily supplies one; but in Chronicles all is made clear by the addition, "Why will he" (David) "be a cause of guilt unto Israel?" Further on the chronicler's special interest in Judah again betrays itself. The book of Samuel described, with some detail, the progress of the enumerators through

Eastern and Northern Palestine by way of Beersheba to Jerusalem. Chronicles having already made them start from Beersheba, omits these details.

In ver. 5 the numbers in Chronicles differ not only from those of the older narrative, but also from the chronicler's own statistics in chap. xxvii. In this last account the men of war are divided into twelve courses of twenty-four thousand each, making a total of two hundred and eighty-eight thousand; in the book of Samuel Israel numbers eight hundred thousand, and Judah five hundred thousand; but in our passage Israel is increased to eleven hundred thousand, and Judah is reduced to four hundred and seventy thousand. Possibly the statistics in chap. xxvii. are not intended to include all the fighting men, otherwise the figures cannot be harmonised. The discrepancy between our passage and the book of Samuel is perhaps partly explained by the following verse, which is an addition of the chronicler. In the book of Samuel the census is completed, but our additional verse states that Levi and Benjamin were not included in the census. The chronicler understood that the five hundred thousand assigned to Judah in the older narrative were the joint total of Judah and Benjamin; he accordingly reduced the total by thirty thousand, because, according to his view, Benjamin was omitted from the census. The increase in the number of the Israelites is unexpected. The chronicler does not usually overrate the northern tribes. Later on Jeroboam, eighteen years after the disruption, takes the field against Abijah with "eight hundred thousand chosen men," a phrase that implies a still larger number of fighting men, if all had been mustered. Obviously the rebel king would not be expected to be able to bring into the field as large a force as the entire strength of Israel in the most flourishing days of David. The chronicler's figures in these two passages are consistent, but the comparison is not an adequate reason for the alteration in the present chapter. Textual corruption is always a possibility in the case of numbers, but on the whole this particular change does not admit of a satisfactory explanation.

In ver. 7 we have a very striking alteration. According to the book of Samuel, David's repentance was entirely spontaneous: "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people"*; but here God smites Israel, and then David's conscience awakes. In ver. 12 the chronicler makes a slight addition, apparently to gratify his literary taste. In the original narrative the third alternative offered to David had been described simply as "the pestilence," but in Chronicles the words "the sword of Jehovah" are added in antithesis to "the sword of Thine enemies" in the previous verse.

Ver. 16, which describes David's vision of the angel with the drawn sword, is an expansion of the simple statement of the book of Samuel that David saw the angel. In ver. 18 we are not merely told that Gad spake to David, but that he spake by the command of the angel of Jehovah. Ver. 20, which tells us how Ornan saw the angel, is an addition of the chronicler's. All these changes lay stress upon the intervention of the angel, and illustrate the interest taken by Juda-

* It is, however, possible that the text in Samuel is a corruption of a text more closely parallel to that of Chronicles.

* R. V. "delight in" is somewhat too strong.

ism in the ministry of angels. Zechariah, the prophet of the Restoration, received his messages by the dispensation of angels; and the title of the last canonical prophet, Malachi, probably means "the Angel." The change from Araunah to Ornan is a mere question of spelling. Possibly Ornan is a somewhat Hebraised form of the older Jebusite name Araunah.

In ver. 22 the reference to "a full price" and other changes in the form of David's words are probably due to the influence of Gen. xxiii. 9. In ver. 23 the chronicler's familiarity with the ritual of sacrifice has led him to insert a reference to a meal offering, to accompany the burnt offering. Later on the chronicler omits the somewhat ambiguous words which seem to speak of Araunah as a king. He would naturally avoid anything like a recognition of the royal status of a Jebusite prince.

In ver. 25 David pays much more dearly for Ornan's threshing-floor than in the book of Samuel. In the latter the price is fifty shekels of silver, in the former six hundred shekels of gold. Most ingenious attempts have been made to harmonise the two statements. It has been suggested that fifty shekels of silver means silver to the value of fifty shekels of gold and paid in gold, and that six hundred shekels of gold means the value of six hundred shekels of silver paid in gold. A more lucid but equally impossible explanation is that David paid fifty shekels for every tribe, six hundred in all.* The real reason for the change is that when the Temple became supremely important to the Jews the small price of fifty shekels for the site seemed derogatory to the dignity of the sanctuary; six hundred shekels of gold was a more appropriate sum. Abraham had paid four hundred shekels for a burying-place; and a site for the Temple, where Jehovah had chosen to put His name, must surely have cost more. The chronicler followed the tradition which had grown up under the influence of this feeling.

Chaps. xxi. 27-xxii. 1 are an addition. According to the Levitical law, David was falling into grievous sin in sacrificing anywhere except before the Mosaic altar of burnt offering. The chronicler therefore states the special circumstances that palliated this offence against the exclusive privileges of the one sanctuary of Jehovah. He also reminds us that this threshing-floor became the site of the altar of burnt offering for Solomon's temple. Here he probably follows an ancient and historical tradition; the prominence given to the threshing-floor in the book of Samuel indicates the special sanctity of the site. The Temple is the only sanctuary whose site could be thus connected with the last days of David. When the book of Samuel was written, the facts were too familiar to need any explanation; every one knew that the Temple stood on the site of Araunah's threshing-floor. The chronicler, writing centuries later, felt it necessary to make an explicit statement on the subject.

Having thus attempted to understand how our narrative assumed its present form, we will now tell the chronicler's story of these incidents. The long reign of David was drawing to a close. Hitherto he had been blessed with uninterrupted prosperity and success. His armies had been victorious over all the enemies of Israel, the borders of the land of Jehovah had been extended,

David himself was lodged with princely splendour, and the services of the Ark were conducted with imposing ritual by a numerous array of priests and Levites. King and people alike were at the zenith of their glory. In worldly prosperity and careful attention to religious observances David and his people were not surpassed by Job himself. Apparently their prosperity provoked the envious malice of an evil and mysterious being, who appears only here in Chronicles: Satan, the persecutor of Job. The trial to which he subjected the loyalty of David was more subtle and suggestive than his assault upon Job. He harassed Job as the wind dealt with the traveller in the fable, and Job only wrapped the cloak of his faith closer about him; Satan allowed David to remain in the full sunshine of prosperity, and seduced him into sin by fostering his pride in being the powerful and victorious prince of a mighty people. He suggested a census. David's pride would be gratified by obtaining accurate information as to the myriads of his subjects. Such statistics would be useful for the civil organisation of Israel; the king would learn where and how to recruit his army or to find an opportunity to impose additional taxation. The temptation appealed alike to the king, the soldier, and the statesman, and did not appeal in vain. David at once instructed Joab and the princes to proceed with the enumeration; Joab demurred and protested: the census would be a cause of guilt unto Israel. But not even the great influence of the commander-in-chief could turn the king from his purpose. His word prevailed against Joab, wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. This brief general statement indicates a long and laborious task, simplified and facilitated in some measure by the primitive organisation of society and by rough and ready methods adopted to secure the very moderate degree of accuracy with which an ancient Eastern sovereign would be contented. When Xerxes wished to ascertain the number of the vast army with which he set out, to invade Greece, his officers packed ten thousand men into as small a space as possible and built a wall round them; then they turned them out, and packed the space again and again; and so in time they ascertained how many tens of thousands of men there were in the army. Joab's methods would be different, but perhaps not much more exact. He would probably learn from the "heads of fathers' houses" the number of fighting men in each family. Where the hereditary chiefs of a district were indifferent, he might make some rough estimate of his own. We may be sure that both Joab and the local authorities would be careful to err on the safe side. The king was anxious to learn that he possessed a large number of subjects. Probably as the officers of Xerxes went on with their counting they omitted to pack the measured area as closely as they did at first; they might allow eight or nine thousand to pass for ten thousand. Similarly David's servants would, to say the least, be anxious not to underestimate the number of his subjects. The work apparently went on smoothly; nothing is said that indicates any popular objection or resistance to the census; the process of enumeration was not interrupted by any token of Divine displeasure against the "cause of guilt unto Israel." Nevertheless Joab's misgivings were not set at rest; he did

* Noldius and R. Salom. *apud* Bertheau i. 1.

what he could to limit the range of the census and to withdraw at least two of the tribes from the impending outbreak of Divine wrath. The tribe of Levi would be exempt from taxation and the obligation of military service; Joab could omit them without rendering his statistics less useful for military and financial purposes. In not including the Levites in the general census of Israel, Joab was following the precedent set by the numbering in the wilderness.

Benjamin was probably omitted in order to protect the Holy City, the chronicler following that form of the ancient tradition which assigned Jerusalem to Benjamin.* Later on,† however, the chronicler seems to imply that these two tribes left to the last were not numbered because of the growing dissatisfaction of Joab with his task: "Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but finished not." But these different reasons for the omission of Levi and Benjamin do not mutually exclude each other. Another limitation is also stated in the later reference: "David took not the number of them twenty years old and under, because Jehovah had said that He would increase Israel like to the stars of heaven." This statement and explanation seems a little superfluous: the census was specially concerned with the fighting men, and in the book of Numbers only those over twenty are numbered. But we have seen elsewhere that the chronicler has no great confidence in the intelligence of his readers, and feels bound to state definitely matters that have only been implied and might be overlooked. Here, therefore, he calls our attention to the fact that the numbers previously given do not comprise the whole male population, but only the adults.

At last the census, so far as it was carried out at all, was finished, and the results were presented to the king. They are meagre and bald compared to the volumes of tables which form the report of a modern census. Only two divisions of the country are recognised: "Judah" and "Israel," or the ten tribes. The total is given for each: eleven hundred thousand for Israel, four hundred and seventy thousand for Judah, in all fifteen hundred and seventy thousand. Whatever details may have been given to the king, he would be chiefly interested in the grand total. Its figures would be the most striking symbol of the extent of his authority and the glory of his kingdom.

Perhaps during the months occupied in taking the census David had forgotten the ineffectual protests of Joab, and was able to receive his report without any presentiment of coming evil. Even if his mind were not altogether at ease, all misgivings would for the time be forgotten. He probably made or had made for him some rough calculation as to the total of men, women, and children that would correspond to the vast array of fighting men. His servants would not reckon the entire population at less than nine or ten millions. His heart would be uplifted with pride as he contemplated the statement of the multitudes that were the subjects of his crown and prepared to fight at his bidding. The numbers are moderate compared with the vast populations and enormous armies of the great powers of modern Europe; they were far surpassed by the Roman empire and the teeming populations of

the valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Tigris; but during the Middle Ages it was not often possible to find in Western Europe so large a population under one government or so numerous an army under one banner. The resources of Cyrus may not have been greater when he started on his career of conquest; and when Xerxes gathered into one motley horde the warriors of half the known world, their total was only about double the number of David's robust and warlike Israelites. There was no enterprise that was likely to present itself to his imagination that he might not have undertaken with a reasonable probability of success. He must have regretted that his days of warfare were past, and that the unwarlike Solomon, occupied with more peaceful tasks, would allow this magnificent instrument of possible conquests to rust unused.

But the king was not long left in undisturbed enjoyment of his greatness. In the very moment of his exaltation, some sense of the Divine displeasure fell upon him.* Mankind has learnt by a long and sad experience to distrust its own happiness. The brightest hours have come to possess a suggestion of possible catastrophe, and classic story loved to tell of the unavailing efforts of fortunate princes to avoid their inevitable downfall. Polycrates and Cræsus, however, had not tempted the Divine anger by ostentatious pride; David's power and glory had made him neglectful of the reverent homage due to Jehovah, and he had sinned in spite of the express warnings of his most trusted minister.

When the revulsion of feeling came, it was complete. The king at once humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, and made full acknowledgment of his sin and folly: "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing; but now put away, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly."

The narrative continues as in the book of Samuel. Repentance could not avert punishment, and the punishment struck directly at David's pride of power and glory. The great population was to be decimated either by famine, war, or pestilence. The king chose to suffer from the pestilence, "the sword of Jehovah"; "Let me fall now into the hand of Jehovah, for very great are His mercies; and let me not fall into the hand of man. So Jehovah sent a pestilence upon Israel, and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men." Not three days since Joab handed in his report, and already a deduction of seventy thousand would have to be made from its total; and still the pestilence was not checked, for "God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it." If, as we have supposed, Joab had withheld Jerusalem from the census, his pious caution was now rewarded: "Jehovah repented Him of the evil, and said to the destroying angel, It is enough; now stay thine hand." At the very last moment the crowning catastrophe was averted. In the Divine counsels Jerusalem was already delivered, but to human eyes its fate still trembled in the balance: "And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of Jehovah stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem." So another great Israelite soldier lifted up his eyes beside Jericho and beheld the captain of the host of Jehovah standing

* Josh. xviii. 28; Judges i. 21, as against Josh. xv. 63; Judges i. 8, which assign the city to Judah.

† Chron. xxvii. 23, 24.

* Ver. 7 is apparently a general anticipation of the narrative in vv. 9-15.

over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.* Then the sword was drawn to smite the enemies of Israel, but now it was turned to smite Israel itself. David and his elders fell upon their faces as Joshua had done before them: "And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done very wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O Jehovah my God, be against me and against my father's house, but not against Thy people, that they should be plagued."

The awful presence returned no answer to the guilty king, but addressed itself to the prophet Gad, and commanded *him* to bid David go up and build an altar to Jehovah in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. The command was a message of mercy. Jehovah permitted David to build Him an altar; He was prepared to accept an offering at his hands. The king's prayers were heard, and Jerusalem was saved from the pestilence. But still the angel stretched out his drawn sword over Jerusalem; he waited till the reconciliation of Jehovah with His people should have been duly ratified by solemn sacrifices. At the bidding of the prophet, David went up to the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Sorrow and reassurance, hope and fear, contended for the mastery. No sacrifice could call back to life the seventy thousand victims whom the pestilence had already destroyed, and yet the horror of its ravages was almost forgotten in relief at the deliverance of Jerusalem from the calamity that had all but overtaken it. Even now the uplifted sword might be only held back for a time; Satan might yet bring about some heedless and sinful act, and the respite might end not in pardon, but in the execution of God's purpose of vengeance. Saul had been condemned because he sacrificed too soon; now perhaps delay would be fatal. Uzzah had been smitten because he touched the Ark; till the sacrifice was actually offered who could tell whether some thoughtless blunder would not again provoke the wrath of Jehovah? Under ordinary circumstances David would not have dared to sacrifice anywhere except upon the altar of burnt offering before the tabernacle at Gibeon; he would have used the ministry of priests and Levites. But ritual is helpless in great emergencies. The angel of Jehovah with the drawn sword seemed to bar the way to Gibeon, as once before he had barred Balaam's progress when he came to curse Israel. In his supreme need David builds his own altar and offers his own sacrifices; he receives the Divine answer without the intervention this time of either priest or prophet. By God's most merciful and mysterious grace, David's guilt and punishment, his repentance and pardon, broke down all barriers between himself and God.

But, as he went up to the threshing-floor, he was still troubled and anxious. The burden was partly lifted from his heart, but he still craved full assurance of pardon. The menacing attitude of the destroying angel seemed to hold out little promise of mercy and forgiveness, and yet the command to sacrifice would be cruel mockery if Jehovah did not intend to be gracious to His people and His anointed.

At the threshing-floor Ornan and his four sons were threshing wheat, apparently unmoved by

* Josh. v. 13.

the prospect of the threatened pestilence. In Egypt the Israelites were protected from the plagues with which their oppressors were punished. Possibly now the situation was reversed, and the remnant of the Canaanites in Palestine were not afflicted by the pestilence that fell upon Israel. But Ornan turned back and saw the angel; he may not have known the grim mission with which the Lord's messenger had been entrusted, but the aspect of the destroyer, his threatening attitude, and the lurid radiance of his unsheathed and outstretched sword must have seemed unmistakable tokens of coming calamity. Whatever might be threatened for the future, the actual appearance of this supernatural visitant was enough to unnerve the stoutest heart; and Ornan's four sons hid themselves.

Before long, however, Ornan's terrors were somewhat relieved by the approach of less formidable visitors. The king and his followers had ventured to show themselves openly, in spite of the destroying angel: and they had ventured with impunity. Ornan went forth and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. In ancient days the father of the faithful, oppressed by the burden of his bereavement, went to the Hittites to purchase a burying-place for his wife. Now the last of the Patriarchs, mourning for the sufferings of his people, came by Divine command to the Jebusite to purchase the ground on which to offer sacrifices, that the plague might be stayed from the people. The form of bargaining was somewhat similar in both cases. We are told that bargains are concluded in much the same fashion to-day. Abraham had paid four hundred shekels of silver for the field of Ephron in Machpelah, "with the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field." The price of Ornan's threshing-floor was in proportion to the dignity and wealth of the royal purchaser and the sacred purpose for which it was designed. The fortunate Jebusite received no less than six hundred shekels of gold.

David built his altar, and offered up his sacrifices and prayers to Jehovah. Then, in answer to David's prayers, as later in answer to Solomon's, fire fell from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering, and all this while the sword of Jehovah flamed across the heavens above Jerusalem, and the destroying angel remained passive, but to all appearances unappeased. But as the fire of God fell from heaven, Jehovah gave yet another final and convincing token that He would no longer execute judgment against His people. In spite of all that had happened to reassure them, the spectators must have been thrilled with alarm when they saw that the angel of Jehovah no longer remained stationary, and that his flaming sword was moving through the heavens. Their renewed terror was only for a moment: "the angel put up his sword again into the sheath thereof," and the people breathed more freely when they saw the instrument of Jehovah's wrath vanish out of their sight.

The use of Machpelah as a patriarchal burying-place led to the establishment of a sanctuary at Hebron, which continued to be the seat of a debased and degenerate worship even after the coming of Christ. It is even now a Mohammedan holy place. But on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite there was to arise a more worthy memorial of the mercy and judgment of Jehovah. Without the aid of priestly oracle or prophetic utterance, David was led by the Spirit

of the Lord to discern the significance of the command to perform an irregular sacrifice in a hitherto unconsecrated place. When the sword of the destroying angel interposed between David and the Mosaic tabernacle and altar of Gibeon, the way was not merely barred against the king and his court on one exceptional occasion. The incidents of this crisis symbolised the cutting off for ever of the worship of Israel from its ancient shrine and the transference of the Divinely appointed centre of the worship of Jehovah to the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, that is to say to Jerusalem, the city of David and the capital of Judah.

The lessons of this incident, so far as the chronicler has simply borrowed from his authority, belong to the exposition of the book of Samuel. The main features peculiar to Chronicles are the introduction of the evil angel Satan, together with the greater prominence given to the angel of Jehovah, and the express statement that the scene of David's sacrifice became the site of Solomon's altar of burnt offering.

The stress laid upon angelic agency is characteristic of later Jewish literature, and is especially marked in Zechariah and Daniel. It was no doubt partly due to the influence of the Persian religion, but it was also a development from the primitive faith of Israel, and the development was favoured by the course of Jewish history. The Captivity and the Restoration, with the events that preceded and accompanied these revolutions, enlarged the Jewish experience of nature and man. The captives in Babylon and the fugitives in Egypt saw that the world was larger than they had imagined. In Josiah's reign the Scythians from the far North swept over Western Asia, and the Medes and Persians broke in upon Assyria and Chaldæa from the remote East. The prophets claimed Scythians, Medes, and Persians as the instruments of Jehovah. The Jewish appreciation of the majesty of Jehovah, the Maker and Ruler of the world, increased as they learnt more of the world He had made and ruled; but the invasion of a remote and unknown people impressed them with the idea of infinite dominion and unlimited resources, beyond all knowledge and experience. The course of Israelite history between David and Ezra involved as great a widening of man's ideas of the universe as the discovery of America or the establishment of Copernican astronomy. A Scythian invasion was scarcely less portentous to the Jews than the descent of an irresistible army from the planet Jupiter would be to the civilised nations of the nineteenth century. The Jew began to shrink from intimate and familiar fellowship with so mighty and mysterious a Deity. He felt the need of a mediator, some less exalted being, to stand between himself and God. For the ordinary purposes of everyday life the Temple, with its ritual and priesthood, provided a mediation; but for unforeseen contingencies and exceptional crises the Jews welcomed the belief that a ministry of angels provided a safe means of intercourse between himself and the Almighty. Many men have come to feel to-day that the discoveries of science have made the universe so infinite and marvellous that its Maker and Governor is exalted beyond human approach. The infinite spaces of the constellations seem to intervene between the earth and the presence-chamber of God; its doors are guarded against prayer and faith by

inexorable laws; the awful Being, who dwells within, has become "unmeasured in height, undistinguished into form." Intellect and imagination alike fail to combine the manifold and terrible attributes of the Author of nature into the picture of a loving Father. It is no new experience, and the present century faces the situation very much as did the chronicler's contemporaries. Some are happy enough to rest in the mediation of ritual priests; others are content to recognise, as of old, powers and forces, not now, however, personal messengers of Jehovah, but the physical agencies of "that which makes for righteousness." Christ came to supersede the Mosaic ritual and the ministry of angels; He will come again to bring those who are far off into renewed fellowship with His Father and theirs.

On the other hand, the recognition of Satan, the evil angel, marks an equally great change from the theology of the book of Samuel. The primitive Israelite religion had not yet reached the stage at which the origin and existence of moral evil became an urgent problem of religious thought; men had not yet realised the logical consequences of the doctrine of Divine unity and omnipotence. Not only was material evil traced to Jehovah as the expression of His just wrath against sin, but "morally pernicious acts were quite frankly ascribed to the direct agency of God."* God hardens the heart of Pharaoh and the Canaanites; Saul is instigated by an evil spirit from Jehovah to make an attempt upon the life of David; Jehovah moves David to number Israel; He sends forth a lying spirit that Ahab's prophets may prophesy falsely and entice him to his ruin.† The Divine origin of moral evil implied in these passages is definitely stated in the book of Proverbs: "Jehovah hath made everything for its own end, yea even the wicked for the day of evil"; in Lamentations, "Out of the mouth of the Most High cometh there not evil and good?" and in the book of Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am Jehovah, that doeth all these things."‡

The ultra-Calvinism, so to speak, of earlier Israelite religion was only possible so long as its full significance was not understood. An emphatic assertion of the absolute sovereignty of the one God was necessary as a protest against polytheism, and later on against dualism as well. For practical purposes men's faith needed to be protected by the assurance that God worked out His purposes in and through human wickedness. The earlier attitude of the Old Testament towards moral evil had a distinct practical and theological value.

But the conscience of Israel could not always rest in this view of the origin of evil. As the standard of morality was raised, and its obligations were more fully insisted on, as men shrank from causing evil themselves and from the use of deceit and violence, they hesitated more and more to ascribe to Jehovah what they sought to avoid themselves. And yet no easy way of escape presented itself. The facts remained; the temptation to do evil was part of the punishment of the sinner and of the discipline of the saint. It was impossible to deny that sin had its place

* Schultz, "Old Testament Theology," ii. 270.

† Exod. iv. 21; Josh. xi. 20; 1 Sam. xix. 9, 10; 2 Sam. xiv. 1; 1 Kings xxii. 20-23.

‡ Prov. xvi. 4; Lam. iii. 38; Isa. xlv. 7.

in God's government of the world; and in view of men's growing reverence and moral sensitiveness, it was becoming almost equally impossible to admit without qualification or explanation that God was Himself the Author of evil. Jewish thought found itself face to face with the dilemma against which the human intellect vainly beats its wings, like a bird against the bars of its cage.

However, even in the older literature there were suggestions, not indeed of a solution of the problem, but of a less objectionable way of stating facts. In Eden the temptation to evil comes from the serpent; and, as the story is told, the serpent is quite independent of God; and the question of any Divine authority or permission for its action is not in any way dealt with. It is true that the serpent was one of the beasts of the field which the Lord God had made, but the narrator probably did not consider the question of any Divine responsibility for its wickedness. Again, when Ahab is enticed to his ruin, Jehovah does not act directly, but through the twofold agency first of the lying spirit and then of the deluded prophets. This tendency to dissociate God from any direct agency of evil is further illustrated in Job and Zechariah. When Job is to be tried and tempted, the actual agent is the malevolent Satan; and the same evil spirit stands forth to accuse the high-priest Joshua * as the representative of Israel. The development of the idea of angelic agency afforded new resources for the reverent exposition of the facts connected with the origin and existence of moral evil. If a sense of Divine majesty led to a recognition of the angel of Jehovah as the Mediator of revelation, the reverence for Divine holiness imperatively demanded that the immediate causation of evil should also be associated with angelic agency. This agent of evil receives the name of Satan, the adversary of man, the *advocatus diaboli* who seeks to discredit man before God, the impeacher of Job's loyalty and of Joshua's purity. Yet Jehovah does not resign any of His omnipotence. In Job Satan cannot act without God's permission; he is strictly limited by Divine control: all that he does only illustrates Divine wisdom and effects the Divine purpose. In Zechariah there is no refutation of the charge brought by Satan; its truth is virtually admitted: nevertheless Satan is rebuked for his attempt to hinder God's gracious purposes towards His people. Thus later Jewish thought left the ultimate Divine sovereignty untouched, but attributed the actual and direct causation of moral evil to malign spiritual agency.

Trained in this school, the chronicler must have read with something of a shock that Jehovah moved David to commit the sin of numbering Israel. He was familiar with the idea that in such matters Jehovah used or permitted the activity of Satan. Accordingly he carefully avoids reproducing any words from the book of Samuel that imply a direct Divine temptation of David, and ascribes it to the well-known and crafty animosity of Satan against Israel. In so doing, he has gone somewhat further than his predecessors: he is not careful to emphasise any Divine permission given to Satan or Divine control exercised over him. The subsequent narrative implies an overruling for good, and the chronicler may have expected his readers to un-

* Zech. iii. i.

derstand that Satan here stood in the same relation to God as in Job and Zechariah; but the abrupt and isolated introduction of Satan to bring about the fall of David invests the arch-enemy with a new and more independent dignity.

The progress of the Jews in moral and spiritual life had given them a keener appreciation both of good and evil, and of the contrast and opposition between them. Over against the pictures of the good kings, and of the angel of the Lord, the generation of the chronicler set the complementary pictures of the wicked kings and the evil angel. They had a higher ideal to strive after, a clearer vision of the kingdom of God; they also saw more vividly the depths of Satan and recoiled with horror from the abyss revealed to them.

Our text affords a striking illustration of the tendency to emphasise the recognition of Satan as the instrument of evil and to ignore the question of the relation of God to the origin of evil. Possibly no more practical attitude can be assumed towards this difficult question. The absolute relation of evil to the Divine sovereignty is one of the problems of the ultimate nature of God and man. Its discussion may throw many sidelights upon other subjects, and will always serve the edifying and necessary purpose of teaching men the limitations of their intellectual powers. Otherwise theologians have found such controversies barren, and the average Christian has not been able to derive from them any suitable nourishment for his spiritual life. Higher intelligences than our own, we have been told,—

“ . . . reasoned high
Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.”

On the other hand, it is supremely important that the believer should clearly understand the reality of temptation as an evil spiritual force opposed to Divine grace. Sometimes this power of Satan will show itself as “the alien law in his members, warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity under the law of sin, which is in his members.” He will be conscious that “he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.” But sometimes temptation will rather come from the outside. A man will find his “adversary” in circumstances, in evil companions, in “the sight of means to do ill deeds”; the serpent whispers in his ear, and Satan moves him to wrong-doing. Let him not imagine for a moment that he is delivered over to the powers of evil; let him realise clearly that with every temptation God provides a way of escape. Every man knows in his own conscience that speculative difficulties can neither destroy the sanctity of moral obligation nor hinder the operation of the grace of God.

Indeed, the chronicler is at one with the books of Job and Zechariah in showing us the malice of Satan overruled for man's good and God's glory. In Job the affliction of the Patriarch only serves to bring out his faith and devotion, and is eventually rewarded by renewed and increased prosperity; in Zechariah the protest of Satan against God's gracious purposes for Israel is made the occasion of a singular display of God's favour towards His people and their priest. In Chronicles the malicious intervention of Satan leads up to the building of the Temple.

Long ago Jehovah had promised to choose

a place in Israel wherein to set His name; but, as the chronicler read in the history of his nation, the Israelites dwelt for centuries in Palestine, and Jehovah made no sign: the ark of God still dwelt in curtains. Those who still looked for fulfilment of this ancient promise must often have wondered by what prophetic utterance or vision Jehovah would make known His choice. Bethel had been consecrated by the vision of Jacob, when he was a solitary fugitive from Esau, paying the penalty of his selfish craft; but the lessons of past history are not often applied practically, and probably no one ever expected that Jehovah's choice of the site for His one temple would be made known to His chosen king, the first true Messiah of Israel, in a moment of even deeper humiliation than Jacob's, or that the Divine announcement would be the climax of a series of events initiated by the successful machinations of Satan.

Yet herein lies one of the main lessons of the incident. Satan's machinations are not really successful; he often attains his immediate object, but is always defeated in the end. He estranges David from Jehovah for a moment, but eventually Jehovah and His people are drawn into closer union, and their reconciliation is sealed by the long-expected choice of a site for the Temple. Jehovah is like a great general, who will sometimes allow the enemy to obtain a temporary advantage, in order to overwhelm him in some crushing defeat. The eternal purpose of God moves onward, unrelenting and unshaking; its quiet and irresistible persistence finds special opportunity in the hindrances that seem sometimes to check its progress. In David's case a few months showed the whole process complete: the malice of the Enemy; the sin and punishment of his unhappy victim; the Divine relenting and its solemn symbol in the newly consecrated altar. But with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; and this brief episode in the history of a small people is a symbol alike of the eternal dealings of God in His government of the universe and of His personal care for the individual soul. How short-lived has been the victory of sin in many souls! Sin is triumphant; the tempter seems to have it all his own way, but his first successes only lead to his final rout; the devil is cast out by the Divine exorcism of chastisement and forgiveness; and he learns that his efforts have been made to subserve the training in the Christian warfare of such warriors as Augustine and John Bunyan. Or, to take a case more parallel to that of David, Satan catches the saint unawares, and entraps him into sin; and, behold, while the evil one is in the first flush of triumph, his victim is back again at the throne of grace in an agony of contrition, and before long the repentant sinner is bowed down into a new humility at the undeserved graciousness of the Divine pardon: the chains of love are riveted with a fuller constraint about his soul, and he is tenfold more the child of God than before.

And in the larger life of the Church and the world Satan's triumphs are still the heralds of his utter defeat. He prompted the Jews to slay Stephen; and the Church were scattered abroad, and went about preaching the word; and the young man at whose feet the witnesses laid down their garments became the Apostle of the Gentiles. He tricked the reluctant Diocletian into ordering the greatest of the persecutions,

and in a few years Christianity was an established religion in the empire. In more secular matters the apparent triumph of an evil principle is usually the signal for its downfall. In America the slave-holders of the Southern States rode roughshod over the Northerners for more than a generation, and then came the Civil War.

These are not isolated instances, and they serve to warn us against undue depression and despondency when for a season God seems to refrain from any intervention with some of the evils of the world. We are apt to ask in our impatience,—

“Is there not wrong too bitter for atoning?

What are these desperate and hideous years?

Hast Thou not heard Thy whole creation groaning,
Sighs of the bondsman, and a woman's tears?”

The works of Satan are as earthly as they are devilish; they belong to the world, which passeth away, with the lust thereof: but the gracious providence of God has all infinity and all eternity to work in. Where to-day we can see nothing but the destroying angel with his flaming sword, future generations shall behold the temple of the Lord.

David's sin, and penitence, and pardon were no inappropriate prelude to this consecration of Mount Moriah. The Temple was not built for the use of blameless saints, but the worship of ordinary men and women. Israel through countless generations was to bring the burden of its sins to the altar of Jehovah. The sacred splendour of Solomon's dedication festival duly represented the national dignity of Israel and the majesty of the God of Jacob; but the self-abandonment of David's repentance, the deliverance of Jerusalem from impending pestilence, the Divine pardon of presumptuous sin, constituted a still more solemn inauguration of the place where Jehovah had chosen to set His name. The sinner, seeking the assurance of pardon in atoning sacrifice, would remember how David had then received pardon for his sin, and how the acceptance of his offering had been the signal for the disappearance of the destroying angel. So in the Middle Ages penitents founded churches to expiate their sins. Such sanctuaries would symbolise to sinners in after-times the possibility of forgiveness; they were monuments of God's mercy as well as of the founders' penitence. To-day churches, both in fabric and fellowship, have been made sacred for individual worshippers because in them the Spirit of God has moved them to repentance and bestowed upon them the assurance of pardon. Moreover, this solemn experience consecrates for God His most acceptable temples in the souls of those that love Him.

One other lesson is suggested by the happy issues of Satan's malign interference in the history of Israel as understood by the chronicler. The inauguration of the new altar was a direct breach of the Levitical law, and involved the superseding of the altar and tabernacle that had hitherto been the only legitimate sanctuary for the worship of Jehovah. Thus the new order had its origin in the violation of existing ordinances and the neglect of an ancient sanctuary. Its early history constituted a declaration of the transient character of sanctuaries and systems of ritual. God would not eternally limit Himself to any building, or His grace to the observance of any forms of external ritual. Long before the

chronicler's time Jeremiah had proclaimed this lesson in the ears of Judah: "Go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. . . . I will do unto the house which is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. . . . I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."* In the Tabernacle all things were made according to the pattern that was showed to Moses in the mount; for the Temple David was made to understand the pattern of all things "in writing from the hand of Jehovah."† If the Tabernacle could be set aside for the Temple, the Temple might in its turn give place to the universal Church. If God allowed David in his great need to ignore the one legitimate altar of the Tabernacle and to sacrifice without its officials, the faithful Israelite might be encouraged to believe that in extreme emergency Jehovah would accept his offering without regard to place or priest.

The principles here involved are of very wide application. Every ecclesiastical system was at first a new departure. Even if its highest claims be admitted, they simply assert that within historic times God set aside some other system previously enjoying the sanction of His authority, and substituted for it a more excellent way. The Temple succeeded the Tabernacle; the synagogue appropriated in a sense part of the authority of the Temple; the Church superseded both synagogue and Temple. God's action in authorising each new departure warrants the expectation that He may yet sanction new ecclesiastical systems; the authority which is sufficient to establish is also adequate to supersede. When the Anglican Church broke away from the unity of Western Christendom by denying the supremacy of the Pope and refusing to recognise the orders of other Protestant Churches, she set an example of dissidence that was naturally followed by the Presbyterians and Independents. The revolt of the Reformers against the theology of their day in a measure justifies those who have repudiated the dogmatic systems of the Reformed Churches. In these and in other ways to claim freedom from authority, even in order to set up a new authority of one's own, involves in principle at least the concession to others of a similar liberty of revolt against one's self.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

IN dealing with the various subjects of this book, we have reserved for separate treatment their relation to the Messianic hopes of the Jews and to the realisation of these hopes in Christ. The Messianic teaching of Chronicles is only complete when we collect and combine the noblest traits in its pictures of David and Solomon, of prophets, priests, and kings. We cannot ascribe to Chronicles any great influence on the subsequent development of the Jewish idea of the Messiah. In the first place the chronicler does not point out the bearing which his treatment of history has upon the expectation of a future deliverer. He has no formal in-

tenion of describing the character and office of the Messiah; he merely wishes to write a history so as to emphasise the facts which most forcibly illustrated the sacred mission of Israel. And, in the second place, Chronicles never exercised any great influence over Jewish thought, and never attained to anything like the popularity of the books of Samuel and Kings. Many circumstances conspired to prevent the Temple ministry* from obtaining an undivided authority over later Judaism. The growth of their power was broken in upon by the persecution of Antiochus and the wars of the Maccabees. The ministry of the Temple under the Maccabæan high-priests must have been very different from that to which the chronicler belonged. Even if the priests and Levites still exercised any influence upon theology, they were overshadowed by the growing importance of the rabbinical schools of Babylon and Palestine. Moreover, the rise of Hellenistic Judaism and the translation of the Scriptures into Greek introduced another new and potent factor into the development of the Jewish religion. Of all the varied forces that were at work few or none tended to assign any special authority to Chronicles, nor has it left any very marked traces on later literature. Josephus indeed uses it for his history, but the New Testament is under very slight obligation to our author.

But Chronicles reveals to us the position and tendencies of Jewish thought in the interval between Ezra and the Maccabees. The Messiah was expected to renew the ancient glories of the chosen people, "to restore the kingdom to Israel"; we learn from Chronicles what sort of a kingdom He was to restore. We see the features of the ancient monarchy that were dear to the memories of the Jews, the characters of the prophets, priests, and kings whom they delighted to honour. As their ideas of the past shaped and coloured their hopes for the future, their conception of what was noblest and best in the history of the monarchy was at the same time the measure of what they expected in the Messiah. However little influence Chronicles may have exerted as a piece of literature, the tendencies of which it is a monument continued to leaven the thought of Israel, and are everywhere manifest in the New Testament.

We have to bear in mind that Messiah, "Anointed," was the familiar title of the Israelite kings; its use for the priests was late and secondary. The use of a royal title to denote the future Saviour of the nation shows us that He was primarily conceived of as an ideal king; and apart from any formal enunciation of this conception, the title itself would exercise a controlling influence upon the development of the Messianic idea. Accordingly in the New Testament we find that the Jews were looking for a king; and Jesus calls His new society the Kingdom of Heaven.

But for the chronicler the Messiah, the Anointed of Jehovah, is no mere secular prince. We have seen how the chronicler tends to include religious duties and prerogatives among the functions of the king. David and Solomon and their pious successors are supreme alike in Church and state as the earthly representatives of Jehovah. The actual titles of priest and prophet are not bestowed upon the kings, but they are virtually priests in their care for and control over the buildings and ritual of the Tem-

* Jer. vii. 12-14; xxvi. 6.

† 1 Chron. xxviii. 19.

ple, and they are prophets when, like David and Solomon, they hold direct fellowship with Jehovah and announce His will to the people. Moreover, David, as "the Psalmist of Israel," had become the inspired interpreter of the religious experience of the Jews. The ancient idea of the king as the victorious conqueror was gradually giving place to a more spiritual conception of his office; the Messiah was becoming more and more a definitely religious personage. Thus Chronicles prepared the way for the acceptance of Christ as a spiritual Deliverer, who was not only King, but also Priest and Prophet. In fact, we may claim the chronicler's own implied authority for including in the picture of the coming King the characteristics he ascribes to the priest and the prophet. Thus the Messiah of Chronicles is distinctly more spiritual and less secular than the Messiah of popular Jewish enthusiasm in our Lord's own time. Whereas in the chronicler's time the tendency was to spiritualise the idea of the king, the tenure of the office of high-priest by the Maccabæan princes tended rather to secularise the priesthood and to restore older and cruder conceptions of the Messianic King.

Let us see how the chronicler's history of the house of David illustrates the person and work of the Son of David, who came to restore the ancient monarchy in the spiritual kingdom of which it was the symbol. The Gospels introduce our Lord very much as the chronicler introduces David: they give us His genealogy, and pass almost immediately to His public ministry. Of his training and preparation for that ministry, of the chain of earthly circumstances that determined the time and method of His entry upon the career of a public Teacher, they tell us next to nothing. We are only allowed one brief glimpse of the life of the holy Child; our attention is mainly directed to the royal Saviour when He has entered upon His kingdom; and His Divine nature finds expression in mature manhood, when none of the limitations of childhood detract from the fulness of His redeeming service and sacrifice.

The authority of Christ rests on the same basis as that of the ancient kings: it is at once human and Divine. In Christ indeed this twofold authority is in one sense peculiar to Himself; but in the practical application of His authority to the hearts and consciences of men He treads in the footsteps of His ancestors. His kingdom rests on His own Divine commission and on the consent of His subjects. God has given Him the right to rule, but He will not reign in any heart till He receives its free submission. And still, as of old, Christ, thus chosen and well beloved of God and man, is King over the whole life of His people, and claims to rule over them in their homes, their business, their recreation, their social and political life, as well as in their public and private worship. If David and his pious successors were devoted to Jehovah and His temple, if they protected their people from foreign foes and wisely administered the affairs of Israel, Christ sets us the example of perfect obedience to the Father; He gives us deliverance and victory in our warfare against principalities and powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places; He administers in peace and holiness the inner kingdom of the believing heart. All that was

foreshadowed both by David and Solomon is realised in Christ. The warlike David is a symbol of the holy warfare of Christ and the Church militant, of Him who came not to send peace on earth, but a sword; Solomon is the symbol of Christ, the Prince of peace in the Church triumphant. The tranquillity and splendour of the reign of the first son of David are types of the serene glory of Christ's kingdom as it is partly realised in the hearts of His children and as it will be fully realised in heaven; the God-given wisdom of Solomon prefigures the perfect knowledge and understanding of Him who is Himself the Word and Wisdom of God.

The shadows that darken the history of the kings of Judah and even the life of David himself remind us that the Messiah moved upon a far higher moral and spiritual level than the monarchs whose royal dignity was a type of His own. Like David, He was exposed to the machinations of Satan; but, unlike David, He successfully resisted the tempter. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

The great priestly work of David and Solomon was the building of the Temple and the organisation of its ritual and ministry. By this work the kings made splendid provision for fellowship between Jehovah and His people, and for the system of sacrifices, whereby a sinful nation expressed their penitence and received the assurance of forgiveness. This has been the supreme work of Christ: through Him we have access to God; we enter into the holy place, into the Divine presence, by a new and living way, that is to say His flesh; He has brought us into the perpetual fellowship of the Spirit. And whereas Solomon could only build one temple, to which the believer paid occasional visits and obtained the sense of Divine fellowship through the ministry of the priests, Christ makes every faithful heart the temple of sacred service, and He has offered for us the one sacrifice, and provides a universal atonement.

In His priesthood, as in His sacrifice, He represents us before God, and this representation is not merely technical and symbolic: in Him we find ourselves brought near to God, and our desires and aspirations are presented as petitions at the throne of the heavenly grace. But, on the other hand, in His love and righteousness He represents God to us, and brings the assurance of our acceptance.

Other minor features of the office and rights of the priests and Levites find a parallel in Christ. He also is our Teacher and our Judge; to Him and to His service all worldly wealth may be consecrated. Christ is in all things the spiritual Heir of the house of Aaron as well as of the house of David; because He is a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, He, like Melchizedek, is also King of Salem; of His kingdom and of His priesthood there shall be no end. But while Christ is to the Kingdom of Heaven what David was to the Israelite monarchy, while in the different aspects of His work He is at once Temple, Priest, and Sacrifice, yet in the ministry of His earthly life He is above all a Prophet, the supreme successor of Elijah and Isaiah. It was only in a figure that He sat upon David's throne: it formed no part of His plan to exercise earthly dominion: His kingdom was not of this world. He did not belong to the priestly tribe, and performed none of the ex-

ternal acts of priestly ritual; He did not base His authority upon any genealogy with regard to priesthood, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "It is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah, as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests."* His royal birth had its symbolic value, but He never asked men to believe in Him because of His human descent from David. He relied as little on the authority of office as on that of birth. Officially He was neither scribe nor rabbi. Like the prophets, His only authority was His Divine commission and the witness of the Spirit in the hearts of His hearers. The people recognised Him as a prophet; they took Him for Elijah or one of the prophets; He spoke of Himself as a prophet: "Not without honour, save in His own country." We have seen that, while the priests ministered to the regular and recurring needs of the people, the Divine guidance in special emergencies and the Divine authority for new departures were given by the prophets. By a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt,† and Christ as a Prophet led His people out of the bondage of the Law into the liberty of the Gospel. By Him the Divine authority was given for the greatest religious revolution that the world has ever seen. And still He is the Prophet of the Church. He does not merely provide for the religious wants that are common to every race and to every generation: as the circumstances of His Church alter, and the believer is confronted with fresh difficulties and called upon to undertake new tasks, Christ reveals to His people the purpose and counsel of God. Even the record of His earthly teaching is constantly found to have anticipated the needs of our own time; His Spirit enables us to discover fresh applications of the truths He taught: and through Him special light is sought and granted for the guidance of individuals and of the Church in their need.

But in Chronicles special stress is laid on the darker aspects of the work of the prophets. They constantly appear to administer rebukes and announce coming punishment. Both Christ and His apostles were compelled to assume the same attitude towards Israel. Like Jeremiah, their hearts sank under the burden of so stern a duty. Christ denounced the Pharisees, and wept over the city that knew not the things belonging to its peace; He declared the impending ruin of the Temple and the Holy City. Even so His Spirit still rebukes sin, and warns the impenitent of inevitable punishment.

We have seen also in Chronicles that no stress was laid on any material rewards for the prophets, and that their fidelity was sometimes recompensed with persecution and death. Like Christ Himself, they had nothing to do with priestly wealth and splendour. The silence of the chronicler as to the income of these prophets makes them fitting types of Him who had not where to lay His head. A discussion of the income of Christ would almost savour of blasphemy; we should shrink from inquiring how far "those who derived spiritual profit from His teaching gave Him substantial proofs of their appreciation of His ministry." Christ's recompense at the hands of the world and of the Jewish Church was that which former prophets had received. Like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, He was

persecuted and slain; He delivered a prophet's message, and died a prophet's death.

But, besides the chronicler's treatment of the offices of prophet, priest, and king, there was another feature of his teaching which would prepare the way for a clear comprehension of the person and work of Christ. We have noticed how the growing sense of the power and majesty of Jehovah seemed to set Him at a distance from man, and how the Jews welcomed the idea of the mediation of an angelic ministry. And yet the angels were too vague and unfamiliar, too little known, and too imperfectly understood to satisfy men's longing for some means of fellowship between themselves and the remote majesty of an almighty God; while still their ministry served to maintain faith in the possibility of mediation, and to quicken the yearning after some better way of access to Jehovah. When Christ came he found this faith and yearning waiting to be satisfied; they opened a door through which Christ found His way into hearts prepared to receive Him. In Him the familiar human figures of priest and prophet were exalted into the supernatural dignity of the Angel of Jehovah. Men had long strained their eyes in vain to a far-off heaven; and, behold, a human voice recalled their gaze to the earth; and they turned and found God beside them, kindly and accessible, a Man with men. They realised the promise that a modern poet puts into David's mouth:—

". . . O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever; a Hand like
this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the
Christ stand!"

We have thus seen how the figures of the chronicler's history—prophet, priest, king, and angel—were types and foreshadowings of Christ. We may sum up this aspect of his teaching by a quotation from a modern exponent of Old Testament theology:—

"Moses the prophet is the first type of the Mediator. By his side stands Aaron the priest, who connects the people with God, and consecrates it. . . . But from the time of David both these figures pale in the imagination of the people before the picture of the Davidic king. His is the figure which appears the most indispensable condition of all true happiness for Israel. David is the third and by far the most perfect type of the Consummator."*

This recurrence to the king as the most perfect type of the Redeemer suggests a last application of the Messianic teaching of the chronicler. In discussing his pictures of the kings, we have ventured to give them a meaning adapted to modern political life. In Israel the king stood for the state. When a community combined for common action to erect a temple or repel an invader, the united force was controlled and directed by the king; he was the symbol of national union and co-operation. To-day, when a community acts as a whole, its agent and instrument is the civil government; the state is the people organised for the common good, subordinating individual ends to the welfare of the whole nation. Where the Old Testament has "king," its modern equivalent may read the state or the civil government,—nay, even for special purposes the municipality, the county

* Heb. vii. 14.

† Hos. xii. 13.

* Schultz, "Old Testament Theology," ii. 353.

council, or the school board. Shall we obtain any helpful or even intelligent result if we apply this method of translation to the doctrine of the Messiah? Externally at any rate the translation bears a startling likeness to what has been regarded as a specially modern development. "Israel looked for salvation from the king," would read, "Modern society should seek salvation from the state." Assuredly there are many prophets who have taken up this burden without any idea that their new heresy was only a reproduction of old and forgotten orthodoxy. But the history of the growth of the Messianic idea supplies a correction to the primitive baldness of this principle of salvation by the state. In time the picture of the Messianic King came to include the attributes of the prophet and the priest. If we care to complete our modern application, we must affirm that the state can never be a saviour till it becomes sensitive to Divine influences and conscious of a Divine presence.

When we see how the Messianic hope of Israel was purified and ennobled to receive a fulfilment glorious beyond its wildest dreams, we are encouraged to believe that the fantastic visions of the Socialist may be divinely guided to some reasonable ideal and may prepare the way for some further manifestation of the grace of God. But the Messianic state, like the Messiah, may be called upon to suffer and die for the salvation of the world, that it may receive a better resurrection.

BOOK IV.

THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST PRAYER OF DAVID.

I CHRONICLES XXIX. 10-19.

In order to do justice to the chronicler's method of presenting us with a number of very similar illustrations of the same principle, we have in the previous book grouped much of his material under a few leading subjects. There remains the general thread of the history, which is, of course, very much the same in Chronicles as in the book of Kings, and need not be dwelt on at any length. At the same time some brief survey is necessary for the sake of completeness and in order to bring out the different complexion given to the history by the chronicler's alterations and omissions. Moreover, there are a number of minor points that are most conveniently dealt with in the course of a running exposition.

The special importance attached by the chronicler to David and Solomon has enabled us to treat their reigns at length in discussing his picture of the ideal king; and similarly the reign of Ahaz has served as an illustration of the character and fortunes of the wicked kings. We therefore take up the history at the accession of Rehoboam, and shall simply indicate very briefly the connection of the reign of Ahaz with what precedes and follows. But before passing on to Rehoboam we must consider "The Last Prayer of David," a devotional paragraph peculiar to

Chronicles. The detailed exposition of this passage would have been out of proportion in a brief sketch of the chronicler's account of the character and reign of David, and would have had no special bearing on the subject of the ideal king. On the other hand, the "Prayer" states some of the leading principles which govern the chronicler in his interpretation of the history of Israel; and its exposition forms a suitable introduction to the present division of our subject.

The occasion of this prayer was the great closing scene of David's life, which we have already described. The prayer is a thanksgiving for the assurance David had received that the accomplishment of the great purpose of his life, the erection of a temple to Jehovah, was virtually secured. He had been permitted to collect the materials for the building, he had received the plans of the Temple from Jehovah, and had placed them in the willing hands of his successor. The princes and the people had caught his own enthusiasm and lavishly supplemented the bountiful provision already made for the future work. Solomon had been accepted as king by popular acclamation. Every possible preparation had been made that could be made, and the aged king poured out his heart in praise to God for His grace and favour.

The prayer falls naturally into four subdivisions: vv. 10-13 are a kind of doxology in honour of Jehovah; in vv. 14-16 David acknowledges that Israel is entirely dependent upon Jehovah for the means of rendering Him acceptable service; in ver. 17 he claims that he and his people have offered willingly unto Jehovah; and in vv. 18 and 19 he prays that Solomon and the people may build the Temple and abide in the Law.

In the doxology God is addressed as "Jehovah, the God of Israel, our Father," and similarly in ver. 18 as "Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel." For the chronicler the accession of David is the starting-point of Israelite history and religion, but here, as in the genealogies, he links his narrative to that of the Pentateuch, and reminds his readers that the crowning dispensation of the worship of Jehovah in the Temple rested on the earlier revelations to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

We are at once struck by the divergence from the usual formula: "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moreover, when God is referred to as the God of the Patriarch personally, the usual phrase is "the God of Jacob." The formula, "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," occurs again in Chronicles in the account of Hezekiah's reformation; it only occurs elsewhere in the history of Elijah in the book of Kings.* The chronicler avoids the use of the name "Jacob," and for the most part calls the Patriarch "Israel." "Jacob" only occurs in two poetic quotations, where its omission was almost impossible, because in each case "Israel" is used in the parallel clause.† This choice of names is an application of the same principle that led to the omission of the discreditable incidents in the history of David and Solomon. Jacob was the supplanter. The name suggested the unbrotherly craft of the Patriarch. It was not desirable that the Jews should be encouraged to think of Jehovah as the God of a grasping and deceitful man. Jehovah was the God of the Patriarch's nobler nature and

* 2 Chron. xxx. 6; 1 Kings xviii. 36.

† 1 Chron. xvi. 13, 17; Gen. xxxii. 28.

higher life, the God of Israel, who strove with God and prevailed.

In the doxology that follows the resources of language are almost exhausted in the attempt to set forth adequately "the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, . . . the riches and honour, . . . the power and might," of Jehovah. These verses read like an expansion of the simple Christian doxology, "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory," but in all probability the latter is an abbreviation from our text. In both there is the same recognition of the ruling omnipotence of God; but the chronicler, having in mind the glory and power of David and his magnificent offerings for the building of the Temple, is specially careful to intimate that Jehovah is the source of all worldly greatness: "Both riches and honour come of Thee, . . . and in Thy hand it is to make great and to give strength unto all."

The complementary truth, the entire dependence of Israel on Jehovah, is dealt with in the next verses. David has learnt humility from the tragic consequences of his fatal census; his heart is no longer uplifted with pride at the wealth and glory of his kingdom; he claims no credit for the spontaneous impulse of generosity that prompted his munificence. Everything is traced back to Jehovah: "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee." Before, when David contemplated the vast population of Israel and the great array of his warriors, the sense of God's displeasure fell upon him; now, when the riches and honour of his kingdom were displayed before him, he may have felt the chastening influence of his former experience. A touch of melancholy darkened his spirit for a moment; standing upon the brink of the dim, mysterious Sheol, he found small comfort in barbaric abundance of timber and stone, jewels, talents, and darics; he saw the emptiness of all earthly splendour. Like Abraham before the children of Heth, he stood before Jehovah a stranger and a sojourner.* Bildad the Shuhite had urged Job to submit himself to the teaching of a venerable orthodoxy, because "we are of yesterday and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow."† The same thought made David feel his insignificance, in spite of his wealth and royal dominion: "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding."

He turns from these sombre thoughts to the consoling reflection that in all his preparations he has been the instrument of a Divine purpose, and has served Jehovah willingly. To-day he can approach God with a clear conscience: "I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things." He rejoiced, moreover, that the people had offered willingly. The chronicler anticipates the teaching of St. Paul that "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver." David gives of his abundance in the same spirit in which the widow gave her mite. The two narratives are mutually supplementary. It is possible to apply the story of the widow's mite so as to suggest that God values our offerings in inverse proportion to their amount. We are reminded by the willing munificence of David that the rich may give of his abundance as simply and humbly and

as acceptably as the poor man gives of his poverty.

But however grateful David might be for the pious and generous spirit by which his people were now possessed, he did not forget that they could only abide in that spirit by the continued enjoyment of Divine help and grace. His thanksgiving concludes with prayer. Spiritual depression is apt to follow very speedily in the train of spiritual exaltation; days of joy and light are granted to us that we may make provision for future necessity.

David does not merely ask that Israel may be kept in external obedience and devotion; his prayer goes deeper. He knows that out of the heart are the issues of life, and he prays that the heart of Solomon and the thoughts of the heart of the people may be kept right with God. Unless the fountain of life were pure, it would be useless to cleanse the stream. David's special desire is that the Temple may be built, but this desire is only the expression of his loyalty to the Law. Without the Temple the commandments, and testimonies, and statutes of the Law could not be rightly observed. But he does not ask that the people may be constrained to build the Temple and keep the Law in order that their hearts may be made perfect; their hearts are to be made perfect that they may keep the Law.

Henceforward throughout his history the chronicler's criterion of a perfect heart, a righteous life, in king and people, is their attitude towards the Law and the Temple. Because their ordinances and worship formed the accepted standard of religion and morality, through which men's goodness would naturally express themselves. Similarly, only under a supreme sense of duty to God and man may the Christian willingly violate the established canons of religious and social life.

We may conclude by noticing a curious feature in the wording of David's prayer. In the nineteenth, as in the first, verse of this chapter the Temple, according to our English versions, is referred to as "the palace." The original word *birâ* is probably Persian, though a parallel form is quoted from the Assyrian. As a Hebrew word it belongs to the latest and most corrupt stage of the language as found in the Old Testament; and only occurs in Chronicles, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel. In putting this word into the mouth of David, the chronicler is guilty of an anachronism, parallel to his use of the word "darics." The word *birâ* appears to have first become familiar to the Jews as the name of a Persian palace or fortress in Susa; it is used in Nehemiah of the castle attached to the Temple, and in later times the derivative Greek name *Bavis* had the same meaning. It is curious to find the chronicler, in his effort to find a sufficiently dignified title for the temple of Jehovah, driven to borrow a word which belonged originally to the royal magnificence of a heathen empire, and which was used later on to denote the fortress whence a Roman garrison controlled the fanaticism of Jewish worship.* The chronicler's intention, no doubt, was to intimate that the dignity of the Temple surpassed that of any royal palace. He could not suppose that it was greater in extent or constructed of more costly materials; the living presence of Jehovah was its one supreme and unique distinction. The King gave honour to His dwelling-place.

* Gen. xxiii. 4; cf. Psalms xxxix. 13, cxix. 10.

† Job viii. 9.

* Called, however, at that time Antonia.

CHAPTER II.

REHOBOAM AND ABIJAH: THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUAL.

2 CHRONICLES x.-xiii.

THE transition from Solomon to Rehoboam brings to light a serious drawback of the chronicler's principle of selection. In the history of Solomon we read of nothing but wealth, splendour, unchallenged dominion, and superhuman wisdom; and yet the breath is hardly out of the body of the wisest and greatest king of Israel before his empire falls to pieces. We are told, as in the book of Kings, that the people met Rehoboam with a demand for release from "the grievous service of thy father," and yet we were expressly told only two chapters before that "of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and rulers of his chariots and of his horsemen."* Rehoboam apparently had been left by the wisdom of his father to the companionship of headstrong and feather-brained youths; he followed their advice rather than that of Solomon's grey-headed counsellors, with the result that the ten tribes successfully revolted and chose Jeroboam for their king. Rehoboam assembled an army to reconquer his lost territory, but Jehovah through the prophet Shemaiah forbade him to make war against Jeroboam.

The chronicler here and elsewhere shows his anxiety not to perplex simple minds with unnecessary difficulties. They might be harassed and disturbed by the discovery that the king, who built the Temple and was specially endowed with Divine wisdom, had fallen into grievous sin and been visited with condign punishment. Accordingly everything that discredits Solomon and detracts from his glory is omitted. The general principle is sound; an earnest teacher, alive to his responsibilities, will not wantonly obtrude difficulties upon his hearers; when silence does not involve disloyalty to truth, he will be willing that they should remain in ignorance of some of the more mysterious dealings of God in nature and history. But silence was more possible and less dangerous in the chronicler's time than in the nineteenth century. He could count upon a docile and submissive spirit in his readers; they would not inquire beyond what they were told; they would not discover the difficulties for themselves. Jewish youths were not exposed to the attacks of eager and militant sceptics, who would force these difficulties upon their notice in an exaggerated form, and at once demand that they should cease to believe in anything human or Divine.

And yet, though the chronicler had great advantages in this matter, his own narrative illustrates the narrow limits within which the principle of the suppression of difficulties can be safely applied. His silence as to Solomon's sins and misfortunes makes the revolt of the ten tribes utterly inexplicable. After the account of the perfect wisdom, peace, and prosperity of Solomon's reign, the revolt comes upon an intelligent reader with a shock of surprise and almost of incredulity. If he could not test the chronicler's narrative by that of the book of Kings—

* *viii. 2.*

and it was no part of the chronicler's purpose that his history should be thus tested—the violent transition from Solomon's unbroken prosperity to the catastrophe of the disruption would leave the reader quite uncertain as to the general credibility of Chronicles. In avoiding Scylla, our author has fallen into Charybdis; he has suppressed one set of difficulties only to create others. If we wish to help intelligent inquirers and to aid them to form an independent judgment, our safest plan will often be to tell them all we know ourselves and to believe that difficulties, which in no way mar our spiritual life, will not destroy their faith.

In the next section* the chronicler tells how for three years Rehoboam administered his diminished kingdom with wisdom and success; he and his people walked in the way of David and Solomon, and his kingdom was established, and he was strong. He fortified fifteen cities in Judah and Benjamin, and put captains in them, and store of victuals, and oil and wine, and shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong. Rehoboam was further strengthened by deserters from the Northern Kingdom. Though the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua assigned to the priests and Levites cities in the territory held by Jeroboam, yet their intimate association with the Temple rendered it impossible for them to remain citizens of a state hostile to Jerusalem. The chronicler indeed tells us that "Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not execute the priest's office unto Jehovah, and appointed others to be priests for the high places and the he-goats and for the calves which he had." It is difficult to understand what the chronicler means by this statement. On the face of it, we should suppose that Jeroboam refused to employ the house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi for the worship of his he-goats and calves, but the chronicler could not describe such action as casting "them off that they should not execute the priest's office unto Jehovah." The passage has been explained to mean that Jeroboam sought to hinder them from exercising their functions at the Temple by preventing them from visiting Judah; but to confine the priests and Levites to his own kingdom would have been a strange way of casting them off. However, whether driven out by Jeroboam or escaping from him, they came to Jerusalem and brought with them from among the ten tribes other pious Israelites, who were attached to the worship of the Temple. Judah and Jerusalem became the home of all true worshippers of Jehovah; and those who remained in the Northern Kingdom were given up to idolatry or the degenerate and corrupt worship of the high places. The chronicler then gives us some account of Rehoboam's harem and children, and tells that he dealt wisely, and dispersed his twenty-eight sons "throughout all the lands of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city." He gave them the means of maintaining a luxurious table, and provided them with numerous wives, and trusted that, being thus happily circumstanced, they would lack leisure, energy, and ambition to imitate Absalom and Adonijah.

Prosperity and security turned the head of Rehoboam as they had done that of David: "He forsook the law of Jehovah, and all Israel with him." "All Israel" means all the subjects of Rehoboam; the chronicler treats the ten tribes as

* *xi. 5-xii. 1*, peculiar to Chronicles.

cut off from Israel. The faithful worshippers of Jehovah in Judah had been reinforced by the priests, Levites, and all other pious Israelites from the Northern Kingdom; and yet in three years they forsook the cause for which they had left their country and their father's house. Punishment was not long delayed, for Shishak, king of Egypt, invaded Judah with an immense host and took away the treasures of the house of Jehovah and of the king's house.

The chronicler explains why Rehoboam was not more severely punished.* Shishak appeared before Jerusalem with his immense host: Ethiopians, Lubim or Lybians, and Sukiim, a mysterious people only mentioned here. The LXX. and Vulgate translate Sukiim "Troglodytes," apparently identifying them with the cave-dwellers on the western or Ethiopian coast of the Red Sea. In order to find safety from these strange and barbarous enemies, Rehoboam and his princes were gathered together in Jerusalem. Shemaiah the prophet appeared before them and declared that the invasion was Jehovah's punishment for their sin, whereupon they humbled themselves, and Jehovah accepted their penitent submission. He would not destroy Jerusalem, but the Jews should serve Shishak, "that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." When they threw off the yoke of Jehovah, they sold themselves into a worse bondage. There is no freedom to be gained by repudiating the restraints of morality and religion. If we do not choose to be the servants of obedience unto righteousness, our only alternative is to become the slaves "of sin unto death." The repentant sinner may return to his true allegiance, and yet he may still be allowed to taste something of the bitterness and humiliation of the bondage of sin. His Shishak may be some evil habit or propensity or special liability to temptation, that is permitted to harass him without destroying his spiritual life. In time the chastening of the Lord works out the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and the Christian is weaned for ever from the unprofitable service of sin.

Unhappily the repentance inspired by trouble and distress is not always real and permanent. Many will humble themselves before the Lord in order to avert imminent ruin, and will forsake Him when the danger has passed away. Apparently Rehoboam soon fell away again into sin, for the final judgment upon him is, "He did that which was evil, because he set not his heart to seek Jehovah."† David in his last prayer had asked for a "perfect heart" for Solomon, but he had not been able to secure this blessing for his grandson, and Rehoboam was "the foolishness of the people, one that had no understanding, who turned away the people through his counsel."‡

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijah, concerning whom we are told in the book of Kings that "he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father." The chronicler omits this unfavourable verdict; he does not indeed classify Abijah among the good kings by the usual formal statement that "he did that which was good and right in the eyes of Je-

hovah," but Abijah delivers a hortatory speech and by Divine assistance obtains a great victory over Jeroboam. There is not a suggestion of any evil-doing on the part of Abijah; and yet we gather from the history of Asa that in Abijah's reign the cities of Judah were given up to idolatry, with all its paraphernalia of "strange altars, high places, Asherim, and sun-images." As in the case of Solomon, so here, the chronicler has sacrificed even the consistency of his own narrative to his care for the reputation of the house of David. How the verdict of ancient history upon Abijah came to be set aside we do not know. The charitable work of whitewashing the bad characters of history has always had an attraction for enterprising annalists; and Abijah was a more promising subject than Nero, Tiberius, or Henry VIII. The chronicler would rejoice to discover one more good king of Judah; but yet why should the record of Abijah's sins be expunged, while Ahaziah and Amon were still held up to the execration of posterity? Probably the chronicler was anxious that nothing should mar the effect of his narrative of Abijah's victory. If his later sources had recorded anything equally creditable of Ahaziah and Amon, he might have ignored the judgment of the book of Kings in their case also.

The section* to which the chronicler attaches so much importance describes a striking episode in the chronic warfare between Judah and Israel. Here Israel is used, as in the older history, to mean the Northern Kingdom, and does not denote the spiritual Israel—*i. e.*, Judah—as in the previous chapter. This perplexing variation in the use of the term "Israel" shows how far Chronicles has departed from the religious ideas of the book of Kings, and reminds us that the chronicler has only partially and imperfectly assimilated his older material.

Abijah and Jeroboam had each gathered an immense army, but the army of Israel was twice as large as that of Judah: Jeroboam had eight hundred thousand to Abijah's four hundred thousand. Jeroboam advanced, confident in his overwhelming superiority and happy in the belief that Providence sides with the strongest battalions. Abijah, however, was nothing dismayed by the odds against him; his confidence was in Jehovah. The two armies met in the neighbourhood of Mount Zemaraim, upon which Abijah fixed his camp. Mount Zemaraim was in the hill-country of Ephraim, but its position cannot be determined with certainty; it was probably near the border of the two kingdoms. Possibly it was the site of the Benjamite city of the same name mentioned in the book of Joshua in close connection with Bethel.† If so, we should look for it in the neighbourhood of Bethel, a position which would suit the few indications of place given by the narrative.

Before the battle, Abijah made an effort to induce his enemies to depart in peace. From the vantage-ground of his mountain camp he addressed Jeroboam and his army as Jotham had addressed the men of Shechem from Mount Gerizim.‡ Abijah reminded the rebels—for as such he regarded them—that Jehovah, the God of Israel, had given the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons, by a covenant of salt, by a charter as solemn and unalterable as that by which the heave-offerings

* xii. 2-8, 12, peculiar to Chronicles.

† xii. 14, peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ Ecclus. xlvii. 23.

* xiii. 3-22, peculiar to Chronicles.

† Josh. xviii. 22.

‡ Judges ix. 8.

had been given to the sons of Aaron.* The obligation of an Arab host to the guest who had sat at meat with him and eaten of his salt was not more binding than the Divine decree which had given the throne of Israel to the house of David. And yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat had dared to infringe the sacred rights of the elect dynasty. He, the slave of Solomon, had risen up and rebelled against his master.

The indignant prince of the house of David not unnaturally forgets that the disruption was Jehovah's own work, and that Jeroboam rose up against his master, not at the instigation of Satan, but by the command of the prophet Abijah.† The advocates of sacred causes even in inspired moments are apt to be one-sided in their statements of fact.

While Abijah is severe upon Jeroboam and his accomplices and calls them "vain men, sons of Belial," he shows a filial tenderness for the memory of Rehoboam. That unfortunate king had been taken at a disadvantage, when he was young and tender-hearted and unable to deal sternly with rebels. The tenderness which could threaten to chastise his people with scorpions must have been of the kind—

"That dared to look on torture and could not look on war";

it only appears in the history in Rehoboam's headlong flight to Jerusalem. No one, however, will censure Abijah for taking an unduly favourable view of his father's character.

But whatever advantage Jeroboam may have found in his first revolt, Abijah warns him that now he need not think to withstand the kingdom of Jehovah in the hands of the sons of David. He is no longer opposed to an unseasoned youth, but to men who know their overwhelming advantage. Jeroboam need not think to supplement and complete his former achievements by adding Judah and Benjamin to his kingdom. Against his superiority of four hundred thousand soldiers Abijah can set a Divine alliance, attested by the presence of priests and Levites and the regular performance of the pentateuchal ritual, whilst the alienation of Israel from Jehovah is clearly shown by the irregular orders of their priests. But let Abijah speak for himself: "Ye be a great multitude, and there are with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods." Possibly Abijah was able to point to Bethel, where the royal sanctuary of the golden calf was visible to both armies: "Have ye not driven out the priests of Jehovah, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests in heathen fashion? When any one comes to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, ye make him a priest of them that are no gods. But as for us, Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and we have priests, the sons of Aaron, ministering unto Jehovah, and the Levites, doing their appointed work; and they burn unto Jehovah morning and evening burnt offerings and sweet incense: the shewbread also they set in order upon the table that is kept free from all uncleanness; and we have the candlestick of gold, with its lamps, to burn every evening; for we observe the ordinances of Jehovah our God; but ye have forsaken Him. And, behold, God is with us at our head, and His priests, with the trumpets of alarm, to sound an alarm against you. O chil-

* Num. xviii. 19.

† 2 Chron. x. 15.

dren of Israel, fight ye not against Jehovah, the God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper."

This speech, we are told, "has been much admired. It was well suited to its object, and exhibits correct notions of the theoretical institutions." But like much other admirable eloquence, in the House of Commons and elsewhere, Abijah's speech had no effect upon those to whom it was addressed. Jeroboam apparently utilised the interval to plant an ambush in the rear of the Jewish army.

Abijah's speech is unique. There have been other instances in which commanders have tried to make oratory take the place of arms, and, like Abijah, they have mostly been unsuccessful; but they have usually appealed to lower motives. Sennacherib's envoys tried ineffectually to seduce the garrison of Jerusalem from their allegiance to Hezekiah, but they relied on threats of destruction and promises of "a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and honey." There is, however, a parallel instance of more successful persuasion. When Octavian was at war with his fellow-triumvir Lepidus, he made a daring attempt to win over his enemy's army. He did not address them from the safe elevation of a neighbouring mountain, but rode openly into the hostile camp. He appealed to the soldiers by motives as lofty as those urged by Abijah, and called upon them to save their country from civil war by deserting Lepidus. At the moment his appeal failed, and he only escaped with a wound in his breast; but after a while his enemy's soldiers came over to him in detachments, and eventually Lepidus was compelled to surrender to his rival. But the deserters were not altogether influenced by pure patriotism. Octavian had carefully prepared the way for his dramatic appearance in the camp of Lepidus, and had used grosser means of persuasion than arguments addressed to patriotic feeling.

Another instance of a successful appeal to a hostile force is found in the history of the first Napoleon, when he was marching on Paris after his return from Elba. Near Grenoble he was met by a body of royal troops. He at once advanced to the front, and exposing his breast, exclaiming to the opposing ranks, "Here is your emperor; if any one would kill me, let him fire." The detachment, which had been sent to arrest his progress, at once deserted to their old commander. Abijah's task was less hopeful: the soldiers whom Octavian and Napoleon won over had known these generals as lawful commanders of Roman and French armies respectively, but Abijah could not appeal to any old associations in the minds of Jeroboam's army: the Israelites were animated by ancient tribal jealousies, and Jeroboam was made of sterner stuff than Lepidus or Louis XVIII. Abijah's appeal is a monument of his humanity, faith, and devotion; and if it failed to influence the enemy, doubtless served to inspirit his own army.

At first, however, things went hardly with Judah. They were outgeneralled as well as outnumbered: Jeroboam's main body attacked them in front, and the ambush assailed their rear. Like the men of Ai, "when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind them." But Jehovah, who fought against Ai, was fighting for Judah, and they cried unto Jehovah; and then, as at Jericho, "the men of Judah gave a shout, and when they shouted, God smote Jero-

boam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah." The rout was complete, and was accompanied by terrible slaughter. No fewer than five hundred thousand Israelites were slain by the men of Judah. The latter pressed their advantage, and took the neighbouring city of Bethel and other Israelite towns. For the time Israel was "brought under," and did not recover from its tremendous losses during the three years of Abijah's reign. As for Jeroboam, Jehovah smote him, and he died; but "Abijah waxed mighty, and took unto himself fourteen wives, and begat twenty-and-two sons and sixteen daughters."* His history closes with the record of these proofs of Divine favour, and he "slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Asa his son reigned in his stead."

The lesson which the chronicler intends to teach by his narrative is obviously the importance of ritual, not the importance of ritual apart from the worship of the true God; he emphasises the presence of Jehovah with Judah, in contrast to the Israelite worship of calves and those that are no gods. The chronicler dwells upon the maintenance of the legitimate priesthood and the prescribed ritual as the natural expression and clear proof of the devotion of the men of Judah to their God.

It may help us to realise the significance of Abijah's speech, if we try to construct an appeal in the same spirit for a Catholic general in the Thirty Years' War addressing a hostile Protestant army. Imagine Wallenstein or Tilly, moved by some unwonted spirit of pious oratory, addressing the soldiers of Gustavus Adolphus:—

"We have a pope who sits in Peter's chair, bishops and priests ministering unto the Lord, in the true apostolical succession. The sacrifice of the Mass is daily offered; matins, lauds, vespers, and compline are all duly celebrated; our churches are fragrant with incense and glorious with stined glass and images; we have crucifixes, and lamps, and candles; and our priests are fitly clothed in ecclesiastical vestments; for we observe the traditions of the Church, but ye have forsaken the Divine order. Behold, God is with us at our head; and we have banners blessed by the Pope. O ye Swedes, ye fight against God; ye shall not prosper."

As Protestants we may find it difficult to sympathise with the feelings of a devout Romanist or even with those of a faithful observer of the complicated Mosaic ritual. We could not construct so close a parallel to Abijah's speech in terms of any Protestant order of service, and yet the objections which any modern denomination feels to departures from its own forms of worship rest on the same principles as those of Abijah. In the abstract the speech teaches two main lessons: the importance of an official and duly accredited ministry and of a suitable and authoritative ritual. These principles are perfectly general, and are not confined to what is usually known as sacerdotalism and ritualism. Every Church has in practice some official ministry, even those Churches that profess to owe their separate existence to the necessity for protesting against an official ministry. Men whose chief occupation is to denounce priestcraft may themselves be saturated with the sacerdotal spirit. Every Church too, has its ritual. The silence of

a Friends' meeting is as much a rite as the most elaborate genuflection before a highly ornamented altar. To regard either the absence or presence of rites as essential is equally ritualistic. The man who leaves his wonted place of worship because "Amen" is sung at the end of a hymn is as bigoted a ritualist as his brother who dare not pass an altar without crossing himself. Let us then consider the chronicler's two principles in this broad sense. The official ministry of Israel consisted of the priests and Levites, and the chronicler counted it a proof of the piety of the Jews that they adhered to this ministry and did not admit to the priesthood any one who could bring a young bullock and seven rams. The alternative was not between a hereditary priesthood and one open to any aspirant with special spiritual qualifications, but between a duly trained and qualified ministry on the one hand and a motley crew of the forerunners of Simon Magus on the other. It is impossible not to sympathise with the chronicler. To begin with, the proper qualification was too low. If livings are to be purchased at all, they should bear a price commensurate with the dignity and responsibility of the sacred office. A mere entrance fee, so to speak, of a young bullock and seven rams must have flooded Jeroboam's priesthood with a host of adventurers, to whom the assumption of the office was a matter of social or commercial speculation. The private adventure system of providing for the ministry of the word scarcely tends to either the dignity or the efficiency of the Church. But, in any case, it is not desirable that mere worldly gifts, money, social position, or even intellect should be made the sole passport to Christian service; even the traditions and education of a hereditary priesthood would be more probable channels of spiritual qualifications.

Another point that the chronicler objects to in Jeroboam's priests is the want of any other than a property qualification. Any one who chose could be a priest. Such a system combined what might seem opposite vices. It preserved an official ministry; these self-appointed priests formed a clerical order; and yet it gave no guarantee whatever of either fitness or devotion. The chronicler, on the other hand, by the importance he attaches to the Levitical priesthood, recognises the necessity of an official ministry, but is anxious that it should be guarded with jealous care against the intrusion of unsuitable persons. A conclusive argument for an official ministry is to be found in its formal adoption by most Churches and its uninvited appearance in the rest. We should not now be contented with the safeguards against unsuitable ministers to be found in hereditary succession; the system of the Pentateuch would be neither acceptable nor possible in the nineteenth century; and yet, if it had been perfectly administered, the Jewish priesthood would have been worthy of its high office, nor were the times ripe for the substitution of any better system. Many of the considerations which justify hereditary succession in a constitutional monarchy might be adduced in defence of a hereditary priesthood. Even now, without any pressure of law or custom, there is a certain tendency towards hereditary succession in the ministerial office. It would be easy to name distinguished ministers who were inspired for the high calling by their fathers' devoted service, and who received an invaluable preparation for their life-work from the Christian enthusiasm

* This verse must of course be understood to give his whole family history, and not merely that of his three years' reign.

of a clerical household. The clerical ancestry of the Wesleys is only one among many illustrations of an inherited genius for the ministry.

But though the best method of obtaining a suitable ministry varies with changing circumstances, the chronicler's main principle is of permanent and universal application. The Church has always felt a just concern that the official representatives of its faith and order should commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. The prophet needs neither testimonials nor official status: the word of the Lord can have free course without either; but the appointment or election to ecclesiastical office entrusts the official with the honour of the Church and in a measure of its Master.

The chronicler's other principle is the importance of a suitable and authoritative ritual. We have already noticed that any order of service that is fixed by the constitution or custom of a Church involves the principle of ritual. Abijah's speech does not insist that only the established ritual should be tolerated; such questions had not come within the chronicler's horizon. The merit of Judah lay in possessing and practising a legitimate ritual, that is to say in observing the Pauline injunction to do all things decently and in order. The present generation is not inclined to enforce any very stringent obedience to Paul's teaching, and finds it difficult to sympathise with Abijah's enthusiasm for the symbolism of worship. But men to-day are not radically different from the chronicler's contemporaries, and it is as legitimate to appeal to spiritual sensibility through the eye as through the ear; architecture and decoration are neither more nor less eloquent than an attractive voice and impressive elocution. Novelty and variety have, or should have, their legitimate place in public worship; but the Church has its obligations to those who have more regular spiritual wants. Most of us find much of the helpfulness of public worship in the influence of old and familiar spiritual associations, which can only be maintained by a measure of permanence and fixity in Divine service. The symbolism of the Lord's Supper never loses its freshness, and yet it is restful because familiar and impressive because ancient. On the other hand, the maintenance of this ritual is a constant testimony to the continuity of Christian life and faith. Moreover, in this rite the great bulk of Christendom finds the outward and visible sign of its unity.

Ritual, too, has its negative value. By observing the Levitical ordinances the Jews were protected from the vagaries of any ambitious owner of a young bullock and seven rams. While we grant liberty to all to use the form of worship in which they find most spiritual profit, we need to have Churches whose ritual will be comparatively fixed. Christians who find themselves most helped by the more quiet and regular methods of devotion naturally look to a settled order of service to protect them from undue and distracting excitement.

In spite of the wide interval that separates the modern Church from Judaism, we can still discern a unity of principle, and are glad to confirm the judgment of Christian experience from the lessons of an older and different dispensation. But we should do injustice to the chronicler's teaching if we forgot that for his own times his teaching was capable of much more definite and forcible application. Christianity and Islam have

purified religious worship throughout Europe, America, and a large portion of Asia. We are no longer tempted by the cruel, loathsome rites of heathenism. The Jews knew the wild extravagance, gross immorality, and ruthless cruelty of Phœnician and Syrian worship. If we had lived in the chronicler's age and had shared his experience of idolatrous rites, we should have also shared his enthusiasm for the pure and lofty ritual of the Pentateuch. We should have regarded it as a Divine barrier between Israel and the abominations of heathenism, and should have been jealous for its strict observance.

CHAPTER III.

ASA: DIVINE RETRIBUTION.

2 CHRONICLES xiv.-xvi.

ABIJAH, dying, as far as we can gather from Chronicles, in the odour of sanctity, was succeeded by his son Asa. The chronicler's history of Asa is much fuller than that which is given in the book of Kings. The older narrative is used as a framework into which material from later sources is freely inserted. The beginning of the new reign was singularly promising. Abijah had been a very David, he had fought the battles of Jehovah, and had assured the security and independence of Judah. Asa, like Solomon, entered into the peaceful enjoyment of his predecessor's exertions in the field. "In his days the land was quiet ten years," as in the days when the judges had delivered Israel, and he was able to exhort his people to prudent effort by reminding them that Jehovah had given them rest on every side.* This interval of quiet was used for both religious reform and military precautions.† The high places and heathen idols and symbols which had somehow survived Abijah's zeal for the Mosaic ritual were swept away, and Judah was commanded to seek Jehovah and observe the Law; and he built fortresses with towers, and gates, and bars, and raised a great army "that bare bucklers and spears,"—no mere hasty levy of half-armed peasants with scythes and axes. The mighty array surpassed even Abijah's great muster of four hundred thousand from Judah and Benjamin: there were five hundred and eighty thousand men, three hundred thousand out of Judah that bare bucklers and spears and two hundred and eighty thousand out of Benjamin that bare shields and drew bows. The great muster of Benjamites under Asa is in striking contrast to the meagre tale of six hundred warriors that formed the whole strength of Benjamin after its disastrous defeat in the days of the judges; and the splendid equipment of this mighty host shows the rapid progress of the nation from the desperate days of Shamgar and Jael or even of Saul's early reign, when "there was neither shield nor spear seen among forty thousand in Israel."

These references of buildings, especially fortresses, to military stores and the vast numbers of Jewish and Israelite armies, form a distinct class amongst the additions made by the chronicler to the material taken from the book of Kings. They are found in the narratives of the reigns of David, Rehoboam, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah,

* xiv. 1, 7, peculiar to Chronicles.

† xiv. 3-9, peculiar to Chronicles.

Jotham, Manasseh, in fact in the reigns of nearly all the good kings; Manasseh's building was done after he had turned from his evil ways.* Hezekiah and Josiah were too much occupied with sacred festivals on the one hand and hostile invaders on the other to have much leisure for building, and it would not have been in keeping with Solomon's character as the prince of peace to have laid stress on his arsenals and armies. Otherwise the chronicler, living at a time when the warlike resources of Judah were of the slightest, was naturally interested in these reminiscences of departed glory; and the Jewish provincials would take a pride in relating these pieces of antiquarian information about their native towns, much as the servants of old manor-houses delight to point out the wing which was added by some famous Cavalier or by some Jacobite squire.

Asa's warlike preparations were possibly intended, like those of the Triple Alliance, to enable him to maintain peace; but if so, their sequel did not illustrate the maxim, "Si vis pacem, para bellum." The rumour of his vast armaments reached a powerful monarch: "Zerah the Ethiopian."† The vagueness of this description is doubtless due to the remoteness of the chronicler from the times he is describing. Zerah has sometimes been identified with Shishak's successor, Osorkon I., the second king of the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty. Zerah felt that Asa's great army was a standing menace to the surrounding princes, and undertook the task of destroying this new military power: "He came out against them." Numerous as Asa's forces were, they still left him dependent upon Jehovah, for the enemy were even more numerous and better equipped. Zerah led to battle an army of a million men, supported by three hundred war chariots. With this enormous host he came to Mareshah, at the foot of the Judæan highlands, in a direction southwest of Jerusalem. In spite of the inferiority of his army, Asa came out to meet him; "and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah." Like Abijah, Asa felt that, with his Divine ally, he need not be afraid of the odds against him even when they could be counted by hundreds of thousands. Trusting in Jehovah, he had taken the field against the enemy; and now at the decisive moment he made a confident appeal for help: "Jehovah, there is none beside Thee to help between the mighty and him that hath no strength." Five hundred and eighty thousand men seemed nothing compared to the host arrayed against them, and outnumbering them in the proportion of nearly two to one. "Help us, Jehovah our God; for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name are we come against this multitude. Jehovah, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee."

Jehovah justified the trust reposed in Him. He smote the Ethiopians, and they fled towards the southwest in the direction of Egypt; and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar, with fearful slaughter, so that of Zerah's million followers not one remained alive.‡ Of course this statement is hyperbolic. The carnage was enormous, and no living enemies remained in

sight. Apparently Gerar and the neighbouring cities had aided Zerah in his advance and attempted to shelter the fugitives from Mareshah. Paralysed with fear of Jehovah, whose avenging wrath had been so terribly manifested, these cities fell an easy prey to the victorious Jews. They smote and spoiled all the cities about Gerar, and reaped a rich harvest, "for there was much spoil in them." It seems that the nomad tribes of the southern wilderness had also in some way identified themselves with the invaders; Asa attacked them in their turn. "They smote also the tents of cattle"; and as the wealth of these tribes lay in their flocks and herds, "they carried away sheep in abundance and camels, and returned to Jerusalem."

This victory is closely parallel to that of Abijah over Jeroboam. In both the numbers of the armies are reckoned by hundreds of thousands; and the hostile host outnumbered the army of Judah in the one case by exactly two to one, in the other by nearly that proportion: in both the king of Judah trusts with calm assurance to the assistance of Jehovah, and Jehovah smites the enemy; the Jews then massacre the defeated army and spoil or capture the neighbouring cities.

These victories over superior numbers may easily be paralleled or surpassed by numerous striking examples from secular history. The odds were greater at Agincourt, where at least sixty thousand French were defeated by not more than twenty thousand Englishmen; at Marathon the Greeks routed a Persian army ten times as numerous as their own; in India English generals have defeated innumerable hordes of native warriors, as when Wellesley—

"Against the myriads of Assaye
Clashed with his fiery few and won."

For the most part victorious generals have been ready to acknowledge the succouring arm of the God of battles. Shakespeare's Henry V. after Agincourt speaks altogether in the spirit of Asa's prayer:—

" . . . O God, Thy arm was here;
And not to us, but to Thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all. . . . Take it, God,
For it is only Thine."

When the small craft that made up Elizabeth's fleet defeated the huge Spanish galleons and galleasses, and the storms of the northern seas finished the work of destruction, the grateful piety of Protestant England felt that its foes had been destroyed by the breath of the Lord; "Afflavit Deus et dissipantur."

The principle that underlies such feelings is quite independent of the exact proportions of opposing armies. The victories of inferior numbers in a righteous cause are the most striking, but not the most significant, illustrations of the superiority of moral to material force. In the wider movements of international politics we may find even more characteristic instances. It is true of nations as well as of individuals that—

"The Lord killeth and maketh alive;
He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up;
The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich;
He bringeth low, He also lifteth up:
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill,
To make them sit with princes
And inherit the throne of glory."

* 1 Chron. xii., etc.; 2 Chron. xi. 5 ff., xvii. 12 ff., xxvi. 9 ff., xxvii. 4 ff., xxiii. 14.

† xiv. 9-15.

‡ So R. V. marg.; R. V. text (with which A. V. is in substantial agreement): "There fell of the Ethiopians so many that they could not recover themselves"; i. e., the routed army were never able to rally.

Italy in the eighteenth century seemed as hopelessly divided as Israel under the judges, and Greece as completely enslaved to the "unspeakable Turk" as the Jews to Nebuchadnezzar; and yet, destitute as they were of any material resources, these nations had at their disposal great moral forces: the memory of ancient greatness and the sentiment of nationality; and to-day Italy can count hundreds of thousands like the chronicler's Jewish kings, and Greece builds her fortresses by land and her ironclads to command the sea. The Lord has fought for Israel.

But the principle has a wider application. A little examination of the more obscure and complicated movements of social life will show moral forces everywhere overcoming and controlling the apparently irresistible material forces opposed to them. The English and American pioneers of the movements for the abolition of slavery had to face what seemed an impenetrable phalanx of powerful interests and influences; but probably any impartial student of history would have foreseen the ultimate triumph of a handful of earnest men over all the wealth and political power of the slave-owners. The moral forces at the disposal of the abolitionists were obviously irresistible. But the soldier in the midst of smoke and tumult may still be anxious and despondent at the very moment when the spectator sees clearly that the battle is won; and the most earnest Christian workers sometimes falter when they realise the vast and terrible forces that fight against them. At such times we are both rebuked and encouraged by the simple faith of the chronicler in the overruling power of God.

It may be objected that if victory were to be secured by Divine intervention, there was no need to muster five hundred and eighty thousand men or indeed any army at all. If in any and every case God disposes, what need is there for the devotion to His service of our best strength, and energy, and culture, or of any human effort at all? A wholesome spiritual instinct leads the chronicler to emphasise the great preparations of Abijah and Asa. We have no right to look for Divine co-operation till we have done our best; we are not to sit with folded hands and expect a complete salvation to be wrought for us, and then to continue as idle spectators of God's redemption of mankind: we are to tax our resources to the utmost to gather our hundreds of thousands of soldiers; we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

This principle may be put in another way. Even to the hundreds of thousands the Divine help is still necessary. The leaders of great hosts are as dependent upon Divine help as Jonathan and his armour-bearer fighting single-handed against a Philistine garrison, or David arming himself with a sling and stone against Goliath of Gath. The most competent Christian worker in the prime of his spiritual strength needs grace as much as the untried youth making his first venture in the Lord's service.

At this point we meet with another of the chronicler's obvious self-contradictions. At the beginning of the narrative of Asa's reign we are told that the king did away with the high places and the symbols of idolatrous worship, and that, because Judah had thus sought Jehovah, He gave them rest. The deliverance from Zerah is another mark of Divine favour. And yet in the

fifteenth chapter Asa, in obedience to prophetic admonition, takes away the abominations from his dominions, as if there had been no previous reformation, but we are told that the high places were not taken out of Israel. The context would naturally suggest that Israel here means Asa's kingdom, as the true Israel of God; but as the verse is borrowed from the book of Kings, and "out of Israel" is an editorial addition made by the chronicler, it is probably intended to harmonise the borrowed verse with the chronicler's previous statement that Asa did away with the high places. If so, we must understand that Israel means the Northern Kingdom, from which the high places had not been removed, though Judah had been purged from these abominations. But here, as often elsewhere, Chronicles taken alone affords no explanation of its inconsistencies.

Again, in Asa's first reformation he commanded Judah to seek Jehovah and to do the Law and the commandments; and accordingly Judah sought the Lord. Moreover, Abijah, about seventeen years* before Asa's second reformation, made it his special boast that Judah had not forsaken Jehovah, but had priests ministering unto Jehovah, "the sons of Aaron and the Levites in their work." During Rehoboam's reign of seventeen years Jehovah was duly honoured for the first three years, and again after Shishak's invasion in the fifth year of Rehoboam. So that for the previous thirty or forty years the due worship of Jehovah had only been interrupted by occasional lapses into disobedience. But now the prophet Oded holds before this faithful people the warning example of the "long seasons" when Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. And yet previously Chronicles supplies an unbroken list of high-priests from Aaron downwards. In response to Oded's appeal, the king and people set about the work of reformation as if they had tolerated some such neglect of God, the priests, and the Law as the prophet had described.

Another minor discrepancy is found in the statement that "the heart of Asa was perfect all his days"; this is reproduced verbatim from the book of Kings. Immediately afterwards the chronicler relates the evil doings of Asa in the closing years of his reign.

Such contradictions render it impossible to give a complete and continuous exposition of Chronicles that shall be at the same time consistent. Nevertheless they are not without their value for the Christian student. They afford evidence of the good faith of the chronicler. His contradictions are clearly due to his use of independent and discrepant sources, and not to any tampering with the statements of his authorities. They are also an indication that the chronicler attaches much more importance to spiritual edification than to historical accuracy. When he seeks to set before his contemporaries the higher nature and better life of the great national heroes, and thus to provide them with an ideal of kingship, he is scrupulously and painfully careful to remove everything that would weaken the force of the lesson which he is trying to teach; but he is comparatively indifferent to accuracy of historical detail. When his authorities contradict each other as to the number or the date of Asa's reformations, or even the character of his later

* The second reformation is dated early in Asa's fifteenth year, and Abijah only reigned three years.

years, he does not hesitate to place the two narratives side by side and practically to draw lessons from both. The work of the chronicler and its presence with the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels in the sacred canon imply an emphatic declaration of the judgment of the Spirit and the Church that detailed historical accuracy is not a necessary consequence of inspiration. In expounding this second narrative of a reformation by Asa, we shall make no attempt at complete harmony with the rest of Chronicles; any inconsistency between the exposition here and elsewhere will simply arise from a faithful adherence to our text.

The occasion then of Asa's second reformation* was as follows: Asa was returning in triumph from his great defeat of Zerah, bringing with him substantial fruits of victory in the shape of abundant spoil. Wealth and power had proved a snare to David and Rehoboam, and had involved them in grievous sin. Asa might also have succumbed to the temptations of prosperity; but, by a special Divine grace not vouchsafed to his predecessors, he was guarded against danger by a prophetic warning. At the very moment when Asa might have expected to be greeted by the acclamations of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when the king would be elate with the sense of Divine favour, military success, and popular applause, the prophet's admonition checked the undue exaltation which might have hurried Asa into presumptuous sin. Asa and his people were not to presume upon their privilege: its continuance was altogether dependent upon their continued obedience: if they fell into sin the rewards of their former loyalty would vanish like fairy gold. "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Jehovah is with you while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you." This lesson was enforced from the earlier history of Israel. The following verses are virtually a summary of the history of the judges:—

"Now for long seasons Israel was without the true God, and without teaching priest, and without law."

Judges tells how again and again Israel fell away from Jehovah. "But when in their distress they turned unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, and sought Him, he was found of them."

Oded's address is very similar to another and somewhat fuller summary of the history of the judges, contained in Samuel's farewell to the people, in which he reminded them how when they forgot Jehovah, their God, He sold them into the hand of their enemies, and when they cried unto Jehovah, He sent Zerubbabel, and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies on every side, and they dwelt in safety.† Oded proceeds to other characteristics of the period of the judges: "There was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in; but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the lands. And they were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God did vex them with all adversity."

Deborah's song records great vexations: the

* xv., based upon 1 Kings xv. 13-15, but the great bulk of the chapter is peculiar to Chronicles; the original passage from Kings is reproduced, with slight changes in vv. 16-18.

† 1 Sam. xii. 9-11. "Barak" with LXX. and Peshito; Masoretic text has "Bedan."

highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways; the rulers ceased in Israel; Gideon "threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites." The breaking of nation against nation and city against city will refer to the destruction of Succoth and Peniel by Gideon, the sieges of Shechem and Thebez by Abimelech, the massacre of the Ephraimites by Jephthah, and the civil war between Benjamin and the rest of Israel and the consequent destruction of Jabesh-gilead.*

"But," said Oded, "be ye strong, and let not your hands be slack, for your work shall be rewarded." Oded implies that abuses were prevalent in Judah which might spread and corrupt the whole people, so as to draw down upon them the wrath of God and plunge them into all the miseries of the times of the judges. These abuses were wide-spread, supported by powerful interests and numerous adherents. The queen-mother, one of the most important personages in an Eastern state, was herself devoted to heathen observances. Their suppression needed courage, energy, and pertinacity; but if they were resolutely grappled with, Jehovah would reward the efforts of His servants with success, and Judah would enjoy prosperity. Accordingly Asa took courage and put away the abominations out of Judah and Benjamin and the cities he held in Ephraim. The abominations were the idols and all the cruel and obscene accompaniments of heathen worship.‡ In the prophet's exhortation to be strong, and not be slack, and in the corresponding statement that Asa took courage, we have a hint for all reformers. Neither Oded nor Asa underrated the serious nature of the task before them. They counted the cost, and with open eyes and full knowledge confronted the evil they meant to eradicate. The full significance of the chronicler's language is only seen when we remember what preceded the prophet's appeal to Asa. The captain of half a million soldiers, the conqueror of a million Ethiopians with three hundred chariots, has to take courage before he can bring himself to put away the abominations out of his own dominions. Military machinery is more readily created than national righteousness; it is easier to slaughter one's neighbours than to let light into the dark places that are full of the habitations of cruelty; and vigorous foreign policy is a poor substitute for good administration. The principle has its application to the individual. The beam in our own eye seems more difficult to extract than the mote in our brother's, and a man often needs more moral courage to reform himself than to denounce other people's sins or urge them to accept salvation. Most ministers could confirm from their own experience Portia's saying, "I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching."

Asa's reformation was constructive as well as destructive; the toleration of "abominations" had diminished the zeal of the people for Jehovah, and even the altar of Jehovah before the porch of the Temple had suffered from neglect: it was now renewed, and Asa assembled the people for a great festival. Under Rehoboam many pious Israelites had left the Northern Kingdom to dwell where they could freely worship at the Temple; under Asa there was a new migration,

* Judges v. 6-7; vi. 11; viii. 15-17; ix.; xii. 1-7; xx.; xxi. † Cf. 1 Kings xv. 12.

"for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance when they saw that Jehovah his God was with him." And so it came about that in the great assembly which Asa gathered together at Jerusalem not only Judah and Benjamin, but also Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, were represented. The chronicler has already told us that after the return from the Captivity some of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh dwelt at Jerusalem with the children of Judah and Benjamin,* and he is always careful to note any settlement of members of the ten tribes in Judah or any acquisition of northern territory by the kings of Judah. Such facts illustrated his doctrine that Judah was the true spiritual Israel, the real δωδεκάφυλον, or twelve-tribed whole, of the chosen people.

Asa's festival was held in the third month of his fifteenth year, the month Sivan, corresponding roughly to our June. The Feast of Weeks, at which first-fruits were offered, fell in this month; and his festival was probably a special celebration of this feast. The sacrifice of seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep out of the spoil taken from the Ethiopians and their allies might be considered a kind of first-fruits. The people pledged themselves most solemnly to permanent obedience to Jehovah; this festival and its offerings were to be first-fruits or earnest of future loyalty. "They entered into a covenant to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; . . . they swore unto Jehovah with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets." The observance of this covenant was not to be left to the uncertainties of individual loyalty; the community were to be on their guard against offenders, Achans who might trouble Israel. According to the stern law of the Pentateuch,† "whosoever would not seek Jehovah, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman." The seeking of Jehovah so far as it could be enforced by penalties, must have consisted in external observances; and the usual proof that a man did not seek Jehovah would be found in his seeking other gods and taking part in heathen rites. Such apostasy was not merely an ecclesiastical offence: it involved immorality and a falling away from patriotism. The pious Jew could no more tolerate heathenism than we could tolerate in England religions that sanctioned polygamy or suttee.

Having thus entered into covenant with Jehovah, "all Judah rejoiced at their oath because they had sworn with all their heart, and sought Him with their whole desire." At the beginning, no doubt, they, like their king, "took courage"; they addressed themselves with reluctance and apprehension to an unwelcome and hazardous enterprise. They now rejoiced over the Divine grace that had inspired their efforts and been manifested in their courage and devotion, over the happy issue of their enterprise, and over the universal enthusiasm for Jehovah; and He set the seal of his approval upon their gladness, He was found of them, and Jehovah gave them rest round about, so that there was no more war for twenty years: unto the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign. It is an unsavoury task to put away abominations: many foul nests of unclean birds are disturbed in the process; men would not choose to have this particular cross laid upon

them, but only those who take up their cross and follow Christ can hope to enter into the joy of the Lord.

The narrative of this second reformation is completed by the addition of details borrowed from the book of Kings. The chronicler next recounts how in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha began to fortify Ramah as an outpost against Judah, but was forced to abandon his undertaking by the intervention of the Syrian king, Benhadad, whom Asa hired with his own treasures and those of the Temple; whereupon Asa carried off Baasha's stones and timber and built Geba and Mizpah as Jewish outposts against Israel. With the exception of the date and a few minor changes, the narrative so far is taken verbatim from the book of Kings. The chronicler, like the author of the priestly document of the Pentateuch, was anxious to provide his readers with an exact and complete system of chronology; he was the Usher or Clinton of his generation. His date of the war against Baasha is probably based upon an interpretation of the source used for chap. xv.; the first reformation secured a rest of ten years, the second and more thorough reformation a rest exactly twice as long as the first. In the interest of these chronological references, the chronicler has sacrificed a statement twice repeated in the book of Kings: that there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days. As Baasha came to the throne in Asa's third year, the statement of the book of Kings would have seemed to contradict the chronicler's assertion that there was no war from the fifteenth to the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.*

After his victory over Zerah, Asa received a Divine message † which somewhat checked the exuberance of his triumph; a similar message awaited him after his successful expedition to Ramah. By Oded Jehovah had warned Asa, but now He commissioned Hanani the seer to pronounce a sentence of condemnation. The ground of the sentence was that Asa had not relied on Jehovah, but on the king of Syria.

Here the chronicler echoes one of the key-notes of the great prophets. Isaiah had protested against the alliance which Ahaz concluded with Assyria in order to obtain assistance against the united onset of Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, and had predicted that Jehovah would bring upon Ahaz, his people, and his dynasty days that had not come since the disruption, even the King of Assyria.‡ When this prediction was fulfilled, and the thunder-cloud of Assyrian invasion darkened all the land of Judah, the Jews, in their lack of faith, looked to Egypt for deliverance; and again Isaiah denounced the foreign alliance: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, . . . but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Jehovah; . . . the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion."§ So Jeremiah in his turn protested against a revival of the Egyptian alliance: "Thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt also, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria."||

In their successive calamities the Jews could derive no comfort from a study of previous history; the pretext upon which each of their oppressors had intervened in the affairs of Pales-

* Kings xv. 16, 32, 33.

† xvi. 7-10, peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ Isa. vii. 17.

§ Isa xxxi. 1; xxx. 3

| Jer. ii. 36.

* 1 Chron. ix. 3.

† Exod. xxii. 20; Deut. xiii. 5, 9, 15.

tine had been an invitation from Judah. In their trouble they had sought a remedy worse than the disease; the consequences of this political quackery had always demanded still more desperate and fatal medicines. Freedom from the border raids of the Ephraimites was secured at the price of the ruthless devastations of Hazael; deliverance from Rezin only led to the wholesale massacres and spoliation of Sennacherib. Foreign alliance was an opiate that had to be taken in continually increasing doses, till at last it caused the death of the patient.

Nevertheless these are not the lessons which the seer seeks to impress upon Asa. Hanani takes a loftier tone. He does not tell him that his unholy alliance with Benhadad was the first of a chain of circumstances that would end in the ruin of Judah. Few generations are greatly disturbed by the prospect of the ruin of their country in the distant future: "After us the Deluge." Even the pious king Hezekiah, when told of the coming captivity of Judah, found much comfort in the thought that there should be peace and truth in his days. After the manner of the prophets, Hanani's message is concerned with his own times. To his large faith the alliance with Syria presented itself chiefly as the loss of a great opportunity. Asa had deprived himself of the privilege of fighting with Syria, whereby Jehovah would have found fresh occasion to manifest His infinite power and His gracious favour towards Judah. Had there been no alliance with Judah, the restless and warlike king of Syria might have joined Baasha to attack Asa; another million of the heathen and other hundreds of their chariots would have been destroyed by the resistless might of the Lord of Hosts. And yet, in spite of the great object-lesson he had received in the defeat of Zerah, Asa had not thought of Jehovah as his Ally. He had forgotten the all-observing, all-controlling providence of Jehovah, and had thought it necessary to supplement the Divine protection by hiring a heathen king with the treasures of the Temple; and yet "the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." With this thought, that the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the earth, Zechariah* comforted the Jews in the dark days between the Return and the rebuilding of the Temple. Possibly during Asa's twenty years of tranquillity his faith had become enfeebled for want of any severe discipline. It is only with a certain reserve that we can venture to pray that the Lord will "take from our lives the strain and stress." The discipline of helplessness and dependence preserves the consciousness of God's loving providence. The resources of Divine grace are not altogether intended for our personal comfort; we are to tax them to the utmost, in the assurance that God will honour all our drafts upon His treasury. The great opportunities of twenty years of peace and prosperity were not given to Asa to lay up funds with which to bribe a heathen king, and then, with this reinforcement of his accumulated resources, to accomplish the mighty enterprise of stealing Baasha's stones and timber and building the walls of a couple of frontier fortresses. With such a history and such opportunities behind him, Asa should have felt himself competent, with Jehovah's help, to deal with both Baasha

* Zech. iv. 10.

and Benhadad, and should have had courage to confront them both.

Sin like Asa's has been the supreme apostasy of the Church in all her branches and through all her generations; Christ has been denied, not by lack of devotion, but by want of faith. Champions of the truth, reformers and guardians of the Temple, like Asa, have been eager to attach to their holy cause the cruel prejudices of ignorance and folly, the greed and vindictiveness of selfish men. They have feared lest these potent forces should be arrayed amongst the enemies of the Church and her Master. Sects and parties have eagerly contested the privilege of counselling a profligate prince how he should satisfy his thirst for blood and exercise his wanton and brutal insolence; the Church has countenanced almost every iniquity and striven to quench by persecution every new revelation of the Spirit, in order to conciliate vested interests and established authorities. It has even been suggested that national Churches and great national vices were so intimately allied that their supporters were content that they should stand or fall together. On the other hand, the advocates of reform have not been slow to appeal to popular jealousy and to aggravate the bitterness of social feuds. To Hanani the seer had come the vision of a larger and purer faith, that would rejoice to see the cause of Satan supported by all the evil passions and selfish interests that are his natural allies. He was assured that the greater the host of Satan, the more signal and complete would be Jehovah's triumph. If we had his faith, we should not be anxious to bribe Satan to cast out Satan, but should come to understand that the full muster of hell assailing us in front is less dangerous than a few companies of diabolic mercenaries in our own array. In the former case the overthrow of the powers of darkness is more certain and more complete.

The evil consequences of Asa's policy were not confined to the loss of a great opportunity, nor were his treasures the only price he was to pay for fortifying Geba and Mizpah with Baasha's building materials. Hanani declared to him that from henceforth he should have wars. This purchased alliance was only the beginning, and not the end, of troubles. Instead of the complete and decisive victory which had disposed of the Ethiopians once for all, Asa and his people were harassed and exhausted by continual warfare. The Christian life would have more decisive victories, and would be less of a perpetual and wearing struggle, if we had faith to refrain from the use of doubtful means for high ends.

Oded's message of warning had been accepted and obeyed, but Asa was now no longer docile to Divine discipline. David and Hezekiah submitted themselves to the censure of Gad and Isaiah; but Asa was wroth with Hanani and put him in prison, because the prophet had ventured to rebuke him. His sin against God corrupted even his civil administration; and the ally of a heathen king, the persecutor of God's prophet, also oppressed the people. Three years* after the repulse of Baasha a new punishment fell upon Asa: his feet became grievously diseased. Still he did not humble himself, but was guilty of further sin †: he sought not Jehovah, but the physicians. It is probable that to seek Jehovah

* The date, as before, is peculiar to Chronicles.

† xvi. 12 b, peculiar to Chronicles.

concerning disease was not merely a matter of worship. Reuss has suggested that the legitimate practice of medicine belonged to the schools of the prophets; but it seems quite as likely that in Judah, as in Egypt, any existing knowledge of the art of healing was to be found among the priests. Conversely, physicians who were neither priests nor prophets of Jehovah were almost certain to be ministers of idolatrous worship and magicians. They failed apparently to relieve their patient: Asa lingered in pain and weakness for two years, and then died. Probably the sufferings of his latter days had protected his people from further oppression, and had at once appealed to their sympathy and removed any cause for resentment. When he died, they only remembered his virtues and achievements; and buried him with royal magnificence, with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices; and made a very great burning for him, probably of aromatic woods.

In discussing the chronicler's picture of the good kings, we have noticed that, while Chronicles and the book of Kings agree in mentioning the misfortunes which as a rule darkened their closing years, Chronicles in each case records some lapse into sin as preceding these misfortunes. From the theological standpoint of the chronicler's school, these invidious records of the sins of good kings were necessary in order to account for their misfortunes. The devout student of the book of Kings read with surprise that of the pious kings who had been devoted to Jehovah and His temple, whose acceptance by Him had been shown by the victories vouchsafed to them, one had died of a painful disease in his feet, another in a lazar-house, two had been assassinated, and one slain in battle. Why had faith and devotion been so ill rewarded? Was it not vain to serve God? What profit was there in keeping His ordinances? The chronicler felt himself fortunate in discovering amongst his later authorities additional information which explained these mysteries and justified the ways of God to man. Even the good kings had not been without reproach, and their misfortunes had been the righteous judgment on their sins.

The principle which guided the chronicler in this selection of material was that sin was always punished by complete, immediate, and manifest retribution in this life, and that conversely all misfortune was the punishment of sin. There is a simplicity and apparent justice about this theory that has always made it the leading doctrine of a certain stage of moral development. It was probably the popular religious teaching in Israel from early days till the time when our Lord found it necessary to protest against the idea that the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices were sinners above all Galileans because they had suffered these things, or that the eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, were offenders above all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This doctrine of retribution was current among the Greeks. When terrible calamities fell upon men their neighbours supposed these to be the punishment of specially heinous crimes. When the Spartan king Cleomenes committed suicide, the public mind in Greece at once inquired of what particular sin he had thus paid the penalty. The horrible circumstances of his death were attributed to the wrath of some offended deity, and the cause of the offence was sought for in one of

his many acts of sacrilege. Possibly he was thus punished because he had bribed the priestess of the Delphic oracle. The Athenians, however, believed that his sacrilege had consisted in cutting down trees in their sacred grove at Eleusis; but the Argives preferred to hold that he came to an untimely end because he had set fire to a grove sacred to their eponymous hero Argos. Similarly, when in the course of the Peloponnesian war the Æginetans were expelled from their island, this calamity was regarded as a punishment inflicted upon them because fifty years before they had dragged away and put to death a suppliant who had caught hold of the handle of the door of the temple of Demeter Theomphorus. On the other hand, the wonderful way in which on four or five occasions the ravages of pestilence delivered Dionysius of Syracuse from his Carthaginian enemies was attributed by his admiring friends to the favour of the gods.

Like many other simple and logical doctrines, this Jewish theory of retribution came into collision with obvious facts, and seemed to set the law of God at variance with the enlightened conscience. "Beneath the simplest forms of truth the subtlest error lurks." The prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous were a standing religious difficulty to the devout Israelite. The popular doctrine held its ground tenaciously, supported not only by ancient prescription, but also by the most influential classes in society. All who were young, robust, wealthy, powerful, or successful were interested in maintaining a doctrine that made health, riches, rank, and success the outward and visible signs of righteousness. Accordingly the simplicity of the original doctrine was hedged about with an ingenious and elaborate apologetic. The prosperity of the wicked was held to be only for a season; before he died the judgment of God would overtake him. It was a mistake to speak of the sufferings of the righteous: these very sufferings showed that his righteousness was only apparent, and that in secret he had been guilty of grievous sin.

Of all the cruelty inflicted in the name of orthodoxy there is little that can surpass the refined torture due to this Jewish apologetic. Its cynical teaching met the sufferer in the anguish of bereavement, in the pain and depression of disease, when he was crushed by sudden and ruinous losses or publicly disgraced by the unjust sentence of a venal law-court. Instead of receiving sympathy and help, he found himself looked upon as a moral outcast and pariah on account of his misfortunes; when he most needed Divine grace, he was bidden to regard himself as a special object of the wrath of Jehovah. If his orthodoxy survived his calamities, he would review his past life with morbid retrospection, and persuade himself that he had indeed been guilty above all other sinners.

The book of Job is an inspired protest against the current theory of retribution, and the full discussion of the question belongs to the exposition of that book. But the narrative of Chronicles, like much Church history in all ages, is largely controlled by the controversial interests of the school from which it emanated. In the hands of the chronicler the story of the kings of Judah is told in such a way that it becomes a polemic against the book of Job. The tragic and disgraceful death of good kings presented a crucial difficulty to the chronicler's theology. A good

man's other misfortunes might be compensated for by prosperity in his latter days; but in a theory of retribution which required a complete satisfaction of justice in this life there could be no compensation for a dishonourable death. Hence the chronicler's anxiety to record any lapses of good kings in their latter days.

The criticism and correction of this doctrine belong, as we have said, to the exposition of the book of Job. Here we are rather concerned to discover the permanent truth of which the theory is at once an imperfect and exaggerated expression. To begin with, there are sins which bring upon the transgressor a swift, obvious, and dramatic punishment. Human law deals thus with some sins; the laws of health visit others with a similar severity; at times the Divine judgment strikes down men and nations before an awe-stricken world. Amongst such judgments we might reckon the punishments of royal sins so frequent in the pages of Chronicles. God's judgments are not usually so immediate and manifest, but these striking instances illustrate and enforce the certain consequences of sin. We are dealing now with cases in which God was set at nought; and, apart from Divine grace, the votaries of sin are bound to become its slaves and victims. Ruskin has said, "Medicine often fails of its effect, but poison never; and while, in summing the observation of past life not unwatchfully spent, I can truly say that I have a thousand times seen Patience disappointed of her hope and Wisdom of her aim, I have never yet seen folly fruitless of mischief, nor vice conclude but in calamity."* Now that we have been brought into a fuller light and delivered from the practical dangers of the ancient Israelite doctrine, we can afford to forget the less satisfactory aspects of the chronicler's teaching, and we must feel grateful to him for enforcing the salutary and necessary lesson that sin brings inevitable punishment, and that therefore, whatever present appearances may suggest, "the world was certainly not framed for the lasting convenience of hypocrites, libertines, and oppressors."†

Indeed, the consequences of sin are regular and exact; and the judgments upon the kings of Judah in Chronicles accurately symbolise the operations of Divine discipline. But pain, and ruin, and disgrace are only secondary elements in God's judgments; and most often they are not judgments at all. They have their uses as chastisements; but if we dwell upon them with too emphatic an insistence, men suppose that pain is a worse evil than sin, and that sin is only to be avoided because it causes suffering to the sinner. The really serious consequence of evil acts is the formation and confirmation of evil character. Herbert Spencer says in his "First Principles‡" "that motion once set up along any line becomes itself a cause of subsequent motion along that line." This is absolutely true in moral and spiritual dynamics: every wrong thought, feeling, word, or act, every failure to think, feel, speak, or act rightly, at once alters a man's character for the worse. Henceforth he will find it easier to sin and more difficult to do right; he has twisted another strand into the cord of habit; and though each may be as fine as the threads of a spider's web, in time there will be cords strong enough to have bound Samson before Delilah

shaved off his seven locks. This is the true punishment of sin; to lose the fine instincts, the generous impulses, and the nobler ambitions of manhood, and become every day more of a beast and a devil.

CHAPTER IV.

JHOSHAPHAT—THE DOCTRINE OF NON-RESISTANCE.

2 CHRONICLES xvii.-xx.

ASA was succeeded by his son Jehoshaphat, and his reign began even more auspiciously* than that of Asa. The new king had apparently taken warning from the misfortunes of Asa's closing years; and as he was thirty-five years old when he came to the throne, he had been trained before Asa fell under the Divine displeasure. He walked in the first ways of his father David, before David was led away by Satan to number Israel. Jehoshaphat's heart was lifted up, not with foolish pride, like Hezekiah's, but "in the ways of Jehovah." He sought the God of his father, and walked in God's commandments, and was not led astray by the evil example and influence of the kings of Israel, neither did he seek the Baals. While Asa had been enfeebled by illness and alienated from Jehovah, the high places and the Asherim had sprung up again like a crop of evil weeds; but Jehoshaphat once more removed them. According to the chronicler, this removing of high places was a very labour of Sisyphus: the stone was no sooner rolled up to the top of the hill than it rolled down again. Jehoshaphat seems to have had an inkling of this; he felt that the destruction of idolatrous sanctuaries and symbols was like mowing down weeds and leaving the roots in the soil. Accordingly he made an attempt to deal more radically with the evil: he would take away the inclination as well as the opportunity for corrupt rites. A commission of princes, priests, and Levites was sent throughout all the cities of Judah to instruct the people in the law of Jehovah. Vice will always find opportunities; it is little use to suppress evil institutions unless the people are educated out of evil propensities. If, for instance, every public-house in England were closed to-morrow, and there were still millions of throats craving for drink, drunkenness would still prevail, and a new administration would promptly reopen gin-shops.

Because the new king thus earnestly and consistently sought the God of his fathers, Jehovah was with him, and established the kingdom in his hand. Jehoshaphat received all the marks of Divine favour usually bestowed upon good kings. He waxed great exceedingly; he had many fortresses, an immense army, and much wealth; he built castles and cities of store; he had arsenals for the supply of war material in the cities of Judah. And these cities, together with other defensible positions and the border cities of Ephraim occupied by Judah, were held by strong garrisons. While David had contented himself with two hundred and eighty-eight thousand men from all Israel, and Abijah had led forth four hundred thousand, and Asa five hundred and eighty thousand, there waited on Jehoshaphat, in addition to his numerous gar-

* "Time and Tide," xii. 67.

† George Eliot, "Romola," xxi.

‡ Part II., chap. ix.

* xvii., peculiar to Chronicles.

rison, *eleven hundred and sixty thousand men.* Of these seven hundred and eighty thousand were men of Judah in three divisions, and three hundred and eighty thousand were Benjamites in two divisions. Probably the steady increase of the armies of Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat symbolises a proportionate increase of Divine favour.

The chronicler records the names of the captains of the five divisions. Two of them are singled out for special commendation: Eliada the Benjamite is styled "a mighty man of valour," and of the Jewish captain Amaziah the son of Zichri it is said that he offered either himself or his possessions willingly to Jehovah, as David and his princes had offered, for the building of the Temple. The devout king had devout officers.

He had also devoted subjects. All Judah brought him presents, so that he had great riches and ample means to sustain his royal power and splendour. Moreover, as in the case of Solomon and Asa, his piety was rewarded with freedom from war: "The fear of Jehovah fell upon all the kingdoms round about, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat." Some of his weaker neighbours were overawed by the spectacle of his great power; the Philistines brought him presents and tribute money, and the Arabians immense flocks of rams and he-goats, seven thousand seven hundred of each.

Great prosperity had the usual fatal effect upon Jehoshaphat's character. In the beginning of his reign he had strengthened himself against Israel and had refused to walk in their ways; now power had developed ambition, and he sought and obtained the honour of marrying his son Jehoram to Athaliah the daughter of Ahab, the mighty and magnificent king of Israel, possibly also the daughter of the Phœnician princess Jezebel, the devotee of Baal. This family connection of course implied political alliance. After a time Jehoshaphat went down to visit his new ally, and was hospitably received.*

Then follows the familiar story of Micaiah the son of Imlah, the disastrous expedition of the two kings, and the death of Ahab, almost exactly as in the book of Kings. There is one significant alteration: both narratives tell us how the Syrian captains attacked Jehoshaphat because they took him for the king of Israel and gave up their pursuit when he cried out, and they discovered their mistake; but the chronicler adds the explanation that Jehovah helped him and God moved them to depart from him. And so the master of more than a million soldiers was happy in being allowed to escape on account of his insignificance, and returned in peace to Jerusalem. Oded and Hanani had met his predecessors on their return from victory; now Jehu the son of Hanani† met Jehoshaphat when he came home defeated. Like his father, the prophet was charged with a message of rebuke. An alliance with the Northern Kingdom was scarcely less reprehensible than one with Syria: "Shouldest thou help the wicked, and love them that hate Jehovah? Jehovah is wroth with thee," Asa's previous reforms were not allowed to mitigate the severity of his condemnation, but Jehovah was more merciful to Jehoshaphat. The prophet makes mention of his piety and his destruction of idolatrous symbols, and no further punishment is inflicted upon him.

* 2 Chron. xviii. 1-3. † ix. 1-3, peculiar to Chronicles.

The chronicler's addition to the account of the king's escape from the Syrian captains reminds us that God still watches over and protects His children even when they are in the very act of sinning against Him. Jehovah knew that Jehoshaphat's sinful alliance with Ahab did not imply complete revolt and apostasy. Hence doubtless the comparative mildness of the prophet's reproof.

When Jehu's father Hanani rebuked Asa, the king flew into a passion, and cast the prophet into prison; Jehoshaphat received Jehu's reproof in a very different spirit*: he repented himself, and found a new zeal in his penitence. Learning from his own experience the proneness of the human heart to go astray, he went out himself amongst his people to bring them back to Jehovah; and just as Asa in his apostasy oppressed his people, Jehoshaphat in his renewed loyalty to Jehovah showed himself anxious for good government. He provided judges in all the walled towns of Judah, with a court of appeal at Jerusalem; he solemnly charged them to remember their responsibility to Jehovah, to avoid bribery, and not to truckle to the rich and powerful. Being themselves faithful to Jehovah, they were to inculcate a like obedience and warn the people not to sin against the God of their fathers. Jehoshaphat's exhortation to his new judges concludes with a sentence whose martial resonance suggests trial by combat rather than the peaceful proceedings of a law-court: "Deal courageously, and Jehovah defend the right!"

The principle that good government must be a necessary consequence of piety in the rulers has not been so uniformly observed in later times as in the pages of Chronicles. The testimony of history on this point is not altogether consistent. In spite of all the faults of the orthodox and devout Greek emperors Theodosius the Great and Marcian, their administration rendered important services to the empire. Alfred the Great was a distinguished statesman and warrior as well as zealous for true religion. St. Louis of France exercised a wise control over Church and state. It is true that when a woman reproached him in open court with being a king of friars, of priests, and of clerks, and not a true king of France, he replied with saintly meekness, "You say true! It has pleased the Lord to make me king; it had been well if it had pleased Him to make some one king who had better ruled the realm."† But something must be allowed for the modesty of the saint; apart from his unfortunate crusades, it would have been difficult for France or even Europe to have furnished a more beneficent sovereign. On the other hand, Charlemagne's successor, the Emperor Louis the Pious, and our own kings Edward the Confessor and the saintly Henry VI., were alike feeble and inefficient; the zeal of the Spanish kings and their kinswoman Mary Tudor is chiefly remembered for its ghastly cruelty; and in comparatively recent times the misgovernment of the States of the Church was a byword throughout Europe. Many causes combined to produce this mingled record. The one most clearly contrary to the chronicler's teaching was an immoral opinion that the Christian should cease to be a citizen, and that the saint has no duties to society. This view is often considered to be the special vice of monas-

* ix. 4-11, peculiar to Chronicles.

† Milman, "Latin Christianity," Book XI., chap. i.

ticism, but it reappears in one form or another in every generation. The failure of the administration of Louis the Pious is partly explained when we read that he was with difficulty prevented from entering a monastery. In our own day there are those who think that a newspaper should have no interest for a really earnest Christian. According to their ideas, Jehoshaphat should have divided his time between a private oratory in his palace and the public services of the Temple, and have left his kingdom to the mercy of unjust judges at home and heathen enemies abroad, or else have abdicated in favour of some kinsman whose heart was not so perfect with Jehovah. The chronicler had a clearer insight into Divine methods, and this doctrine of his is not one that has been superseded together with the Mosaic ritual.

Possibly the martial tone of the sentence that concludes the account of Jehoshaphat as the Jewish Justinian is due to the influence upon the chronicler's mind of the incident * which he now describes.

Jehoshaphat's next experience was parallel to that of Asa with Zerah. When his new reforms were completed, he was menaced with a formidable invasion. His new enemies were almost as distant and strange as the Ethiopians and Lubim who had followed Zerah. We hear nothing about any king of Israel or Damascus, the usual leaders of assaults upon Judah; we hear instead of a triple alliance against Judah. Two of the allies are Moab and Ammon; but the Jewish kings were not wont to regard these as irresistible foes, so that the extreme dismay which takes possession of king and people must be due to the third ally: the Meunim† we have already met with in connection with the exploits of the children of Simeon in the reign of Hezekiah; they are also mentioned in the reign of Uzziah,‡ and nowhere else, unless indeed they are identical with the Maonites, who are named with the Amalekites in Judges x. 12. They are thus a people peculiar to Chronicles, and appear from this narrative to have inhabited Mount Seir, by which term "Meunim" is replaced as the story proceeds.§ Since the chronicler wrote so long after the events he describes, we cannot attribute to him any very exact knowledge of political geography. Probably the term "Meunim" impressed his contemporaries very much as it does a modern reader, and suggested countless hordes of Bedouin plunderers; Josephus calls them a great army of Arabians. This host of invaders came from Edom,§ and having marched round the southern end of the Dead Sea, were now at Engedi, on its western shore. The Moabites and Ammonites might have crossed the Jordan by the fords near Jericho; but this route would not have been convenient for their allies the Meunim, and would have brought them into collision with the forces of the Northern Kingdom.

On this occasion Jehoshaphat does not seek any foreign alliance. He does not appeal to Syria, like Asa, nor does he ask Ahab's succes-

or to repay in kind the assistance given to Ahab at Ramoth-gilead, partly perhaps because there was no time, but chiefly because he had learnt the truth which Hanani had sought to teach his father, and which Hanani's son had taught him. He does not even trust in his own hundreds of thousands of soldiers, all of whom cannot have perished at Ramoth-gilead; his confidence is placed solely and absolutely in Jehovah. Jehoshaphat and his people made no military preparations; subsequent events justified their apparent neglect: none were necessary. Jehoshaphat sought Divine help instead, and proclaimed a fast throughout Judah; and all Judah gathered themselves to Jerusalem to ask help of Jehovah. This great national assembly met "before the new court" of the Temple. The chronicler, who is supremely interested in the Temple buildings, has told us nothing about any new court, nor is it mentioned elsewhere; our author is probably giving the title of a corresponding portion of the second Temple: the place where the people assembled to meet Jehoshaphat would be the great court built by Solomon.*

Here Jehoshaphat stood up as the spokesman of the nation, and prayed to Jehovah on their behalf and on his own. He recalls the Divine omnipotence; Jehovah is God of earth and heaven, God of Israel and Ruler of the heathen, and therefore able to help even in this great emergency:—

"O Jehovah, God of our fathers, art Thou not God in heaven? Dost Thou not rule all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in Thy hand is power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee."

The land of Israel had been the special gift of Jehovah to His people, in fulfilment of His ancient promise to Abraham:—

"Didst not Thou, O our God, dispossess the inhabitants of this land in favour of Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever?"

And now long possession had given Israel a prescriptive right to the Land of Promise; and they had, so to speak, claimed their rights in the most formal and solemn fashion by erecting a temple to the God of Israel. Moreover, the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple had been accepted by Jehovah as the basis of His covenant with Israel, and Jehoshaphat quotes a clause from that prayer or covenant which had expressly provided for such emergencies as the present:—

"And they" (Israel) "dwelt in the land, and built Thee therein a sanctuary for Thy name, saying, If evil come upon us, the sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before Thee (for Thy name is in this house), and cry unto Thee in our affliction; and Thou wilt hear and save."†

Moreover, the present invasion was not only an attempt to set aside Jehovah's disposition of Palestine and the long-established rights of Israel: it was also gross ingratitude, a base return for the ancient forbearance of Israel towards her present enemies:—

"And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom Thou wouldest not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned aside from them

* 2 Chron. iv. 9.
† Ver. 9; cf. 2 Chron. vi. 28, and the whole paragraph (vv. 22-30) of which our verse is a brief abstract.

* xx. 1-30, peculiar to Chronicles.
† So R. V. marg., with the LXX. The Targum has "Edomites," the A. V. is not justified by the Hebrew, and the R. V. does not make sense.
‡ Cf. 1 Chron. iv. 41, R. V.; and 2 Chron. xxvi. 7.
§ One Hebrew manuscript is quoted as having this reading. A. R. V., with the ordinary Masoretic text, have "Syria"; but it is simply absurd to suppose that a multitude from beyond the sea from Syria would first make their appearance on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

and destroyed them not—behold how they reward us by coming to dispossess us of Thy possession which Thou hast caused us to possess.”

For this nefarious purpose the enemies of Israel had come up in overwhelming numbers, but Judah was confident in the justice of its cause and the favour of Jehovah:—

“O our God, wilt Thou not execute judgment against them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee.”

Meanwhile the great assemblage stood in the attitude of supplication before Jehovah, not a gathering of mighty men of valour praying for blessing upon their strength and courage, but a mixed multitude, men and women, children and infants, seeking sanctuary, as it were, at the Temple, and casting themselves in their extremity upon the protecting care of Jehovah. Possibly when the king finished his prayer the assembly broke out into loud, wailing cries of dismay and agonised entreaty; but the silence of the narrative rather suggests that Jehoshaphat's strong, calm faith communicated itself to the people, and they waited quietly for Jehovah's answer, for some token or promise of deliverance. Instead of the confused cries of an excited crowd, there was a hush of expectancy, such as sometimes falls upon an assembly when a great statesman has risen to utter words which will be big with the fate of empires.

And the answer came, not by fire from heaven or any visible sign, not by voice of thunder accompanied by angelic trumpets, nor by angel or archangel, but by a familiar voice hitherto unsuspected of any supernatural gifts, by a prophetic utterance whose only credentials were given by the influence of the Spirit upon the speaker and his audience. The chronicler relates with evident satisfaction how, in the midst of that great congregation, the Spirit of Jehovah came, not upon king, or priest, or acknowledged prophet, but upon a subordinate minister of the Temple, a Levite and member of the Temple choir like himself. He is careful to fix the identity of this newly called prophet and to gratify the family pride of existing Levitical families by giving the prophet's genealogy for several generations. He was Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, of the sons of Asaph. The very names were encouraging. What more suitable names could be found for a messenger of Divine mercy than Jahaziel—“God gives prophetic vision”—the son of Zechariah—“Jehovah remembers”?

Jahaziel's message showed that Jehoshaphat's prayer had been accepted; Jehovah responded without reserve to the confidence reposed in Him: He would vindicate His own authority by delivering Judah; Jehoshaphat should have blessed proof of the immense superiority of simple trust in Jehovah over an alliance with Ahab or the king of Damascus. Twice the prophet exhorts the king and people in the very words that Jehovah had used to encourage Joshua when the death of Moses had thrown upon him all the heavy responsibilities of leadership: “Fear not, nor be dismayed.” They need no longer cling like frightened suppliants to the sanctuary, but are to go forth at once, the very next day, against the enemy. That they may lose no time in looking for them, Jehovah announces the exact spot

where the enemy are to be found: “Behold, they are coming by the ascent of Hazziz,* and ye shall find them at the end of the ravine before the wilderness of Jeruel.” This topographical description was doubtless perfectly intelligible to the chronicler's contemporaries, but it is no longer possible to fix exactly the locality of Hazziz or Jeruel. The ascent of Hazziz has been identified with the Wady Husasa, which leads up from the coast of the Dead Sea north of Engedi, in the direction of Tekoa; but the identification is by no means certain.

The general situation, however, is fairly clear: the allied invaders would come up from the coast into the highlands of Judah by one of the wadies leading inland; they were to be met by Jehoshaphat and his people on one of the “wildernesses,” or plateaus of pasture-land, in the neighbourhood of Tekoa.

But the Jews went forth, not as an army, but in order to be the passive spectators of a great manifestation of the power of Jehovah. They had no concern with the numbers and prowess of their enemies; Jehovah Himself would lay bare His mighty arm, and Judah should see that no foreign ally, no millions of native warriors, were necessary for their salvation: “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; take up your position, stand still and see the deliverance of Jehovah with you, O Judah and Jerusalem.”

Thus had Moses addressed Israel on the eve of the passage of the Red Sea. Jehoshaphat and his people owned and honoured the Divine message as if Jahaziel were another Moses; they prostrated themselves on the ground before Jehovah. The sons of Asaph had already been privileged to provide Jehovah with His prophet; these Asaphites represented the Levitical clan of Gershom: but now the Kohathites, with their guild of singers, the sons of Korah, “stood up to praise Jehovah, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice,” as the Levites sang when the foundations of the second Temple were laid, and when Ezra and Nehemiah made the people enter into a new covenant with their God.

Accordingly on the morrow the people rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa, ten or twelve miles south of Jerusalem. In ancient times generals were wont to make a set speech to their armies before they led them into battle, so Jehoshaphat addresses his subjects as they pass out before him. He does not seek to make them confident in their own strength and prowess; he does not inflame their passions against Moab and Ammon, nor exhort them to be brave and remind them that they fight this day for the ashes of their fathers and the temple of their God. Such an address would have been entirely out of place, because the Jews were not going to fight at all. Jehoshaphat only bids them have faith in Jehovah and His prophets. It is a curious anticipation of Pauline teaching. Judah is to be “saved by faith” from Moab and Ammon, as the Christian is delivered by faith from sin and its penalty. The incident might almost seem to have been recorded in order to illustrate the truth that St. Paul was to teach. It is strange that there is no reference to this chapter in the epistles of St. Paul and St. James, and that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not remind us how “by faith Jehoshaphat was delivered from Moab and Ammon.”

* Not Ziz, as A. R. V.

There is no question of military order, no reference to the five great divisions into which the armies of Judah and Benjamin are divided in chap. xvii. Here, as at Jericho, the captain of Israel is chiefly concerned to provide musicians to lead his army. When David was arranging for the musical services before the Ark, he took counsel with his captains. In this unique military expedition there is no mention of captains; they were not necessary, and if they were present there was no opportunity for them to show their skill and prowess in battle. In an even more democratic spirit Jehoshaphat takes counsel with the people—that is, probably makes some proposition, which is accepted with universal acclamation.

The Levitical singers, dressed in the splendid robes* in which they officiated at the Temple, were appointed to go before the people, and offer praises unto Jehovah, and sing the anthem, "Give thanks unto Jehovah, for His mercy endureth for ever." These words or their equivalent are the opening words, and the second clause the refrain, of the post-Exilic Psalms: cvi., cvii., cxviii., and cxxxvi. As the chronicler has already ascribed Psalm cvi. to David, he possibly ascribes all four to David, and intends us to understand that one or all of them were sung by the Levites on this occasion. Later Judaism was in the habit of denoting a book or section of a book by its opening words.

And so Judah, a pilgrim caravan rather than an army, went on to its Divinely appointed tryst with its enemies, and at its head the Levitical choir sang the Temple hymns. It was not a campaign, but a sacred function, on a much larger scale a procession such as may be seen winding its way, with chants and incense, banners, images, and crucifixes, through the streets of Catholic cities.

Meanwhile Jehovah was preparing a spectacle to gladden the eyes of His people and reward their implicit faith and exact obedience; He was working for those who were waiting for Him. Though Judah was still far from its enemies, yet like the trumpet at Jericho, the strain of praise and thanksgiving was the signal for the Divine intervention: "When they began to sing and praise, Jehovah set liers in wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir." Who were these liers in wait? They could not be men of Judah; they were not to fight, but to be passive spectators of their own deliverance. Did the allies set an ambush for Judah, and was it thus that they were afterwards led to mistake their own people for enemies? Or does the chronicler intend us to understand that these "liers in wait" were spirits; that the allied invaders were tricked and bewildered like the shipwrecked sailors in the *Tempest*; or that when they came to the wilderness of Jeruel there fell upon them a spirit of mutual distrust, jealousy, and hatred, that had, as it were, been waiting for them there? But, from whatever cause, a quarrel broke out amongst them; and they were smitten. When Ammonite, Moabite, and Edomite met, there were many private and public feuds waiting their opportunity; and such confederates were as ready to quarrel among themselves as a group of Highland clans engaged in a Lowland foray.

"Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir utterly to slay and destroy them." But even Ammon and Moab soon dissolved their alliance; and at last, partly maddened by panic, partly intoxicated by a wild thirst for blood, a very Berserker frenzy, all ties of friendship and kindred were forgotten, and every man's hand was against his brother. "When they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another."

While this tragedy was enacting, and the air was rent with the cruel yells of that death struggle, Jehoshaphat and his people moved on in tranquil pilgrimage to the cheerful sound of the songs of Zion. At last they reached an eminence, perhaps the long, low summit of some ridge overlooking the plateau of Jeruel. When they had gained this watchtower of the wilderness, the ghastly scene burst upon their gaze. Jehovah had kept His word: they had found their enemy. They "looked upon the multitude," all those hordes of heathen tribes that had filled them with terror and dismay. They were harmless enough now; the Jews saw nothing but "dead bodies fallen to the earth"; and in that Aceldama lay all the multitude of profane invaders who had dared to violate the sanctity of the Promised Land: "There were none that escaped." So had Israel looked back after crossing the Red Sea and seen the corpses of the Egyptians washed up on the shore.* So when the angel of Jehovah smote Sennacherib,—

"Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown."

There is no touch of pity for the wretched victims of their own sins. Greeks of every city and tribe could feel the pathos of the tragic end of the Athenian expedition against Syracuse; but the Jews had no ruth for the kindred tribes that dwelt along their frontier, and the age of the chronicler had not yet learnt that Jehovah had either tenderness or compassion for the enemies of Israel.

The spectators of this carnage—we cannot call them victors—did not neglect to profit to the utmost by their great opportunity. They spent three days in stripping the dead bodies; and as Orientals delight in jewelled weapons and costly garments, and their chiefs take the field with barbaric ostentation of wealth, the spoil was both valuable and abundant: "riches, and raiment,† and precious jewels, . . . more than they could carry away."

In collecting the spoil, the Jews had become dispersed through all the wide area over which the fighting between the confederates must have extended; but on the fourth day they gathered together again in a neighbouring valley and gave solemn thanks for their deliverance: "There they blessed Jehovah; therefore the name of that place was called the valley of Berachah unto this day." West of Tekoa,‡ not too far from the scene of carnage, a ruin and a wady still bear the name "Bereikut"; and doubtless in the chronicler's time the valley was called Berachah, and local tradition furnished our author with this explanation of the origin of the name.

* Exod. xiv. 30.

† With R. V. marg.

* *הדרת קודש*, literally, as A. R. V., "beauty of holiness"; i. e. sacred robes. Translate with R. V. marg., "praise in the beauty of holiness," not, as A. R. V., "praise the beauty of holiness."

‡ The identification of the valley of Berachah with the valley of Jehoshaphat, close to Jerusalem and mentioned by Josephus, is a mere theory, quite at variance with the topographical evidence.

When the spoil was all collected, they returned to Jerusalem as they came, in solemn procession, headed, no doubt, by the Levites, with psalteries, and harps, and trumpets. They came back to the scene of their anxious supplications: to the house of Jehovah. But yesterday, as it were, they had assembled before Jehovah, terror-stricken at the report of an irresistible host of invaders; and to-day their enemies were utterly destroyed. They had experienced a deliverance that might rank with the Exodus; and as at that former deliverance they had spoiled the Egyptians, so now they had returned laden with the plunder of Moab, Ammon, and Edom. And all their neighbours were smitten with fear when they heard of the awful ruin which Jehovah had brought upon these enemies of Israel. No one would dare to invade a country where Jehovah laid a ghostly ambush of liars in wait for the enemies of His people. The realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, not because he was protected by powerful allies or by the swords of his numerous and valiant soldiers, but because Judah had become another Eden, and cherubim with flaming swords guarded the frontier on every hand, and "his God gave him rest round about."

Then follow the regular summary and conclusion of the history of the reign taken from the book of Kings, with the usual alterations in the reference to further sources of information. We are told here, in direct contradiction to xvii. 6 and to the whole tenor of the previous chapters, that the high places were not taken away, another illustration of the slight importance the chronicler attached to accuracy in details. He either overlooks the contradiction between passages borrowed from different sources, or else does not think it worth while to harmonise his inconsistent materials.

But after the narrative of the reign is thus formally closed the chronicler inserts a postscript, perhaps by a kind of after-thought. The book of Kings narrates * how Jehoshaphat made ships to go to Ophir for gold, but they were broken at Ezion-geber; then Ahaziah the son of Ahab proposed to enter into partnership with Jehoshaphat, and the latter rejected his proposal. As we have seen, the chronicler's theory of retribution required some reason why so pious a king experienced misfortune. What sin had Jehoshaphat committed to deserve to have his ships broken? The chronicler has a new version of the story, which provides an answer to this question. Jehoshaphat did not build any ships by himself; his unfortunate navy was constructed in partnership with Ahaziah; and accordingly the prophet Eliezer rebuked him for allying himself a second time with a wicked king of Israel, and announced the coming wreck of the ships. And so it came about that the ships were broken, and the shadow of Divine displeasure rested on the last days of Jehoshaphat.

We have next to notice the chronicler's most important omissions. The book of Kings narrates another alliance of Jehoshaphat with Jehoram, king of Israel, like his alliances with Ahab and Ahaziah. The narrative of this incident closely resembles that of the earlier joint expedition to Ramoth-Gilead. As then Jehoshaphat marched out with Ahab, so now he accompanies Ahab's son Jehoram, taking with him his subject ally the king of Edom. Here also a prophet appears upon the scene; but on this oc-

casion Elisha addresses no rebuke to Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Israel, but treats him with marked respect: and the allied army wins a great victory. If this narrative had been included in Chronicles, the reign of Jehoshaphat would not have afforded an altogether satisfactory illustration of the main lesson which the chronicler intended it to teach.

This main lesson was that the chosen people should not look for protection against their enemies either to foreign alliances or to their own military strength, but solely to the grace and omnipotence of Jehovah. One negative aspect of this principle has been enforced by the condemnation of Asa's alliance with Syria and Jehoshaphat's with Ahab and Ahaziah. Later on the uselessness of an army apart from Jehovah is shown in the defeat of "the great host" of Joash by "a small company" of Syrians.* The positive aspect has been partially illustrated by the signal victories of Abijah and Asa against overwhelming odds and without the help of any foreign allies. But these were partial and unsatisfactory illustrations: Jehovah vouchsafed to share the glory of these victories with great armies that were numbered by the hundred thousand. And, after all, the odds were not so very overwhelming. Scores of parallels may be found in which the odds were much greater. In the case of vast Oriental hosts a superiority of two to one might easily be counterbalanced by discipline and valour in the smaller army.

The peculiar value to the chronicler of the deliverance from Moab, Ammon, and the Meunim lay in the fact that no human arm divided the glory with Jehovah. It was shown conclusively not merely that Judah could safely be contented with an army smaller than those of its neighbours, but that Judah would be equally safe with no army at all. We feel that this lesson is taught with added force when we remember that Jehoshaphat had a larger army than is ascribed to any Israelite or Jewish king after David. Yet he places no confidence in his eleven hundred and sixty thousand warriors, and he is not allowed to make any use of them. In the case of a king with small military resources, to trust in Jehovah might be merely making a virtue of necessity; but if Jehoshaphat, with his immense army, felt that his only real help was in his God, the example furnished an *à fortiori* argument which would conclusively show that it was always the duty and privilege of the Jews to say with the Psalmist, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of Jehovah our God."† The ancient literature of Israel furnished illustrations of the principle: at the Red Sea the Israelites had been delivered without any exercise of their own warlike prowess; at Jericho, as at Jeruel, the enemy had been completely overthrown by Jehovah before His people rushed upon the spoil; and the same direct Divine intervention saved Jerusalem from Sennacherib. But the later history of the Jews had been a series of illustrations of enforced dependence upon Jehovah. A little semi-ecclesiastical community inhabiting a small province that passed from one great power to another like a counter in the game of international politics had no choice but to trust in Jehovah, if it were in any way to maintain its self-respect. For this community of the second Temple to have had

* 1 Kings xxii. 48, 49.

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 24, peculiar to Chronicles.

† Psalm xx. 7.

confidence in its sword and bow would have seemed equally absurd to the Jews and to their Persian and Greek masters.

When they were thus helpless, Jehovah wrought for Israel, as He had destroyed the enemies of Jehoshaphat in the wilderness of Jeruel. The Jews stood still and saw the working out of their deliverance; great empires wrestled together like Moab, Ammon, and Edom, in the agony of the death struggle: and over all the tumult of battle Israel heard the voice of Jehovah, "The battle is not yours, but God's; . . . set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the deliverance of Jehovah with you, O Judah and Jerusalem." Before their eyes there passed the scenes of that great drama which for a time gave Western Asia Aryan instead of Semitic masters. For them the whole action had but one meaning: without calling Israel into the field, Jehovah was devoting to destruction the enemies of His people and opening up a way for His redeemed to return, like Jehoshaphat's procession, to the Holy City and the Temple. The long series of wars became a wager of battle, in which Israel, herself a passive spectator, appeared by her Divine Champion; and the assured issue was her triumphant vindication and restoration to her ancient throne in Zion.

After the Restoration God's protecting providence asked no armed assistance from Judah. The mandates of a distant court authorised the rebuilding of the Temple and the fortifying of the city. The Jews solaced their national pride and found consolation for their weakness and subjection in the thought that their ostensible masters were in reality only the instruments which Jehovah used to provide for the security and prosperity of His children.

We have already noticed that this philosophy of history is not peculiar to Israel. Every nation has a similar system, and regards its own interests as the supreme care of Providence. We have seen, too, that moral influences have controlled and checkmated material forces; God has fought against the biggest battalions. Similarly, the Jews are not the only people for whom deliverances have been worked out almost without any co-operation on their own part. It was not a negro revolt, for instance, that set free the slaves of our colonies or of the Southern States. Italy regained her Eternal City as an incidental effect of a great war in which she herself took no part. Important political movements and great struggles involve consequences equally unforeseen and unintended by the chief actors in these dramas, consequences which would seem to them insignificant compared with more obvious results. Some obscure nation almost ready to perish is given a respite, a breathing space, in which it gathers strength; instead of losing its separate existence, it endures till time and opportunity make it one of the ruling influences in the world's history: some Geneva or Wittenberg becomes, just at the right time, a secure refuge and vantage-ground for one of the Lord's prophets. Our understanding of what God is doing in our time and our hopes for what He may yet do will indeed be small, if we think that God can do nothing for our cause unless our banner flies in the forefront of the battle, and the war-cry is "The sword of Gideon!" as well as "The sword of Jehovah!" There will be many battles fought in which we shall strike no blow and yet be privileged to divide the spoil. We some-

times "stand still and see the salvation of Jehovah."

The chronicler has found disciples in these latter days of a kindlier spirit and more catholic sympathies. He and they have reached their common doctrines by different paths, but the chronicler teaches non-resistance as clearly as the Society of Friends. "When you have fully yielded yourself to the Divine teaching," he says, "you will neither fight yourself nor ask others to fight for you; you will simply stand still and watch a Divine providence protecting you and destroying your enemies." The Friends could almost echo this teaching, not perhaps laying quite so much stress on the destruction of the enemy, though among the visions of the earlier Friends there were many that revealed the coming judgments of the Lord; and the modern enthusiast is still apt to consider that his enemies are the Lord's enemies and to call the gratification of his own revengeful spirit a vindication of the honour of the Lord and a satisfaction of outraged justice.

If the chronicler had lived to-day, the history of the Society of Friends might have furnished him with illustrations almost as apt as the destruction of the allied invaders of Judah. He would have rejoiced to tell us how a people that repudiated any resort to violence succeeded in conciliating savage tribes and founding the flourishing colony of Pennsylvania, and would have seen the hand of the Lord in the wealth and honour that have been accorded to a once despised and persecuted sect.

We should be passing to matters that were still beyond the chronicler's horizon, if we were to connect his teaching with our Lord's injunction, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Such a sentiment scarcely harmonises with the three days' stripping of dead bodies in the wilderness of Jeruel. But though the chronicler's motives for non-resistance were not touched and softened with the Divine gentleness of Jesus of Nazareth, and his object was not to persuade his hearers to patient endurance of wrong, yet he had conceived the possibility of a mighty faith that could put its fortunes unreservedly into the hands of God and trust Him with the issues. If we are ever to be worthy citizens of the kingdom of our Lord, it can only be by the sustaining power and inspiring influence of a like faith.

When we come to ask how far the people for whom he wrote responded to his teaching and carried it into practical life, we are met with one of the many instances of the grim irony of history. Probably the chronicler's glowing vision of peaceful security, guarded on every hand by legions of angels, was partly inspired by the comparative prosperity of the time at which he wrote. Other considerations combine with this to suggest that the composition of his work beguiled the happy leisure of one of the brighter intervals between Ezra and the Maccabees.

Circumstances were soon to test the readiness of the Jews, in times of national danger, to observe the attitude of passive spectators and wait for a Divine deliverance. It was not altogether in this spirit that the priests met the savage persecutions of Antiochus. They made no vain attempts to exorcise this evil spirit with hymns, and psalteries, and harps, and trumpets; but the priest Mattathias and his sons slew the king's commissioner and raised the standard of armed

revolt. We do indeed find indications of something like obedience to the chronicler's principles. A body of the revolted Jews were attacked on the Sabbath Day; they made no attempt to defend themselves: "When they gave them battle with all speed, they answered them not, neither cast they a stone at them, nor stopped the places where they lay hid, . . . and their enemies rose up against them on the sabbath, and slew them, with their wives, and their children, and their cattle, to the number of a thousand people."* No Divine intervention rewarded this devoted faith, nor apparently did the Jews expect it, for they had said, "Let us die all in our innocence; heaven and earth shall testify for us that ye put us to death wrongfully." This is, after all, a higher note than that of Chronicles: obedience may not bring invariable reward; nevertheless the faithful will not swerve from their loyalty. But the priestly leaders of the people looked with no favourable eye upon this offering up of human hecatombs in honour of the sanctity of the Sabbath. They were not prepared to die passively; and, as representatives of Jehovah and of the nation for the time being, they decreed that henceforth they would fight against those who attacked them, even on the Sabbath Day. Warfare on these more secular principles was crowned with that visible success which the chronicler regarded as the manifest sign of Divine approval; and a dynasty of royal priests filled the throne and led the armies of Israel, and assured and strengthened their authority by intrigues and alliances with every heathen sovereign within their reach.

CHAPTER V.

JEHORAM, AHAZIAH, AND ATHALIAH: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FOREIGN MARRIAGE.

2 CHRONICLES XXI-XXIII.

THE accession of Jehoram is one of the instances in which a wicked son succeeded to a conspicuously pious father, but in this case there is no difficulty in explaining the phenomenon: the depraved character and evil deeds of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah are at once accounted for when we remember that they were respectively the son-in-law, grandson, and daughter of Ahab, and possibly of Jezebel. If, however, Jezebel were really the mother of Athaliah, it is difficult to believe that the chronicler understood or at any rate realised the fact. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah the chronicler lays great stress upon the iniquity and inexpediency of marriage with strange wives, and he has been careful to insert a note into the history of Jehoshaphat to call attention to the fact that the king of Judah had joined affinity with Ahab. If he had understood that this implied joining affinity with a Phœnician devotee of Baal, this significant fact would not have been passed over in silence. Moreover, the names Athaliah and Ahaziah are both compounded with the sacred name Jehovah. A Phœnician Baal-worshipper may very well have been sufficiently eclectic to make such use of the name sacred to the family into which she married, but on the whole those names rather tell against the descent of their owners from Jezebel and her Zidonian ancestors.

* 1 Macc. ii. 35-38.

We have seen that, after giving the concluding formula for the reign of Jehoshaphat, the chronicler adds a postscript narrating an incident discreditable to the king. Similarly he prefaces the introductory formula for the reign of Jehoram by inserting a cruel deed of the new king. Before telling us Jehoram's age at his accession and the length of his reign, the chronicler relates* the steps taken by Jehoram to secure himself upon his throne. Jehoshaphat, like Rehoboam, had disposed of his numerous sons in the fenced cities of Judah, and had sought to make them quiet and contented by providing largely for their material welfare: "Their father gave them great gifts: silver, gold, and precious things, with fenced cities in Judah." The sanguine judgment of paternal affection might expect that these gifts would make his younger sons loyal and devoted subjects of their elder brother; but Jehoram, not without reason, feared that treasure and cities might supply the means for a revolt, or that Judah might be split up into a number of small principalities. Accordingly when he had strengthened himself he slew all his brethren with the sword, and with them those princes of Israel whom he suspected of attachment to his other victims. He was following the precedent set by Solomon when he ordered the execution of Adonijah; and, indeed, the slaughter by a new sovereign of all those near relations who might possibly dispute his claim to the throne has usually been considered in the East to be a painful but necessary and perfectly justifiable act, being, in fact, regarded in much the same light as the drowning of superfluous kittens in domestic circles. Probably this episode is placed before the introductory formula for the reign because until these possible rivals were removed Jehoram's tenure of the throne was altogether unsafe.

For the next few verses† the narrative follows the book of Kings with scarcely any alteration, and states the evil character of the new reign, accounting for Jehoram's depravity by his marriage with a daughter of Ahab. The successful revolt of Edom from Judah is next given, and the chronicler adds a note of his own to the effect that Jehoram experienced these reverses because he had forsaken Jehovah, the God of his fathers.

Then the chronicler proceeds‡ to describe further sins and misfortunes of Jehoram. He mentions definitely, what is doubtless implied by the book of Kings, that Jehoram made high places in the cities of Judah§ and seduced the people into taking part in a corrupt worship. The Divine condemnation of the king's wrong-doing came from an unexpected quarter and in an unusual fashion. The other prophetic messages specially recorded by the chronicler were uttered by prophets of Judah, some apparently receiving their inspiration for one particular occasion. The prophet who rebuked Jehoram was no less distinguished a personage than the great Israelite Elijah, who, according to the book of Kings, had long since been translated to heaven. In the older narrative Elijah's work is exclusively confined to the Northern Kingdom. But the chronicler entirely ignores Elijah, except when his his-

* xxi. 2-4, peculiar to Chronicles.

† Vv. 5-10; cf. 2 Kings viii. 17-22.

‡ xxi. 11-10, peculiar to Chronicles.

§ So R. V. marg., with LXX. and Vulgate. A. R. V. have "mountains," with Masoretic text.

tory becomes connected for a moment with that of the house of David.

The other prophets of Judah delivered their messages by word of mouth, but this communication is made by means of "a writing." This, however, is not without parallel: Jeremiah sent a letter to the captives in Babylon, and also sent a written collection of his prophecies to Jehoiakim.* In the latter case, however, the prophecies had been originally promulgated by word of mouth.

Elijah writes in the name of Jehovah, the God of David, and condemns Jehoram because he was not walking in the ways of Asa and Jehoshaphat, but in the ways of the kings of Israel and the house of Ahab. It is pleasant to find that, in spite of the sins which marked the latter days of Asa and Jehoshaphat, their "ways" were as a whole such as could be held up as an example by the prophet of Jehovah. Here and elsewhere God appeals to the better feelings that spring from pride of birth. *Noblesse oblige*. Jehoram held his throne as representative of the house of David, and was proud to trace his descent to the founder of the Israelite monarchy and to inherit the glory of the great reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat; but this pride of race implied that to depart from their ways was dishonourable apostasy. There is no more pitiful spectacle than an effeminate libertine pluming himself on his noble ancestry.

Elijah further rebukes Jehoram for the massacre of his brethren, who were better than himself. They had all grown up at their father's court, and till the other brethren were put in possession of their fenced cities had been under the same influences. It is the husband of Ahab's daughter who is worse than all the rest; the influence of an unsuitable marriage has already begun to show itself. Indeed, in view of Athaliah's subsequent history, we do her no injustice by supposing that, like Jezebel and Lady Macbeth, she had suggested her husband's crime. The fact that Jeroram's brethren were better men than himself adds to his guilt morally, but this undesirable superiority of the other princes of the blood to the reigning sovereign would seem to Jehoram and his advisers an additional reason for putting them out of the way; the massacre was an urgent political necessity.

"Truly the tender mercies of the weak,
As of the wicked, are but cruel."

There is nothing so cruel as the terror of a self-ish man. The Inquisition is the measure not only of the inhumanity, but also of the weakness, of the mediæval Church; and the massacre of St. Bartholomew was due to the feebleness of Charles IX. as well as to the "revenge or the blind instinct of self-preservation" † of Mary de Medici.

The chronicler's condemnation of Jehoram's massacre marks the superiority of the standard of later Judaism to the current Oriental morality. For his sins Jehoram was to be punished by sore disease and by a great "plague" which would fall upon his people, and his wives, and his children, and all his substance. From the following verses we see that "plague," here as in the case of some of the plagues of Egypt, has the sense of calamity generally, and not the narrower meaning of pestilence. This plague took

* Jer. xxix. ; xxxvi.

† Green's "Shorter History," p. 404.

the form of an invasion of the Philistines and of the Arabians "which are beside the Ethiopians." Divine inspiration prompted them to attack Judah; Jehovah stirred up their spirit against Jehoram. Probably here, as in the story of Zerah, the term Ethiopians is used loosely for the Egyptians, in which case the Arabs in question would be inhabitants of the desert between the south of Palestine and Egypt, and would thus be neighbours of their Philistine allies.

These marauding bands succeeded where the huge hosts of Zerah had failed: they broke into Judah, and carried off all the king's treasure, together with his sons and his wives, only leaving him his youngest son: Jehoahaz or Ahaziah. They afterwards slew the princes they had taken captive.* The common people would scarcely suffer less severely than their king. Jehoram himself was reserved for special personal punishment: Jehovah smote him with a sore disease; and, like Asa, he lingered for two years and then died. The people were so impressed by his wickedness that "they made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers," whereas they had made a very great burning for Asa. †

The chronicler's account of the reign of Ahaziah ‡ does not differ materially from that given by the book of Kings, though it is considerably abridged, and there are other minor alterations. The chronicler sets forth even more emphatically than the earlier history the evil influence of Athaliah and her Israelite kinsfolk over Ahaziah's short reign of one year. The story of his visit to Jehoram, king of Israel, and the murder of the two kings by Jehu, is very much abridged. The chronicler carefully omits all reference to Elisha, according to his usual principle of ignoring the religious life of Northern Israel; but he expressly tells us that, like Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah suffered for consorting with the house of Omri: "His destruction or treading down was of God in that he went unto Jehoram." Our English versions have carefully reproduced an ambiguity in the original; but it seems probable that the chronicler does not mean that visiting Jehoram in his illness was a flagrant offence which God punished with death, but rather that, to punish Ahaziah for his imitation of the evil-doings of the house of Omri, § God allowed him to visit Jehoram in order that he might share the fate of the Israelite king.

The book of Kings had stated that Jehu slew forty-two brethren of Ahaziah. It is, of course, perfectly allowable to take "brethren" in the general sense of "kinsmen"; but as the chronicler had recently mentioned the massacre of all Ahaziah's brethren, he avoids even the appearance of a contradiction by substituting "sons of the brethren of Ahaziah" for brethren. This

* xxii. 1 b, peculiar to Chronicles.

† The Hebrew original of the A. R. V., "departed without being desired," is as obscure as the English of our versions. The most probable translation is, "He behaved so as to please no one." The A. R. V. apparently mean that no one regretted his death.

‡ We need not discuss in detail the question of Ahaziah's age at his accession. The age of forty-two, given in 2 Chron. xxii. 2, is simply impossible, seeing that his father was only forty years old when he died. The Peshito and Arabic versions have followed 2 Kings viii. 26, and altered forty-two to twenty-two; and the LXX. reads twenty years. But twenty-two years still presents difficulties. According to this reading, Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, was born when his father was only eighteen, and Jehoram, having had several sons before the age of eighteen, had none afterwards.

§ xxii. 7 a, peculiar to Chronicles.

alteration introduces new difficulties, but these difficulties simply illustrate the general confusion of numbers and ages which characterises the narrative at this point. In connection with the burial of Ahaziah, it may be noted that the popular recollection of Jehoshaphat endorsed the favourable judgment contained in the "writing of Elijah": "They said" of Ahaziah, "he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought Jehovah with all his heart."

The chronicler next narrates Athaliah's murder of the seed royal of Judah and her usurpation of the throne of David, in terms almost identical with those of the narrative in the book of Kings. But his previous additions and modifications are hard to reconcile with the account he here borrows from his ancient authority. According to the chronicler, Jehoram had massacred all the other sons of Jehoshaphat, and the Arabians had slain all Jehoram's sons except Ahaziah, and Jehu had slain their sons; so that Ahaziah was the only living descendant in the male line of his grandfather Jehoshaphat; he himself apparently died at the age of twenty-three. It is intelligible enough that he should have a son Joash and possibly other sons; but still it is difficult to understand where Athaliah found "all the seed royal" and "the king's sons" whom she put to death. It is at any rate clear that Jehoram's slaughter of his brethren met with an appropriate punishment: all his own sons and grandsons were similarly slain, except the child Joash.

The chronicler's narrative of the revolution by which Athaliah was slain, and the throne recovered for the house of David in the person of Joash, follows substantially the earlier history, the chief difference being, as we have already noticed,* that the chronicler substitutes the Levitical guard of the second Temple for the bodyguard of foreign mercenaries who were the actual agents in this revolution.

A distinguished authority on European history is fond of pointing to the evil effects of royal marriages as one of the chief drawbacks to the monarchical system of government. A crown may at any time devolve upon a woman, and by her marriage with a powerful reigning prince her country may virtually be subjected to a foreign yoke. If it happens that the new sovereign professes a different religion from that of his wife's subjects, the evils arising from the marriage are seriously aggravated. Some such fate befell the Netherlands as the result of the marriage of Mary of Burgundy with the Emperor Maximilian, and England was only saved from the danger of transference to Catholic dominion by the caution and patriotism of Queen Elizabeth.

Athaliah's usurpation was a bold attempt to reverse the usual process and transfer the husband's dominions to the authority and faith of the wife's family. It is probable that Athaliah's permanent success would have led to the absorption of Judah in the Northern Kingdom. This last misfortune was averted by the energy and courage of Jehoiada, but in the meantime the half-heathen queen had succeeded in causing untold harm and suffering to her adopted country. Our own history furnishes numerous illustrations of the evil influences that come in the train of foreign queens. Edward II. suffered grievously at the hands of his French queen;

* Cf. p. 745

Henry VI.'s wife, Margaret of Anjou, contributed considerably to the prolonged bitterness of the struggle between York and Lancaster; and to Henry VIII.'s marriage with Catherine of Aragon the country owed the miseries and persecutions inflicted by Mary Tudor. But, on the other hand, many of the foreign princesses who have shared the English throne have won the lasting gratitude of the nation. A French queen of Kent, for instance, opened the way for Augustine's mission to England.

But no foreign queen of England has had the opportunities for mischief that were enjoyed and fully utilised by Athaliah. She corrupted her husband and her son, and she was probably at once the instigator of their crimes and the instrument of their punishment. By corrupting the rulers of Judah and by her own misgovernment, she exercised an evil influence over the nation; and as the people suffered, not for their sins only, but also for those of their kings, Athaliah brought misfortunes and calamity upon Judah. Unfortunately such experiences are not confined to royal families; the peace and honour, and prosperity of godly families in all ranks of life have been disturbed and often destroyed by the marriage of one of their members with a woman of alien spirit and temperament. Here is a very general and practical application of the chronicler's objection to intercourse with the house of Omri.

CHAPTER VI.

JOASH AND AMAZIAH.

2 CHRONICLES xxiv.-xxv.

FOR Chronicles, as for the book of Kings, the main interest of the reign of Joash is the repairing of the Temple; but the later narrative introduces modifications which give a somewhat different complexion to the story. Both authorities tell us that Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah all the days of Jehoiada, but the book of Kings immediately adds that "the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places."* Seeing that Jehoiada exercised the royal authority during the minority of Joash, this toleration of the high places must have had the sanction of the high-priest. Now the chronicler and his contemporaries had been educated in the belief that the Pentateuch was the ecclesiastical code of the monarchy; they found it impossible to credit a statement that the high-priest had sanctioned any other sanctuary besides the temple of Zion; accordingly they omitted the verse in question.

In the earlier narrative of the repairing of the Temple the priests are ordered by Joash to use certain sacred dues and offerings to repair the breaches of the house; but after some time had elapsed it was found that the breaches had not been repaired, and when Joash remonstrated with the priests, they flatly refused to have anything to do with the repairs or with receiving funds for the purpose. Their objections were, however, overruled; and Jehoiada placed beside the altar a chest with a hole in the lid, into

* Cf. xxv. 2 with 2 Kings xiv. 4, xxvi. 4 with 2 Kings xv. 4, xxvii. 2 with 2 Kings xv. 34, where similar statements are omitted by the chronicler.

which "the priests put all the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah." * When it was sufficiently full, the king's scribe and the high-priest counted the money, and put it up in bags.

There were several points in this earlier narrative which would have furnished very inconvenient precedents, and were so much out of keeping with the ideas and practices of the second Temple that, by the time the chronicler wrote, a new and more intelligible version of the story was current among the ministers of the Temple. To begin with, there was an omission which would have grated very unpleasantly on the feelings of the chronicler. In this long narrative, wholly taken up with the affairs of the Temple, nothing is said about the Levites. The collecting and receiving of money might well be supposed to belong to them; and accordingly in Chronicles the Levites are first associated with the priests in this matter, and then the priests drop out of the narrative, and the Levites alone carry out the financial arrangements.

Again, it might be understood from the book of Kings that sacred dues and offerings, which formed the revenue of the priests and Levites, were diverted by the king's orders to the repair of the fabric. The chronicler was naturally anxious that there should be no mistake on this point; the ambiguous phrases are omitted, and it is plainly indicated that funds were raised for the repairs by means of a special tax ordained by Moses. Joash "assembled the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out into the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not." The remissness of the priests in the original narrative is here very faithfully and candidly transferred to the Levites. Then, as in the book of Kings, Joash remonstrates with Jehoiada, but the terms of his remonstrance are altogether different; here he complains because the Levites have not been required "to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the tax appointed by Moses the servant of Jehovah and by the congregation of Israel for the tent of the testimony," *i. e.*, the Tabernacle, containing the Ark and the tables of the Law. The reference apparently is to the law † that when a census was taken a poll-tax of a half-shekel a head should be paid for the service of the Tabernacle. As one of the main uses of a census was to facilitate the raising of taxes, this law might not unfairly be interpreted to mean that when occasion arose, or perhaps even every year, a census should be taken in order that this poll-tax might be levied. Nehemiah arranged for a yearly poll-tax of a third of a shekel for the incidental expenses of the Temple. ‡ Here, however, the half-shekel prescribed in Exodus is intended; and it should be observed that this poll-tax was to be levied, not once only, but "from year to year." The chronicler then inserts a note to explain why these repairs were necessary: "The sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of Jehovah they bestowed upon the Baals." Here we are confronted with a further difficulty. All Jehoram's sons except Ahaziah were murdered by the Arabs in their father's life-time. Who are these "sons of Athaliah" who broke

up the Temple? Jehoram was about thirty-seven when his sons were massacred, so that some of them may have been old enough to break up the Temple. One would think that "the dedicated things" might have been recovered for Jehovah when Athaliah was overthrown; but possibly, when the people retaliated by breaking into the house of Baal, there were Achans among them, who appropriated the plunder.

Having remonstrated with Jehoiada, the king took matters into his own hands; and he, not Jehoiada, had a chest made and placed, not beside the altar—such an arrangement savoured of profanity—but without at the gate of the Temple. This little touch is very suggestive. The noise and bustle of paying over money, receiving it, and putting it into the chest, would have mingled distractingly with the solemn ritual of sacrifice. In modern times the tinkle of three-penny pieces often tends to mar the effect of an impressive appeal and to disturb the quiet influences of a communion service. The Scotch arrangement, by which a plate covered with a fair white cloth is placed in the porch of a church and guarded by two modern Levites or elders, is much more in accordance with Chronicles.

Then, instead of sending out Levites to collect the tax, proclamation was made that the people themselves should bring their offerings. Obedience apparently was made a matter of conscience, not of solicitation. Perhaps it was because the Levites felt that sacred dues should be given freely that they were not forward to make yearly tax-collecting expeditions. At any rate, the new method was signally successful. Day after day the princes and people gladly brought their offerings, and money was gathered in abundance. Other passages suggest that the chronicler was not always inclined to trust to the spontaneous generosity of the people for the support of the priests and Levites; but he plainly recognised that free-will offerings are more excellent than the donations which are painfully extracted by the yearly visits of official collectors. He would probably have sympathised with the abolition of pew-rents.

As in the book of Kings, the chest was emptied at suitable intervals; but instead of the high-priest being associated with the king's scribe, as if they were on a level and both of them officials of the royal court, the chief-priest's *officer* assists the king's *scribe*, so that the chief-priest is placed on a level with the king himself.

The details of the repairs in the two narratives differ considerably in form, but for the most part agree in substance; the only striking point is that they are apparently at variance as to whether vessels of silver or gold were or were not made for the renovated Temple.

Then follows the account * of the ingratitude and apostasy of Joash and his people. As long as Jehoiada lived, the services of the Temple were regularly performed, and Judah remained faithful to its God; but at last he died, full of days: a hundred and thirty years old. In his life-time he had exercised royal authority, and when he died he was buried like a king; "They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel and toward God and His house." † Like Nero when he

* xxiv. 14-22, peculiar to Chronicles.

† Curiously enough, Jehoiada's name does not occur in the list of high-priests in 1 Chron. vi. 1-12.

* 2 Kings xii. 9. † Exod. xxx. 11-16. ‡ Neh. x. 32.

shook off the control of Seneca and Burrhus, Joash changed his policy as soon as Jehoiada was dead. Apparently he was a weak character, always following some one's leading. His freedom from the influence that had made his early reign decent and honourable was not, as in Nero's case, his own act. The change of policy was adopted at the suggestion of the princes of Judah. King, princes, and people fell back into the old wickedness; they forsook the Temple and served idols. Yet Jehovah did not readily give them up to their own folly, nor hastily inflict punishment; He sent, not one prophet, but many, to bring them back to Himself, but they would not hearken. At last Jehovah made one last effort to win Joash back; this time He chose for His messenger a priest who had special personal claims on the favourable attention of the king. The prophet was Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, to whom Joash owed his life and his throne. The name was a favourite one in Israel, and was borne by two other prophets besides the son of Jehoiada. Its very etymology constituted an appeal to the conscience of Joash: it is compounded of the sacred name and a root meaning "to remember." The Jews were adepts at extracting from such a combination all its possible applications. The most obvious was that Jehovah would remember the sin of Judah, but the recent prophets sent to recall the sinners to their God showed that Jehovah also remembered their former righteousness and desired to recall it to them and them to it; they should remember Jehovah. Moreover, Joash should remember the teaching of Jehoiada and his obligations to the father of the man now addressing him. Probably Joash did remember all this when, in the striking Hebrew idiom, "the spirit of God clothed itself with Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people and said unto them. Thus saith God: Why transgress ye the commandments of Jehovah, to your hurt? Because ye have forsaken Jehovah, He hath also forsaken you." This is the burden of the prophetic utterances in Chronicles*; the converse is stated by Irenæus when he says that to follow the Saviour is to partake of salvation. Though the truth of this teaching had been enforced again and again by the misfortunes that had befallen Judah under apostate kings, Joash paid no heed to it, nor did he remember the kindness which Jehoiada had done him; that is to say, he showed no gratitude towards the house of Jehoiada. Perhaps an uncomfortable sense of obligation to the father only embittered him the more against his son. But the son of the high-priest could not be dealt with as summarily as Asa dealt with Hanani when he put him in prison. The king might have been indifferent to the wrath of Jehovah, but the son of the man who had for years ruled Judah and Jerusalem must have had a strong party at his back. Accordingly the king and his adherents conspired against Zechariah, and they stoned him with stones by the king's command. This Old Testament martyr died in a very different spirit from that of Stephen; his prayer was, not, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," but "Jehovah, look upon it and require it." His prayer did not long remain unanswered. Within a year the Syrians †

came against Joash; he had a very great host, but he was powerless against a small company of the Divinely commissioned avengers of Zechariah. The tempters who had seduced the king into apostasy were a special mark for the wrath of Jehovah: the Syrians destroyed all the princes, and sent their spoil to the king of Damascus. Like Asa and Jehoram, Joash suffered personal punishment in the shape of "great diseases," but his end was even more tragic than theirs. One conspiracy avenged another: in his own household there were adherents of the family of Jehoiada: "Two of his own servants conspired against him for the blood of Zechariah, and slew him on his bed; and they buried him in the city of David, and not in the sepulchres of the kings."

The chronicler's biography of Joash might have been specially designed to remind his readers that the most careful education must sometimes fail of its purpose. Joash had been trained from his earliest years in the Temple itself, under the care of Jehoiada and of his aunt Jehoshabeath, the high-priest's wife. He had no doubt been carefully instructed in the religion and sacred history of Israel, and had been continually surrounded by the best religious influences of his age. For Judah, in the chronicler's estimation, was even then the one home of the true faith. These holy influences had been continued after Joash had attained to manhood, and Jehoiada was careful to provide that the young king's harem should be enlisted in the cause of piety and good government. We may be sure that the two wives whom Jehoiada selected for his pupil were consistent worshippers of Jehovah and loyal to the Law and the Temple. No daughter of the house of Ahab, no "strange wife" from Egypt, Ammon, or Moab, would be allowed the opportunity of undoing the good effects of early training. Moreover, we might have expected the character developed by education to be strengthened by exercise. The early years of his reign were occupied by zealous activity in the service of the Temple. The pupil outstripped his master, and the enthusiasm of the youthful king found occasion to rebuke the tardy zeal of the venerable high-priest.

And yet all this fair promise was blighted in a day. The piety carefully fostered for half a life-time gave way before the first assaults of temptation, and never even attempted to reassert itself. Possibly the brief and fragmentary records from which the chronicler had to make his selection unduly emphasise the contrast between the earlier and later years of the reign of Joash; but the picture he draws of the failure of the best of tutors and governors is unfortunately only too typical. Julian the Apostate was educated by a distinguished Christian prelate, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and was trained in a strict routine of religious observances; yet he repudiated Christianity at the earliest safe opportunity. His apostasy, like that of Joash, was probably characterised by base ingratitude. At Constantine's death the troops in Constantinople massacred nearly all the princes of the imperial family, and Julian, then only six years old, is said to have been saved and concealed in a church by Mark, Bishop of Arethusa. When Julian became emperor, he repaid this obligation by subjecting his benefactor to cruel tortures because he had destroyed a heathen temple and refused to make any compensation. Imagine Joash requiring

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9; 2 Chron. vii. 19, xii. 5, xiii. 10, xv. 2, xxi. 10, xxviii. 6, xxxix. 6, xxxiv. 25.

† Cf. 2 Kings xii. 17, 18, of which this narrative is probably an adaptation.

Jehoiada to make compensation for pulling down a high place!

The parallel of Julian may suggest a partial explanation of the fall of Joash. The tutelage of Jehoiada may have been too strict, monotonous, and prolonged; in choosing wives for the young king, the aged priest may not have made an altogether happy selection; Jehoiada may have kept Joash under control until he was incapable of independence and could only pass from one dominant influence to another. When the high-priest's death gave the king an opportunity of changing his masters, a reaction from the too urgent insistence upon his duty to the Temple may have inclined Joash to listen favourably to the solicitations of the princes.

But perhaps the sins of Joash are sufficiently accounted for by his ancestry. His mother was Zibiah of Beersheba, and therefore probably a Jewess. Of her we know nothing further, good or bad. Otherwise his ancestors for two generations had been uniformly bad. His father and grandfather were the wicked kings Jehoram and Ahaziah; his grandmother was Athaliah; and he was descended from Ahab, and possibly from Jezebel. When we recollect that his mother Zibiah was a wife of Ahaziah and had probably been selected by Athaliah, we cannot suppose that the element she contributed to his character would do much to counteract the evil he inherited from his father.

The chronicler's account of his successor Amaziah is equally disappointing; he also began well and ended miserably. In the opening formulæ of the history of the new reign and in the account of the punishment of the assassins of Joash, the chronicler closely follows the earlier narrative, omitting, as usual, the statement that this good king did not take away the high places. Like his pious predecessors, Amaziah in his earlier and better years was rewarded with a great army* and military success; and yet the muster-roll of his forces shows how the sins and calamities of the recent wicked reigns had told on the resources of Judah. Jehoshaphat could command more than eleven hundred and sixty thousand soldiers; Amaziah has only three hundred thousand.

These were not sufficient for the king's ambition; by the Divine grace, he had already amassed wealth, in spite of the Syrian ravages at the close of the preceding reign; and he laid out a hundred talents of silver in purchasing the services of as many thousand Israelites, thus falling into the sin for which Jehoshaphat had twice been reproved and punished. Jehovah, however, arrested Amaziah's employment of unholy allies at the outset. A man of God came to him and exhorted him not to let the army of Israel go with him, because "Jehovah is not with Israel"; if he had courage and faith to go with only his three hundred thousand Jews, all would be well, otherwise God would cast him down, as He had done Ahaziah. The statement that Jehovah was not with Israel might have been understood in a sense that would seem almost blasphemous to the chronicler's contemporaries; he is careful therefore to explain that here "Israel" simply means "the children of Ephraim."

Amaziah obeyed the prophet, but was natu-

rally distressed at the thought that he had spent a hundred talents for nothing: "What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" He did not realise that the Divine alliance would be worth more to him than many hundred talents of silver; or perhaps he reflected that Divine grace is free, and that he might have saved his money. One would like to believe that he was anxious to recover this silver in order to devote it to the service of the sanctuary; but he was evidently one of those sordid souls who like, as the phrase goes, "to get their religion for nothing." No wonder Amaziah went astray! We can scarcely be wrong in detecting a vein of contempt in the prophet's answer: "Jehovah can give thee much more than this."

This little episode carries with it a great principle. Every crusade against an established abuse is met with the cry, "What shall we do for the hundred talents?"—for the capital invested in slaves or in gin-shops; for English revenues from alcohol or Indian revenues from opium? Few have faith to believe that the Lord can provide for financial deficits, or, if we may venture to indicate the method in which the Lord provides, that a nation will ever be able to pay its way by honest finance. Let us note, however, that Amaziah was asked to sacrifice his own talents, and not other people's.

Accordingly Amaziah sent the mercenaries home; and they returned in great dudgeon, offended by the slight put upon them and disappointed at the loss of prospective plunder. The king's sin in hiring Israelite mercenaries was to suffer a severer punishment than the loss of money. While he was away at war, his rejected allies returned, and attacked the border cities,* killed three thousand Jews, and took much plunder.

Meanwhile Amaziah and his army were reaping direct fruits of their obedience in Edom, where they gained a great victory, and followed it up by a massacre of ten thousand captives, whom they killed by throwing down from the top of a precipice. Yet, after all, Amaziah's victory over Edom was of small profit to him, for he was thereby seduced into idolatry. Amongst his other prisoners, he had brought away the gods of Edom; and instead of throwing them over a precipice, as a pious king should have done, "he set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them."

Then Jehovah, in His anger, sent a prophet to demand, "Why hast thou sought after foreign gods, which have not delivered their own people out of thine hand?" According to current ideas outside of Israel, a nation might very reasonably seek after the gods of their conquerors. Such conquest could only be attributed to the superior power and grace of the gods of the victors; the gods of the defeated were vanquished along with their worshippers, and were obviously incompetent and unworthy of further confidence. But to act like Amaziah—to go out to battle in the name of Jehovah, directed and encouraged by His prophet, to conquer by the grace of the God of Israel, and then to desert Jehovah of hosts, the Giver of

*In the phrase "from Samaria to Beth-horon," "Samaria" apparently means the Northern Kingdom, and not the city, *i. e.*, from the borders of Samaria; the chronicler has fallen into the nomenclature of his own age.

*xxv. 5-13, peculiar to Chronicles, except that the account of the war with Edom is expanded from the brief note in Kings. Cf. ver. 11 *b* with 2 Kings xiv. 7.

victory, for the paltry and discredited idols of the conquered Edomites—this was sheer madness. And yet as Greece enslaved her Roman conquerors, so the victor has often been won to the faith of the vanquished. The Church subdued the barbarians who had overwhelmed the empire, and the heathen Saxons adopted at last the religion of the conquered Britons. Henry IV. of France is scarcely a parallel to Amaziah: he went to Mass that he might hold his sceptre with a firmer grasp, while the king of Judah merely adopted foreign idols in order to gratify his superstition and love of novelty.

Apparently Amaziah was at first inclined to discuss the question: he and the prophet talked together; but the king soon became irritated, and broke off the interview with abrupt discourtesy: "Have we made thee of the king's counsel? Forbear; why shouldst thou be smitten?" Prosperity seems to have been invariably fatal to the Jewish kings who began to reign well; the success that rewarded, at the same time destroyed, their virtue. Before his victory Amaziah had been courteous and submissive to the messenger of Jehovah; now he defied Him and treated His prophet roughly. The latter disappeared, but not before he had declared the Divine condemnation of the stubborn king.

The rest of the history of Amaziah—his presumptuous war with Joash, king of Israel, his defeat and degradation, and his assassination—is taken verbatim from the book of Kings, with a few modifications and editorial notes by the chronicler to harmonise these sections with the rest of his narrative. For instance, in the book of Kings the account of the war with Joash begins somewhat abruptly: Amaziah sends his defiance before any reason has been given for his action. The chronicler inserts a phrase which connects his new paragraph very suggestively with the one that goes before. The former concluded with the king's taunt that the prophet was not of his counsel, to which the prophet replied that the king should be destroyed because he had not hearkened to the Divine counsel proffered to him. Then Amaziah "took advice"; *i. e.*, he consulted those who were of his counsel, and the sequel showed their incompetence. The chronicler also explains that Amaziah's rash persistence in his challenge to Joash "was of God, that He might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought after the gods of Edom." He also tells us that the name of the custodian of the sacred vessels of the Temple was Obed-edom. As the chronicler mentions five Levites of the name of Obed-edom, four of whom occur nowhere else, the name was probably common in some family still surviving in his own time. But, in view of the fondness of the Jews for significant etymology, it is probable that the name is recorded here because it was exceedingly appropriate. "The servant of Edom" suits the official who has to surrender his sacred charge to a conqueror because his own king has worshipped the gods of Edom. Lastly, an additional note explains that Amaziah's apostasy had promptly deprived him of the confidence and loyalty of his subjects; the conspiracy which led to his assassination was formed from the time that he turned away from following Jehovah, so that when he sent his proud challenge to Joash his authority was already undermined, and there

were traitors in the army which he led against Israel. We are shown one of the means used by Jehovah to bring about his defeat.

CHAPTER VII.

UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AND AHAZ.*

2 CHRONICLES XXVI.-XXVIII.

AFTER the assassination of Amaziah, all the people of Judah took his son Uzziah, a lad of sixteen, called in the book of Kings Azariah, and made him king. The chronicler borrows from the older narrative the statement that "Uzziah did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father Amaziah had done." In the light of the sins attributed both to Amaziah and Uzziah in Chronicles, this is a somewhat doubtful compliment. Sarcasm, however, is not one of the chronicler's failings; he simply allows the older history to speak for itself, and leaves the reader to combine its judgment with the statement of later tradition as best he can. But yet we might modify this verse, and read that Uzziah did good and evil, prospered and fell into misfortune, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, or an even closer parallel might be drawn between what Uzziah did and suffered and the chequered character and fortunes of Joash.

Though much older than the latter, at his accession Uzziah was young enough to be very much under the control of ministers and advisers; and as Joash was trained in loyalty to Jehovah by the high-priest Jehoiada, so Uzziah "set himself to seek God during the life-time" of a certain prophet, who, like the son of Jehoiada, was named Zechariah, "who had understanding or gave instruction in the fear of Jehovah," † *i. e.*, a man versed in sacred learning, rich in spiritual experience, and able to communicate his knowledge, such a one as Ezra the scribe in later days.

Under the guidance of this otherwise unknown prophet, the young king was led to conform his private life and public administration to the will of God. In "seeking God," Uzziah would be careful to maintain and attend the Temple services, to honour the priests of Jehovah and make due provision for their wants; and "as long as he sought Jehovah God gave him prosperity."

Uzziah received all the rewards usually bestowed upon pious kings: he was victorious in war and exacted tribute from neighbouring states; he built fortresses, and had abundance of cattle and slaves, a large and well-equipped army, and well-supplied arsenals. Like other powerful kings of Judah, he asserted his supremacy over the tribes along the southern frontier of his kingdom. God helped him against the Philistines, the Arabians of Gur-baal, and the Meunim. He destroyed the fortifications of Gath, Jabne, and Ashdod, and built forts of his own in the country of the Philistines. Nothing is known about Gur-baal; but the Arabian allies

* For the discussion of the chronicler's account of Ahaz see Book III., chap. vii.

† So R. V. marg., with LXX. Targum, Syriac and Arabic versions, Talmud, Rashi, Kimchi, and some Hebrew manuscripts (Bertheau, i. 1). A. R. V., "had understanding in the visions" (R. V. vision) "of God." The difference between the two Hebrew readings is very slight. Vv. 5-20, with the exception of the bare fact of the leprosy, are peculiar to Chronicles.

of the Philistines would be, like Jehoram's enemies "the Arabians who dwelt near the Ethiopians," nomads of the deserts south of Judah. These Philistines and Arabians had brought tribute to Jehoshaphat without waiting to be subdued by his armies; so now the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah, and his name spread abroad "even to the entering in of Egypt," possibly a hundred or even a hundred and fifty miles from Jerusalem. It is evident that the chronicler's ideas of international politics were of very modest dimensions.

Moreover, Uzziah added to the fortifications of Jerusalem; and because he loved husbandry and had cattle, and husbandmen, and vine-dressers in the open country and outlying districts of Judah, he built towers for their protection. His army was of about the same strength as that of Amaziah, three hundred thousand men, so that in this, as in his character and exploits, he did according to all that his father had done, except that he was content with his own Jewish warriors and did not waste his talents in purchasing worse than useless reinforcements from Israel. Uzziah's army was well disciplined, carefully, organised, and constantly employed; they were men of mighty power, and went out to war by bands, to collect the king's tribute and enlarge his dominions and revenue by new conquests. The war material in his arsenals is described at greater length than that of any previous king: shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slings. The great advance of military science in Uzziah's reign was marked by the invention of engines of war for the defence of Jerusalem; some, like the Roman *catapulta*, were for arrows, and others, like the *ballista*, to hurl huge stones. Though the Assyrian sculptures show us that battering-rams were freely employed by them against the walls of Jewish cities,* and the *ballista* is said by Pliny to have been invented in Syria,† no other Hebrew king is credited with the possession of this primitive artillery. The chronicler or his authority seems profoundly impressed by the great skill displayed in this invention: in describing it, he uses the root *hāshabh*, to devise, three times in three consecutive words. The engines were "*hishshebhōnōth mahāshebheheth hōshēbh*"—"engines engineered by the ingenious." Jehovah not only provided Uzziah with ample military resources of every kind, but also blessed the means which He Himself had furnished; Uzziah "was marvelously helped, till he was strong, and his name spread far abroad." The neighbouring states heard with admiration of his military resources.

The student of Chronicles will by this time be prepared for the invariable sequel to God-given prosperity. Like David, Rehoboam, Asa, and Amaziah, when Uzziah "was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." The most powerful of the kings of Judah died a leper. An attack of leprosy admitted of only one explanation: it was a plague inflicted by Jehovah Himself as the punishment of sin; and so the book of Kings tells us that "Jehovah smote the king," but says nothing about the sin thus punished. The chronicler was able to supply the omission: Uzziah had dared to go into the Temple and with irregular zeal to burn incense on the altar of incense. In so doing, he was violating the Law, which made the priestly office

and all priestly functions the exclusive prerogative of the house of Aaron and denounced the penalty of death against any one who usurped priestly functions.* But Uzziah was not allowed to carry out his unholy design; the high-priest Azariah went in after him with eighty stalwart colleagues, rebuked his presumption, and bade him leave the sanctuary. Uzziah was no more tractable to the admonitions of the priest than Asa and Amaziah had been to those of the prophets. The kings of Judah were accustomed, even in Chronicles, to exercise an unchallenged control over the Temple and to regard the high-priests very much in the light of private chaplains. Uzziah was wroth; he was at the zenith of his power and glory; his heart was lifted up. Who were these priests, that they should stand between him and Jehovah and dare to publicly check and rebuke him in his own temple? Henry II.'s feelings towards Becket must have been mild compared to those of Uzziah towards Azariah, who, if the king could have had his way, would doubtless have shared the fate of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. But a direct intervention of Jehovah protected the priests, and preserved Uzziah from further sacrilege. While his features were convulsed with anger, leprosy brake forth in his forehead. The contest between king and priest was at once ended; the priests thrust him out, and he himself hastened to go, recognising that Jehovah had smitten him. Henceforth he lived apart, cut off from fellowship alike with man and God, and his son Jotham governed in his stead. The book of Kings simply makes the general statement that Uzziah was buried with his fathers in the city of David; but the chronicler is anxious that his readers should not suppose that the tombs of the sacred house of David were polluted by the presence of a leprosy corpse: the explains that the leper was buried, not in the royal sepulchre, but in the field attached to it.

The moral of this incident is obvious. In attempting to understand its significance, we need not trouble ourselves about the relative authority of kings and priests; the principle vindicated by the punishment of Uzziah was the simple duty of obedience to an express command of Jehovah. However trivial the burning of incense may be in itself, it formed part of an elaborate and complicated system of ritual. To interfere with the Divine ordinances in one detail would mar the significance and impressiveness of the whole Temple service. One arbitrary innovation would be a precedent for others, and would constitute a serious danger for a system whose value lay in continuous uniformity. Moreover, Uzziah was stubborn in disobedience. His attempt to burn incense might have been sufficiently punished by the public and humiliating reproof of the high-priest. His leprosy came upon him because, when thwarted in an unholy purpose, he gave way to ungoverned passion.

In its consequences we see a practical application of the lessons of the incident. How often is the sinner only provoked to greater wickedness by the obstacles which Divine grace opposes to his wrong-doing! How few men will tolerate the suggestion that their intentions are cruel, selfish, or dishonourable! Remonstrance is an insult, an offence against their personal dignity; they feel that their self-respect demands that they should persevere in their purpose, and

* Cf. Ezek. xxvi. 9.

† Pliny, vii. 56, *apud* Smith's "Bible Dictionary."

* Num. xviii. 7; Exod. xxx. 7.

that they should resent and punish any one who has tried to thwart them. Uzziah's wrath was perfectly natural; few men have been so uniformly patient of reproof as not sometimes to have turned in anger upon those who warned them against sin. The most dramatic feature of this episode, the sudden frost of leprosy in the king's forehead, is not without its spiritual anti-type. Men's anger at well-merited reproof has often blighted their lives once for all with ineradicable moral leprosy. In the madness of passion they have broken bonds which have hitherto restrained them and committed themselves beyond recall to evil pursuits and fatal friendships. Let us take the most lenient view of Uzziah's conduct, and suppose that he believed himself entitled to offer incense; he could not doubt that the priests were equally confident that Jehovah had enjoined the duty on them, and them alone. Such a question was not to be decided by violence, in the heat of personal bitterness. Azariah himself had been unwisely zealous in bringing in his eighty priests; Jehovah showed him that they were quite unnecessary, because at the last Uzziah "himself hastened to go out." When personal passion and jealousy are eliminated from Christian polemics, the Church will be able to write the epitaph of the *odium theologium*.

Uzziah was succeeded by Jotham, who had already governed for some time as regent. In recording the favourable judgment of the book of Kings, "He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father Uzziah had done," the chronicler is careful to add, "Howbeit he entered not into the temple of Jehovah"; the exclusive privilege of the house of Aaron had been established once for all. The story of Jotham's reign comes like a quiet and pleasant oasis in the chronicler's dreary narrative of wicked rulers, interspersed with pious kings whose piety failed them in their latter days. Jotham shares with Solomon the distinguished honour of being a king of whom no evil is recorded either in Kings or Chronicles, and who died in prosperity, at peace with Jehovah. At the same time it is probable that Jotham owes the blameless character he bears in Chronicles to the fact that the earlier narrative does not mention any misfortunes of his, especially any misfortune towards the close of his life. Otherwise the theological school from whom the chronicler derived his later traditions would have been anxious to discover or deduce some sin to account for such misfortune. At the end of the short notice of his reign, between two parts of the usual closing formula, an editor of the book of Kings has inserted the statement that "in those days Jehovah began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah." This verse the chronicler has omitted; neither the date* nor the nature of this trouble was clear enough to cast any slur upon the character of Jotham.

Jotham, again, had the rewards of a pious king: he added a gate to the Temple, and strengthened the wall of Ophel,† and built cities and castles in Judah; he made successful war

* Kimchi interprets "those days" as meaning "after the death of Jotham."

† The reference to the wall of Ophel is peculiar to Chronicles; indeed, Ophel is only mentioned in Chronicles and Nehemiah; it was the southern spur of Mount Moriah (Neh. iii. 26, 27). Vv. 3 6-7 are also peculiar to Chronicles.

upon Ammon, and received from them an immense tribute—a hundred talents of silver, ten thousand measures of wheat, and as much barley—for three successive years. What happened afterwards we are not told. It has been suggested that the amounts mentioned were paid in three yearly instalments, or that the three years were at the end of the reign, and the tribute came to an end when Jotham died or when the troubles with Pekah and Rezin began.

We have had repeated occasion to notice that in his accounts of the good kings the chronicler almost always omits the qualifying clause to the effect that they did not take away the high places. He does so here; but, contrary to his usual practice, he inserts a qualifying clause of his own: "The people did yet corruptly." He probably had in view the unmitigated wickedness of the following reign, and was glad to retain the evidence that Ahaz found encouragement and support in his idolatry; he is careful, however, to state the fact so that no shadow of blame falls upon Jotham.

The life of Ahaz has been dealt with elsewhere. Here we need merely repeat that for the sixteen years of his reign Judah was to all appearance utterly given over to every form of idolatry, and was oppressed and brought low by Israel, Syria, and Assyria.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEZEKIAH: THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF MUSIC.

2 CHRONICLES XXIX.-XXXII.

THE bent of the chronicler's mind is well illustrated by the proportion of space assigned to ritual by him and by the book of Kings respectively. In the latter a few lines only are devoted to ritual, and the bulk of the space is given to the invasion of Sennacherib, the embassy from Babylon, etc., while in Chronicles ritual occupies about three times as many verses as personal and public affairs.

Hezekiah, though not blameless, was all but perfect in his loyalty to Jehovah. The chronicler reproduces the customary formula for a good king: "He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that David his father had done"; but his cautious judgment rejects the somewhat rhetorical statement in Kings that "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."

Hezekiah's policy was made clear immediately after his accession. His zeal for reformation could tolerate no delay; the first month* of the first year of his reign saw him actively engaged in the good work.† It was no light task that lay before him. Not only were there altars in every corner of Jerusalem and idolatrous high places in every city of Judah, but the Temple services had ceased, the lamps were put out, the sacred vessels cut in pieces, the Temple had

* This is usually understood as Nisan, the first month of the ecclesiastical year.

† xxx. 3-xxxi. 21 (the cleansing of the Temple and accompanying feast, Passover, organisation of the priests and Levites) are substantially peculiar to Chronicles, though in a sense they expand 2 Kings xviii. 4-7 because they fulfil the commandments which Jehovah commanded Moses.

been polluted and then closed, and the priests and Levites were scattered. Sixteen years of licensed idolatry must have fostered all that was vile in the country, have put wicked men in authority, and created numerous vested interests connected by close ties with idolatry, notably the priests of all the altars and high places. On the other hand, the reign of Ahaz had been an unbroken series of disasters; the people had repeatedly endured the horrors of invasion. His government as time went on must have become more and more unpopular, for when he died he was not buried in the sepulchres of the kings. As idolatry was a prominent feature of his policy, there would be a reaction in favour of the worship of Jehovah, and there would not be wanting true believers to tell the people that their sufferings were a consequence of idolatry. To a large party in Judah Hezekiah's reversal of his father's religious policy would be as welcome as Elizabeth's declaration against Rome was to most Englishmen.

Hezekiah began by opening and repairing the doors of the Temple. Its closed doors had been a symbol of the national repudiation of Jehovah; to reopen them was necessarily the first step in the reconciliation of Judah to its God, but only the first step. The doors were open as a sign that Jehovah was invited to return to His people and again to manifest His presence in the Holy of holies, so that through those open doors Israel might have access to Him by means of the priests. But the Temple was as yet no fit place for the presence of Jehovah. With its lamps extinguished, its sacred vessels destroyed, its floors and walls thick with dust and full of all filthiness, it was rather a symbol of the apostasy of Judah. Accordingly Hezekiah sought the help of the Levites. It is true that he is first said to have collected together priests and Levites, but from that point onward the priests are almost entirely ignored.

Hezekiah reminded the Levites of the misdoings of Ahaz and his adherents and the wrath which they had brought upon Judah and Jerusalem; he told them it was his purpose to conciliate Jehovah by making a covenant with Him; he appealed to them as the chosen ministers of Jehovah and His temple to co-operate heartily in this good work.

The Levites responded to his appeal apparently rather in acts than words. No spokesman replies to the king's speech, but with prompt obedience they set about their work forthwith; they arose, Kohathites, sons of Merari, Gershonites, sons of Elizaphan, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun—the chronicler has a Homeric fondness for catalogues of high-sounding names—the leaders of all these divisions are duly mentioned. Kohath, Gershon, and Merari are well known as the three great clans of the house of Levi; and here we find the three guilds of singers—Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun—placed on a level with the older clans. Elizaphan was apparently a division of the clan Kohath,* which, like the guilds of singers, had obtained an independent status. The result is to recognise seven divisions of the tribe.

The chiefs of the Levites gathered their brethren together, and having performed the necessary rites of ceremonial cleansing for themselves, went in to cleanse the Temple; that is to

say, the priests went into the holy place and the Holy of holies and brought out "all the uncleanness" into the court, and the Levites carried it away to the brook Kidron: but before the building itself could be reached eight days were spent in cleansing the courts, and then the priests went into the Temple itself and spent eight days in cleansing it, in the manner described above. Then they reported to the king that the cleansing was finished, and especially that "all the vessels which King Ahaz cast away" had been recovered and reconsecrated with due ceremony. We were told in the previous chapter that Ahaz had cut to pieces the vessels of the Temple, but these may have been other vessels.

Then Hezekiah celebrated a great dedication feast; seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven he-goats were offered as a sin-offering for the dynasty,* for the Temple, for Judah, and (by special command of the king) for all Israel, *i. e.*, for the northern tribes as well as for Judah and Benjamin. Apparently this sin-offering was made in silence, but afterwards the king set the Levites and priests in their places with their musical instruments, and when the burnt-offering began "the song of Jehovah began with the trumpets together with the instruments of David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded," and all this continued till the burnt-offering was finished.

When the people had been formally reconciled to Jehovah by this representative national sacrifice, and thus purified from the uncleanness of idolatry and consecrated afresh to their God, they were permitted and invited to make individual sacrifices, thank-offerings and burnt-offerings. Each man might enjoy for himself the renewed privilege of access to Jehovah, and obtain the assurance of pardon for his sins, and offer thanksgiving for his own special blessings. And they brought offerings in abundance; seventy bullocks, a hundred rams, and two hundred lambs for a burnt-offering; and six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep for thank-offerings. Thus were the Temple services restored and re-inaugurated; and Hezekiah and the people rejoiced because they felt that this unpremeditated outburst of enthusiasm was due to the gracious influence of the Spirit of Jehovah.

The chronicler's narrative is somewhat marred by a touch of professional jealousy. According to the ordinary ritual,† the offerer flayed the burnt-offerings; but for some special reason, perhaps because of the exceptional solemnity of the occasion, this duty now devolved upon the priests. But the burnt-offerings were abundant beyond all precedent; the priests were too few for the work, and the Levites were called in to help them, "for the Levites were more upright in heart to purify themselves than the priests." Apparently even in the second Temple brethren did not always dwell together in unity.

Hezekiah had now provided for the regular services of the Temple, and had given the inhabitants of Jerusalem a full opportunity of returning to Jehovah; but the people of the provinces were chiefly acquainted with the Temple through the great annual festivals. These, too, had long been in abeyance; and special steps had to be taken to secure their future observance. In order to do this, it was necessary to recall

* Exod. vi. 18, 22; Num. iii. 39, mention Elizaphan as a descendant of Kohath.

* So Strack-Zoeller, i. 1.

† Lev. i. 6.

the provincials to their allegiance to Jehovah. Under ordinary circumstances the great festival of the Passover would have been observed in the first month, but at the time appointed for the paschal feast the Temple was still unclean, and the priests and Levites were occupied in its purification. But Hezekiah could not endure that the first year of his reign should be marked by the omission of this great feast. He took counsel with the princes and public assembly—nothing is said about the priests—and they decided to hold the Passover in the second month instead of the first. We gather from casual allusions in vv. 6-8 that the kingdom of Samaria had already come to an end; the people had been carried into captivity, and only a remnant were left in the land.* From this point the kings of Judah act as religious heads of the whole nation and territory of Israel. Hezekiah sent invitations to all Israel from Dan to Beersheba. He made special efforts to secure a favourable response from the northern tribes, sending letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, *i. e.*, to the ten tribes under their leadership. He reminded them that their brethren had gone into captivity because the northern tribes had deserted the Temple; and held out to them the hope that, if they worshipped at the Temple and served Jehovah, they should themselves escape further calamity, and their brethren and children who had gone into captivity should return to their own land.

"So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun." Either Zebulun is used in a broad sense for all the Galilean tribes, or the phrase "from Beersheba to Dan" is merely rhetorical, for to the north, between Zebulun and Dan, lay the territories of Asher and Naphtali. It is to be noticed that the tribes beyond Jordan are nowhere referred to; they had already fallen out of the history of Israel, and were scarcely remembered in the time of the chronicler.

Hezekiah's appeal to the surviving communities of the Northern Kingdom failed; they laughed his messengers to scorn, and mocked them; but individuals responded to his invitation in such numbers that they are spoken of as "a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun." There were also men of Asher among the northern pilgrims.†

The pious enthusiasm of Judah stood out in vivid contrast to the stubborn impenitence of the majority of the ten tribes. By the grace of God, Judah was of one heart to observe the feast appointed by Jehovah through the king and princes, so that there was gathered in Jerusalem a very great assembly of worshippers, surpassing even the great gatherings which the chronicler had witnessed at the annual feasts.

But though the Temple had been cleansed, the Holy City was not yet free from the taint of idolatry. The character of the Passover demanded that not only the Temple, but the whole city, should be pure. The paschal lamb was eaten at home, and the doorposts of the house were sprinkled with its blood. But Ahaz had set up altars at every corner of the city; no devout Israelite could tolerate the symbols of

idolatrous worship close to the house in which he celebrated the solemn rites of the Passover. Accordingly before the Passover was killed these altars were removed.*

Then the great feast began; but after long years of idolatry neither the people nor the priests and Levites were sufficiently familiar with the rites of the festival to be able to perform them without some difficulty and confusion. As a rule each head of a household killed his own lamb; but many of the worshippers, especially those from the north, were not ceremonially clean; and this task devolved upon the Levites. The immense concourse of worshippers and the additional work thrown upon the Temple ministry must have made extraordinary demands on their zeal and energy.† At first apparently they hesitated, and were inclined to abstain from discharging their usual duties. A passover in a month not appointed by Moses, but decided on by the civil authorities without consulting the priesthood, might seem a doubtful and dangerous innovation. Recollecting Azariah's successful assertion of hierarchical prerogative against Uzziah, they might be inclined to attempt a similar resistance to Hezekiah. But the pious enthusiasm of the people clearly showed that the Spirit of Jehovah inspired their somewhat irregular zeal; so that the ecclesiastical officials were shamed out of their unsympathetic attitude, and came forward to take their full share and even more than their full share in this glorious rededication of Israel to Jehovah.

But a further difficulty remained: uncleanness not only disqualified from killing the paschal lambs, but from taking any part in the Passover; and a multitude of the people were unclean. Yet it would have been ungracious and even dangerous to discourage their newborn zeal by excluding them from the festival; moreover, many of them were worshippers from among the ten tribes, who had come in response to a special invitation, which most of their fellow-countrymen had rejected with scorn and contempt. If they had been sent back because they had failed to cleanse themselves according to a ritual of which they were ignorant, and of which Hezekiah might have known they would be ignorant, both the king and his guests would have incurred measureless ridicule from the impious northerners. Accordingly they were allowed to take part in the Passover despite their uncleanness. But this permission could only be granted with serious apprehensions as to its consequences. The Law threatened with death any one who attended the services of the sanctuary in a state of uncleanness.‡ Possibly there were already signs of an outbreak of pestilence; at any rate, the dread of Divine punishment for sacrilegious presumption would distress the whole assembly and mar their enjoyment of Divine fellowship. Again it is no priest or prophet, but the king, the Messiah, who comes forward as the mediator between God and man. Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "Jehovah, in His grace and mercy,§ pardon every one that

* xxx. 14; cf. 2 Kings xviii. 4. The chronicler omits the statement that Hezekiah destroyed Moses's brazen serpent, which the people had hitherto worshipped. His readers would not have understood how this corrupt worship survived the reforms of pious kings and priests who observed the law of Moses.

† Cf. xxix. 34, xxx. 3.

‡ Lev. xv. 31.

§ So Bertheau, i. 1, slightly paraphrasing.

* According to 2 Kings xviii. 10, Samaria was not taken till the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign. It is not necessary for an expositor of Chronicles to attempt to harmonise the two accounts.

† Cf. xxx. 11, 18.

setteth his heart to seek Elohim Jehovah, the God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the ritual of the Temple. And Jehovah hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people," *i. e.*, either healed them from actual disease or relieved them from the fear of pestilence.

And so the feast went on happily and prosperously, and was prolonged by acclamation for an additional seven days. During fourteen days king and princes, priests and Levites, Jews and Israelites, rejoiced before Jehovah; thousands of bullocks and sheep smoked upon the altar; and now the priests were not backward: great numbers purified themselves to serve the popular devotion. The priests and Levites sang and made melody to Jehovah, so that the Levites earned the king's special commendation. The great festival ended with a solemn benediction: "The priests * arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to His holy habitation, even unto heaven." The priests, and through them the people, received the assurance that their solemn and prolonged worship had met with gracious acceptance.

We have already more than once had occasion to consider the chronicler's main theme: the importance of the Temple, its ritual, and its ministers. Incidentally and perhaps unconsciously, he here suggests another lesson, which is specially significant as coming from an ardent ritualist, namely the necessary limitations of uniformity in ritual. Hezekiah's celebration of the Passover is full of irregularities: it is held in the wrong month; it is prolonged to twice the usual period; there are amongst the worshippers multitudes of unclean persons, whose presence at these services ought to have been visited with terrible punishment. All is condoned on the ground of emergency, and the ritual laws are set aside without consulting the ecclesiastical officials. Everything serves to emphasise the lesson we touched on in connection with David's sacrifices at the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite: ritual is made for man, and not man for ritual. Complete uniformity may be insisted on in ordinary times, but can be dispensed with in any pressing emergency; necessity knows no law, not even the Torah of the Pentateuch. Moreover, in such emergencies it is not necessary to wait for the initiative or even the sanction of ecclesiastical officials; the supreme authority in the Church in all its great crises resides in the whole body of believers. No one is entitled to speak with greater authority on the limitations of ritual than a strong advocate of the sanctity of ritual like the chronicler; and we may well note, as one of the most conspicuous marks of his inspiration, the sanctified common sense shown by his frank and sympathetic record of the irregularities of Hezekiah's passover. Doubtless emergencies had arisen even in his own experience of the great feasts of the Temple that had taught him this lesson; and it says much for the healthy tone of the Temple community in his day that he does not attempt to

reconcile the practice of Hezekiah with the law of Moses by any harmonistic quibbles.

The work of purification and restoration, however, was still incomplete: the Temple had been cleansed from the pollutions of idolatry, the heathen altars had been removed from Jerusalem, but the high places remained in all the cities of Judah. When the Passover was at last finished, the assembled multitude, "all Israel that were present," set out, like the English or Scotch Puritans, on a great iconoclastic expedition. Throughout the length and breadth of the Land of Promise, throughout Judah and Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh, they brake in pieces the sacred pillars, and hewed down the Asherim, and brake down the high places and altars; then they went home.

Meanwhile Hezekiah was engaged in reorganising the priests and Levites and arranging for the payment and distribution of the sacred dues. The king set an example of liberality by making provision for the daily, weekly, monthly, and festival offerings. The people were not slow to imitate him; they brought first-fruits and tithes in such abundance that four months were spent in piling up heaps of offerings.

"Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah; and he wrought that which was good, and right, and faithful before Jehovah his God; and in every work that he began in the service of the Temple, and in the Law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and brought it to a successful issue."

Then follow an account of the deliverance from Sennacherib and of Hezekiah's recovery from sickness, a reference to his undue pride in the matter of the embassy from Babylon, and a description of the prosperity of his reign, all for the most part abridged from the book of Kings. The prophet Isaiah, however, is almost ignored. A few of the more important modifications deserve some little attention. We are told that the Assyrian invasion was "after these things and this faithfulness," in order that we may not forget that the Divine deliverance was a recompense for Hezekiah's loyalty to Jehovah. While the book of Kings tells us that Sennacherib took all the fenced cities of Judah, the chronicler feels that even this measure of misfortune would not have been allowed to befall a king who had just reconciled Israel to Jehovah, and merely says that Sennacherib purposed to break these cities up.

The chronicler * has preserved an account of the measures taken by Hezekiah for the defence of his capital: how he stopp'd up the fountains and water-courses outside the city, so that a besieging army might not find water, and repaired and strengthened the walls, and encouraged his people to trust in Jehovah.

Probably the stopping of the water supply outside the walls was connected with an operation mentioned at the close of the narrative of Hezekiah's reign: "Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David." † Moreover, the chronicler's statements are based upon 2 Kings xx. 20, where it is said that "Hezekiah made the pool and the conduit and brought water to the city." The chronicler was of course intimately acquainted with the topography of Jerusalem in his own days, and uses his knowledge to interpret and expand the

* A. R. V., with Masoretic text, "the priests the Levites"; LXX., Vulg. Syr., "the priests and the Levites." The former is more likely to be correct. The verse is partly an echo of Deut. xxvi. 15, so that the chronicler naturally uses the Deuteronomic phrase "the priests the Levites"; but he probably does so unconsciously, without intending to make any special claim for the Levites: hence I have omitted the word in the text.

statement in the book of Kings. He was possibly guided in part by Isa. xxii. 9, 11, where the "gathering together the waters of the lower pool" and the "making a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool" are mentioned as precautions taken in view of a probable Assyrian siege. The recent investigations of the Palestine Exploration Fund have led to the discovery of aqueducts, and stoppages, and diversions of watercourses which are said to correspond to the operations mentioned by the chronicler. If this be the case, they show a very accurate knowledge on his part of the topography of Jerusalem in his own day, and also illustrate his care to utilise all existing evidence in order to obtain a clear and accurate interpretation of the statements of his authority.

The reign of Hezekiah appears a suitable opportunity to introduce a few remarks on the importance which the chronicler attaches to the music of the Temple services. Though the music is not more prominent with him than with some earlier kings, yet in the case of David, Solomon, and Jehoshaphat other subjects presented themselves for special treatment; and Hezekiah's reign being the last in which the music of the sanctuary is specially dwelt upon, we are able here to review the various references to this subject. For the most part the chronicler tells his story of the virtuous days of the good kings to a continual accompaniment of Temple music. We hear of the playing and singing when the Ark was brought to the house of Obed-edom; when it was taken into the city of David; at the dedication of the Temple; at the battle between Abijah and Jeroboam; at Asa's reformation; in connection with the overthrow of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Meunim in the reign of Jehoshaphat; at the coronation of Joash; at Hezekiah's feasts; and again, though less emphatically, at Josiah's passover. No doubt the special prominence given to the subject indicates a professional interest on the part of the author. If, however, music occupies an undue proportion of his space, and he has abridged accounts of more important matters to make room for his favourite theme, yet there is no reason to suppose that his actual statements overrate the extent to which music was used in worship or the importance attached to it. The older narratives refer to the music in the case of David and Joash, and assign psalms and songs to David and Solomon. Moreover, Judaism is by no means alone in its fondness for music, but shares this characteristic with almost all religions.

We have spoken of the chronicler so far chiefly as a professional musician, but it should be clearly understood that the term must be taken in its best sense. He was by no means so absorbed in the technique of his art as to forget its sacred significance; he was not less a worshipper himself because he was the minister or agent of the common worship. His accounts of the festivals show a hearty appreciation of the entire ritual; and his references to the music do not give us the technical circumstances of its production, but rather emphasise its general effect. The chronicler's sense of the religious value of music is largely that of a devout worshipper, who is led to set forth for the benefit of others a truth which is the fruit of his own experience. This experience is not confined to trained musicians; indeed, a scientific knowledge

of the art may sometimes interfere with its devotional influence. Criticism may take the place of worship; and the hearer, instead of yielding to the sacred suggestions of hymn or anthem, may be distracted by his æsthetic judgment as to the merits of the composition and the skill shown by its rendering. In the same way critical appreciation of voice, elocution, literary style, and intellectual power does not always conduce to edification from a sermon. In the truest culture, however, sensitiveness to these secondary qualities has become habitual and automatic, and blends itself imperceptibly with the religious consciousness of spiritual influence. The latter is thus helped by excellence and only slightly hindered by minor defects in the natural means. But the very absence of any great scientific knowledge of music may leave the spirit open to the spell which sacred music is intended to exercise, so that all cheerful and guileless souls may be "moved with concord of sweet sounds," and sad and weary hearts find comfort in subdued strains that breathe sympathy of which words are incapable.

Music, as a mode of utterance moving within the restraints of a regular order, naturally attaches itself to ritual. As the earliest literature is poetry, the earliest liturgy is musical. Melody is the simplest and most obvious means by which the utterances of a body of worshippers can be combined into a seemly act of worship. The mere repetition of the same words by a congregation in ordinary speech is apt to be wanting in impressiveness or even in decorum; the use of tune enables a congregation to unite in worship even when many of its members are strangers to each other.

Again, music may be regarded as an expansion of language: not new dialect, but a collection of symbols that can express thought, and more especially emotion, for which mere speech has no vocabulary. This new form of language naturally becomes an auxiliary of religion. Words are clumsy instruments for the expression of the heart, and are least efficient when they undertake to set forth moral and spiritual ideas. Music can transcend mere speech in touching the soul to fine issues, suggesting visions of things ineffable and unseen.

Browning makes Abt Vogler say of the most enduring and supreme hopes that God has granted to men, "'Tis we musicians know"; but the message of music comes home with power to many who have no skill in its art.

CHAPTER IX.

MANASSEH: REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

2 CHRONICLES xxxiii.

In telling the melancholy story of the wickedness of Manasseh in the first period of his reign, the chronicler reproduces the book of Kings, with one or two omissions and other slight alterations. He omits the name of Manasseh's mother; she was called Hephzi-bah—"My pleasure is in her." In any case, when the son of a godly father turns out badly, and nothing is known about the mother, uncharitable people might credit her with his wickedness. But the chronicler's readers were familiar with the great

influence of the queen-mother in Oriental states. When they read that the son of Hezekiah came to the throne at the age of twelve and afterwards gave himself up to every form of idolatry, they would naturally ascribe his departure from his father's ways to the suggestions of his mother. The chronicler is not willing that the pious Hezekiah should lie under the imputation of having taken delight in an ungodly woman, and so her name is omitted.

The contents of 2 Kings xxi. 10-16 are also omitted; they consist of a prophetic utterance and further particulars as to the sins of Manasseh; they are virtually replaced by the additional information in Chronicles.

From the point of view of the chronicler, the history of Manasseh in the book of Kings was far from satisfactory. The earlier writer had not only failed to provide materials from which a suitable moral could be deduced, but he had also told the story so that undesirable conclusions might be drawn. Manasseh sinned more wickedly than any other king of Judah: Ahaz merely polluted and closed the Temple, but Manasseh "built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the Temple," and set up in it an idol. And yet in the earlier narrative this most wicked king escaped without any personal punishment at all. Moreover, length of days was one of the rewards which Jehovah was wont to bestow upon the righteous; but while Ahaz was cut off at thirty-six, in the prime of manhood, Manasseh survived to the mature age of sixty-seven, and reigned fifty-five years.

However, the history reached the chronicler in a more satisfactory form. Manasseh was duly punished, and his long reign fully accounted for.* When, in spite of Divine warning, Manasseh and his people persisted in their sin, Jehovah sent against them "the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh in chains, and bound him with fetters,† and carried him to Babylon."

The Assyrian invasion referred to here is partially confirmed by the fact that the name of Manasseh occurs amongst the tributaries of Esarhaddon and his successor, Assur-bani-pal. The mention of Babylon as his place of captivity rather than Nineveh may be accounted for by supposing that Manasseh was taken prisoner in the reign of Esarhaddon. This king of Assyria rebuilt Babylon, and spent much of his time there. He is said to have been of a kindly disposition, and to have exercised towards other royal captives the same clemency which he extended to Manasseh. For the Jewish king's misfortunes led him to repentance: "When he was in trouble, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed, unto him." Amongst the Greek Apocrypha is found a "Prayer of Manasseh," doubtless intended by its author to represent the prayer referred to in Chronicles. In it Manasseh celebrates the Divine glory, confesses his great wickedness, and asks that his penitence may be accepted and that he may obtain deliverance.

If these were the terms of Manasseh's prayers, they were heard and answered; and the captive king returned to Jerusalem a devout worshipper

and faithful servant of Jehovah. He at once set to work to undo the evil he had wrought in the former period of his reign. He took away the idol and the heathen altars from the Temple, restored the altar of Jehovah, and re-established the Temple services. In earlier days he had led the people into idolatry; now he commanded them to serve Jehovah, and the people obediently followed the king's example. Apparently he found it impracticable to interfere with the high places; but they were so far purified from corruption that, though the people still sacrificed at these illegal sanctuaries, they worshipped exclusively Jehovah, the God of Israel.

Like most of the pious kings, his prosperity was partly shown by his extensive building operations. Following in the footsteps of Jotham, he strengthened or repaired the fortifications of Jerusalem, especially about Ophel. He further provided for the safety of his dominions by placing captains, and doubtless also garrisons, in the fenced cities of Judah. The interest taken by the Jews of the second Temple in the history of Manasseh is shown by the fact that the chronicler is able to mention, not only the "Acts of the Kings of Israel," but a second authority: "The History of the Seers." The imagination of the Targumists and other later writers embellished the history of Manasseh's captivity and release with many striking and romantic circumstances.

The life of Manasseh practically completes the chronicler's series of object-lessons in the doctrine of retribution; the history of the later kings only provides illustrations similar to those already given. These object-lessons are closely connected with the teaching of Ezekiel. In dealing with the question of heredity in guilt, the prophet is led to set forth the character and fortunes of four different classes of men. First* we have two simple cases: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. These have been respectively illustrated by the prosperity of Solomon and Jotham and the misfortunes of Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Ahaz. Again, departing somewhat from the order of Ezekiel—"When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations of the wicked man, shall he live? None of his righteous deeds that he hath done shall be remembered; in his trespass that he hath trespassed and in his sin that he hath sinned he shall die"—here we have the principle that in Chronicles governs the Divine dealings with the kings who began to reign well and then fell away into sin: Asa, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah.

We reached this point in our discussion of the doctrine of retribution in connection with Asa. So far the lessons taught were salutary: they might deter from sin; but they were gloomy and depressing; they gave little encouragement to hope for success in the struggle after righteousness, and suggested that few would escape terrible penalties of failure. David and Solomon formed a class by themselves; an ordinary man could not aspire to their almost supernatural virtue. In his later history the chronicler is chiefly bent on illustrating the frailty of man and the wrath of God. The New Testament teaches a similar lesson when it asks, "If the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the un-

* xxxiii. 11-10, peculiar to Chronicles.

† So R. V.; A. V., "among the thorns"; R. V. marg., "with hooks," if so in a figurative sense. Others take the word as a proper name: Hôhim.

* Ezek. xviii. 20.

godly and sinner appear?"* But in Chronicles not even the righteous is saved. Again and again we are told at a king's accession that he "did that which was good and right in the eyes of Jehovah"; and yet before the reign closes he forfeits the Divine favour, and at last dies ruined and disgraced.

But this sombre picture is relieved by occasional gleams of light. Ezekiel furnishes a fourth type of religious experience: "If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live; he shall not die. None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, saith the Lord Jehovah, and not rather that he should return from his way and live?"† The one striking and complete example of this principle is the history of Manasseh. It is true that Rehoboam also repented, but the chronicler does not make it clear that his repentance was permanent. Manasseh is unique alike in extreme wickedness, sincere penitence, and thorough reformation. The reformation of Julius Cæsar or of our Henry V., or, to take a different class of instance, the conversion of St. Paul, was nothing compared to the conversion of Manasseh. It was as though Herod the Great or Cæsar Borgia had been checked midway in a career of cruelty and vice, and had thenceforward lived pure and holy lives, glorifying God by ministering to their fellow-men. Such a repentance gives us hope for the most abandoned. In the forgiveness of Manasseh the penitent sinner receives assurance that God will forgive even the most guilty. The account of his closing years shows that even a career of desperate wickedness in the past need not hinder the penitent from rendering acceptable service to God and ending his life in the enjoyment of Divine favour and blessing. Manasseh becomes in the Old Testament what the Prodigal Son is in the New: the one great symbol of the possibilities of human nature and the infinite mercy of God.

The chronicler's theology is as simple and straightforward as that of Ezekiel. Manasseh repents, submits himself, and is forgiven. His captivity apparently had expiated his guilt, as far as expiation was necessary. Neither prophet nor chronicler was conscious of the moral difficulties that have been found in so simple a plan of salvation. The problems of an objective atonement had not yet risen above their horizon.

These incidents afford another illustration of the necessary limitations of ritual. In the great crisis of Manasseh's spiritual life, the Levitical ordinances played no part; they moved on a lower level, and ministered to less urgent needs. Probably the worship of Jehovah was still suspended during Manasseh's captivity; none the less Manasseh was able to make his peace with God. Even if they were punctually observed, of what use were services at the Temple in Jerusalem to a penitent sinner at Babylon? When Manasseh returned to Jerusalem, he restored the Temple worship, and offered sacrifices of peace-offerings and of thanksgiving; nothing is said about sin-offerings. His sacrifices were not the condition of his pardon, but the seal and token of a reconciliation already effected. The experi-

* 1 Peter iv. 18.

† Ezek. xviii. 21-23.

ence of Manasseh anticipated that of the Jews of the Captivity: he discovered the possibility of fellowship with Jehovah, far away from the Holy Land, without temple, priest, or sacrifice. The chronicler, perhaps unconsciously, already foreshadows the coming of the hour when men should worship the Father neither in the holy mountain of Samaria nor yet in Jerusalem.

Before relating the outward acts which testified the sincerity of Manasseh's repentance, the chronicler devotes a single sentence to the happy influence of forgiveness and deliverance upon Manasseh himself. When his prayer had been heard, and his exile was at an end, *then* Manasseh knew and acknowledged that Jehovah was God. Men first begin to know God when they have been forgiven. The alienated and disobedient, if they think of Him at all, merely have glimpses of His vengeance and try to persuade themselves that He is a stern Tyrant. By the penitent not yet assured of the possibility of reconciliation God is chiefly thought of as a righteous Judge. What did the Prodigal Son know about his father when he asked for the portion of goods that fell to him or while he was wasting his substance in riotous living? Even when he came to himself, he thought of the father's house as a place where there was bread enough and to spare; and he supposed that his father might endure to see him living at home in permanent disgrace, on the footing of a hired servant. When he reached home, after he had been met a great way off with compassion and been welcomed with an embrace, he began for the first time to understand his father's character. So the knowledge of God's love dawns upon the soul in the blessed experience of forgiveness; and because love and forgiveness are more strange and unearthly than rebuke and chastisement, the sinner is humbled by pardon far more than by punishment; and his trembling submission to the righteous Judge deepens into profounder reverence and awe for the God who can forgive, who is superior to all vindictiveness, whose infinite resources enable Him to blot out the guilt, to cancel the penalty, and annul the consequences of sin.

"There is forgiveness with Thee,
That Thou mayest be feared."*

The words that stand in the forefront of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name," are virtually a petition that sinners may repent, and be converted, and obtain forgiveness.

In seeking for a Christian parallel to the doctrine expounded by Ezekiel and illustrated by Chronicles, we have to remember that the permanent elements in primitive doctrine are often to be found by removing the limitations which imperfect faith has imposed on the possibilities of human nature and Divine mercy. We have already suggested that the chronicler's somewhat rigid doctrine of temporal rewards and punishments symbolises the inevitable influence of conduct on the development of character. The doctrine of God's attitude towards backsliding and repentance seems somewhat arbitrary as set forth by Ezekiel and Chronicles. A man apparently is not to be judged by his whole life, but only by the moral period that is closed by his death. If his last years be pious, his former transgressions are forgotten; if his last years be

* Psalm cxxx. 4, probably belonging to about the same period as Chronicles.

evil, his righteous deeds are equally forgotten. While we gratefully accept the forgiveness of sinners, such teaching as to backsliders seems a little cynical; and though, by God's grace and discipline, a man may be led through and out of sin into righteousness, we are naturally suspicious of a life of "righteous deeds" which towards its close lapses into gross and open sin. "Nemo repente turpissimus fit." We are inclined to believe that the final lapse reveals the true bias of the whole character. But the chronicler suggests more than this: by his history of the almost uniform failure of the pious kings to persevere to the end, he seems to teach that the piety of early and mature life is either unreal or else is unable to survive as body and mind wear out. This doctrine has sometimes, inconsiderately no doubt, been taught from Christian pulpits; and yet the truth of which the doctrine is a misrepresentation supplies a correction of the former principle that a life is to be judged by its close. Putting aside any question of positive sin, a man's closing years sometimes seem cold, narrow, and selfish when once he was full of tender and considerate sympathy; and yet the man is no Asa or Amaziah who has deserted the living God for idols of wood and stone. The man has not changed, only our impression of him. Unconsciously we are influenced by the contrast between his present state and the splendid energy and devotion or self-sacrifice that marked his prime; we forget that inaction is his misfortune, and not his fault; we overrate his ardour in the days when vigorous action was a delight for its own sake; and we overlook the quiet heroism with which remnants of strength are still utilised in the Lord's service, and do not consider that moments of fretfulness are due to decay and disease that at once increase the need of patience and diminish the powers of endurance. Muscles and nerves slowly become less and less efficient; they fail to carry to the soul full and clear reports of the outside world; they are no longer satisfactory instruments by which the soul can express its feelings or execute its will. We are less able than ever to estimate the inner life of such by that which we see and hear. While we are thankful for the sweet serenity and loving sympathy which often make the hoary head a crown of glory, we are also entitled to judge some of God's more militant children by their years of arduous service, and not by their impatience of enforced inactivity.

If our author's statement of these truths seem unsatisfactory, we **must** remember that his lack of a doctrine of the future life placed him at a serious disadvantage. He wished to exhibit a complete picture of God's dealings with the characters of his history, so that their lives should furnish exact illustrations of the working of sin and righteousness. He was controlled and hampered by the idea that underlies many discussions in the Old Testament: that God's righteous judgment upon a man's actions is completely manifested during his earthly life. It may be possible to assert an *eternal* providence; but conscience and heart have long since revolted against the doctrine that God's justice, to say nothing of His love, is declared by the misery of lives that might have been innocent, if they had ever had the opportunity of knowing what innocence meant. The chronicler worked on too small a scale for his subject. The entire Divine economy of Him with whom a thousand years are

as one day cannot be even outlined for a single soul in the history of its earthly existence. These narratives of Jewish kings are only imperfect symbols of the infinite possibilities of the eternal providence. The moral of Chronicles is very much that of the Greek sage, "Call no man happy till he is dead"; but since Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, we no longer pass final judgment upon either the man or his happiness by what we know of his life here. The decisive revelation of character, the final judgment upon conduct, the due adjustment of the gifts and discipline of God, are deferred to a future life. When these are completed, and the soul has attained to good or evil beyond all reversal, then we shall feel, with Ezekiel and the chronicler, that there is no further need to remember either the righteous deeds or the transgressions of earlier stages of its history.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH.

2 CHRONICLES xxxiv.-xxxvi.

WHATEVER influence Manasseh's reformation exercised over his people generally, the taint of idolatry was not removed from his own family. His son Amon succeeded him at the age of two-and-twenty. Into his reign of two years he compressed all the varieties of wickedness once practised by his father, and undid the good work of Manasseh's later years. He recovered the graven images which Manasseh had discarded, replaced them in their shrines, and worshipped them instead of Jehovah. But in his case there was no repentance, and he was cut off in his youth.

In the absence of any conclusive evidence as to the date of Manasseh's reformation, we cannot determine with certainty whether Amon received his early training before or after his father returned to the worship of Jehovah. In either case Manasseh's earlier history would make it difficult for him to counteract any evil influence that drew Amon towards idolatry. Amon could set the example and perhaps the teaching of his father's former days against any later exhortations to righteousness. When a father has helped to lead his children astray, he cannot be sure that he will carry them with him in his repentance.

After Amon's assassination the people placed his son Josiah on the throne. Like Joash and Manasseh, Josiah was a child, only eight years old. The chronicler follows the general line of the history in the book of Kings, modifying, abridging, and expanding, but introducing no new incidents; the reformation, the repairing of the Temple, the discovery of the book of the Law, the Passover, Josiah's defeat and death at Megiddo, are narrated by both historians. We have only to notice differences in a somewhat similar treatment of the same subject.

Beyond the general statement that Josiah "did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah" we hear nothing about him in the book of Kings till the eighteenth year of his reign, and his reformation and putting away of idolatry are placed in that year. The chronicler's authorities corrected the statement that the pious king

tolerated idolatry for eighteen years. They record how in the eighth year of his reign, when he was sixteen, he began to seek after the God of David; and in his twelfth year he set about the work of utterly destroying idols throughout the whole territory of Israel, in the cities and ruins of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, as well as in Judah and Benjamin. Seeing that the cities assigned to Simeon were in the south of Judah, it is a little difficult to understand why they appear with the northern tribes, unless they are reckoned with them technically to make up the ancient number.

The consequence of this change of date is that in Chronicles the reformation precedes the discovery of the book of the Law, whereas in the older history this discovery is the cause of the reformation. The chronicler's account of the idols and other apparatus of false worship destroyed by Josiah is much less detailed than that of the book of Kings. To have reproduced the earlier narrative in full would have raised serious difficulties. According to the chronicler, Manasseh had purged Jerusalem of idols and idol altars; and Amon alone was responsible for any that existed there at the accession of Josiah: but in the book of Kings Josiah found in Jerusalem the altars erected by the kings of Judah and the horses they had given to the sun. Manasseh's altars still stood in the courts of the Temple; and over against Jerusalem there still remained the high places that Solomon had built for Ash-toreth, Chemosh, and Milcom. As the chronicler in describing Solomon's reign carefully omitted all mention of his sins, so he omits this reference to his idolatry. Moreover, if he had inserted it, he would have had to explain how these high places escaped the zeal of the many pious kings who did away with the high places. Similarly, having omitted the account of the man of God who prophesied the ruin of Jeroboam's sanctuary at Bethel, he here omits the fulfilment of that prophecy.

The account of the repairing of the Temple is enlarged by the insertion of various details as to the names, functions, and zeal of the Levites, amongst whom those who had skill in instruments of music seem to have had the oversight of the workmen. We are reminded of the walls of Thebes, which rose out of the ground while Orpheus played upon his flute. Similarly in the account of the assembly called to hear the contents of the book of the Law the Levites are substituted for the prophets. This book of the Law is said in Chronicles to have been given by Moses, but his name is not connected with the book in the parallel narrative in the book of Kings.

The earlier authority simply states that Josiah held a great passover; Chronicles, as usual, describes the festival in detail. First of all, the king commanded the priests and Levites to purify themselves and take their places in due order, so that they might be ready to perform their sacred duties. The narrative is very obscure, but it seems that either during the apostasy of Amon or on account of the recent Temple repairs the Ark had been removed from the Holy of holies. The Law had specially assigned to the Levites the duty of carrying the Tabernacle and its furniture, and they seem to have thought that they were only bound to exercise the function of carrying the Ark; they perhaps proposed to bear it in solemn procession round

the city as part of the celebration of the Passover, forgetting the words of David* that the Levites should no more carry the Tabernacle and its vessels. They would have been glad to substitute this conspicuous and honourable service for the laborious and menial work of flaying the victims. Josiah, however, commanded them to put the Ark into the Temple and attend to their other duties.

Next, the king and his nobles provided beasts of various kinds for the sacrifices and the Passover meal. Josiah's gifts were even more munificent than those of Hezekiah. The latter had given a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep; Josiah gave just three times as many. Moreover, at Hezekiah's passover no offerings of the princes are mentioned, but now they added their gifts to those of the king. The heads of the priesthood provided three hundred oxen and two thousand six hundred small cattle for the priests, and the chiefs of the Levites five hundred oxen and five thousand small cattle for the Levites. But numerous as were the victims at Josiah's passover, they still fell far short of the great sacrifice† of twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep which Solomon offered at the dedication of the Temple.

Then began the actual work of the sacrifices: the victims were killed and flayed, and their blood was sprinkled on the altar; the burnt-offerings were distributed among the people; the Passover lambs were roasted, and the other offerings boiled, and the Levites "carried them quickly to all the children of the people." Apparently private individuals could not find the means of cooking the bountiful provision made for them; and, to meet the necessity of the case, the Temple courts were made kitchen as well as slaughterhouse for the assembled worshippers. The other offerings would not be eaten with the Passover lamb, but would serve for the remaining days of the feast.

The Levites not only provided for the people, for themselves, and the priests, but the Levites who ministered in the matter of the sacrifices also prepared for their brethren who were singers and porters, so that the latter were enabled to attend undisturbed to their own special duties; all the members of the guild of porters were at the gates maintaining order among the crowd of worshippers; and the full strength of the orchestra and choir contributed to the beauty and solemnity of the services. It was the greatest Passover held by any Israelite king.

Josiah's passover, like that of Hezekiah, was followed by a formidable foreign invasion; but whereas Hezekiah was rewarded for renewed loyalty by a triumphant deliverance, Josiah was defeated and slain. These facts subject the chronicler's theory of retribution to a severe strain. His perplexity finds pathetic expression in the opening words of the new section, "After all this," after all the idols had been put away, after the celebration of the most magnificent Passover the monarchy had ever seen. After all this, when we looked for the promised rewards of piety—for fertile seasons, peace and prosperity at home, victory and dominion abroad, tribute from subject peoples, and wealth from successful commerce—after all this, the rout of the armies

* 1 Chron. xxiii. 26, peculiar to Chronicles.

† 2 Chron. vii. 5. The figures are peculiar to Chronicles; 1 Kings viii. 5 says that the victims could not be counted.

of Jehovah at Megiddo, the flight and death of the wounded king, the lamentation over Josiah, the exaltation of a nominee of Pharaoh to the throne, and the payment of tribute to the Egyptian king. The chronicler has no complete explanation of this painful mystery, but he does what he can to meet the difficulties of the case. Like the great prophets in similar instances, he regards the heathen king as charged with a Divine commission. Pharaoh's appeal to Josiah to remain neutral should have been received by the Jewish king as an authoritative message from Jehovah. It was the failure to discern in a heathen king the mouthpiece and prophet of Jehovah that cost Josiah his life and Judah its liberty.

The chronicler had no motive for lingering over the last sad days of the monarchy; the rest of his narrative is almost entirely abridged from the book of Kings. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah pass over the scene in rapid and melancholy succession. In the case of Jehoahaz, who only reigned three months, the chronicler omits the unfavourable judgment recorded in the book of Kings; but he repeats it for the other three, even for the poor lad of eight* who was carried away captive after a reign of three months and ten days. The chronicler had not learnt that kings can do no wrong; on the other hand, the ungodly policy of Jehoiachin's ministers is labelled with the name of the boy-sovereign.

Each of these kings in turn was deposed and carried away into captivity, unless indeed Jehoiakim is an exception. In the book of Kings we are told that he slept with his fathers, *i. e.*, that he died and was buried in the royal tombs at Jerusalem, a statement which the LXX. inserts here also, specifying, however, that he was buried in the garden of Uzza. If the pious Josiah were punished for a single error by defeat and death, why was the wicked Jehoiakim allowed to reign till the end of his life and then die in his bed? The chronicler's information differed from that of the earlier narrative in a way that removed, or at any rate suppressed the difficulty. He omits the statement that Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and tells us† that Nebuchadnezzar bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon. Casual readers would naturally suppose that this purpose was carried out, and that the Divine justice was satisfied by Jehoiakim's death in captivity; and yet if they compared this passage with that in the book of Kings, it might occur to them that after the king had been put in chains something might have led Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind, or, like Manasseh, Jehoiakim might have repented and been allowed to return. But it is very doubtful whether the chronicler's authorities contemplated the possibility of such an interpretation; it is scarcely fair to credit them with all the subtle devices of modern commentators.

The real conclusion of the chronicler's history of the kings of the house of David is a summary of the sins of the last days of the monarchy and of the history of its final ruin in xxxvi. 14-20.‡ All the chief of the priests and of the people were given over to the abominations of

idolatry; and in spite of constant and urgent admonitions from the prophets of Jehovah, they hardened their hearts, and mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people, and there was no healing.

However, to this peroration a note is added that the length of the Captivity was fixed at seventy years, in order that the land might "enjoy her sabbaths." This note rests upon Lev. xxv. 1-7, according to which the land was to be left fallow every seventh year. The seventy years' captivity would compensate for seventy periods of six years each during which no sabbatical years had been observed. Thus the Captivity, with the four hundred and twenty previous years of neglect, would be equivalent to seventy sabbatical periods. There is no economy in keeping back what is due to God.

Moreover, the editor who separated Chronicles from the book of Ezra and Nehemiah was loath to allow the first part of the history to end in a gloomy record of sin and ruin. Modern Jews, in reading the last chapter of Isaiah, rather than conclude with the ill-omened words of the last two verses, repeat a previous portion of the chapter. So here to the history of the ruin of Jerusalem the editor has appended two verses from the opening of the book of Ezra, which contain the decree of Cyrus authorising the return from the Captivity. And thus Chronicles concludes in the middle of a sentence which is completed in the book of Ezra: "Who is there among you of all his people? Jehovah his God be with him, and let him go up. . . ."

Such a conclusion suggests two considerations which will form a fitting close to our exposition. Chronicles is not a finished work; it has no formal end; it rather breaks off abruptly like an interrupted diary. In like manner the book of Kings concludes with a note as to the treatment of the captive Jehoiachin at Babylon: the last verse runs, "And for his allowance there was a continual allowance given him of the king, every day a portion, all the days of his life." The book of Nehemiah has a short final prayer: "Remember me, O my God, for good"; but the preceding paragraph is simply occupied with the arrangements for the wood offering and the first-fruits. So in the New Testament the history of the Church breaks off with the statement that St. Paul abode two whole years in his own hired house, preaching the kingdom of God. The sacred writers recognise the continuity of God's dealings with His people; they do not suggest that one period can be marked off by a clear dividing line or interval from another. Each historian leaves, as it were, the loose ends of his work ready to be taken up and continued by his successors. The Holy Spirit seeks to stimulate the Church to a forward outlook, that it may expect and work for a future wherein the power and grace of God will be no less manifest than in the past. Moreover, the final editor of Chronicles has shown himself unwilling that the book should conclude with a gloomy record of sin and ruin, and has appended a few lines to remind his readers of the new life of faith and hope that lay beyond the Captivity. In so doing, he has echoed the key-note of prophecy: ever beyond man's transgression and punishment the prophets saw the vision of his forgiveness and restoration to God.

* Jehoiachin. The ordinary reading in 2 Kings xxiv. 8 makes him eighteen.

† xxxvi. 6 *b*, peculiar to Chronicles.

‡ Mostly peculiar to Chronicles.

THE BOOKS OF EZRA,
NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
CHAPTER I.		CHAPTER XIX.	
Introductory : Ezra and Nehemiah,	589	Building the Walls,	640
CHAPTER II.		CHAPTER XX.	
Cyrus,	591	“ Mark Ye Well Her Bulwarks,”	643
CHAPTER III.		CHAPTER XXI.	
The Royal Edict,	594	On Guard,	646
CHAPTER IV.		CHAPTER XXII.	
The Second Exodus,	597	Usury,	49
CHAPTER V.		CHAPTER XXIII.	
The New Temple,	600	Wise as Serpents,	652
CHAPTER VI.		CHAPTER XXIV.	
The Limits of Comprehension,	603	The Law,	655
CHAPTER VII.		CHAPTER XXV.	
The Mission of Prophecy,	606	The Joy of the Lord,	658
CHAPTER VIII.		CHAPTER XXVI.	
New Difficulties Met in a New Spirit,	609	The Religion of History,	661
CHAPTER IX.		CHAPTER XXVII.	
The Dedication of the Temple,	612	The Covenant,	663
CHAPTER X.		CHAPTER XXVIII.	
Ezra the Scribe,	615	The Holy City	666
CHAPTER XI.		CHAPTER XXIX.	
Ezra's Expedition,	618	Beginnings,	669
CHAPTER XII.		CHAPTER XXX.	
Foreign Marriages,	621	The Rigour of the Reformer,	671
CHAPTER XIII.		CHAPTER XXXI.	
The Home Sacrificed to the Church,	623	The Book of Esther : Introductory,	674
CHAPTER XIV.		CHAPTER XXXII.	
The Cost of an Idealist's Success,	626	Ahasuerus and Vashti,	677
CHAPTER XV.		CHAPTER XXXIII.	
Nehemiah the Patriot,	628	Haman,	679
CHAPTER XVI.		CHAPTER XXXIV.	
Nehemiah's Prayer,	631	Queen Esther,	682
CHAPTER XVII.		CHAPTER XXXV.	
The Prayer Answered,	634	Mordecai,	681
CHAPTER XVIII.			
The Midnight Ride,	637		

THE BOOKS OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER.

BY WALTER F. ADENEY, M. A.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY: EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.

THOUGH in close contact with the most perplexing problems of Old Testament literature, the main history recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is fixed securely above the reach of adverse criticism. Here the most cautious reader may take his stand with the utmost confidence, knowing that his feet rest on a solid rock. The curiously inartistic process adopted by the writer is in itself some guarantee of authenticity. Ambitious authors who set out with the design of creating literature—and perhaps building up a reputation for themselves by the way—may be very conscientious in their search for truth; but we cannot help suspecting that the method of melting down their materials and recasting them in the mould of their own style which they usually adopt must gravely endanger their accuracy. Nothing of the kind is attempted in this narrative. In considerable portions of it the primitive records are simply copied word for word, without the least pretense at original writing on the part of the historian. Elsewhere he has evidently kept as near as possible to the form of his materials, even when the plan of his work has necessitated some condensation or re-adjustment. The crudity of this procedure must be annoying to literary epicures who prefer flavour to substance, but it should be an occasion of thankfulness on the part of those of us who wish to trace the revelation of God in the life of Israel, because it shows that we are brought as nearly as possible face to face with the facts in which that revelation was clothed.

In the first place, we have some of the very writings of Ezra and Nehemiah, the leading actors in the great drama of real life that is here set forth. We cannot doubt the genuineness of these writings. They are each of them composed in the first person singular, and they may be sharply distinguished from the remainder of the narrative, inasmuch as that is in the third person—not to mention other and finer marks of difference. Of course this implies that the whole of Ezra and Nehemiah should not be ascribed to the two men whose names the books bear in our English Bibles. The books themselves do not make any claim to be written throughout by these great men. On the contrary, they clearly hint the opposite, by the transition to the third person in those sections which are not extracted verbatim from one or other of the two authorities.

It is most probable that the Scripture books now known as Ezra and Nehemiah were compiled by one and the same person, that, in fact, they originally constituted a single work. This view was held by the scribes who arranged the Hebrew Canon, for there they appear as one book. In the Talmud they are treated as one. So they are among the early Christian writers. As late as the fifth century of our era Jerome gives the name of "Esdras" to both, describing "Nehemiah" as "The Second Book of Esdras."

Further, there seem to be good reasons for believing that the compiler of our Ezra-Nehemiah was no other than the author of Chronicles. The repetition of the concluding passage of 2 Chronicles as the introduction to Ezra is an indication that the latter was intended to be a continuation of the chronicler's version of the History of Israel. When we compare the two works together, we come across many indications of their agreement in spirit and style. In both we discover a disposition to hurry over secular affairs in order to dilate on the religious aspects of history. In both we meet with the same exalted estimation of The Law, the same unwearied interest in the details of temple ritual, and especially in the musical arrangements of the Levites, and the same singular fascination for long lists of names, which are inserted wherever an opportunity for letting them in can be found.

Now, there are several things in our narrative that tend to show that the chronicler belongs to a comparatively late period. Thus in Nehemiah xii. 22 he mentions the succession of priests down "to the reign of Darius the Persian." The position of this phrase in connection with the previous lists of names makes it clear that the sovereign here referred to must be Darius III., surnamed Codommanus, the last king of Persia, who reigned from B. C. 336 to B. C. 332. Then the title "the Persian" suggests the conclusion that the dynasty of Persia had passed away; so does the phrase "king of Persia," which we meet with in the chronicler's portion of the narrative. The simple expression "the king," without any descriptive addition, would be sufficient on the lips of a contemporary. Accordingly we find that it is used in the first-person sections of Ezra-Nehemiah, and in those royal edicts that are cited in full. Again, Nehemiah xii. 11 and 22 give us the name of Jaddua in the series of high-priests. But Jaddua lived as late as the time of Alexander; his date must be about B. C. 331.* This lands us in the Grecian period. Lastly, the references to "the days of Nehemiah"† clearly point to a writer in some subsequent age. Though it is justly urged that it was quite in accordance with custom for later scribes to work over an old book, inserting a phrase here and there to bring it up to date, the indications of the later date are too closely interwoven with the main structure of the composition to admit this hypothesis here.

Nevertheless, though we seem to be shut up to the view that the Grecian era had been reached before our book was put together, this is really only a matter of literary interest, seeing that it is agreed on all sides that the history is authentic, and that the constituent parts of it are contemporary with the events they record. The function of the compiler of such a book as this is not much more than that of an editor. It must be admitted that the date of the final editor is as late as the Macedonian Empire. The only question is whether this man was the sole editor and compiler of the narrative. We may let that point of purely literary criticism be settled in favour

* Josephus, "Ant.," XI. viii. 7. † Neh. xii. 26 and 47.

of the later date for the original compilation, and yet rest satisfied that we have all we want—a thoroughly genuine history in which to study the ways of God with man during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

This narrative is occupied with the Persian period of the History of Israel. It shows us points of contact between the Jews and a great Oriental Empire; but, unlike the history in the dismal Babylonian age, the course of events now moves forward among scenes of hopeful progress. The new dominion is of an Aryan stock—intelligent, appreciative, generous. Like the Christians in the time of the Apostles, the Jews now find the supreme government friendly to them, even ready to protect them from the assaults of their hostile neighbours. It is in this political relationship, and scarcely, if at all, by means of the intercommunication of ideas affecting religion, that the Persians take an important place in the story of Ezra and Nehemiah. We shall see much of their official action; we can but grope about vaguely in search of the few hints of their influence on the theology of Israel that may be looked for on the pages of the sacred narrative. Still a remarkable characteristic of the leading religious movement of this time is the Oriental and foreign locality of its source. It springs up in the breasts of Jews who are most stern in their racial exclusiveness, most relentless in their scornful rejection of any Gentile alliance. But this is on a foreign soil. It comes from Babylon, not Jerusalem. Again and again fresh impulses and new resources are brought up to the sacred city, and always from the far-off colony in the land of exile. Here the money for the cost of the rebuilding of the temple was collected; here The Law was studied and edited; here means were found for restoring the fortifications of Jerusalem. Not only did the first company of pilgrims go up from Babylon to begin a new life among the tombs of their fathers; but one after another fresh bands of emigrants, borne on new waves of enthusiasm, swept up from the apparently inexhaustible centres of Judaism in the East to rally the flagging energies of the citizens of Jerusalem. For a long while this city was only maintained with the greatest difficulty as a sort of outpost from Babylon: it was little better than a pilgrim's camp; often it was in danger of destruction from the uncongenial character of its surroundings. Therefore it is Babylonian Judaism that here claims our attention. The mission of this great religious movement is to found and cultivate an offshoot of itself in the old country. Its beginning is at Babylon; its end is to shape the destinies of Jerusalem.

Three successive embassies from the living heart of Judaism in Babylon go up to Jerusalem, each with its own distinctive function in the promotion of the purposes of the mission. The first is led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua in the year B. C. 537.* The second is conducted by Ezra eighty years later. The third follows shortly after this with Nehemiah as its central figure. Each of the two first-named expeditions is a great popular migration of men, women, and children returning home from exile; Nehemiah's journey is more personal—the travelling of an officer

of state with his escort. The principal events of the history spring out of these three expeditions. Zerubbabel and Jeshua are commissioned to restore the sacrifices and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Ezra sets forth with the visible object of further ministering to the resources of the sacred shrine; but the real end that he is inwardly aiming at is the introduction of The Law to the people of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's main purpose is to rebuild the city walls, and so restore the civic character of Jerusalem and enable her to maintain her independence in spite of the opposition of neighbouring foes. In all three cases a strong religious motive lies at the root of the public action. To Ezra the priest and scribe religion was everything. He might almost have taken as his motto, "Perish the State, if the Church may be saved." He desired to absorb the State into the Church: he would permit the former to exist, indeed, as the visible vehicle of the religious life of the community; but to sacrifice the religious ideal in deference to political exigencies was a policy against which he set his face like flint when it was advocated by a latitudinarian party among the priests. The conflict which was brought about by this clash of opposing principles was the great battle of his life. Nehemiah was a statesman, a practical man, a courtier who knew the world. Outwardly his aims and methods were very different from those of the unpractical scholar. Yet the two men thoroughly understood one another. Nehemiah caught the spirit of Ezra's ideas; and Ezra, whose work came to a standstill while he was left to his own resources, was afterwards able to carry through his great religious reformation on the basis of the younger man's military and political renovation of Jerusalem.

In all this the central figure is Ezra. We are able to see the most marked results in the improved condition of the city after his capable and vigorous colleague has taken up the reins of government. But though the hand is then the hand of Nehemiah, the voice is still the voice of Ezra. Later times have exalted the figure of the famous scribe into gigantic proportions. Even as he appears on the page of history he is sufficiently great to stand out as the maker of his age.

For the Jews in all ages, and for the world at large, the great event of this period is the adoption of The Law by the citizens of Jerusalem. Recent investigations and discussions have directed renewed attention to the publication of The Law by Ezra, and the acceptance of it on the part of Israel. It will be especially important, therefore, for us to study these things in the calm and ingenuous record of the ancient historian, where they are treated without the slightest anticipation of modern controversies. We shall have to see what hints this record affords concerning the history of The Law in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

One broad fact will grow upon us with increasing clearness as we proceed. Evidently we have here come to the watershed of Hebrew History. Up to this point all the better teachers of Israel had been toiling painfully in their almost hopeless efforts to induce the Jews to accept the unique faith of Jehovah, with its lofty claims and its rigorous restraints. That faith itself however had appeared in three forms,—as a popular cult, often degraded to the level of the local religion of heathen neighbours; as a priestly tradition,

* Allowing some months for the preparation of the expedition—and this we must do—we may safely say that it started in the year after the decree of Cyrus, which was issued in B. C. 538.

exact and minute in its performances, but the secret of a caste; and as a subject of prophetic instruction, instinct with moral principles of righteousness and spiritual conceptions of God, but too large and free to be reached by a people of narrow views and low attainments. With the publication of The Law by Ezra the threefold condition ceased, and henceforth there was but one type of religion for the Jews.

The question when The Law was moulded into its present shape introduces a delicate point of criticism. But the consideration of its popular reception is more within the reach of observation. In the solemn sealing of the covenant the citizens of Jerusalem—laity as well as priests—men, women, and children—all deliberately pledged themselves to worship Jehovah according to The Law. There is no evidence to show that they had ever done so before. The narrative bears every indication of novelty. The Law is received with curiosity; it is only understood after being carefully explained by experts; when its meaning is taken in, the effect is a shock of amazement bordering on despair. Clearly this is no collection of trite precepts known and practised by the people from antiquity.

It must be remembered, on the other hand, that an analogous effect was produced by the spread of the Scriptures at the Reformation. It does not fall within the scope of our present task to pursue the inquiry whether, like the Bible in Christendom, the entire law had been in existence in an earlier age, though then neglected and forgotten. Yet even our limited period contains evidence that The Law had its roots in the past. The venerated name of Moses is repeatedly appealed to when The Law is to be enforced. Ezra never appears as a Solon legislating for his people. Still neither is he a Justinian codifying a system of legislation already recognised and adopted. He stands between the two, as the introducer of a law hitherto unpractised and even unknown. These facts will come before us more in detail as we proceed.

The period now brought before our notice is to some extent one of national revival; but it is much more important as an age of religious construction. The Jews now constitute themselves into a Church; the chief concern of their leaders is to develop their religious life and character. The charm of these times is to be found in the great spiritual awakening that inspires and shapes their history. Here we approach very near to the Holy Presence of the Spirit of God in His glorious activity as the Lord and Giver of Life. This epoch was to Israel what Pentecost became to the Christians. Pentecost!—We have only to face the comparison to see how far the later covenant exceeded the earlier covenant in glory. To us Christians there is a hardness, a narrowness, a painful externalism in the whole of this religious movement. We cannot say that it lacks soul; but we feel that it has not the liberty of the highest spiritual vitality. It is cramped in the fetters of legal ordinances. We shall come across evidences of the existence of a liberal party that shrank from the rigour of The Law. But this party gave no signs of religious life; the freedom it claimed was not the glorious liberty of the sons of God. There is no reason to believe that the more devout people anticipated the standpoint of St. Paul and saw any imperfection in their law. To them it presented a lofty scheme of life, worthy of the highest aspiration.

And there is much in their spirit that commands our admiration and even our emulation. The most obnoxious feature of their zeal is its pitiless exclusiveness. But without this quality Judaism would have been lost in the cross-currents of life among the mixed populations of Palestine.

The policy of exclusiveness saved Judaism. At heart this is just an application—though a very harsh and formal application—of the principle of separation from the world which Christ and His Apostles enjoined on the Church, and the neglect of which has sometimes nearly resulted in the disappearance of any distinctive Christian truth and life, like the disappearance of a river that breaking through its banks spreads itself out in lagoons and morasses, and ends by being swallowed up in the sands of the desert.

The exterior aspect of the stern, strict Judaism of these days is by no means attractive. But the interior life of it is simply superb. It recognises the absolute supremacy of God. In the will of God it acknowledges the one unquestionable authority before which all who accept His covenant must bow; in the revealed truth of God it perceives an inflexible rule for the conduct of His people. To be pledged to allegiance to the will and law of God is to be truly consecrated to God. That is the condition voluntarily entered into by the citizens of Jerusalem in this epoch of religious awakening. A few centuries later their example was followed by the primitive Christians, who, according to the testimony of the two Bithynian handmaidens tortured by Pliny, solemnly pledged themselves to lives of purity and righteousness; again, it was imitated, though in strangely perverted guise, by anchorites and monks, by the great founders of monastic orders and their loyal disciples, and by mediæval reformers of Church discipline such as St. Bernard; still later it was followed more closely by the Protestant inhabitants of Swiss cities at the Reformation, by the early Independents at home and the Pilgrim Fathers in New England, by the Covenanters in Scotland, by the first Methodists. It is the model of Church order, and the ideal of the religious organisation of civic life. But it awaits the adequate fulfilment of its promise in the establishment of the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER II.

CYRUS.

EZRA i. 1.

THE remarkable words with which the Second Book of Chronicles closes, and which are repeated in the opening verses of the Book of Ezra, afford the most striking instance on record of that peculiar connection between the destinies of the little Hebrew nation and the movements of great World Empires which frequently emerges in history. We cannot altogether set it down to the vanity of their writers, or to the lack of perspective accompanying a contracted, provincial education, that the Jews are represented in the Old Testament as playing a more prominent part on the world's stage than one to which the size of their territory—little bigger than Wales—or their military prowess would entitle them. The fact is indisputable. No doubt it is to be attributed in part to the geographical

position of Palestine on the highway of the march of armies to and fro between Asia and Africa; but it must spring also in some measure from the unique qualities of the strange people who have given their religion to the most civilised societies of mankind.

In the case before us the greatest man of his age, one of the half-dozen Founders of Empires, who constitute a lofty aristocracy even among sovereigns, is manifestly concerning himself very specially with the restoration of one of the smallest of the many subject races that fell into his hands when he seized the garnered spoils of previous conquerors. Whatever we may think of the precise words of his decree as this is now reported to us by a Hebrew scribe, it is unquestionable that he issued some such orders as are contained in it. Cyrus, as it now appears, was originally king of Elam, the modern Khuzistan, not of Persia, although the royal family from which he sprang was of Persian extraction. After making himself master of Persia and building up an empire in Asia Minor and the north, he swept down on to the plains of Chaldæa and captured Babylon in the year B. C. 538. To the Jews this would be the first year of his reign, because it was the first year of his rule over them, just as the year A. D. 1603 is reckoned by Englishmen as the first year of James I., because the king of Scotland then inherited the English throne. In this year the new sovereign, of his own initiative, released the Hebrew exiles, and even assisted them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their ruined temple. Such an astounding act of generosity was contrary to the precedent of other conquerors, who accepted as a matter of course the arrangement of subject races left by their predecessors; and we are naturally curious to discover the motives that prompted it.

Like our mythical King Arthur, the Cyrus of legend is credited with a singularly attractive disposition. Herodotus says the Persians regarded him as their "father" and their "shepherd." In Xenophon's romance he appears as a very kindly character. Cicero calls him the most just, wise, and amiable of rulers. Although it cannot be dignified with the name of history, this universally accepted tradition seems to point to some foundation in fact. It is entirely in accord with the Jewish picture of the Great King. There is some reason for believing that the privilege Cyrus offered to the Jews was one in which other nations shared. On a small, broken clay cylinder, some four inches in diameter, discovered quite recently and now deposited in the British Museum, Cyrus is represented as saying, "I assembled all those nations, and I caused them to go back to their countries." Thus the return of the Jews may be regarded as a part of a general centrifugal movement in the new Empire.

Nevertheless, the peculiar favour indicated by the decree issued to the Jews suggests something special in their case, and this must be accounted for before the action of Cyrus can be well understood.

Little or no weight can be attached to the statement of Josephus, who inserts in the very language of the decree a reference to the foretelling of the name of Cyrus by "the prophets," as a prime motive for issuing it, and adds that this was known to Cyrus by his reading the Book of Isaiah.* Always more or less untrustworthy

* "Ant.," XI. i. 1, 2.

whenever he touches the relations between his people and foreigners, the Jewish historian is even exceptionally unsatisfactory in his treatment of the Persian Period. It may be, as Ewald asserts, that Josephus is here following some Hellenistic writer; but we know nothing of his authority. There is no reference to this in our one authority, the Book of Ezra; and if it had been true there would have been every reason to publish it. Some Jews at court may have shown Cyrus the prophecies in question; indeed it is most probable that men who wished to please him would have done so. Plato in the "Laws" represents Cyrus as honouring those who knew how to give good advice. But it is scarcely reasonable to suppose, without a particle of evidence, that a great monarch, flushed with victory, would set himself to carry out a prediction purporting to emanate from the Deity of one of the conquered peoples, when that prediction was distinctly in their interests, unless he was first actuated by some other considerations.

Until a few years ago it was commonly supposed that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian, who was disgusted at the cruel and lustful idolatry of the Babylonians, and that when he discovered a monotheistic people oppressed by vicious heathen polytheists, he claimed religious brotherhood with them, and so came to show them singular favour. Unfortunately for his fame, this fascinating theory has been recently shattered by the discovery of the little cylinder already referred to. Here Cyrus is represented as saying that "the gods" have deserted Nabonidas—the last king of Babylon—because he has neglected their service; and that Merodach, the national divinity of Babylon, has transferred his favour to Cyrus; who now honours him with many praises. An attempt has been made to refute the evidence of this ancient record by attributing the cylinder to some priest of Bel, who, it is said, may have drawn up the inscription without the knowledge of the king, and even in direct opposition to his religious views. A most improbable hypothesis! especially as we have absolutely no grounds for the opinion that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian. The Avesta, the sacred collection of hymns which forms the basis of the Parsee scriptures, came from the far East, close to India, and it was written in a language almost identical with Sanscrit and quite different from the Old Persian of Western Persia. We have no ground for supposing that as yet it had been adopted in the remote southwestern region of Elam, where Cyrus was brought up. That monarch, it would seem, was a liberal-minded syncretist, as ready to make himself at home with the gods of the peoples he conquered as with their territories. Such a man would be astute enough to represent the indigenous divinities as diverting their favour from the fallen and therefore discredited kings he had overthrown, and transferring it to the new victor. We must therefore descend from the highlands of theology in our search for an explanation of the conduct of Cyrus. Can we find this in some department of state policy?

We learn from the latter portion of our Book of Isaiah that the Jewish captives suffered persecution under Nabonidas. It is not difficult to guess the cause of the embitterment of this king against them after they had been allowed to live in peace and prosperity under his predecessors. Evidently the policy of Nebuchadnezzar, which

may have succeeded with some other races, had broken down in its application to a people with such tough national vitality as that of the Jews. It was found to be impossible to eradicate their patriotism—or rather the patriotism of the faithful nucleus of the nation—impossible to make Jerusalem forgotten by the waters of Babylon. This ancient "Semitic question" was the very reverse of that which now vexes Eastern Europe, because in the case of the Jews at Babylon the troublesome aliens were only desirous of liberty to depart; but it sprang from the same essential cause—the separateness of the Hebrew race.

Now things often present themselves in a true light to a newcomer who approaches them with a certain mental detachment, although they may have been grievously misapprehended by those people among whom they have slowly shaped themselves. Cyrus was a man of real genius; and immediately he came upon the scene he must have perceived the mistake of retaining a restless, disaffected population, like a foreign body rankling in the very heart of his empire. Moreover, to allow the Jews to return home would serve a double purpose. While it would free the Euphrates Valley from a constant source of distress, it would plant a grateful, and therefore loyal, people on the western confines of the empire—perhaps, as some have thought, to be used as outworks and a basis of operations in a projected campaign against Egypt. Thus a far-sighted statesman might regard the liberation of the Jews as a stroke of wise policy. But we must not make too much of this. The restored Jews were a mere handful of religious devotees, scarcely able to hold their own against the attacks of neighbouring villages; and while they were permitted to build their temple, nothing was said in the royal rescript about fortifying their city. So feeble a colony could not have been accounted of much strategic importance by such a master of armies as Cyrus. Again, we know from the "Second Isaiah" that, when the Persian war-cloud was hovering on the horizon, the Jewish exiles hailed it as the sign of deliverance from persecution. The invader who brought destruction to Babylon promised relief to her victims; and the lofty strains of the prophet bespeak an inspired perception of the situation which encouraged higher hopes. A second discovery in the buried library of bricks is that of a small flat tablet, also recently unearthed like the cylinder of Cyrus, which records this very section of the history of Babylon. Here it is stated that Cyrus intrigued with a disaffected party within the city. Who would be so likely as the persecuted Jews to play this part? Further, the newly found Babylonian record makes it clear that Herodotus was mistaken in his famous account of the siege of Babylon where he connected it with the coming of Cyrus. He must have misapprehended a report of one of the two sieges under Darius, when the city had revolted and was recaptured by force, for we now know that after a battle fought in the open country Cyrus was received into the city without striking another blow. He would be likely to be in a gracious mood then, and if he knew there were exiles, languishing in captivity, who hailed his advent as that of a deliverer, even apart from the question whether they had previously opened up negotiations with him, he could not but look favourably upon them; so that generosity and perhaps grati-

tude combined with good policy to govern his conduct. Lastly, although he was not a theological reformer, he seems to have been of a religious character, according to his light, and therefore it is not unnatural to suppose that he may have heartily thrown himself into a movement of which his wisdom approved, and with which all his generous instincts sympathised. Thus, after all, there may be something in the old view, if only we combine it with our newer information. Under the peculiar political circumstances of his day, Cyrus may have been prepared to welcome the prophetic assurance that he was a heaven-sent shepherd, if some of the Jews had shown it him. Even without any such assurance, other conquerors have been only too ready to flatter themselves that they were executing a sacred mission.

These considerations do not in the least degree limit the Divine element of the narrative as that is brought forward by the Hebrew historian. On the contrary, they give additional importance to it. The chronicler sees in the decree of Cyrus and its issues an accomplishment of the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah. Literally he says that what happens is in order that the word of the Lord may be brought to an end. It is in the "fulness of the time," as the advent of Christ was later in another relation.* The writer seems to have in mind the passage—"And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate for ever";† as well as another prophecy—"For thus saith the Lord, After seventy years be accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."‡ Now if we do not accept the notion of Josephus that Cyrus was consciously and purposely fulfilling these predictions, we do not in any way diminish the fact that the deliverance came from God. If we are driven to the conclusion that Cyrus was not solely or chiefly actuated by religious motives, or even if we take his action to be *purely* one of state policy, the ascription of this inferior position to Cyrus only heightens the wonderful glory of God's overruling providence. Nebuchadnezzar was described as God's "servant"§ because, although he was a bad man, only pursuing his own wicked way, yet, all unknown to him, that way was made to serve God's purposes. Similarly Cyrus, who is not a bad man, is God's "Shepherd," when he delivers the suffering flock from the wolf and sends it back to the fold, whether he aims at obeying the will of God or not. It is part of the great revelation of God in history, that He is seen working out His supreme purposes in spite of the ignorance and sometimes even by means of the malice of men. Was not this the case in the supreme event of history, the crucifixion of our Lord? If the cruelty of Nebuchadnezzar and the feebleness of Pilate could serve God, so could the generosity of Cyrus.

The question of the chronological exactness of this fulfilment of prophecy troubles some minds that are anxious about Biblical arithmetic. The

* Gal. iv. 4.

† Jer. xxv. 11, 12.

‡ Jer. xxix. 10.

§ Jer. xxvii. 6.

difficulty is to arrive at the period of seventy years. It would seem that this could only be done by some stretching at both ends of the exile. We must begin with Nebuchadnezzar's first capture of Jerusalem and the first carrying away of a small body of royal hostages to Babylon in the year B. C. 606. Even then we have only sixty-eight years to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, which happened in B. C. 538. Therefore to get the full seventy years it is proposed to extend the exile till the year B. C. 536, which is the date of the commencement of Cyrus's sole rule. But there are serious difficulties in these suggestions. In his prediction of the seventy years Jeremiah plainly refers to the complete overthrow of the nation with the strong words, "This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment." As a matter of fact, the exile only began in earnest with the final siege of Jerusalem, which took place in B. C. 588. Then Cyrus actually began his reign over the Jews in B. C. 538, when he took Babylon, and he issued his edict in his first year. Thus the real exile as a national trouble seems to have occupied fifty years, or, reckoning a year for the issuing and execution of the edict, fifty-one years. Instead of straining at dates, is it not more simple and natural to suppose that Jeremiah gave a round figure to signify a period which would cover the lifetime of his contemporaries, at all events? However this may be, nobody can make a grievance out of the fact that the captivity may not have been quite so lengthy as the previous warnings of it foreshadowed. Tillotson wisely remarked that there is this difference between the Divine promises and the Divine threatenings, that while God pledges His faithfulness to the full extent of the former, He is not equally bound to the perfect accomplishment of the latter. If the question of dates shows a little discrepancy, what does this mean but that God is so merciful as not always to exact the last farthing? Moreover it should be remarked that the point of Jeremiah's prophecy is not the exact length of the captivity, but the certain termination of it after a long while. The time is fulfilled when the end has come.

But the action of Cyrus is not only regarded as the accomplishment of prophecy; it is also attributed to the direct influence of God exercised on the Great King, for we read "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," etc. It would indicate the radical scepticism which is too often hidden under the guise of a rigorous regard for correct belief, to maintain that because we now know Cyrus to have been a polytheist his spirit could not have been stirred up by the true God. It is not the teaching of the Bible that God confines His influence on the hearts of men to Jews and Christians. Surely we cannot suppose that the Father of all mankind rigidly refuses to hold any intercourse with the great majority of His children—never whispers them a guiding word in their anxiety and perplexity, never breathes into them a helpful impulse, even in their best moments, when they are earnestly striving to do right. In writing to the Romans St. Paul distinctly argues on the ground that God has revealed Himself to the heathen world,* and in the presence of Cornelius St. Peter as distinctly asserts that God accepts the devout and upright of all nations.† Here even in the Old Testament it is recognised that God moves the

king of Persia. This affords a singular encouragement for prayer, because it suggests that God has access to those who are far out of our reach; that He quite sets aside the obstruction of intermediaries—secretaries, chamberlains, grand-viziers, and all the *entourage* of a court; that He goes straight into the audience chamber, making direct for the inmost thoughts and feelings of the man whom He would influence. The wonder of it is that God condescends to do this even with men who know little of Him; but it should be remembered that though He is strange to many men, none of them are strange to Him. The Father knows the children who do not know Him. It may be remarked, finally, on this point, that the special Divine influence now referred to is dynamic rather than illuminating. To stir up the spirit is to move to activity. God not only teaches; He quickens. In the case of Cyrus, the king used his own judgment and acted on his own opinions; yet the impulse which drove him was from God. That was everything. We live in a God-haunted world: why then are we slow to take the first article of our creed in its full meaning? Is it so difficult to believe in God when all history is alive with His presence?

CHAPTER III.

THE ROYAL EDICT.

EZRA i. 2-4. 7-11.

It has been asserted that the Scripture version of the edict of Cyrus cannot be an exact rendering of the original, because it ascribes to the Great King some knowledge of the God of the Jews, and even some faith in Him. For this reason it has been suggested that either the chronicler or some previous writer who translated the decree out of the Persian language, in which of course it must have been first issued, inserted the word *Jehovah* in place of the name of Ormazd or some other god worshipped by Cyrus, and shaped the phrases generally so as to commend them to Jewish sympathies. Are we driven to this position? We have seen that when Cyrus got possession of Babylon he had no scruple in claiming the indigenous divinity Merodach as his god. Is it not then entirely in accordance with his eclectic habit of mind—not to mention his diplomatic art in humouring the prejudices of his subjects—that he should draw up a decree in which he designed to show favour to an exceptionally religious people in language that would be congenial to them? Like most men of higher intelligence even among polytheistic races, Cyrus may have believed in one supreme Deity, who, he may have supposed, was worshipped under different names by different nations. The final clause of Ezra i. 3 is misleading, as it stands in the Authorised Version; and the Revisers, with their habitual caution, have only so far improved upon it as to permit the preferable rendering to appear in the margin, where we have generally to look for the opinions of the more scholarly as well as the more courageous critics. Yet even the Authorised Version renders the same words correctly in the very next verse. There is no occasion to print the clause, "He is the God," as a parenthesis, so as to make Cyrus inform the world that *Jehovah* is the one real divinity. The more probable rendering in

* Rom. i. 10.

† Acts x. 34, 35.

idea is also the more simple one in construction. Removing the superfluous brackets, we read right on: "He is the God which is in Jerusalem"—*i. e.*, we have an indication who "Jehovah" is for the information of strangers to the Jews who may read the edict. With this understanding let us examine the leading items of the decree. It was proclaimed by the mouth of king's messengers, and it was also preserved in writing, so that possibly the original inscription may be recovered from among the burnt clay records that lie buried in the ruins of Persian cities. The edict is addressed to the whole empire. Cyrus announces to all his subjects his intention to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Then he specialises the aim of the decree by granting a license to the Jews to go up to Jerusalem and undertake this work. It is a perfectly free offer to all Jews in exile without exception. "Who is there among you"—*i. e.*, among all the subjects of the empire—"of all His" (Jehovah's) "people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem," etc. In particular we may observe the following points:—

First, Cyrus begins by acknowledging that "the God of Heaven"—whom he identifies with the Hebrew "Jehovah," in our version of the edict—has given him his dominions. It is possible to treat this introductory sentence as a superficial formula; but there is no reason for so ungenerous an estimate of it. If we accept the words in their honest intention, we must see in them a recognition of the hand of God in the setting up of kingdoms. Two opposite kinds of experience awaken in men a conviction of God's presence in their lives—great calamities and great successes. The influence of the latter experience is not so often acknowledged as that of the former, but probably it is equally effective, at least in extreme instances. There is something awful in the success of a world-conqueror. When the man is a destroyer, spreading havoc and misery, like Attila, he regards himself as a "Scourge of God"; and when he is a vulgar impersonation of selfish greed like Napoleon, he thinks he is swept on by a mighty tide of destiny. In both instances the results are too stupendous to be attributed to purely human energy. But in the case of Cyrus, an enlightened and noble-minded hero is bringing liberty and favour to the victims of a degraded tyranny, so that he is hailed by some of them as the Anointed King raised up by their God, and therefore it is not unnatural that he should ascribe his brilliant destiny to a Divine influence.

Secondly, Cyrus actually asserts that God has charged him to build Him a temple at Jerusalem. Again, this may be the language of princely courtesy; but the noble spirit which breathes through the decree encourages us to take a higher view of it, and to refrain from reading minimising comments between the lines. It is probable that those eager, patriotic Jews who had got the ear of Cyrus—or he would never have issued such a decree as this—may have urged their suit by showing him predictions like that of Isaiah xlv. 28, in which God describes Himself as One "that saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying of Jerusalem, Let her be built; and, Let the foundations of the temple be laid." Possibly Cyrus is here alluding to that very utterance, although, as we have seen, Josephus is incorrect in inserting a reference to Hebrew prophecy in the

very words of the decree, and in suggesting that the fulfilment of prophecy was the chief end Cyrus had in view.

It is a historical fact that Cyrus did help to build the temple; he supplied funds from the public treasury for that object. We can understand his motives for doing so. If he desired the favour of the God of the Jews, he would naturally aid in restoring His shrine. Nabonidas had fallen, it was thought, through neglecting the worship of the gods. Cyrus seems to have been anxious to avoid this mistake, and to have given attention to the cultivation of their favour. If, as seems likely, some of the Jews had impressed his mind with the greatness of Jehovah, he might have desired to promote the building of the temple at Jerusalem with exceptional assiduity.

In the next place, Cyrus gives the captive Jews leave to go up to Jerusalem. The edict is purely permissive. There is to be no expulsion of Jews from Babylon. Those exiles who did not choose to avail themselves of the boon so eagerly coveted by the patriotic few were allowed to remain unmolested in peace and prosperity. The restoration was voluntary. This free character of the movement would give it a vigour quite out of proportion to the numbers of those who took part in it, and would, at the same time, ensure a certain elevation of tone and spirit. It is an image of the Divine restoration of souls, which is confined to those who accept it of their own free will.

Further, the object of the return, as it is distinctly specified, is simply to rebuild the temple, not—at all events in the first instance—to build up and fortify a city on the ruins of Jerusalem; much less does it imply a complete restoration of Palestine to the Jews, with a wholesale expulsion of its present inhabitants from their farms and vineyards. Cyrus does not seem to have contemplated any such revolution. The end in view was neither social nor political, but purely religious. That more would come out of it, that the returning exiles must have houses to live in and must protect those houses from the brigandage of the Bedouin, and that they must have fields producing food to support them and their families, are inevitable consequences. Here is the germ and nucleus of a national restoration. Still it remains true that the immediate object—the only object named in the decree—is the rebuilding of the temple. Thus we see from the first that the idea which characterises the restoration is religious. The exiles return as a Church. The goal of their pilgrimage is a holy site. The one work they are to aim at achieving is to further the worship of their God.

Lastly, the inhabitants of the towns in which the Jews have been settled are directed to make contributions towards the work. It is not quite clear whether these "Benevolences" are to be entirely voluntary. A royal exhortation generally assumes something of the character of a command. Probably rich men were requisitioned to assist in providing the gold and silver and other stores, together with the beasts of burden which would be needed for the great expedition. This was to supplement what Cyrus calls "the free-will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem"—*i. e.*, either the gifts of the Jews who remained in Babylon, or possibly his own contribution from the funds of the state. We are reminded of the Hebrews spoiling the Egyptians at the Exodus. The prophet Haggai

saw in this a promise of future supplies, when the wealth of foreign nations would be poured into the temple treasury in donations of larger dimensions from the heathen. "For thus saith the Lord of hosts," he writes, "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; . . . and the desirable things of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts."*

The assumed willingness of their neighbours to contribute at a hint from the king suggests that the exiles were not altogether unpopular. On the other hand, it is quite possible that, under the oppression of Nabonidas, they had suffered much wrong from these neighbours. A public persecution always entails a large amount of private cruelty, because the victims are not protected by the law from the greed and petty spite of those who are mean enough to take advantage of their helpless condition. Thus it may be that Cyrus was aiming at a just return in his recommendation to his subjects to aid the Jews.

Such was the decree. Now let us look at the execution of it.

In the first place, there was a ready response on the part of some of the Jews, seen especially in the conduct of their leaders, who "rose up," bestirring themselves to prepare for the expedition, like expectant watchers released from their weary waiting and set free for action. The social leaders are mentioned first, which is a clear indication that the theocracy, so characteristic of the coming age, was not yet the recognised order. A little later the clergy will be placed before the laity, but at present the laity are still named before the clergy. The order is domestic. The leaders are the heads of great families—"the chief of the fathers." For such people to be named first is also an indication that the movement did not originate in the humbler classes. Evidently a certain aristocratic spirit permeated it. The wealthy merchants may have been loath to leave their centres of commerce, but the nobility of blood and family were at the head of the crusade. We have not yet reached the age of the democracy. It is clear, further, that there was some organisation among the exiles. They were not a mere crowd of refugees. The leaders were of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. We shall have to consider the relation of the Ten Tribes to the restoration later on; here it may be enough to observe in passing that representatives of the Southern Kingdom take the lead in a return to Jerusalem, the capital of that kingdom. Next come the ecclesiastical leaders, the priests and Levites. Already we find these two orders named separately—an important fact in relation to the development of Judaism that will meet us again, with some hints here and there to throw light upon the meaning of it.

There is another side to this response. It was by no means the case that the whole of the exiles rose up in answer to the edict of Cyrus; only those leaders and only those people responded "whose spirit God had raised." The privilege was offered to all the Jews, but it was not accepted by all. We cannot but be impressed by the religious faith and the inspired insight of our historian in this matter. He saw that Cyrus issued his edict because the Lord had stirred up his spirit; now he attributes the prompting to

* Hag. ii. 6-8.

make use of the proffered liberty to a similar Divine influence. Thus the return was a movement of heaven-sent impulses throughout. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones showed the deplorable condition of the Northern Kingdom in his day—stripped bare, shattered to fragments, scattered abroad. The condition of Judah was only second to this ghastly national ruin. But now to Judah there had come the breath of the Divine Spirit which Ezekiel saw promised for Israel, and a living army was rising up in new energy. Here we may discover the deeper, the more vital source of the return. Without this the edict of Cyrus would have perished as a dead letter. Even as it was, only those people who felt the breath of the Divine afflatus rose up for the arduous undertaking. So to-day there is no return to the heavenly Jerusalem and no rebuilding the fallen temple of human nature except in the power of the Spirit of God. Regeneration always goes hand in hand with redemption—the work of the Spirit with the work of the Christ. In the particular case before us, the special effect of the Divine influence is "to raise the spirit"—*i. e.*, to infuse life, to rouse to activity and hope and high endeavour. A people thus equipped is fit for any expedition of toil or peril. Like Gideon's little, sifted army, the small band of inspired men who rose up to accept the decree of Cyrus carried within their breasts a super-human power, and therefore a promise of ultimate success. The aim with which they set out confirmed the religious character of the whole enterprise. They accepted the limitation and they gladly adopted the one definite purpose suggested in the edict of Cyrus. They proceeded "to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." This was their only confessed aim. It would have been impossible for patriots such as these Jews were not to feel some national hopes and dreams stirring within them; still we have no reason to believe that the returning exiles were not loyal to the spirit of the decree of the Great King. The religious aim was the real occasion of the expedition. So much the more need was there to go in the Spirit and strength of God. Only they whose spirit God has raised are fit to build God's temple, because work for God must be done in the Spirit of God.

Secondly, the resident neighbours fell in with the recommendation of the king ungrudgingly, and gave rich contributions for the expedition. They could not go themselves, but they could have a share in the work by means of their gifts—as the home Church can share in the foreign mission she supports. The acceptance of these bounties by the Jews does not well accord with their subsequent conduct when they refused the aid of their Samaritan neighbours in the actual work of building the temple. It has an ugly look, as though they were willing to take help from all sources excepting where any concessions in return would be expected on the part of those who were befriending them. However, it is just to remember that the aid was invited and offered by Cyrus, not solicited by the Jews.

Thirdly, the execution of the decree appears to have been honestly and effectively promoted by its author. In accordance with his generous encouragement of the Jews to rebuild their temple, Cyrus restored the sacred vessels that had been carried off by Nebuchadnezzar on the occasion of the first Chaldean raid on Jerusalem, and deposited in a temple at Babylon nearly sev-

enty years before the time of the return. No doubt these things were regarded as of more importance than other spoils of war. It would be supposed that the patron god of the conquered people was humiliated when the instruments of his worship were offered to Bel or Nebo. Perhaps it was thought that some charm attaching to them would bring luck to the city in which they were guarded. When Nabonidas was seized with frantic terror at the approach of the Persian hosts, he brought the idols of the surrounding nations to Babylon for his protection. The reference to the temple vessels, and the careful and detailed enumeration of them, without the mention of any image, is a clear proof that, although before the captivity the majority of the Jews may have consisted of idolaters, there was no idol in the temple at Jerusalem. Had there been one there Nebuchadnezzar would most certainly have carried it off as the greatest trophy of victory. In default of images, he had to make the most of the gold and silver plate used in the sacrificial ceremonies.

Viewed in this connection, the restitution of the stolen vessels by Cyrus appears to be more than an act of generosity or justice. A certain religious import belongs to it. It put an end to an ancient insult offered by Babylon to the God of Israel; and it might be taken as an act of homage offered to Jehovah by Cyrus. Yet it was only a restitution, a return of what was God's before, and so a type of every gift man makes to God.

It has been noticed that the total number of the vessels restored does not agree with the sum of the numbers of the several kinds of vessels. The total is 5400; but an addition of the list of the vessels only amounts to 2499. Perhaps the less valuable articles are omitted from the detailed account; or possibly there is some error of transcription, and if so the question is, in which direction shall we find it? It may be that the total was too large. On the other hand, in 1 Esdras nearly the same high total is given—viz., 5469—and there the details are made to agree with it by an evidently artificial manipulation of the numbers.* This gives some probability to the view that the total is correct, and that the error must be in the numbers of the several items. The practical importance of these considerations is that they lead us to a high estimate of the immense wealth of the Old Temple treasures. Thus they suggest the reflection that much devotion and generosity had been shown in collecting such stores of gold and silver in previous ages. They help us to picture the sumptuous ritual of the first temple, with the "barbaric splendour" of a rich display of the precious metals. Therefore they show that the generosity of Cyrus in restoring so great a hoard was genuine and considerable. It might have been urged that after the treasures had been lying for two generations in a heathen temple the original owners had lost all claim upon them. It might have been said that they had been contaminated by this long residence among the abominations of Babylonian idolatry. The restoration of them swept away all such ideas. What was once God's belongs to Him by right for ever. His property is alienable; His claims never lapse with time, never fail through change.

It is not without significance that the treasurer who handed over their temple-property to the

* 1 Esdras ii. 14.

Jews was named "Mithredath"—a word that means "given by Mithra," or "devoted to Mithra." This suggests that the Persian sun-god was honoured among the servants of Cyrus, and yet that one who by name at least was especially associated with this divinity was constrained to honour the God of Israel. Next to Judaism and Christianity, the worship of Mithra showed the greatest vitality of all religions in Western Asia, and later even in Europe. So vigorous was it as recently as the commencement of the Christian era, that M. Renan has remarked, that if the Roman world had not become Christian it would have become Mithraistic. In those regions where the dazzling radiance and burning heat of the sun are felt as they are not even imagined in our chill, gloomy climate, it was naturally supposed that if any visible God existed He must be found in the great fiery centre of the world's light and life. Our own day has seen the scientific development of the idea that the sun's force is the source of all the energy of nature. In the homage paid by one of the ancient followers of Mithra, the sun-god, to the God of Israel, may we not see an image of the recognition of the claims of the Supreme by our priests of the sun—Kepler, Newton, Faraday? Men must be more blind than the slaves of Mithra if they cannot recognise an awful, invisible energy behind and above the forces of the solar system—nay more, a living Spirit—God!

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND EXODUS.

EZRA ii. 1-67.

THE journey of the returning exiles from Babylon has some points of resemblance to the exodus of their fathers from Egypt. On both occasions the Israelites had been suffering oppression in a foreign land. Deliverance had come to the ancient Hebrews in so wonderful a way that it could only be described as a miracle of God: no material miracle was recorded of the later movement; and yet it was so marvellously providential that the Jews were constrained to acknowledge that the hand of God was not less concerned in it.

But there were great differences between the two events. In the original *Hegira* of the Hebrews a horde of slaves was fleeing from the land of their brutal masters; in the solemn pilgrimage of the second exodus the Jews were able to set out with every encouragement from the conqueror of their national enemy. On the other hand, while the flight from Egypt led to liberty, the expedition from Babylon did not include an escape from the foreign yoke. The returning exiles were described as "children of the province" *—i. e., of the Persian province of Judæa—and their leader bore the title of a Persian governor.† Zerubbabel was no new Moses. The first exodus witnessed the birth of a nation; the second saw only a migration within the boundaries of an empire, sanctioned by the ruler because it did not include the deliverance of the subject people from servitude.

In other respects the condition of the Israelites who took part in the later expedition contrasts favourably with that of their ancestors under

* Ezra ii. 1.

† Tirshatha. Ezra ii. 63.

Moses. In the arts of civilisation, of course, they were far superior to the crushed Egyptian bondmen. But the chief distinction lay in the matter of religion. At length, in these days of Cyrus, the people were ripe to accept the faith of the great teachers who hitherto had been as voices crying in the wilderness. This fact signalises the immense difference between the Jews in every age previous to the exile, and the Jews of the return. In earlier periods they appear as a kingdom, but not as a Church; in the later age they are no longer a kingdom, but they have become a Church. The kingdom had been mainly heathenish and idolatrous in its religion, and most abominably corrupt in its morals, with only a thin streak of purer faith and conduct running through the course of its history. But the new Church, formed out of captives purified in the fires of persecution, consisted of a body of men and women who heartily embraced the religion to which but few of their forefathers had attained, and who were even ready to welcome a more rigorous development of its cult. Thus they became a highly developed Church. They were consolidated into a Puritan Church in discipline, and a High Church in ritual.

It must be borne in mind that only a fraction of the Jews in the East went back to Palestine. Nor were they who tarried, in all cases, the more worldly, enamoured of the fleshpots. In the Talmud it is said that only the chaff returned, while the wheat remained behind. Both Ezra and Nehemiah sprang from families still residing in the East long after the return under Zerubbabel.

It is in accordance with these conditions that we come across one of the most curious characteristics of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah—a characteristic which they share with Chronicles, viz., the frequent insertion of long lists of names.

Thus the second chapter of Ezra contains a list of the families who went up to Jerusalem in response to the edict of Cyrus. One or two general considerations arise here.

Since it was not a whole nation that migrated from the plains of Babylon across the great Syrian desert, but only some fragments of a nation, we shall not have to consider the fortunes and destinies of a composite unity, such as is represented by a kingdom. The people of God must now be regarded disjunctively. It is not the blessing of Israel, or the blessing of Judah, that faith now anticipates; but the blessing of those men, women, and children who fear God and walk in His ways, though, of course, for the present they are all confined to the limits of the Jewish race.

On the other hand, it is to be observed that this individualism was not absolute. The people were arranged according to their families, and the names that distinguished the families were not those of the present heads of houses, but the names of ancestors, possibly of captives taken down to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. As some of these names occur in later expeditions, it is plain that the whole of the families they represented were not found in the first body of pilgrims. Still the people were grouped in family order. The Jews anticipated the modern verdict of sociology, that the social unit is the family, not the individual. Judaism was, through and through, a domestic religion.

Further, it is to be noted that a sort of caste feeling was engendered in the midst of the do-

mestic arrangement of the people. It emerges already in the second chapter of Ezra in the cases of families that could not trace their genealogy, and it bears bitter fruit in some pitiable scenes in the later history of the returned people. Not only national rights, but also religious privileges, come more and more to depend on purity of birth and descent. Religion is viewed as a question of blood relationship. Thus even with the very appearance of that new-born individualism which might be expected to counteract it, even when the recovered people is composed entirely of volunteers, a strong racial current sets in, which grows in volume until in the days of our Lord the fact of a man's being a Jew is thought a sufficient guarantee of his enjoying the favour of Heaven, until in our own day such a book as "Daniel Deronda" portrays the race-enthusiasm of the Israelite as the very heart and essence of his religion.

We have three copies of the list of the returning exiles—one in Ezra ii., the second in Nehemiah vii., and the third in 1 Esdras v. They are evidently all of them transcripts of the same original register; but though they agree in the main, they differ in details, giving some variation in the names and considerable diversity in the numbers—Esdras coming nearer to Ezra than to Nehemiah, as we might expect. The total, however, is the same in every case, viz., 42,360 (besides 7337 servants)—a large number, which shows how important the expedition was considered to be.

The name of Zerubbabel appears first. He was the lineal descendant of the royal house, the heir to the throne of David. This is a most significant fact. It shows that the exiles had retained some latent national organisation, and it gives a faint political character to the return, although, as we have already observed, the main object of it was religious. To fervent readers of old prophecies strange hopes would dawn, hopes of the Messiah whose advent Isaiah, in particular, had predicted. Was this new shoot from the stock of David indeed the Lord's Anointed? Those who secretly answered the question to themselves in the affirmative were doomed to much perplexity and not a little disappointment. Nevertheless Zerubbabel was a lower, a provisional, a temporary Messiah. God was educating His people through their illusions. As one by one the national heroes failed to satisfy the large hopes of the prophets, they were left behind, but the hopes still maintained their unearthly vitality. Hezekiah, Josiah, Zerubbabel, the Maccabees all passed, and in passing they all helped to prepare for One who alone could realise the dreams of seers and singers in all the best ages of Hebrew thought and life.

Still the bulk of the people do not seem to have been dominated by the Messianic conception. It is one characteristic of the return that the idea of the personal, God-sent, but human Messiah recedes; and another, older and more persistent Jewish hope comes to the front—viz., the hope in God Himself as the Saviour of His people and their Vindicator. Cyrus could not have suspected any political designs, or he would not have made Zerubbabel the head of the expedition. Evidently "Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah," to whom Cyrus handed over the sacred vessels of the temple, is the same man as Zerubbabel, because in v. 16 we read that Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the temple, while in iii. 8

this work is ascribed to Zerubbabel, with whom the origin of the work is again connected in v. 2.

The second name is Jeshua.* The man who bears it was afterwards the high-priest at Jerusalem. It is impossible to say whether he had exercised any sacerdotal functions during the exile; but his prominent place shows that honour was now offered to his priesthood. Still he comes after the royal prince.

Then follow nine names without any description.† Nehemiah's list includes another name, which seems to have dropped out of the list in Ezra. These, together with the two already mentioned, make an exact dozen. It cannot be an accident that twelve names stand at the head of the list; they must be meant to represent the twelve tribes—like the twelve apostles in the Gospels, and the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse. Thus it is indicated that the return is for all Israel, not exclusively for the Judean Hebrews. Undoubtedly the bulk of the pilgrims were descendants of captives from the Southern Kingdom.‡ The dispersion of the Northern Kingdom had begun two centuries earlier than Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judæa; it had been carried on by successive removals of the people in successive wars. Probably most of these early exiles had been driven farther north than those districts which were assigned to the Judean captives; probably, too, they had been scattered far and wide; lastly, we know that they had been sunken in an idolatrous imitation of the manners and customs of their heathen neighbours, so that there was little to differentiate them from the people among whom they were domiciled. Under all these circumstances, is it remarkable that the ten tribes have disappeared from the observation of the world? They have vanished, but only as the Goths have vanished in Italy, as the Huguenot refugees have vanished in England—by mingling with the resident population. We have not to search for them in Tartary, or South America, or any other remote region of the four continents, because we have no reason to believe that they are now a separate people.

Still a very small "Remnant" was faithful. This "Remnant" was welcome to find its way back to Palestine with the returning Judeans. As the immediate object of the expedition was to rebuild the temple at the rival capital of Jerusalem, it was not to be expected that patriots of the Northern Kingdom would be very eager to join it. Yet some descendants of the ten tribes made their way back. Even in New Testament times the genealogy of the prophetess Anna was reckoned from the tribe of Asher.§ It is most improbable that the twelve leaders were actually descendants of the twelve tribes. But just as in the case of the apostles, whom we cannot regard as thus descended, they represented all Israel. Their position at the head of the expedition proclaimed that the "middle wall of partition" was broken down. Thus we see that redemption tends to liberalise the redeemed, that those who are restored to God are also brought back to the love of their brethren.

* This name is a later form of "Joshua"; the older form of the name is used for the same person in Hag. i. 1, 14, and Zech. iii. 1.

† Of course the Nehemiah and Mordecai in this list are different persons from those who bear the same names in the Books of Nehemiah and Esther and belong to later dates.

‡ See Ezra i. 5.

§ Luke ii. 36.

The list that follows the twelve is divisible into two sections. First, we have a number of families; then there is a change in the tabulation, and the rest of the people are arranged according to their cities. The most simple explanation of this double method is that the families constitute the Jerusalem citizens.

The towns named in the second division are all situated in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. The only part of Palestine as yet restored to the Jews was Jerusalem, with the towns in its vicinity. The southern half of Judæa remained in the hands of the Edomites, who begrudged to the Jews even the resumption of the northern portion—and very naturally, seeing that the Edomites had held it for half a century, a time which gives some assurance of permanent possession. This must be borne in mind when we come across the troubles between the returned exiles and their neighbours in Palestine. We can never understand a quarrel until we have heard both sides. There is no Edomite history of the wars of Israel. No doubt such a history would put another face on the events—just as a Chinese history of the English wars in the East would do, to the shame of the Christian nation.

After the leaders and the people generally come the successive orders of the temple ministry. We begin with the priests, and among these a front rank is given to the house of Jeshua. The high-priest himself had been named earlier, next to Zerubbabel, among the leaders of the nation, so distinct was his position from that of the ordinary priesthood. Next to the priests we have the Levites, who are now sharply separated from the first order of the ministry. The very small number of Levites in comparison with the large number of priests is startling—over four thousand priests and only seventy-four Levites! The explanation of this anomaly may be found in what had been occurring in Chaldæa. Ezekiel declared that the Levites were to be degraded because of their sinful conduct.* We see from the arrangement in Ezra that the prophet's message was obeyed. The Levites were now separated from the priests, and set down to a lower function. This could not have been acceptable to them. Therefore it is not at all surprising that the majority of them held aloof from the expedition for rebuilding the temple in sullen resentment, or at best in cool indifference, refusing to take part in a work the issue of which would exhibit their humiliation to menial service. But the seventy-four had grace to accept their lowly lot.

The Levites are not set in the lowest place. They are distinguished from several succeeding orders. The singers, the children of Asaph, were really Levites; but they form a separate and important class, for the temple service was to be choral—rich and gladsome. The door-keepers are a distinct order, lowly but honourable, for they are devoted to the service of God, for whom all work is glorious.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Next come the Nethinims, or temple-helots. These seem to have been aborigines of Canaan who had been pressed into the service of the old Jerusalem temple, like the Gibeonites, the hewers of wood and drawers of water. After the Nethinims come "the children of Solomon's serv-

* Ezek. xlv. 9-16.

ants," another order of slaves, apparently the descendants of the war captives whom Solomon had assigned to the work of building the temple. It shows what thorough organisation was preserved among the captives that these bondsmen were retained in their original position and brought back to Jerusalem. To us this is not altogether admirable. We may be grieved to see slavery thus enlisted in the worship of God. But we must recollect that even with the Christian gospel in her hand, for centuries, the Church had her slaves, the monasteries their serfs. No idea is of slower growth than the idea of the brotherhood of man.

So far all was in order; but there were exceptional cases. Some of the people could not prove their Israelite descent, and accordingly they were set aside from their brethren. Some of the priests even could not trace their genealogy. Their condition was regarded as more serious, for the right of office was purely hereditary. The dilemma brought to light a sad sense of loss. If only there were a priest with the Urim and Thummim, this antique augury of flashing gems might settle the difficulty! But such a man was not to be found. The Urim and Thummim, together with the Ark and the Shekinah, are named by the rabbis among the precious things that were never recovered. The Jews looked back with regret to the wonderful time when the privilege of consulting an oracle had been within the reach of their ancestors. Thus they shared the universal instinct of mankind that turns fondly to the past for memories of a golden age, the glories of which have faded and left us only the dingy scenes of every-day life. In this instinct we may detect a transference to the race of the vaguely perceived personal loss of each man as he reflects on those far-off, dream-like child-days, when even he was a "mighty prophet," a "seer blest," one who had come into the world "trailing clouds of glory." Alas! he perceives that the mystic splendours have faded into the light of common day, if they have not even given place to the gloom of doubt, or the black night of sin. Then, taking himself as a microcosm, he ascribes a similar fate to the race.

Nothing is more inspiriting in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ than its complete reversal of this dismal process of reflection, and its promise of the Golden Age in the future. The most exalted Hebrew prophecy anticipated something of the kind; here and there it lit up its sombre pages with the hope of a brilliant future. The attitude of the Jews in the present instance, when they simply set a question on one side, waiting till a priest with Urim and Thummim should appear, suggests too faint a belief in the future to be prophetic. But like Socrates' hint at the possibility of one arising who should solve the problems which were inscrutable to the Athenians of his day, it points to a sense of need. When at length Christ came as "the Light of the World," it was to supply a widely felt want. It is true He brought no Urim and Thummim. The supreme motive for thankfulness in this connection is that His revelation is so much more ample than the wizard guidance men had formerly clung to, as to be like the broad sunshine in comparison with the shifting lights of magic gems. Though He gave no formal answers to petty questions such as those for which the Jews would resort to a priest, as their heathen neighbours

resorted to a soothsayer. He shed a wholesome radiance on the path of life, so that His followers have come to regard the providing of a priest with Urim and Thummim as at best an expedient adapted to the requirements of an age of superstition.

If the caravan lacked the privilege of an oracle, care was taken to equip it as well as the available means would allow. These were not abundant. There were servants, it is true. There were beasts of burden too—camels, horses, asses; but these were few in comparison to the numbers of the host—only at the rate of one animal to a family of four persons. Yet the expedition set out in a semi-royal character, for it was protected by a guard of a thousand horsemen sent by Cyrus. Better than this, it possessed a spirit of enthusiasm which triumphed over poverty and hardship, and spread a great gladness through the people. Now at length it was possible to take down the harps from the willows. Besides the temple choristers, two hundred singing men and women accompanied the pilgrims to help to give expression to the exuberant joyousness of the host. The spirit of the whole company was expressed in a noble lyric that has become familiar to us:—

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like unto them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing:
Then said they among the nations,
The Lord hath done great things for them.
The Lord hath done great things for us;
Whereof we are glad."*

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW TEMPLE.

EZRA ii. 68-iii.

UNLIKE the historian of the exodus from Egypt, our chronicler gives no account of adventures of the pilgrims on the road to Palestine, although much of their way led them through a wild and difficult country. So huge a caravan as that which accompanied Zerubbabel must have taken several months to cover the eight hundred miles between Babylon and Jerusalem;† for even Ezra with his smaller company spent four months on their journey.‡ A dreary desert stretched over the vast space between the land of exile and the old home of the Jews among the mountains of the West; and here the commissariat would tax the resources of the ablest organisers. It is possible that the difficulties of the desert were circumvented in the most prosaic manner—by simply avoiding this barren, waterless region, and taking a long sweep round by the north of Syria. Passing over the pilgrimage, which afforded him no topics of interest, without a word of comment, the chronicler plants us at once in the midst of the busy scenes at Jerusalem, where we see the returned exiles, at length arrived at the end of their tedious journey, preparing to accomplish the one purpose of their expedition.

The first step was to provide the means for building the temple, and contributions were made

* Psalm cxxvi. 1-3.

† *I. e.*, if the route was the usual one, by Tadmor (Palmyra). The easier but roundabout way by Aleppo would have occupied a still longer time.

‡ Ezra vii. 8, 9.

for this object by all classes of the community—as we gather from the more complete account in Nehemiah*—from the prince and the aristocracy to the general public, for it was to be a united work. And yet it is implied by the narrative that many had no share in it. These people may have been poor originally or impoverished by their journey, and not at all deficient in generosity or lacking in faith. Still we often meet with those who have enough enthusiasm to applaud a good work and yet not enough to make any sacrifice in promoting it. It is expressly stated that the gifts were offered freely. No tax was imposed by the authorities; but there was no backwardness on the part of the actual donors, who were impelled by a glowing devotion to open their purses without stint. Lastly, those who contributed did so “after their ability.” This is the true “proportionate giving.” For all to give an equal sum is impossible unless the poll-tax is to be fixed at a miserable minimum. Even for all to give the same proportion is unjust. There are poor men who ought not to sacrifice a tenth of what they receive; there are rich men who will be guilty of unfaithfulness to their stewardship if they do not devote far more than this fraction of their vast revenues to the service of God and their fellow-men. It would be reasonable for some of the latter only to reserve the tithe for their own use and to give away nine-tenths of their income, for even then they would not be giving “after their ability.”

After the preliminary step of collecting the contributions, the pilgrims proceed to the actual work they have in hand. In this they are heartily united; they gather themselves together “as one man” in a great assembly, which, if we may trust the account in Esdras, is held in an open space by the first gate towards the east,† and therefore close to the site of the old temple, almost among its very ruins. The unity of spirit and the harmony of action which characterise the commencement of the work are good auguries of its success. This is to be a popular undertaking. Sanctioned by Cyrus, promoted by the aristocracy, it is to be carried out with the full co-operation of the multitude. The first temple had been the work of a king; the second is to be the work of a people. The nation had been dazzled by the splendour of Solomon’s court, and had basked in its rays so that the after-glow of them lingered in the memories of ages even down to the time of our Lord.‡ But there was a healthier spirit in the humbler work of the returned exiles, when, forced to dispense with the king they would gladly have accepted, they undertook the task of building the new temple themselves.

In the centre of the mosque known as the “Dome of the Rock” there is a crag with the well-worn remains of steps leading up to the top of it, and with channels cut in its surface. This has been identified by recent explorers as the site of the great Altar of Burnt-offerings. It is on the very crest of Mount Moriah. Formerly it was thought that it was the site of the inmost shrine of the temple, known as “The Holy of Holies,” but the new view, which seems to be fairly established, gives an unexpected prominence to the altar. This rude square structure of unhewn stone was the most elevated and conspicuous object in the temple. The altar was to Judaism what the cross is to Chris-

tianity. Both for us and for the Jews what is most vital and precious in religion is the dark mystery of a sacrifice. The first work of the temple-builders was to set up the altar again on its old foundation. Before a stone of the temple was laid, the smoke of sacrificial fires might be seen ascending to heaven from the highest crag of Moriah. For fifty years all sacrifices had ceased. Now with haste, in fear of hindrance from jealous neighbours, means were provided to re-establish them before any attempt was made to rebuild the temple. It is not quite easy to see what the writer means when, after saying “And they set the altar upon his bases,” he adds, “for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries.” The suggestion that the phrase may be varied so as to mean that the awe which this religious work inspired in the heathen neighbours prevented them from molesting it is far-fetched and improbable. Nor is it likely that the writer intends to convey the idea that the Jews hastened the building of the altar as a sort of Palladium, trusting that its sacrifices would protect them in case of invasion, for this is to attribute too low and materialistic a character to their religion. More reasonable is the explanation that they hastened the work because they feared that their neighbours might either hinder it or wish to have a share in it—an equally objectionable thing, as subsequent events showed.

The chronicler distinctly states that the sacrifices which were now offered, as well as the festivals which were established later, were all designed to meet the requirements of the law of Moses—that everything might be done “as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.” This statement does not throw much light on the history of the Pentateuch. We know that that work was not yet in the hands of the Jews at Jerusalem, because this was nearly eighty years before Ezra introduced it. The sentence suggests that according to the chronicler *some* law bearing the name of Moses was known to the first body of returned exiles. We need not regard that suggestion as a reflection from later years. Deuteronomy may have been the law referred to; or it may have been some rubric of traditional usages in the possession of the priests.

Meanwhile two facts of importance come out here—*first*, that the method of worship adopted by the returned exiles was a revival of ancient customs, a return to the old ways, not an innovation of their own, and *second*, that this restoration was in careful obedience to the known will of God. Here we have the root idea of the Torah. It announces that God has revealed His will, and it implies that the service of God can only be acceptable when it is in harmony with the will of God. The prophets taught that obedience was better than sacrifice. The priests held that sacrifice itself was a part of obedience. With both the primary requisite was obedience—as it is the primary requisite in all religion.

The particular kind of sacrifice offered on the great altar was the burnt-offering. Now we do occasionally meet with expiatory ideas in connection with this sacrifice; but unquestionably the principal conception attached to the burnt-offering in distinction from the sin-offering, was the idea of self-dedication on the part of the worshipper. Thus the Jews re-consecrated themselves to God by the solemn ceremony of sacrifice, and they kept up the thought of renewed consecration by the regular repetition of the

* Neh. vii. 70-72.

† 1 Esdras v. 47.

‡ Matt. vi. 29.

burnt-offering. It is difficult for us to enter into the feelings of the people who practised so antique a cult, even to them archaic in its ceremonies, and dimly suggestive of primitive rites that had their origin in far-off barbaric times. But one thing is clear, shining as with letters of awful fire against the black clouds of smoke that hang over the altar. This sacrifice was always a "whole offering." As it was being completely consumed in the flames before their very eyes, the worshippers would see a vivid representation of the tremendous truth that the most perfect sacrifice is death—nay, that it is even more than death, that it is absolute self-effacement in total and unreserved surrender to God.

Various rites follow the great central sacrifice of the burnt-offering, ushered in by the most joyous festival of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people scatter themselves over the hills round Jerusalem under the shade of extemporised bowers made out of the leafy boughs of trees, and celebrate the goodness of God in the final and richest harvest, the vintage. Then come New Moon and the other festivals that stud the calendar with sacred dates and make the Jewish year a round of glad festivities.

Thus, we see, the full establishment of religious services precedes the building of the temple. A weighty truth is enshrined in this apparently incongruous fact. The worship itself is felt to be more important than the house in which it is to be celebrated. That truth should be even more apparent to us who have read the great words of Jesus uttered by Jacob's well, "The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father, . . . when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."* How vain then is it to treat the erection of churches as though it were the promotion of a revival of religion! As surely as the empty sea-shell tossed up on the beach can never secrete a living organism to inhabit it, a mere building—whether it be the most gorgeous cathedral or the plainest village meeting-house—will never induce a living spirit of worship to dwell in its cold desolation. Every true religious revival begins in the spiritual sphere and finds its place of worship where it may—in the rustic barn or on the hill-side—if no more seemly home can be provided for it, because its real temple is the humble and contrite heart.

Still the design of building the temple at Jerusalem was kept constantly in view by the pilgrims. Accordingly it was necessary to purchase materials, and in particular the fragrant cedar wood from the distant forests of Lebanon. These famous forests were still in the possession of the Phœnicians, for Cyrus had allowed a local autonomy to the busy trading people on the northern sea-board. So, in spite of the king's favour, it was requisite for the Jews to pay the full price for the costly timber. Now, in disbursing the original funds brought up from Babylon, it would seem that the whole of this money was expended in labour, in paying the wages of masons and carpenters. Therefore the Jews had to export agricultural products—such as corn, wine, and olive oil—in exchange for the imports of timber they received from the Phœnicians. The question at once arises, how did they come to be possessed of these fruits of the soil? The answer is supplied by a chronological remark in our narrative. It was in the second

year of their residence in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood that the Jews commenced the actual building of their temple. They had first patiently cleared, ploughed, and sown the neglected fields, trimmed and trained the vines, and tended the olive gardens, so that they were able to reap a harvest, and to give the surplus products for the purchase of the timber required in building the temple. As the foundation was laid in the spring, the order for the cedar wood must have been sent before the harvest was reaped—pledging it in advance with faith in the God who gives the increase. The Phœnician woodmen fell their trees in the distant forests of Lebanon; and the massive trunks are dragged down to the coast, and floated along the Mediterranean to Joppa, and then carried on the backs of camels or slowly drawn up the heights of Judah in ox-wagons, while the crops that are to pay for them are still green in the fields.

Here then is a further proof of devotion on the part of the Jews from Babylon—though it is scarcely hinted at in the narrative, though we can only discover it by a careful comparison of facts and dates. Labour is expended on the fields; long weary months of waiting are endured; when the fruits of toil are obtained, these hard-earned stores are not hoarded by their owners: they too, like the gold and silver of the wealthier Jews, are gladly surrendered for the one object which kindles the enthusiasm of every class of the community.

At length all is ready. Jeshua the priest now precedes Zerubbabel, as well as the rest of the twelve leaders, in inaugurating the great work. On the Levites is laid the immediate responsibility of carrying it through. When the foundation is laid, the priests in their new white vestments sound their silver trumpets, and the choir of Levites, the sons of Asaph, clang their brazen cymbals. To the accompaniment of this inspiring music they sing glad psalms in praise of God, giving thanks to Him, celebrating His goodness and His mercy that endureth for ever toward Israel. This is not at all like the soft music and calm chanting of subdued cathedral services that we think of in connection with great national festivals. The instruments blare and clash, the choristers cry aloud, and the people join them with a mighty shout. When shrill discordant notes of bitter wailing, piped by a group of melancholy old men, threaten to break the harmony of the scene, they are drowned in the deluge of jubilation that rises up in protest and beats down all their opposition with its triumph of gladness. To a sober Western the scene would seem to be a sort of religious orgy, like a wild Bacchanalian festival, like the howling of hosts of dervishes. But although it is the Englishman's habit to take his religion sombrely, if not sadly, it may be well for him to pause before pronouncing a condemnation of those men and women who are more exuberant in the expression of spiritual emotion. If he finds, even among his fellow-countrymen, some who permit themselves a more lively music and a more free method of public worship than he is accustomed to, is it not a mark of insular narrowness for him to visit these unconventional people with disapprobation? In abandoning the severe manners of their race, they are only approaching nearer to the time-old methods of ancient Israel.

In this clangour and clamour at Jerusalem the

* John iv. 21, 23.

predominant note was a burst of irrepressible gladness. When God turned the captivity of Israel, mourning was transformed into laughter. To understand the wild excitement of the Jews, their psalm of joy, their very ecstasy, we must recollect what they had passed through, as well as what they were now anticipating. We must remember the cruel disaster of the overthrow of Jerusalem, the desolation of the exile, the sickness of weary waiting for deliverance, the harshness of the persecution that embittered the later years of the captivity under Nabonidas; we must think of the toilsome pilgrimage through the desert, with its dismal wastes, its dangers and its terrors, followed by the patient work on the land and gathering in of means for building the temple. And now all this was over. The bow had been terribly bent; the rebound was immense. People who cannot feel strong religious gladness have never known the heartache of deep religious grief. These Israelites had cried out of the depths; they were prepared to shout for joy from the heights. Perhaps we may go further, and detect a finer note in this great blast of jubilation, a note of higher and more solemn gladness. The chastisement of the exile was past, and the long-suffering mercy of God—enduring for ever—was again smiling out on the chastened people. And yet the positive realisation of their hopes was for the future. The joy, therefore, was inspired by faith. With little accomplished as yet, the sanguine people already saw the temple in their mind's eye, with its massive walls, its cedar chambers, and its adornment of gold and richly dyed hangings. In the very laying of the foundation their eager imaginations leaped forward to the crowning of the highest pinnacles. Perhaps they saw more; perhaps they perceived, though but dimly, something of the meaning of the spiritual blessedness that had been foretold by their prophets.

All this gladness centred in the building of a temple, and therefore ultimately in the worship of God. We take but a one-sided view of Judaism if we judge it by the sour ideas of later Pharisaism. As it presented itself to St. Paul in opposition to the gospel, it was stern and loveless. But in its earlier days this religion was free and gladsome, though, as we shall soon see, even then a rigour of fanaticism soon crept in and turned its joy into grief. Here, however, at the founding of the temple, it wears its sunniest aspect. There is no reason why religion should wear any other aspect to the devout soul. It should be happy; for is it not the worship of a happy God?

Nevertheless, in the midst of the almost universal acclaim of joy and praise, there was the note of sadness wailed by the old men, who could recollect the venerable fane in which their fathers had worshipped before the ruthless soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar had reduced it to a heap of ashes. Possibly some of them had stood on this very spot half a century before, in an agony of despair, while they saw the cruel flames licking the ancient stones and blazing up among the cedar beams, and all the fine gold dimmed with black clouds of smoke. Was it likely that the feeble flock just returned from Babylon could ever produce such a wonder of the world as Solomon's temple had been? The enthusiastic younger people might be glad in their ignorance; but their sober elders, who knew more, could only weep. We cannot but think that, after the

too common habit of the aged, these mournful old men viewed the past in a glamour of memory, magnifying its splendours as they looked back on them through the mists of time. If so, they were old indeed; for this habit, and not years, makes real old age. He is aged who lives in bygone days, with his face ever set to the irreparable past, vainly regretting its retreating memories, uninterested in the present, despondent of the future. The true elixir of life, the secret of perpetual youth of soul, is interest in the present and the future, with the forward glance of faith and hope. Old men who cultivate this spirit have young hearts though the snow is on their heads. And such are wise. No doubt, from the standpoint of a narrow common sense, with its shrunken views confined to the material and the mundane, the old men who wept had more reason for their conduct than the inexperienced younger men who rejoiced. But there is a prudence that comes of blindness, and there is an imprudence that is sublime in its daring, because it springs from faith. The despair of old age makes one great mistake, because it ignores one great truth. In noting that many good things have passed away, it forgets to remember that God remains. God is not dead! Therefore the future is safe. In the end the young enthusiasts of Jerusalem were justified. A prophet arose who declared that a glory which the former temple had never known should adorn the new temple, in spite of its humble beginning; and history verified his word when the Lord took possession of His house in the person of His Son.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIMITS OF COMPREHENSION.

EZRA IV. 1-5, 24.

THE fourth chapter of the Book of Ezra introduces the vexed question of the limits of comprehension in religion by affording a concrete illustration of it in a very acute form. Communities, like individual organisms, can only live by means of a certain adjustment to their environment, in the settlement of which there necessarily arises a serious struggle to determine what shall be absorbed and what rejected, how far it is desirable to admit alien bodies and to what extent it is necessary to exclude them. The difficulty thus occasioned appeared in the company of returned exiles soon after they had begun to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. It was the seed of many troubles. The anxieties and disappointments which overshadowed the subsequent history of nearly all of them sprang from this one source. Here we are brought to a very distinguishing characteristic of the Persian period. The idea of Jewish exclusiveness which has been so singular a feature in the whole course of Judaism right down to our own day was now in its birth-throes. Like a young Hercules, it had to fight for its life in its very cradle. It first appeared in the anxious compilation of genealogical registers and the careful sifting of the qualifications of the pilgrims before they left Babylon. In the events which followed the settlement at Jerusalem it came forward with determined insistence on its rights, in opposition to a very tempting offer which would have been fatal to its very existence.

The chronicler introduces the neighbouring people under the title "The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin"; but in doing so he is describing them according to their later actions; when they first appear on his pages their attitude is friendly, and there is no reason to suspect any hypocrisy in it. We cannot take them to be the remainder of the Israelite inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom who had been permitted to stay in their land when their brethren had been violently expelled by the Assyrians, and who were now either showing their old enmity to Judah and Benjamin by trying to pick a new quarrel, or, on the other hand, manifesting a better spirit and seeking reconciliation. No doubt such people existed, especially in the north, where they became, in part at least, the ancestors of the Galileans of New Testament times. But the men now referred to distinctly assert that they were brought up to Palestine by the Assyrian king Esar-haddon. Neither can they be the descendants of the Israelite priests who were sent at the request of the colonists to teach them the religion of the land when they were alarmed at an incursion of lions; * for only one priest is directly mentioned in the history, and though he may have had companions and assistants, the small college of missionaries could not be called "the people of the land" (ver. 4). These people must be the foreign colonists. There were Chaldeans from Babylon and the neighbouring cities of Cutha and Sepharvaim (the modern *Mosaib*), Elamites from Susa, Phœnicians from Sidon—if we may trust Josephus here †—and Arabs from Petra. These had been introduced on four successive occasions—first, as the Assyrian inscriptions show, by Sargon, who sent two sets of colonists; then by Esar-haddon; and, lastly, by Ashur-banipal. ‡ The various nationalities had had time to become well amalgamated together, for the first colonisation had happened a hundred and eighty years, and the latest colonisation a hundred and thirty years, before the Jews returned from Babylon. As the successive exportations of Israelites went on side by side with the successive importations of foreigners, the two classes must have lived together for some time; and even after the last captivity of the Israelites had been effected, those who were still left in the land would have come into contact with the colonists. Thus, apart from the special mission of the priest whose business it was to introduce the rites of sacrificial worship, the popular religion of the Israelites would have become known to the mixed heathen people who were settled among them.

These neighbours assert that they worship the God whom the Jews at Jerusalem worship, and that they have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esar-haddon, the Assyrian king to whom, in particular, they attribute their being brought up to Palestine, possibly because the ancestors of the deputation to Jerusalem were among the colonists planted by that king. For a century and a half they have acknowledged the God of the Jews. They therefore request to be permitted to assist in rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem. At the first blush of it their petition looks reasonable and even generous. The Jews were poor; a great work lay before them; and the inadequacy of their means in view of what they aimed at had plunged the less enthusiastic among them

into grief and despair. Here was an offer of assistance that might prove most efficacious. The idea of centralisation in worship of which Josiah had made so much would be furthered by this means, because instead of following the example of the Israelites before the exile who had their altar at Bethel, the colonists proposed to take part in the erection of the one Jewish temple at Jerusalem. If their previous habit of offering sacrifices in their own territory was offensive to rigorous Jews, although they might speak of it quite naïvely, because they were unconscious that there was anything objectionable in it and even regard it as meritorious, the very way to abolish this ancient custom was to give the colonists an interest in the central shrine. If their religion was defective, how could it be improved better than by bringing them into contact with the law-abiding Jews? While the offer of the colonists promised aid to the Jews in building the temple, it also afforded them a grand missionary opportunity for carrying out the broad programme of the Second Isaiah, who had promised the spread of the light of God's grace among the Gentiles.

In view of these considerations we cannot but read the account of the absolute rejection of the offer by Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the twelve leaders with a sense of painful disappointment. The less pleasing side of religious intensity here presents itself. Zeal seems to be passing into fanaticism. A selfish element mars the picture of whole-hearted devotion which was so delightfully portrayed in the history of the returned exiles up to this time. The leaders are cautious enough to couch their answer in terms that seem to hint at their inability to comply with the friendly request of their neighbours, however much they may wish to do so, because of the limitation imposed upon them in the edict of Cyrus which confined the command to build the temple at Jerusalem to the Jews. But it is evident that the secret of the refusal is in the mind and will of the Jews themselves. They absolutely decline any co-operation with the colonists. There is a sting in the carefully chosen language with which they define their work: they call it building a house "unto *our* God." Thus they not only accept the polite phrase "Your God" employed by the colonists in addressing them; but by markedly accentuating its limitation they disallow any right of the colonists to claim the same divinity.

Such a curt refusal of friendly overtures was naturally most offensive to the people who received it. But their subsequent conduct was so bitterly ill-natured that we are driven to think they must have had some selfish aims from the first. They at once set some paid agents to work at court to poison the mind of the government with calumnies about the Jews. It is scarcely likely that they were able to win Cyrus over to their side against his favourite *protégés*. The king may have been too absorbed with the great affairs of his vast dominions for any murmur of this business to reach him while it was being disposed of by some official. But perhaps the matter did not come up till after Cyrus had handed over the government to his son Cambyses, which he did in the year B. C. 532—three years before his death. At all events the calumnies were successful. The work of the temple building was arrested at its very commencement—for as yet little more had been done beyond collecting materials. The Jews were paying dearly for their exclusiveness.

* 2 Kings xvii. 25-28.

† "Ant.," XII. v. 5.

‡ The "Osnappar" of Ezra iv. 10.

All this looks very miserable. But let us examine the situation.

We should show a total lack of the historical spirit if we were to judge the conduct of Zerubbabel and his companions by the broad principles of Christian liberalism. We must take into account their religious training and the measure of light to which they had attained. We must also consider the singularly difficult position in which they were placed. They were not a nation; they were a Church. Their very existence, therefore, depended upon a certain ecclesiastical organisation. They must have shaped themselves according to some definite lines, or they would have melted away into the mass of mixed nationalities and debased eclectic religions with which they were surrounded. Whether the course of personal exclusiveness which they chose was wisest and best may be fairly questioned. It has been the course followed by their children all through the centuries, and it has acquired this much of justification—it has succeeded. Judaism has been preserved by Jewish exclusiveness. We may think that the essential truths of Judaism might have been maintained by other means which would have allowed of a more gracious treatment of outsiders. Meanwhile, however, we must see that Zerubbabel and his companions were not simply indulging in churlish unsociability when they rejected the request of their neighbours. Rightly or wrongly, they took this disagreeable course with a great purpose in mind.

Then we must understand what the request of the colonists really involved. It is true they only asked to be allowed to assist in *building* the temple. But it would have been impossible to stay here. If they had taken an active share in the labour and sacrifice of the construction of the temple, they could not have been excluded afterwards from taking part in the temple worship. This is the more clear since the very grounds of their request were that they worshipped and sacrificed to the God of the Jews. Now a great prophet had predicted that God's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations.* But the Jews at Jerusalem belonged to a very different school of thought. With them, as we have learnt from the genealogies, the racial idea was predominant. Judaism was for the Jews.

But let us understand what that religion was which the colonists asserted to be identical with the religion of the returned exiles. They said they worshipped the God of the Jews, but it was after the manner of the people of the Northern Kingdom. In the days of the Israelites that worship had been associated with the steer at Bethel, and the people of Jerusalem had condemned the degenerate religion of their northern brethren as sinful in the sight of God. But the colonists had not confined themselves to this. They had combined their old idolatrous religion with that of the newly adopted indigenous divinity of Palestine. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods."† Between them, they adored a host of Pagan divinities, whose barbarous names are grimly noted by the Hebrew historian—Succoth-benoth, Nergal, Ashima, etc.‡ There is no evidence to show that this heathenism had become extinct by the time of the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. At all events,

the bastard product of such a worship as that of the Bethel steer and the Babylonian and Phœnician divinities, even when purged of its most gross corruption, was not likely to be after the mind of the puritan pilgrims. The colonists did not offer to adopt the traditional Torah, which the returned exiles were sedulously observing.

Still it may be said, if the people were imperfect in knowledge and corrupt in practice, might not the Jews have enlightened and helped them? We are reminded of the reproach that Bede brings so sternly against the ancient British Christians when he blames them for not having taught the gospel to the Saxon heathen who had invaded their land. How far it would have been possible for a feeble people to evangelise their more powerful neighbours, in either case, it is impossible to say.

It cannot be denied, however, that in their refusal the Jews gave prominence to racial and not to religious distinctions. Yet even in this matter it would be unreasonable for us to expect them to have surpassed the early Christian Church at Jerusalem and to have anticipated the daring liberalism of St. Paul. The followers of St. James were reluctant to receive any converts into their communion except on condition of circumcision. This meant that Gentiles must become Jews before they could be recognised as Christians. Now there was no sign that the mixed race of colonists ever contemplated becoming Jews by humbling themselves to a rite of initiation. Even if most of them were already circumcised, as far as we know none of them gave an indication of willingness to subject themselves wholly to Jewish ordinances. To receive them, therefore, would be contrary to the root principle of Judaism. It is not fair to mete out a harsh condemnation to Jews who declined to do what was only allowed among Christians after a desperate struggle, which separated the leader of the liberal party from many of his brethren and left him for a long while under a cloud of suspicion.

Great confusion has been imported into the controversy on Church comprehension by not keeping it separate from the question of tolerance in religion. The two are distinct in many respects. Comprehension is an ecclesiastical matter; tolerance is primarily concerned with the policy of the state. Whilst it is admitted that nobody should be coerced in his religion by the state, it is not therefore to be assumed that everybody is to be received into the Church.

Nevertheless we feel that there is a real and vital connection between the ideas of tolerance and Church comprehensiveness. A Church may become culpably intolerant, although she may not use the power of the state for the execution of her mandates; she may contrive many painful forms of persecution, without resorting to the rack and the thumb-screw. The question therefore arises, What are the limits to tolerance within a Church? The attempt to fix these limits by creeds and canons has not been wholly successful, either in excluding the unworthy or in including the most desirable members. The drift of thought in the present day being towards wider comprehensiveness, it becomes increasingly desirable to determine on what principles this may be attained. Good men are weary of the little garden walled around, and they doubt whether it is altogether the Lord's peculiar ground; they have discovered that many

* Isa. lvi. 7.

† 2 Kings xvii. 33.

‡ 2 Kings xvii. 30, 31.

of the flowers of the field are fair and fragrant, and they have a keen suspicion that not a few weeds may lurk even in the trim parterre; so they look over the wall and long for breath and brotherhood, in a large recognition of all that is good in the world. Now the dull religious lethargy of the eighteenth century is a warning against the chief danger that threatens those who yield themselves to this fascinating impulse. Latitudinarianism sought to widen the fold that had been narrowed on one side by sacerdotal pretensions and on the other side by puritan rigour. The result was that the fold almost disappeared. Then religion was nearly swallowed up in the swamps of indifference. This deplorable issue of a well-meant attempt to serve the cause of charity suggests that there is little good in breaking down the barriers of exclusiveness unless we have first established a potent centre of unity. If we have put an end to division simply by destroying the interests which once divided men, we have only attained the communion of death. In the graveyard friend and foe lie peaceably side by side, but only because both are dead. Wherever there is life two opposite influences are invariably at work. There is a force of attraction drawing in all that is congenial, and there is a force of a contrary character repelling everything that is uncongenial. Any attempt to tamper with either of these forces must result in disaster. A social or an ecclesiastical division that arbitrarily crosses the lines of natural affinity creates a schism in the body, and leads to a painful mutilation of fellowship. On the other hand, a forced comprehension of alien elements produces internal friction, which often leads to an explosion, shattering the whole fabric. But the common mistake has been in attending to the circumference and neglecting the centre, in beating the bounds of the parish instead of fortifying the citadel. The liberalism of St. Paul was not latitudinarian, because it was inspired by a vital principle which served as the centre of all his teaching. He preached liberty and comprehensiveness, because he had first preached Christ. In Christ he found at once a bond of union and an escape from narrowness. The middle wall of partition was broken down, not by a Vandal armed with nothing better than the besom of destruction, but by the Founder of a new kingdom, who could dispense with artificial restrictions because He could draw all men unto Himself.

Unfortunately the returned captives at Jerusalem did not feel conscious of any such spiritual centre of unity. They might have found it in their grandly simple creed, in their faith in God. But their absorption in sacrificial ritual and its adjuncts shows that they were too much under the influence of religious externalism. This being the case, they could only preserve the purity of their communion by carefully guarding its gates. It is pitiable to see that they could find no better means of doing this than the harsh test of racial integrity. Their action in this matter fostered a pride of birth which was as injurious to their own better lives as it was to the extension of their religion in the world. But so long as they were incapable of a larger method, if they had accepted counsels of liberalism they would have lost themselves and their mission. Looking at the positive side of their mission, we see how the Jews were called to bear witness to the great principle of separateness. This principle

is as essential to Christianity as it was to Judaism. The only difference is that with the more spiritual faith it takes a more spiritual form. The people of God must ever be consecrated to God, and therefore separate from sin, separate from the world—separate unto God.

NOTE.—For the section iv. 6-23 see Chapter XIV. This section is marked by a change of language; the writer adopts Aramaic at iv. 8, and he continues in that language down to vi. 18. The decree of Artaxerxes in vii. 12-26 is also in Aramaic.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSION OF PROPHECY.

EZRA v. 1, 2.

THE work of building the temple at Jerusalem, which had been but nominally commenced in the reign of Cyrus, when it was suddenly arrested before the death of that king, and which had not been touched throughout the reigns of the two succeeding kings, Cambyses and Pseudo-Bardes, was taken up in earnest in the second year of Darius, the son of Hystaspes (B. C. 521). The disorders of the empire were then favourable to local liberty. Cambyses committed suicide during a revolt of his army on the march to meet the Pretender who had assumed the name of his murdered brother, Bardes. Seven months later the usurper was assassinated in his palace by some of the Persian nobles. Darius, who was one of the conspirators, ascended the throne in the midst of confusion and while the empire seemed to be falling to pieces. Elam, the old home of the house of Cyrus, revolted; Syria revolted; Babylon revolted twice, and was twice taken by siege. For a time the king's writ could not run in Palestine. But it was not on account of these political changes that the Jews returned to their work. The relaxing of the supreme authority had left them more than ever at the mercy of their unfriendly neighbours. The generous disposition of Darius might have led them to regard him as a second Cyrus, and his religion might have encouraged them to hope that he would be favourable to them, for Darius was a monotheist, a worshipper of Ormazd. But they recommenced their work without making any appeal to the Great King and without receiving any permission from him, and they did this when he was far too busy fighting for his throne to attend to the troubles of a small, distant city.

We must look in another direction for the impetus which started the Jews again upon their work. Here we come upon one of the most striking facts in the history of Israel, nay, one of the greatest phenomena in the spiritual experience of mankind. The voice of prophecy was heard among the ruins of Jerusalem. The Cassandra-like notes of Jeremiah had died away more than half a century before. Then Ezekiel had seen his fantastic visions, "a captive by the river of Chebar," and the Second Isaiah had sounded his trumpet-blast in the East, summoning the exiles to a great hope; but as yet no prophet had appeared among the pilgrims on their return to Jerusalem. We cannot account for the sudden outburst of prophecy. It is a work of the Spirit that breathes like the wind, coming we know not how. We can hear its sound; we can perceive

the fact. But we cannot trace its origin, or determine its issues. It is born in mystery and it passes into mystery. If it is true that "*poeta nascitur, non fit*," much more must we affirm that the prophet is no creature of human culture. He may be cultivated, after God has made him; he cannot be manufactured by any human machinery. No "School of the Prophets" ever made a true prophet. Many of the prophets never came near any such institution; some of them distinctly repudiated the professional "order." The lower prophets with which the Northern Kingdom once swarmed were just dervishes who sang and danced and worked themselves into a frenzy before the altars on the high places; these men were quite different from the truly inspired messengers of God. Their craft could be taught, and their sacred colleges recruited to any extent from the ranks of fanaticism. But the rare, austere souls that spoke with the authority of the Most High came in a totally different manner. When there was no prophet and when visions were rare men could only wait for God to send the hoped-for guide; they could not call him into existence. The appearance of an inspired soul is always one of the marvels of history. Great men of the second rank may be the features of their age. But it is given to the few of the very first order to be independent of their age, to confront it and oppose it if need be, perhaps to turn its current and shape its course.

The two prophets who now proclaimed their message in Jerusalem appeared at a time of deep depression. They were not borne on the crest of a wave of a religious revival, as its spokesmen to give it utterance. Pagan orators and artists flourished in an Augustan age. The Hebrew prophets came when the circumstances of society were least favourable. Like painters arising to adorn a dingy city, like poets singing of summer in the winter of discontent, like flowers in the wilderness, like wells in the desert, they brought life and strength and gladness to the helpless and despondent, because they came from God. The literary form of their work reflected the civilisation of their day, but there was on it a light that never shone on sea or shore, and this they knew to be the light of God. We never find a true religious revival springing from the spirit of the age. Such a revival always begins in one or two choice souls—in a Moses, a Samuel, a John the Baptist, a St. Bernard, a Jonathan Edwards, a Wesley, a Newman. Therefore it is vain for weary watchers to scan the horizon for signs of the times in the hope that some general improvement of society or some widespread awakening of the Church will usher in a better future. This is no reason for discouragement, however. It rather warns us not to despise the day of small things. When once the spring of living water breaks out, though it flows at first in a little brook, there is hope that it may swell into a great river.

The situation is the more remarkable since the first of the two prophets was an old man, who even seems to have known the first temple before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.* Haggai is called simply "the prophet," perhaps because his father's name was not known, but more likely because he himself had attained so much eminence that the title was given to him *par excellence*. Still this may only apply to the descriptions of him in the age of the chronicler. There is no

* Hag. i. 1, ii. 0.

indication that he prophesied in his earlier days. He was probably one of the captives who had been carried away to Babylon in his childhood, and who had returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. Yet all this time and during the first year of his return, as far as we know, he was silent. At length, in extreme old age, he burst out into inspired utterance—one of Joel's old men who were to dream dreams,* like John the Evangelist, whose greatest work dates from his last years, and Milton, who wrote his great epic when affliction seemed to have ended his life-work. He must have been brooding over the bitter disappointment in which the enthusiasm of the returned captives had been quenched. It could not be God's will that they should be thus mocked and deceived in their best hopes. True faith is not a will-o'-the-wisp that lands its followers in a dreary swamp. The hope of Israel is no mirage. For God is faithful. Therefore the despair of the Jews must be wrong.

We have a few fragments of the utterances of Haggai preserved for us in the Old Testament Canon. They are so brief and bald and abrupt as to suggest the opinion that they are but notes of his discourses, mere outlines of what he really said. As they are preserved for us they certainly convey no idea of wealth of poetic imagination or richness of oratorical colouring. But Haggai may have possessed none of these qualities, and yet his words may have had a peculiar force of their own. He is a reflective man. The long meditation of years has taught him the value of thoughtfulness. The burden of his message is "Consider your ways."† In short, incisive utterances he arrests attention and urges consideration. But the outcome of all he has to say is to cheer the drooping spirits of his fellow-citizens, and urge on the rebuilding of the temple with confident promises of its great future. For the most part his inspiration is simple, but it is searching, and we perceive the triumphant hopefulness of the true prophet in the promise that the latter glory of the house of God shall be greater than the former.‡

Haggai began to prophesy on the first day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius.§ So effective were his words that Zerubbabel and his companions were at once roused from the lethargy of despair, and within three weeks the masons and carpenters were again at work on the temple.|| Two months after Haggai had broken the long silence of prophecy in Jerusalem Zechariah appeared. He was of a very different stamp; he was one of the young men who see visions. Familiar with the imagery of Babylonian art, he wove its symbols into the pictures of his own exuberant fancy. Moreover, Zechariah was a priest. Thus, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he united the two rival tendencies which had confronted one another in marked antagonism during the earlier periods of the history of Israel. Henceforth the brief return of propheticism, its soft after-glow among the restored people, is in peaceable alliance with priestism. The last prophet, Malachi, even exhorts the Jews to pay the priests their dues of tithe. Zechariah, like Haggai, urges on the work of building the temple.

Thus the chronicler's brief note on the appearance of two prophets at Jerusalem, and the electrical effect of their message, is a striking illustra-

* Joel ii. 28. † Hag. i. 5, 7. ‡ Hag. ii. 0.

§ Hag. i. 1. || Hag. ii. 1 seq.

tion of the mission of prophecy. That mission has been strangely misapprehended by succeeding ages. Prophets have been treated as miraculous conjurers, whose principal business consisted in putting together elaborate puzzles, perfectly unintelligible to their contemporaries, which the curious of later times were to decipher by the light of events. The prophets themselves formed no such idle estimate of their work, nor did their contemporaries assign to them this quaint and useless rôle. Though these men were not the creatures of their times, they lived for their times. Haggai and Zechariah, as the chronicler emphatically puts it, "prophesied to the Jews that were in Jerusalem, . . . *even unto them.*" The object of their message was immediate and quite practical—to stir up the despondent people and urge them to build the temple—and it was successful in accomplishing that end. As prophets of God they necessarily touched on eternal truths. They were not mere opportunists; their strength lay in the grasp of fundamental principles. This is why their teaching still lives, and is of lasting use for the Church in all ages. But in order to understand that teaching we must first of all read it in its original historical setting, and discover its direct bearing on contemporary needs.

Now the question arises, In what way did these prophets of God help the temple-builders? The fragments of their utterances which we possess enable us to answer this question. Zerubbabel was a disappointing leader. Such a man was far below the expected Messiah, although high hopes may have been set upon him when he started at the head of the caravan of pilgrims from Babylon. Cyrus may have known him better, and with the instinct of a king in reading men may have entrusted the lead to the heir of the Jewish throne, because he saw there would be no possibility of a dangerous rebellion resulting from the act of confidence. Haggai's encouragement to Zerubbabel to "be strong" is in a tone that suggests some weakness on the part of the Jewish leader. Both the prophets thought that he and his people were too easily discouraged. It was a part of the prophetic insight to look below the surface and discover the real secret of failure. The Jews set down their failure to adverse circumstances; the prophets attributed it to the character and conduct of the people and their leaders. Weak men commonly exercise their inactivity by reciting their difficulties, when stronger men would only regard those difficulties as furnishing an occasion for extra exertion. That is a most superficial view of history which regards it as wholly determined by circumstances. No great nation ever arose on such a principle. The Greeks who perished at Thermopylæ within a few years of the times we are now considering are honoured by all the ages as heroes of patriotism just because they refused to bow to circumstances. Now the courage which patriots practised in pagan lands is urged upon the Jews by their prophets from higher considerations. They are to see that they are weak and cowardly when they sit in dumb despair, crushed by the weight of external opposition. They have made a mistake in putting their trust in princes.* They have relied too much on Zerubbabel and too little on God. The failure of the arm of flesh should send them back to the never-failing outstretched arm of the Almighty.

* Psalm cxviii. 8, 9.

Have we not met with the same mistaken discouragement and the same deceptive excuses for it in the work of the Church, in missionary enterprises, in personal lives? Every door is shut against the servant of God but one, the door of prayer. Forgetting this, and losing sight of the key of faith that would unlock it, he sits, like Elijah by Kerith, the picture of abject wretchedness. His great enterprises are abandoned because he thinks the opposition to them is insuperable. He forgets that, though his own forces are small, he is the envoy of the King of kings, who will not suffer him to be worsted if only he appeals to Heaven for fresh supplies. A dead materialism lies like a leaden weight on the heart of the Church, and she has not faith enough to shake it off and claim her great inheritance in all the spiritual wealth of the Unseen. Many a man cries, like Jacob, "All these things are against me," not perceiving that, even if they are, no number of "things" should be permitted to check the course of one who looks above and beyond what is seen, and therefore only temporal, to the eternal resources of God.

This was the message of Zechariah to Zerubbabel: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head stone with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it!"*

Here, then, is the secret of the sudden revival of activity on the part of the Jews after they had been sitting for years in dumb apathy, gazing hopelessly on the few stones that had been laid among the ruins of the old temple. It was not the returning favour of the court under Darius, it was not the fame of the house of David, it was not the priestly dignity of the family of Zadok that awakened the slumbering zeal of the Jews; the movement began in an unofficial source, and it passed to the people through unofficial channels. It commenced in the meditations of a calm thinker; it was furthered by the visions of a rapt seer. This is a clear indication of the fact that the world is ruled by mind and spirit, not merely by force and authority. Thought and imagination lie at the springs of action. In the heart of it history is moulded by ideas. "Big battalions," "the sinews of war," "blood and iron," are phrases that suggest only the most external and therefore the most superficial causes. Beneath them are the *ideas* that govern all they represent.

Further, the influence of the prophets shows that the ideas which have most vitality and vigour are moral and spiritual in character. All thoughts are influential in proportion as they take possession of the minds and hearts of men and women. There is power in conceptions of science, philosophy, politics, sociology. But the ideas that touch people to the quick, the ideas that stir the hidden depths of consciousness and rouse the slumbering energies of life, are those that make straight for the conscience. Thus the two prophets exposed the shame of indolence; they rallied their gloomy fellow-citizens by high appeals to the sense of right.

Again, this influence was immensely strengthened by its relation to God. The prophets were more than moralists. The meditations of Marcus Aurelius could not touch any people as the considerations of the calm Haggai touched the Jews, for the older prophet, as well as the more rous-

* Zech. iv. 6, 7.

ing Zechariah, found the spell of his message in its revelation of God. He made the Jews perceive that they were not deserted by Jehovah; and directly they felt that God was with them in their work the weak and timid citizens were able to quit them like men. The irresistible might of Cromwell's Ironsides at Marston Moor came from the unwavering faith in their battle-cry, "The Lord of Hosts is with us!" General Gordon's immeasurable courage is explained when we read his letters and diaries, and see how he regarded himself as simply an instrument through whom God wrought. Here, too, is the strong side of Calvinism.

Then this impression of the power and presence of God in their destinies was deepened in the Jews by the manifest Divine authority with which the prophets spake. They prophesied "in the name of the God of Israel"—the one God of the people of both kingdoms now united in their representatives. Their "Thus saith the Lord" was the powder that drove the shot of their message through the toughest hide of apathy. Except to a Platonist, ideas are impossible apart from the mind that thinks them. Now the Jews, as well as their prophets, felt that the great ideas of prophecy could not be the products of pure human thinking. The sublime character, the moral force, the superb hopefulness of these ideas proclaimed their Divine origin. As it is the mission of the prophet to speak for God, so it is the voice of God in His inspired messenger that awakes the dead and gives strength to the weak.

This ultimate source of prophecy accounts for its unique character of hopefulness, and that in turn makes it a powerful encouragement for the weak and depressed people to whom it is sent. Wordsworth tells us that we live by "admiration, love, and hope." If one of these three sources of vitality is lost, life itself shrinks and fades. The man whose hope has fled has no lustre in his eye, no accent in his voice, no elasticity in his tread; by his dull and listless attitude he declares that the life has gone out of him. But the ultimate end of prophecy is to lead up to a gospel, and the meaning of the word "gospel" is just that there is a message from God bringing hope to the despairing. By inspiring a new hope this message kindles a new life.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW DIFFICULTIES MET IN A NEW SPIRIT.

EZRA v. 3-vi. 5.

It is in keeping with the character of his story of the returned Jews throughout, that no sooner has the chronicler let a ray of sunshine fall on his page—in his brief notice of the inspiring mission of the two prophets—than he is compelled to plunge his narrative again into gloom. But he shows that there was now a new spirit in the Jews, so that they were prepared to meet opposition in a more manly fashion. If their jealous neighbours had been able to paralyse their efforts for years, it was only to be expected that a revival of energy in Jerusalem should provoke an increase of antagonism abroad, and doubtless the Jews were prepared for this. Still it was not a little alarming to

learn that the infection of the anti-Jewish temper had spread over a wide area. The original opposition had come from the Samaritans. But in this later time the Jews were questioned by the Satrap of the whole district east of the Euphrates—"the governor beyond the river,"* as the chronicler styles him, describing his territory as it would be regarded officially from the standpoint of Babylon. His Aramaic name, Tattenai, shows that he was not a Persian, but a native Syrian, appointed to his own province, according to the Persian custom. This man and one Shethar-bozenai, whom we may assume to be his secretary, must have been approached by the colonists in such a way that their suspicions were roused. Their action was at first only just and reasonable. They asked the Jews to state on what authority they were rebuilding the temple with its massive walls. In the Hebrew Bible the answer of the Jews is so peculiar as to suggest a corruption of the text. It is in the first person plural—"Then said *we* unto them," etc.† In the Septuagint the third person is substituted—"Then said *they*," etc., and this rendering is followed in the Syriac and Arabic versions. It would require a very slight alteration in the Hebrew text. The Old Testament Revisers have retained the first person—setting the alternative reading in the margin. If we keep to the Hebrew text as it stands, we must conclude that we have here a fragment from some contemporary writer which the chronicler has transcribed literally. But then it seems confusing. Some have shaped the sentence into a direct statement, so that in reply to the inquiry for their authority the Jews give the names of the builders. How is this an answer? Possibly the name of Zerubbabel, who had been appointed governor of Jerusalem by Cyrus, could be quoted as an authority. And yet the weakness of his position was so evident that very little would be gained in this way, for it would be the right of the Satrap to inquire into the conduct of the local governor. If, however, we read the sentence in the third person, it will contain a further question from the Satrap and his secretary, inquiring for the names of the leaders in the work at Jerusalem. Such an inquiry threatened danger to the feeble Zerubbabel.

The seriousness of the situation is recognised by the grateful comment of the chronicler, who here remarks that "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews."‡ It is the peculiarity of even the driest records of Scripture that the writers are always ready to detect the presence of God in history. This justifies us in describing the Biblical narratives as "sacred history," in contrast to the so-called "secular history" of such authors as Herodotus and Livy. The narrow conception of the difference is to think that God was with the Jews, while He left the Greeks and Romans and the whole Gentile world to their fate without any recognition or interference on His part. Such a view is most dishonouring to God, who is thus regarded as no better than a tribal divinity, and not as the Lord of heaven and earth. It is directly contradicted by the Old Testament historians, for they repeatedly refer to the influence of God on great world monarchies. No doubt a claim to the Divine graciousness as the peculiar privilege of Israel is to be seen in the Old Testament. As far as this was perverted into a selfish

* Ezra v. 3.

† Ezra v. 4.

‡ Ezra v. 5.

desire to confine the blessings of God to the Jews, it was vigorously rebuked in the Book of Jonah. Still it is indisputable that those who truly sought God's grace, acknowledged His authority, and obeyed His will, must have enjoyed privileges which such of the heathen as St. Paul describes in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans could not share. Thus the chronicler writes as though the leaders of the Jews in their difficulties were the special objects of the Divine notice. The eye of God was on *them*, distinctively. God is spoken of as *their* God. They were men who knew, trusted, and honoured God, and at the present moment they were loyally carrying out the direction of God's prophets. All this is special. Nevertheless, it remains true that the chief characteristic of Biblical history is its recognition of the presence of God in the affairs of mankind generally, and this applies to all nations, although it is most marked among those nations in which God is known and obeyed.

The peculiar form of Providence which is brought before us in the present instance is the Divine observation. It is difficult to believe that, just as the earth is visible to the stars throughout the day while the stars are invisible to the earth, we are always seen by God although we never see Him. When circumstances are adverse—and these circumstances are only too visible—it is hard not to doubt that God is still watching all that happens to us, because although we cry out in our agony no answer breaks the awful silence and no hand comes out of the clouds to hold us up. It seems as though our words were lost in the void. But that is only the impression of the moment. If we read history with the large vision of the Hebrew chronicler, can we fail to perceive that this is not a God-deserted world? In the details His presence may not be discerned, but when we stand back from the canvas and survey the whole picture, it flashes upon us like a sunbeam spread over the whole landscape. Many a man can recognise the same happy truth in the course of his own life as he looks back over a wide stretch of it, although while he was passing through his perplexing experience the thicket of difficulties intercepted his vision of the heavenly light.

Now it is a most painful result of unbelief and cowardice working on the consciousness of guilt lurking in the breast of every sinful man, that the "eye of God" has become an object of terror to the imagination of so many people. Poor Hagar's exclamation of joy and gratitude has been sadly misapprehended. Discovering to her amazement that she is not alone in the wilderness, the friendless, heart-broken slave-girl looks up through her tears with a smile of sudden joy on her face, and exclaims, "Thou God seest me!"* And yet her happy words have been held over terrified children as a menace! That is a false thought of God which makes any of His children shrink from His presence, except they are foul and leprous with sin, and even then their only refuge is, as St. Augustine found, to come to the very God against whom they have sinned. We need not fear lest some day God may make a miserable discovery about us. He knows the worst, already. Then it is a ground of hope that while He sees all the evil in us God still loves His children—that He does not

*Gen. xvi. 13.

love us, as it were, under a misapprehension. Our Lord's teaching on the subject of the Divine observation is wholly reassuring. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father's notice, the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and the exhortation based on these facts is not "Beware of the all-seeing Eye!" but "Fear not."*

The limitation of the chronicler's remark is significant. He speaks of the *eye* of God, not of God's mighty hand, nor of His outstretched arm. It was not yet the time for action; but God was watching the course of events. Or if God was acting, His procedure was so secret that no one could perceive it. Meanwhile it was enough to know that God was observing everything that was transpiring. He could not be thought of as an Epicurean divinity, surveying the agony and tragedy of human life with a stony gaze of supercilious indifference, as the proud patrician looks down on the misery of the dim multitude. For God to see is for God to care; and for God to care is for God to help. But this simple statement of the Divine observation maintains a reserve as to the method of the action of God, and it is perhaps the best way of describing Providence so that it shall not appear to come into collision with the free will of man.

The chronicler distinctly associates the Divine observation with the continuance of the Jews in their work. Because the eye of God was on them their enemies could not cause them to cease until the matter had been referred to Darius and his answer received. This may be explained by some unrecorded juncture of circumstances which arrested the action of the enemies of Israel; by the overruling Providence according to which the Satrap was led to perceive that it would not be wise or just for him to act until he had orders from the king; or by the new zeal with which the two prophets had inspired the Jews, so that they took up a bold position in the calm confidence that God was with them. Account for it as we may, we see that in the present case the Jews were not hindered in their work. It is enough for faith to perceive the result of the Divine care without discovering the process.

The letter of the Satrap and his secretary embodies the reply of the Jews to the official inquiries, and that reply clearly and boldly sets forth their position. One or two points in it call for passing notice.

In the first place, the Jews describe themselves as "servants of the God of heaven and earth." Thus they start by mentioning their religious status, and not any facts about their race or nation. This was wise, and calculated to disarm suspicion as to their motives; and it was strictly true, for the Jews were engaged in a distinctly religious work. Then the way in which they describe their God is significant. They do not use the national name "Jehovah." That would serve no good purpose with men who did not know or acknowledge their special faith. They say nothing to localise and limit their idea of God. To build the temple of a tribal god would be to further the ends of the tribe, and this the jealous neighbours of the Jews supposed they were doing. By the larger title the Jews lift their work out of all connection with petty personal ends. In doing so they

*Luke xii. 7.

confess their true faith. These Jews of the return were pure monotheists. They believed that there was one God who ruled over heaven and earth.

In the second place, with just a touch of national pride, pathetic under the circumstances, they remind the Persians that their nation has seen better days, and that they are rebuilding the temple which a great king has set up. Thus, while they would appeal to the generosity of the authorities, they would claim their respect, with the dignity of men who know they have a great history. In view of this the next statement is most striking. Reciting the piteous story of the overthrow of their nation, the destruction of their temple, and the captivity of their fathers, the Jews ascribe it all to their national sins. The prophets had long ago discerned the connection of cause and effect in these matters. But while it was only the subject of prediction, the proud people indignantly rejected the prophetic view. Since then their eyes had been opened by the painful purging of dire national calamities. One great proof that the nation had profited by the fiery ordeal of the captivity is that it now humbly acknowledged the sins which had brought it into the furnace. Trouble is illuminating. While it humbles men, it opens their eyes. It is better to see clearly in a lowly place than to walk blindfold on perilous heights.

After this explanatory preamble, the Jews appeal to the edict of Cyrus, and describe their subsequent conduct as a direct act of obedience to that edict. Thus they plead their cause as loyal subjects of the Persian empire. In consequence of this appeal, the Satrap and his secretary request the king to order a search to be made for the edict, and to reply according to his pleasure.

The chronicler then proceeds to relate how the search was prosecuted, first among the royal archives at Babylon—in "the house of books."* One of Mr. Layard's most valuable discoveries was that of a set of chambers in a palace at Koyunjik, the whole of the floor of which was covered more than a foot deep with terra-cotta tablets inscribed with public records.† A similar collection has been recently found in the neighbourhood of Babylon.‡ In some such record-house the search for the edict of Cyrus was made. But the cylinder or tablet on which it was written could not be found. The searchers then turned their attention to the roll-chamber at the winter palace of Ecbatana, and there a parchment or papyrus copy of the edict was discovered.

One of the items of this edict as it is now given is somewhat surprising, for it was not named in the earlier account in the first chapter of the Book of Ezra. This is a description of the dimensions of the temple which was to be built at Jerusalem. It must have been not a little humiliating to the Jews to have to take these measurements for a foreign sovereign, a heathen, a polytheist. Possibly, however, they had been first supplied to the king by the Jews, so that the builders might have the more explicit permission for what they were about to undertake. On the other hand, it may be that we have here the outside dimensions, beyond

which the Jews were not permitted to go, and that the figures represent a limit for their ambitions. In either case the appearance of the details in the decree at all gives us a vivid conception of the thoroughness of the Persian autocracy, and of the perfect subjection of the Jews to Cyrus.

Some difficulty has been felt in interpreting the figures because they seem to point to a larger building than Solomon's temple. The height is given at sixty cubits, and the breadth at the same measurement. But Solomon's temple was only thirty cubits high, and its total breadth, with its side-chambers, was not more than forty cubits.* When we consider the comparative poverty of the returned Jews, the difficulties under which they laboured, the disappointment of the old men who had seen the former building, and the short time within which the work was finished—only four years †—it is difficult to believe that it was more than double the size of the glorious fabric for which David collected materials, on which Solomon lavished the best resources of his kingdom, and which even then took many more years in building. Perhaps the height includes the terrace on which the temple was built, and the breadth of the temple adjuncts. Perhaps the temple never attained the dimensions authorised by the edict. But even if the full size were reached, the building would not have approached the size of the stupendous temples of the great ancient empires. Apart from its courts Solomon's temple was certainly a small building. It was not the size, but the splendour of that famous fabric that led to its being regarded with so much admiration and pride.

The most remarkable architectural feature of all these ancient temples was the enormous magnitude of the stones with which they were built. At the present day the visitor to Jerusalem gazes with wonder at huge blocks, all carefully chiselled and accurately fitted together, where parts of the old foundations may still be discerned. The narrative in Ezra makes several references to the great stones—"stones of rolling" ‡ it calls them, because they could only be moved on rollers. Even the edict mentions "three rows of great stones," together with "a row of new timber," §—an obscure phrase, which perhaps means that the walls were to be of the thickness of three stones, while the timber formed an inner panneling; or that there were to be three storeys of stone and one of wood; or yet another possibility, that on three tiers of stone a tier of wood was to be laid. In the construction of the inner court of Solomon's temple this third method seems to have been followed, for we read, "And he built the inner court with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams." || However we regard it—and the plan is confusing and a matter of much discussion—the impression is one of massive strength. The jealous observers noted especially the building of "the wall" of the temple. ¶ So solid a piece of work might be turned into a fortification. But no such end seems to have been contemplated by the Jews. They built solidly because they wished their work to stand. It was to be no temporary tabernacle; but a permanent temple designed to endure to posterity. We are struck with the massive character of the Roman remains

* Ezra vi. 1.

† "Nineveh and Babylon," p. 345.

‡ Bertheau-Ryssel, "Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch," p. 74.

* 1 Kings vi. 2.

† Ezra iv. 24, vi. 15.

‡ Ezra v. 8.

§ Ezra vi. 4.

|| 1 Kings vi. 36.

¶ Ezra v. 9.

in Britain, which show that when the great world conquerors took possession of our island they settled down in it and regarded it as a permanent property. The same grand consciousness of permanence must have been in the minds of the brave builders who planted this solid structure at Jerusalem in the midst of troubles and threatenings of disaster. To-day, when we look at the stupendous Phœnician and Jewish architecture of Syria, we are struck with admiration at the patience, the perseverance, the industry, the thoroughness, the largeness of idea that characterised the work of these old-world builders. Surely it must have been the outcome of a similar tone and temper of mind. The modern mind may be more nimble, as the modern work is more expeditious. But for steadfastness of purpose the races that wrought so patiently at great enduring works seem to have excelled anything we can attain. And yet here and there a similar characteristic is observable—as, for example, in the self-restraint and continuous toil of Charles Darwin, when he collected facts for twenty years before he published the book which embodied the conclusion he had drawn from his wide induction.

The solid character of the temple-building is further suggestive, because the work was all done for the service of God. Such work should never be hasty, because God has the leisure of eternity in which to inspect it. It is labour lost to make it superficial and showy without any real strength, because God sees behind all pretences. Moreover, the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is. We grow impatient of toil; we weary for quick results; we forget that in building the spiritual temple strength to endure the shocks of temptation and to outlast the decay of time is more valued by God than the gourd-like display which is the sensation of the hour, only to perish as quickly as it has sprung up.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

EZRA vi. 6-22.

THE chronicler's version of the edict in which Darius replies to the application of the Satrap Tattenai is so very friendly to the Jews that questions have been raised as to its genuineness. We cannot but perceive that the language has been modified in its transition from the Persian terra-cotta cylinder to the roll of the Hebrew chronicler, because the Great King could not have spoken of the religion of Israel in the absolute phrases recorded in the Book of Ezra. But when all allowance has been made for verbal alterations in translation and transcription, the substance of the edict is still sufficiently remarkable. Darius fully endorses the decree of Cyrus, and even exceeds that gracious ordinance in generosity. He curtly bids Tattenai "let the work of the house of God alone." He even orders the Satrap to provide for this work out of the revenues of his district. The public revenues are also to be used in maintaining the Jewish priests and in providing them with sacrifices—"that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savour unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and of his sons."*

* Ezra vi. 10.

On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that Darius sent a reply that was favourable to the Jews, for all opposition to their work was stopped, and means were found for completing the temple and maintaining the costly ritual. The Jews gratefully acknowledged the influence of God on the heart of Darius. Surely they were right in doing so. They were gifted with the true insight of faith. It is no contradiction to add that—in the earthly sphere and among the human motives through which God works, by guiding them—what we know of Darius will account to some extent for his friendliness towards the Jews. He was a powerful ruler, and when he had quelled the serious rebellions that had broken out in several quarters of his kingdom, he organised his government in a masterly style with a new and thorough system of satrapies.* Then he pushed his conquests farther afield, and subsequently came into contact with Europe, although ultimately to suffer a humiliating defeat in the famous battle of Marathon. In fact, we may regard him as the real founder of the Persian Empire. Cyrus, though his family was of Persian origin, was originally a king of Elam, and he had to conquer Persia before he could rule over it; but Darius was a prince of the Persian royal house. Unlike Cyrus, he was at least a monotheist, if not a thoroughgoing Zoroastrian. The inscription on his tomb at *Naksh-i-Rustem* attributes all that he has achieved to the favour of Ormazd. "When Ormazd saw this earth filled with revolt and civil war, then did he entrust it to me. He made me king, and I am king. By the grace of Ormazd I have restored the earth." "All that I have done I have done through the grace of Ormazd. Ormazd brought help to me until I had completed my work. May Ormazd protect from evil me and my house and this land. Therefore I pray unto Ormazd, May Ormazd grant this to me." "O Man! May the command of Ormazd not be despised by thee: leave not the path of right, sin not!"† Such language implies a high religious conception of life. Although it is a mistake to suppose that the Jews had borrowed anything of importance from Zoroastrianism during the captivity or in the time of Cyrus—inasmuch as that religion was then scarcely known in Babylon—when it began to make itself felt there, its similarity to Judaism could not fail to strike the attention of observant men. It taught the existence of one supreme God—though it co-ordinated the principles of good and evil in His being, as two subsidiary existences, in a manner not allowed by Judaism—and it encouraged prayer. It also insisted on the dreadful evil of sin and urged men to strive after purity, with an earnestness that witnessed to the blending of morality with religion to an extent unknown elsewhere except among the Jews. Thus, if Darius were a Zoroastrian, he would have two powerful links of sympathy with the Jews in opposition to the corrupt idolatry of the heathen—the spiritual monotheism and the earnest morality that were common to the two religions. And in any case it is not altogether surprising to learn that when he read the letter of the people who described themselves as "the servants of the God of heaven and earth," the worshipper of Ormazd should have sympathised with them rather than with their semi-pagan opponents. Moreover, Darius must have known something

* Herodotus, iii. 89. † Sayce, Introduction, pp. 57, 58.

of Judaism from the Jews of Babylon. Then, he was restoring the temples of Ormazd which his predecessor had destroyed. But the Jews were engaged in a very similar work; therefore the king, in his antipathy to the idolaters, would give no sanction to a heathenish opposition to the building of the temple at Jerusalem by a people who believed in One Spiritual God.

Darius was credited with a generous disposition, which would incline him to a kindly treatment of his subjects. Of course we must interpret this according to the manners of the times. For example, in his edict about the temple-building he gives orders that any one of his subjects who hinders the work is to be impaled on a beam from his own house, the site of which is to be used for a refuse heap.* Darius also invokes the God of the Jews to destroy any foreign king or people who should attempt to alter or destroy the temple at Jerusalem. The savagery of his menace is in harmony with his conduct when, according to Herodotus, he impaled *three thousand* men at Babylon after he had recaptured the city.† Those were cruel times—Herodotus tells us that the besieged Babylonians had previously strangled their own wives when they were running short of provisions.‡ The imprecation with which the edict closes may be matched by one on the inscription of Darius at *Behistun*, where the Great King invokes the curse of Ormazd on any persons who should injure the tablet. The ancient despotic world-rulers had no conception of the modern virtue of humanitarianism. It is sickening to picture to ourselves their methods of government. The enormous misery involved is beyond calculation. Still we may believe that the worst threats were not always carried out; we may make some allowance for Oriental extravagance of language. And yet, after all has been said, the conclusion of the edict of Darius presents to us a kind of state support for religion which no one would defend in the present day. In accepting the help of the Persian sovereign the Jews could not altogether dissociate themselves from his way of government. Nevertheless it is fair to remember that they had not asked for his support. They had simply desired to be left unmolested.

Tattenai loyally executed the decree of Darius; the temple-building proceeded without further hindrance, and the work was completed about four years after its recommencement at the instigation of the prophet Haggai. Then came the joyous ceremony of the dedication. All the returned exiles took part in it. They are named collectively "the children of Israel"—another indication that the restored Jews were regarded by the chronicler as the representatives of the whole united nation as this had existed under David and Solomon before the great schism. Similarly there are *twelve* he-goats for the sin-offering—for the twelve tribes.§ Several classes of Israelites are enumerated,—first the clergy in their two orders, the priests and the Levites, always kept distinct in Ezra; next the laity, who are described as "the children of the captivity." The limitation of this phrase is significant. In the dedication of the temple the Israelites of the land who were mixed up with the heathen people are not included. Only the returned exiles had built the temple; only they were associated in the dedication of it. Here is

a strictly guarded Church. Access to it is through the one door of an unimpeachable genealogical record. Happily the narrowness of this arrangement is soon to be broken through. In the meanwhile it is to be observed that it is just the people who have endured the hardship of separation from their beloved Jerusalem to whom the privilege of rejoicing in the completion of the new temple is given. The tame existence that cannot fathom the depths of misery is incapable of soaring to the heights of bliss. The joy of the harvest is for those who have sown in tears.

The work was finished, and yet its very completion was a new commencement. The temple was now dedicated—literally "initiated"—for the future service of God.

This dedication is an instance of the highest use of man's work. The fruit of years of toil and sacrifice is given to God. Whatever theories we may have about the consecration of a building—and surely every building that is put to a sacred use is in a sense a sacred building—there can be no question as to the rightness of dedication. This is just the surrender to God of what was built for Him out of the resources that he had supplied. A dedication service is a solemn act of transfer by which a building is given over to the use of God. We may save it from narrowness if we do not limit it to places of public assembly. The home where the family altar is set up, where day by day prayer is offered, and where the common round of domestic duties is elevated and consecrated by being faithfully discharged as in the sight of God, is a true sanctuary; it too, like the Jerusalem temple, has its "Holy of Holies." Therefore when a family enters a new house, or when two young lives cross the threshold of what is to be henceforth their "home," there is as true a ground for a solemn act of dedication as in the opening of a great temple. A prophet declared that "Holiness to the Lord" was to characterise the very vessels of household use in Jerusalem.* It may lift some of the burden of drudgery which presses on people who are compelled to spend their time in common house-toil, for them to perceive that they may become priests and priestesses ministering at the altar even in their daily work. In the same spirit truly devout men of business will dedicate their shops, their factories, their offices, the tools of their work, and the enterprises in which they engage, so that all may be regarded as belonging to God, and only to be used as His will dictates. Behind every such act of dedication there must be a prior act of self-consecration, without which the gift of any mere thing to God is but an insult to the Father who only seeks the hearts of His children. Nay, without this a real gift of any kind is impossible. But the people who have first given their own selves to the Lord are prepared for all other acts of surrender.

According to the custom of their ritual, the Jews signalled the dedication of the temple by the offering of sacrifices. Even with the help of the king's bounty these were few in number compared with the lavish holocausts that were offered in the ceremony of dedicating Solomon's temple.† Here, in the external aspect of things, the melancholy archæologists might have found another cause for lamentation. But we are not told that any such people appeared on the pres-

* Ezra vi. 11.

† Herodotus, iii. 150.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ Ezra vi. 17.

* Zech. xiv. 21.

† 1 Kings viii. 63.

ent occasion. The Jews were not so foolish as to believe that the value of a religious movement could be ascertained by the study of architectural dimensions. Is it less misleading to attempt to estimate the spiritual prosperity of a Church by casting up the items of its balance-sheet, or tabulating the numbers of its congregations?

Looking more closely into the chronicler's description of the sacrifices, we see that these were principally of two distinct kinds.* There were some animals for burnt-offerings, which signified complete dedication, and pledged their offerers to it. Then there were other animals for sin-offerings. Thus even in the joyous dedication of the temple the sin of Israel could not be forgotten. The increasing importance of sacrifices for sin is one of the most marked features of the Hebrew ritual in its later stages of development. It shows that in the course of ages the national consciousness of sin was intensified. At the same time it makes it clear that the inexplicable conviction that without shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins was also deepened. Whether the sacrifice was regarded as a gift pleasing and propitiating an offended God, or as a substitute bearing the death-penalty of sin, or as a sacred life, bestowing, by means of its blood, new life on sinners who had forfeited their own lives; in any case, and however it was interpreted, it was felt that blood must be shed if the sinner was to be freed from guilt. Throughout the ages this awful thought was more and more vividly presented, and the mystery which the conscience of many refused to abandon continued, until there was a great revelation of the true meaning of sacrifice for sin in the one efficacious atonement of Christ.

A subsidiary point to be noticed here is that there were just *twelve* he-goats sacrificed for the twelve tribes of Israel. These were national sin-offerings, and not sacrifices for individual sinners. Under special circumstances the individual could bring his own private offering. But in this great temple function only national sins were considered. The nation had sinned as a whole for its collective sin; in a corresponding way it had its collective expiation of sin. There are always national sins which need a broad public treatment, apart from the particular acts of wickedness committed by separate men.

All this is said by the chronicler to have taken place in accordance with The Law—"As it is written in the book of Moses."† Here, as in the case of the similar statement of the chronicler in connection with the sacrifices offered when the great altar of burnt-offerings was set up,‡ we must remember, in the first place, that we have to do with the reflections of an author writing in a subsequent age, to whom the whole Pentateuch was a familiar book. But then it is also clear that before Ezra had startled the Jews by reading The Law in its later revelation there must have been some earlier form of it, not only in Deuteronomy, but also in a priestly collection of ordinances. It is a curious fact that no full directions on the division of the courses of the priests and Levites is now to be found in the Pentateuch. On this occasion the services must have been arranged on the model of the traditional priestly law. They were not left to the caprice of the hour. There was order; there was continuity; there was obedience.

The chronicler concludes this period of his

* Ezra vi. 17.

† Ezra vi. 18.

‡ Ezra iii. 2.

history by adding a paragraph* on the first observance of the Passover among the returned Jews. The national religion is now re-established, and therefore the greatest festival of the year can be enjoyed. One of the characteristics of this festival is made especially prominent in the present observance of it. The significance of the unleavened bread is pointedly noticed. All leaven is to be banished from the houses during the week of the Passover. All impurity must also be banished from the people. The priests and Levites perform the ceremonial purifications and get themselves legally clean. The franchise is enlarged; and the limitations of genealogy with which we started are dispensed with. A new class of Israelites receives a brotherly welcome in this time of general purification. In distinction from the returned captives, there are now the Israelites who "had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord." Jehovah is pointedly described as "the God of Israel"—i. e., the God of all sections of Israel.† These people cannot be proselytes from heathenism—there could be few if any such in exclusive times. They might consist of Jews who had been living in Palestine all through the captivity. Israelites also left in the Northern Kingdom, and scattered members of the ten tribes from various regions. All such are welcome on condition of a severe process of social purging. They must break off from their heathen associations. We may suspect a spirit of Jewish animosity in the ugly phrase "the filthiness of the heathen." But it was only too true that both the Canaanite and the Babylonian habits of life were disgustingly immoral. The same horrible characteristic is found among most of the heathen to-day. These degraded people are not simply benighted in theological error; they are corrupted by horrible vices. Missionary work is more than the propagation of Christian theology; it is the purging of Augean stables. St. Paul reminds us that we must put away the old leaven of sinful habits in order to partake of the Christian Passover,‡ and St. James that one feature of the religious service which is acceptable to God is to keep oneself unspotted from the world.§ Though unfortunately with the externalism of the Jews their purification too often became a mere ceremony, and their separation an ungracious race-exclusiveness, still, at the root of it, the Passover idea here brought before us is profoundly true. It is the thought that we cannot take part in a sacred feast of Divine gladness except on condition of renouncing sin. The joy of the Lord is the beatific vision of saints, the blessedness of the pure in heart who see God.

On this condition, for the people who were thus separate, the festival was a scene of great gladness. The chronicler calls attention to three things that were in the mind of the Jews, inspiring their praises throughout.¶ The first is that God was the source of their joy—"the Lord had made them joyful." There is joy in religion; and this joy springs from God. The second is that God had brought about the successful end of their labours by directly influencing the Great King. He had "turned the heart of the

* Here, at Ezra vi. 18, the author drops the Aramaic language—which was introduced at iv. 8—and resumes the Hebrew. See p. 606.

† Ezra vi. 21.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 7.

§ James i. 27.

¶ Ezra vi. 22.

king of Assyria"—a title for Darius that speaks for the authenticity of the narrative, for it represents an old form of speech for the ruler of the districts that had once belonged to the king of Assyria. The third fact is that God had been the source of strength to the Jews, so that they had been able to complete their work. The result of the Divine aid was "to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." Among His own people joy and strength from God, in the great world a providential direction of the mind of the king—this was what faith now perceived, and the perception of so wonderful a Divine activity made the Passover a festival of boundless gladness. Wherever that ancient Hebrew faith is experienced in conjunction with the Passover spirit of separation from the leaven of sin religion always is a well of joy.

CHAPTER X.

EZRA THE SCRIBE.

EZRA vii. 1-10.

ALTHOUGH the seventh chapter of Ezra begins with no other indication of time than the vague phrase "Now after these things," nearly sixty years had elapsed between the events recorded in the previous chapter and the mission of Ezra here described. We have no history of this long period. Zerubbabel passed into obscurity without leaving any trace of his later years. He had accomplished his work; the temple had been built; but the brilliant Messianic anticipations that had clustered about him at the outset of his career were to await their fulfilment in a greater Son of David, and people could afford to neglect the memory of the man who had only been a sort of temporary trustee of the hope of Israel. We shall come across indications of the effects of social trouble and religious decadence in the state of Jerusalem as she appeared at the opening of this new chapter in her history. She had not recovered a vestige of her ancient civic splendour; the puritan rigour with which the returned exiles had founded a Church among the ruins of her political greatness had been relaxed, so that the one distinguishing feature of the humble colony was in danger of melting away in easy and friendly associations with neighboring peoples. When it came, the revival of zeal did not originate in the Holy City. It sprang up among the Jews at Babylon. The earlier movement in the reign of Cyrus had arisen in the same quarter. The best of Judaism was no product of the soil of Palestine; it was an exotic. The elementary "Torah" of Moses emerged from the desert, with the learning of Egypt as its background, long before it was cultivated at Jerusalem to blossom in the reformation of Josiah. The final edition of The Law was shaped in the Valley of the Euphrates, with the literature and science of Babylon to train its editors for their great task, though it may have received its finishing touches in Jerusalem. These facts by no means obscure the glory of the inspiration and Divine character of The Law. In its theology, in its ethics, in its whole spirit and character, the Pentateuch is no more a product of Babylonian than of Egyptian ideas. Its purity and elevation of char-

acter speak all the more emphatically for its Divine origin when we take into account its corrupt surroundings; it was like a white lily growing on a dung-heap.

Still it is important to notice that the great religious revival of Ezra's time sprang up on the plains of Babylon, not among the hills of Judah. This involves two very different facts—the peculiar spiritual experience with which it commenced, and the special literary and scientific culture in the midst of which it was shaped.

First, it originated in the experience of the captivity, in humiliation and loss, and after long brooding over the meaning of the great chastisement. The exiles were like poets who "learn in suffering what they teach in song." This is apparent in the pathetic psalms of the same period, and in the writings of the visionary of Chebar, who contributed a large share to the new movement in view of the re-establishment of religious worship at Jerusalem.

Thus Jerusalem was loved by the exiles, the temple pictured in detail to the imagination of men who never trod its sacred courts, and the sacrificial system most carefully studied by people who had no means of putting it in practice. No doubt The Law now represented an intellectual rather than a concrete form of religion. It was an ideal. So long as the real is with us, it tends to depress the ideal by its material bulk and weight. The ideal is elevated in the absence of the real. Therefore the pauses of life are invaluable; by breaking through the iron routine of habit, they give us scope for the growth of larger ideas that may lead to better attainments.

Secondly, this religious revival appeared in a centre of scientific and literary culture. The Babylonians "had cultivated arithmetic, astronomy, history, chronology, geography, comparative philology, and grammar."* In astronomy they were so advanced that they had mapped out the heavens, catalogued the fixed stars, calculated eclipses, and accounted for them correctly. Their enormous libraries of terra-cotta, only now being unearthed, testify to their literary activity. The Jews brought back from Babylon the names of the months, the new form of letters used in writing their books, and many other products of the learning and science of the Euphrates. Internally the religion of Israel is solitary, pure, Divine. Externally the literary form of it, and the physical conception of the universe which it embodies, owe not a little to the light which God had bestowed upon the people of Babylon; just as Christianity, in soul and essence the religion of Jesus of Nazareth, was shaped in theory by the thought, and in discipline by the law and order, with which God had endowed the two great European races of Greece and Rome.

The chronicler introduces Ezra with a brief sketch of his origin and a bare outline of his expedition to Jerusalem.† He then next transcribes a copy of the edict of Artaxerxes which authorised the expedition.‡ After this he inserts a detailed account of the expedition from the pen of Ezra himself, so that here the narrative proceeds in the first person—though, in the abrupt manner of the whole book, without a word of warning that this is to be the case.§

* Rawlinson, "Ezra and Nehemiah," p. 2.

† Ezra vii. 1-10.

‡ Ezra vii. 11-26.

§ Ezra vii. 27-ix.

In the opening verses of Ezra vii. the chronicler gives an epitome of the genealogy of Ezra, passing over several generations, but leading up to Aaron. Ezra, then, could claim a high birth. He was a born priest of the select family of Zadok, but not of the later house of high-priests. Therefore the privileges which are assigned to that house in the Pentateuch cannot be accounted for by ascribing ignoble motives of nepotism to its publisher. Though Ezra is named "The Priest," he is more familiarly known to us as "The Scribe." The chronicler calls him "a ready scribe" (or, a scribe skilful) "in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given." Originally the title "Scribe" was used for town recorders and registrars of the census. Under the later kings of Judah, persons bearing this name were attached to the court as the writers and custodians of state documents. But these are all quite distinct from the scribes who appeared after the exile. The scribes of later days were guardians and interpreters of the written Torah, the sacred law. They appeared with the publication and adoption of the Pentateuch. They not only studied and taught this complete law; they interpreted and applied its precepts. In so doing they had to pronounce judgments of their own. Inasmuch as changing circumstances necessarily required modifications in rules of justice, while The Law could not be altered after Ezra's day, great ingenuity was required to reconcile the old law with the new decisions. Thus arose sophistical casuistry. Then in "fencing" The Law the scribes added precepts of their own to prevent men from coming near the danger of transgression.

Scribism was one of the most remarkable features of the later days of Israel. Its existence in so much prominence showed that religion had passed into a new phase, that it had assumed a literary aspect. The art of writing was known, indeed, in Egypt and Babylon before the exodus; it was even practised in Palestine among the Hittites as early as Abraham. But at first in their religious life the Jews did not give much heed to literary documents. Priestism was regulated by traditional usages rather than by written directions, and justice was administered under the kings according to custom, precedent, and equity. Quite apart from the discussion concerning the antiquity of the Pentateuch, it is certain that its precepts were neither used nor known in the time of Josiah, when the reading of the roll discovered in the temple was listened to with amazement. Still less did prophetism rely on literary resources. What need was there of a book when the Spirit of God was speaking through the audible voice of a living man? At first the prophets were men of action. In more cultivated times they became orators, and then their speeches were sometimes preserved—as the speeches of Demosthenes were preserved—for future reference, after their primary end had been served. Jeremiah found it necessary to have a scribe, Baruch, to write down his utterances. This was a further step in the direction of literature; and Ezekiel was almost entirely literary, for his prophecies were most of them written in the first instance. Still they were prophecies; *i. e.*, they were original utterances, drawn directly from the wells of inspiration. The function of the scribes was more humble—to collect the sayings and traditions of earlier ages; to arrange and edit the literary fragments of

more original minds. Their own originality was almost confined to their explanations of difficult passages, or their adaptation of what they received to new needs and new circumstances. Thus we see theology passing into the reflective stage: it is becoming historical; it is being transformed into a branch of archæology. Ezra the Scribe is nervously anxious to claim the authority of Moses for what he teaches. The robust spirit of Isaiah was troubled with no such scruple. Scribism rose when prophecy declined. It was a melancholy confession that the fountains of living water were drying up. It was like an aqueduct laboriously constructed in order to convey stored water to a thirsty people from distant reservoirs. The reservoirs may be full, the aqueduct may be sound; still who would not rather drink of the sparkling stream as it springs from the rock? Moreover scribism degenerated into rabbinism, the scholasticism of the Jews. We may see its counterpart in the Catholic scholasticism which drew supplies from patristic tradition, and again in Protestant scholasticism—which came nearer to the source of inspiration in the Bible, and yet which stiffened into a traditional interpretation of Scripture, confining its waters to iron pipes of orthodoxy.

But some men refuse to be thus tied to anti-quarianism. They dare to believe that the Spirit of God is still in the world, whispering in the fancy of little children, soothing weary souls, thundering in the conscience of sinners, enlightening honest inquirers, guiding perplexed men of faith. Nevertheless we are always in danger of one or other of the two extremes of formal scholasticism and indefinite mysticism. The good side of the scribes' function is suggestive of much that is valuable. If God did indeed speak to men of old "by divers portions and in divers manners,"* what He said must be of the greatest value to us, for truth in its essence is eternal. We Christians have the solid foundation of a historical faith to build upon, and we cannot dispense with our gospel narratives and doctrinal epistles. What Christ was, what Christ did, and the meaning of all this, is of vital importance to us; but it is chiefly important because it enables us to see what He is today—a Priest ever living to make intercession for us, a Deliverer who is even now able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him, a present Lord who claims the active loyalty of every fresh generation of the men and women for whom He died in the far-off past. We have to combine the concrete historical religion with the inward, living, spiritual religion to reach a faith that shall be true both objectively and subjectively—true to the facts of the universe, and true to personal experience.

Ezra accomplished his great work, to a large extent, because he ventured to be more than a scribe. Even when he was relying on the authority of antiquity, the inspiration which was in him saved him from a pedantic adherence to the letter of the Torah as he had received it. The modification of The Law when it was re-issued by the great scribe, which is so perplexing to some modern readers, is a proof that the religion of Israel had not yet lost vitality and settled down into a fossil condition. It was living; therefore it was growing, and in growing it was casting its old shell and evolving a new vesture better adapted to its changed environ-

* Heb. i. 2.

ment. Is not this just a signal proof that God had not deserted His people?

Ezra is presented to us as a man of a deeply devout nature. He cultivated his own personal religion before he attempted to influence his compatriots. The chronicler tells us that he had prepared (directed) his heart, to seek the law of the Lord and to do it. With our haste to obtain "results" in Christian service, there is danger lest the need of personal preparation should be neglected. But work is feeble and fruitless if the worker is inefficient, and he must be quite as inefficient if he has not the necessary graces as if he had not the requisite gifts. Over and above the preparatory intellectual culture—never more needed than in our own day—there is the all-essential spiritual training. We cannot effectually win others to that truth which has no place in our own hearts. Enthusiasm is kindled by enthusiasm. The fire must be first burning within the preacher himself if he would light it in the breasts of other men. Here lies the secret of the tremendous influence Ezra exerted when he came to Jerusalem. He was an enthusiast for the law he so zealously advocated. Now enthusiasm is not the creation of a moment's thought; it is the outgrowth of long meditation, inspired by deep, passionate love. It shows itself in the experience expressed by the Psalmist when he said, "While I mused the fire burned."* Ours is not an age of musing. But if we have no time to meditate over the great verities of our faith, the flames will not be kindled, and in place of the glowing fire of enthusiasm we shall have the gritty ashes of officialism.

Ezra turned his thoughts to the law of his God; he took this for the subject of his daily meditation, brooding over it until it became a part of his own thinking. This is the way a character is made. Men have larger power over their thoughts than they are inclined to admit; and the greatness or the meanness, the purity or the corruption of their character depends on the way in which that power is used. Evil thoughts may come unbidden to the purest mind—for Christ was tempted by the devil; but such thoughts can be resisted, and treated as unwelcome intruders. The thoughts that are welcomed and cherished, nourished in meditation, and sedulously cultivated—these bosom friends of the inner man determine what he himself is to become. To allow one's mind to be treated as the plaything of every idle reverie—like a boat drifting at the mercy of wind and current without a hand at the helm—is to court intellectual and moral shipwreck. The first condition of achieving success in self-culture is to direct the course of the thinking aright. St. Paul enumerated a list of good and honourable subjects to bid us "think on" such things.†

The aim of Ezra's meditation was threefold. First, he would "seek the law of the Lord," for the teacher must begin with understanding the truth, and this may involve much anxious searching. Possibly Ezra had to pursue a literary inquiry, hunting up documents, comparing data, arranging and harmonising scattered fragments. But the most important part of his seeking was his effort to find the real meaning and purpose of The Law. It was in regard to this that he would have to exercise his mind most earnestly. Secondly, his aim was "to do it." He would not attempt to preach what he had not tried to

perform. He would test the effect of his doctrine on himself before venturing to prescribe it for others. Thus he would be most sure of escaping a subtle snare which too often entraps the preacher. When the godly man of business reads his Bible, it is just to find light and food for his own soul; but when the preacher turns the pages of the sacred book, he is haunted by the anxiety to light upon suitable subjects for his sermons. Every man who handles religious truths in the course of his work is in danger of coming to regard those truths as the tools of his trade. If he succumbs to this danger it will be to his own personal loss, and then even as instruments in his work the degraded truths will be blunt and inefficient, because a man can never know the doctrine until he has begun to obey the commandment. If religious teaching is not to be pedantic and unreal, it must be interpreted by experience. The most vivid teaching is a transcript from life. Thirdly, Ezra would "teach in Israel statutes and judgments." This necessarily comes last—after the meditation, after the experience. But it is of great significance as the crown and finish of the rest. Ezra is to be his nation's instructor. In the new order the first place is not to be reserved for a king; it is assigned to a schoolmaster.

This will be increasingly the case as knowledge is allowed to prevail, and as truth is permitted to sway the lives of men and fashion the history of communities.

So far we have Ezra's own character and culture. But there was another side to his preparation for his great life-work of which the chronicler took note, and which he described in a favorite phrase of Ezra's, a phrase so often used by the scribe that the later writer adopted it quite naturally. Ezra's request to be permitted to go up to Jerusalem with a new expedition is said to have been granted him by the king "according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him."* Thus the chronicler here acknowledges the Divine hand in the whole business, as he has the inspired insight to do again and again in the course of his narrative. The special phrase thus borrowed from Ezra is rich in meaning. In an earlier passage the chronicler noticed that "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews."† Now, in Ezra's phrase, it is the *hand* of his God that is on Ezra. The expression gives us a distinct indication of the Divine activity. God works, and, so to speak, uses His hand. It also suggests the nearness of God. The hand of God is not only moving and acting; it is upon Ezra. God touches the man, holds him, directs him, impels him; and, as he shows elsewhere, Ezra is conscious of the influence, if not immediately, yet by means of a devout study of the providential results. This Divine power even goes so far as to move the Persian monarch. The chronicler ascribes the conduct of successive kings of Persia to the immediate action of God. But here it is connected with God's hand being on Ezra. When God is holding and directing His servants, even external circumstances are found to work for their good, and even other men are induced to further the same end. This brings us to the kernel, the very essence of religion. That was not found in Ezra's wisely chosen meditations; nor was it to be seen in his devout practices. Behind and beneath the man's earnest piety was the unseen but mighty

* Psalm xxxix. 3.

† Phil. iv. 8.

* Ezra vii. 6.

† Ezra v. 5.

action of God; and here, in the hand of his God resting upon him, was the root of all his religious life. In experience the human and the Divine elements of religion are inextricably blended together: but the vital element, that which originates and dominates the whole, is the Divine. There is no real, living religion without it. It is the secret of energy and the assurance of victory. The man of true religion is he who has the hand of God resting upon him, he whose thought and action are inspired and swayed by the mystic touch of the Unseen.

CHAPTER XI.

EZRA'S EXPEDITION.

EZRA vii. 11-viii.

LIKE the earlier pilgrimage of Zerubbabel and his companions, Ezra's great expedition was carried out under a commission from the Persian monarch of his day. The chronicler simply calls this king "Artaxerxes" (*Artahshasta*), a name borne by three kings of Persia; but there can be no reasonable doubt that his reference is to the son and successor of Xerxes—known by the Greeks as "Macrocheir," and by the Romans as "Longimanus"—Artaxerxes "of the long hand," for this Artaxerxes alone enjoyed a sufficiently extended reign to include both the commencement of Ezra's public work and the later scenes in the life of Nehemiah which the chronicler associates with the same king. Artaxerxes was but a boy when he ascended the throne, and the mission of Ezra took place in his earlier years, while the generous enthusiasm of the kindly sovereign—whose gentleness has become historic—had not yet been crushed by the cares of empire. In accordance with the usual style of our narrative, we have his decree concerning the Jews preserved and transcribed in full; and yet here, as in other cases, we must make some allowance either for the literary freedom of the chronicler, or for the Jewish sympathies of the translator; for it cannot be supposed that a heathen, such as Artaxerxes undoubtedly was, would have shown the knowledge of the Hebrew religion, or have owned the faith in it, which the edict as we now have it suggests. Nevertheless, here again, there is no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the document, for it is quite in accord with the policy of the previous kings Cyrus and Darius, and in its special features it entirely agrees with the circumstances of the history.

This edict of Longimanus goes beyond any of its predecessors in favouring the Jews, especially with regard to their religion. It is directly and personally addressed to Ezra, whom the king may have known as an earnest, zealous leader of the Hebrew community at Babylon, and through him it grants to all Jewish exiles who wish to go up to Jerusalem liberty to return to the home of their fathers. It may be objected that after the decree of Cyrus any such fresh sanction should not have been needed. But two generations had passed away since the pilgrimage of the first body of returning captives, and during this long time many things had happened to check the free action of the Jews and to cast reproach upon their movements. For a great expedition to start now without any orders from

the reigning monarch might excite his displeasure, and a subject people who were dependent for their very existence on the good-will of an absolute sovereign would naturally hesitate before they ventured to rouse his suspicions by undertaking any considerable migration on their own account.

But Artaxerxes does much more than sanction the journey to Jerusalem; he furthers the object of this journey with royal bounty, and he lays a very important commission on Ezra, a commission which carries with it the power, if not the name, of a provincial magistrate. In the first place, the edict authorises a state endowment of the Jewish religion. Ezra is to carry great stores to the poverty-stricken community at Jerusalem. These are made up in part of contributions from the Babylonian Jews, in part of generous gifts from their friendly neighbours, and in part of grants from the royal treasury. The temple has been rebuilt, and the funds now accumulated are not like the bulk of those collected in the reign of Cyrus for a definite object, the cost of which might be set down to the "Capital Account" in the restoration of the Jews; they are destined in some measure for improvements to the structure, but they are also to be employed in maintenance charges, especially in supporting the costly services of the temple. Thus the actual performance of the daily ritual at the Jerusalem sanctuary is to be kept up by means of the revenues of the Persian Empire. Then, the edict proceeds to favour the priesthood by freeing that order from the burden of taxation. This "clerical immunity," which suggests an analogy with the privileges the Christian clergy prized so highly in the Middle Ages, is an indirect form of increased endowment, but the manner in which the endowment is granted calls especial attention to the privileged status of the order that enjoys it. Thus the growing importance of the Jerusalem hierarchy is openly fostered by the Persian king. Still further, Artaxerxes adds to his endowment of the Jewish religion a direct legal establishment. Ezra is charged to see that the law of his God is observed throughout the whole region extending up from the Euphrates to Jerusalem. This can only be meant to apply to the Jews who were scattered over the wide area, especially those of Syria. Still the mandate is startling enough, especially when we take into account the heavy sanctions with which it is weighted, for Ezra has authority given him to enforce obedience by excommunication, by fine, by imprisonment, and even by the death-penalty. "The law of his God" is named side by side with "the law of the king,"* and the two are to be obeyed equally. Fortunately, owing to the unsettled condition of the country as well as to Ezra's own somewhat unpractical disposition, the reformer never seems to have put his great powers fully to the test.

Now, as in the previous cases of Cyrus and Darius, we are confronted with the question, How came the Persian king to issue such a decree? It has been suggested that as Egypt was in revolt at the time, he desired to strengthen the friendly colony at Jerusalem as a western bulwark. But, as we have seen in the case of Cyrus, the Jews were too few and feeble to be taken much account of among the gigantic forces of the vast empire; and, moreover, it was not the military fortification of Jerusalem—cer-

* Ezra vii. 26.

tainly a valuable stronghold when well maintained—but the religious services of the temple and the observance of The Law that this edict aimed at aiding and encouraging. No doubt in times of unsettlement the king would behave most favourably towards a loyal section of his people. Still, more must be assigned as an adequate motive for his action. Ezra is charged as a special commissioner to investigate the condition of the Jews in Palestine. He is to "inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem."* Inasmuch as it was customary for the Persian monarchs to send out inspectors from time to time to examine and report on the condition of the more remote districts of their extensive empire, it has been plausibly suggested that Ezra may have been similarly employed. But in the chronicler's report of the edict we read, immediately after the injunction to make the investigation, an important addition describing how this was to be done, viz., "According to the law of thy God which is in thine hand,"† which shows that Ezra's inquiry was to be of a religious character, and as a preliminary to the exactation of obedience to the Jewish law. It may be said that this clause was not a part of the original decree; but the drift of the edict is religious throughout rather than political, and therefore the clause in question is fully in harmony with its character. There is one sentence which is of the deepest significance, if only we can believe that it embodies an original utterance of the king himself—"Whosoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?"‡ While his empire was threatened by dangerous revolts, Artaxerxes seems to have desired to conciliate the God whom the most devout of his people regarded with supreme awe.

What is more clear and at the same time more important is the great truth detected by Ezra and recorded by him in a grateful burst of praise. Without any warning the chronicler suddenly breaks off his own narrative, written in the third person, to insert a narrative written by Ezra himself in the first person—beginning at Ezra vii. 27 and continued down to Ezra x. The scribe opens by blessing God—"the Lord God of our fathers," who had "put such a thing in the king's heart as to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."§ This, then, was a Divine movement. It can only be accounted for by ascribing the original impulse to God. Natural motives of policy or of superstition may have been providentially manipulated, but the hand that used them was the hand of God. The man who can perceive this immense fact at the very outset of his career is fit for any enterprise. His transcendent faith will carry him through difficulties that would be insuperable to the worldly schemer.

Passing from the thought of the Divine influence on Artaxerxes, Ezra further praises God because he has himself received "mercy . . . before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes."¶ This personal thanksgiving is evidently called forth by the scribe's consideration of the part assigned to him in the royal edict. There was enough in that edict to make the head of a self-seeking, ambitious man swim with vanity. But we can see

from the first that Ezra is of a higher character. The burning passion that consumes him has not a particle of hunger for self-aggrandisement; it is wholly generated by devotion to the law of his God. In the narrowness and bigotry that characterise his later conduct as a reformer, some may suspect the action of that subtle self-will which creeps unawares into the conduct of some of the noblest men. Still the last thing that Ezra seeks, and the last thing that he cares for when it is thrust upon him, is the glory of earthly greatness.

Ezra's aim in leading the expedition may be gathered from the reflection of it in the royal edict, since that edict was doubtless drawn up with the express purpose of doubling the project of the favoured Jew. Ezra puts the beautifying of the temple in the front of his grateful words of praise to God. But the personal commission entrusted to Ezra goes much further. The decree significantly recognises the fact that he is to carry up to Jerusalem a copy of the Sacred Law. It refers to "the law of thy God which is in thine hand."* We shall hear more of this hereafter. Meanwhile it is important to see that the law, obedience to which Ezra is empowered to exact, is to be conveyed by him to Jerusalem. Thus he is both to introduce it to the notice of the people, and to see that it does not remain a dead letter among them. He is to teach it to those who do not know it.† At the same time these people are distinctly separated from others, who are expressly described as "all such as know the laws of thy God."‡ This plainly implies that both the Jerusalem Jews, and those west of the Euphrates generally, were not all of them ignorant of the Divine Torah. Some of them, at all events, knew the laws they were to be made to obey. Still they may not have possessed them in any written form. The plural term "laws" is here used, while the written compilation which Ezra carried up with him is described in the singular as "The Law." Ezra, then, having searched out The Law and tested it in his own experience, is now eager to take it up to Jerusalem, and get it executed among his fellow-countrymen at the religious metropolis as well as among the scattered Jews of the provincial districts. His great purpose is to make what he believes to be the will of God known, and to see that it is obeyed. The very idea of a Torah implies a Divine will in religion. It presses upon our notice the often-forgotten fact that God has something to say to us about our conduct, that when we are serving Him it is not enough to be zealous, that we must also be obedient. Obedience is the keynote of Judaism. It is not less prominent in Christianity. The only difference is that Christians are freed from the shackles of a literal law in order that they may carry out "the law of liberty," by doing the will of God from the heart as loyal disciples of Jesus Christ, so that for us, as for the Jews, obedience is the most fundamental fact of religion. We can walk by faith in the freedom of sons; but that implies that we have "the obedience of faith." The ruling principle of our Lord's life is expressed in the words "I delight to do Thy will, O My God," and this must be the ruling principle in the life of every true Christian.

Equipped with a royal edict, provided with rich contributions, inspired with a great religious pur-

* Ezra vii. 14. † Ezra vii. 14. ‡ Ezra vii. 23.

§ Ezra vii. 27. ¶ Ezra vii. 28.

* Ezra vii. 14.

† Ezra vii. 25.

‡ *Ibid*

pose, confident that the hand of his God was upon him, Ezra collected his volunteers, and proceeded to carry out his commission with all practicable speed. In his record of the journey, he first sets down a list of the families that accompanied him. It is interesting to notice names that had occurred in the earlier list of the followers of Zerubbabel, showing that some of the descendants of those who refused to go on the first expedition took part in the second. They remind us of Christiana and her children, who would not join the Pilgrim when he set out from the City of Destruction, but who subsequently followed in his footsteps.

But there was little at Jerusalem to attract a new expedition; for the glamour which had surrounded the first return, with a son of David at its head, had faded in grievous disappointments; and the second series of pilgrims had to carry with them the torch with which to rekindle the flames of devotion.

Ezra states that when he had marshalled his forces he spent three days with them by a river called the "Ahava," apparently because it flowed by a town of that name. The exact site of the camp cannot be determined, although it could not have been far from Babylon, and the river must have been either one of the tributaries of the Euphrates or a canal cut through its alluvial plain. The only plausible conjecture of a definite site settles upon a place now known as *Hüt*, in the neighbourhood of some bitumen springs; and the interest of this place may be found in the fact that here the usual caravan route leaves the fertile Valley of the Euphrates and plunges into the waterless desert. Even if Ezra decided to avoid the difficult desert track, and to take his heavy caravan round through Northern Syria by way of Aleppo and the Valley of the Orontes—an extended journey which would account for the three months spent on the road—it would still be natural for him to pause at the parting of the ways and review the gathering host. One result of this review was the startling discovery that there were no Levites in the whole company. We were struck with the fact that but a very small and disproportionate number of these officials accompanied the earlier pilgrimage of Zerubbabel, and we saw the probable explanation in the disappointment if not the disaffection of the Levites at their degradation by Ezekiel. The more rigid arrangement of Ezra's edition of The Law, which gave them a definite and permanent place in a second rank, below the priesthood, was not likely to encourage them to volunteer for the new expedition. Nothing is more difficult than self-effacement, even in the service of God.

There was a community of Levites at a place called Casiphia,* under the direction of a leader named Iddo. It would be interesting to think that this community was really a sort of Levitical college, a school of students of the Torah; but we have no data to go upon in forming an opinion. One thing is certain. We cannot suppose that the new edition of The Law had been drawn up in this community of the Levites, be-

cause Ezra had started with it in his hand as the charter of his great enterprise; nor, indeed, in any other Levitical college, because it was not at all according to the mind of the Levites.

After completing his company by the addition of the Levites, Ezra made a solemn religious preparation for his journey. Like the Israelites after the defeat at Gibeah in their retributive war with Benjamin: * like the penitent people at Mizpeh, in the days of Samuel, when they put away their idols; † like Jehoshaphat and his subjects when rumours of a threatened invasion filled them with apprehension. ‡—Ezra and his followers fasted and humbled themselves before God in view of their hazardous undertaking. The fasting was a natural sign of the humiliation, and this prostration before God was at once a confession of sin and an admission of absolute dependence on His mercy. Thus the people reveal themselves as the "poor in spirit" to whom our Lord directs His first beatitude. They are those who humble themselves, and therefore those whom God will exalt.

We must not confound this state of self-humiliation before God with the totally different condition of abject fear which shrinks from danger in contemptible cowardice. The very opposite to that is the attitude of these humble pilgrims. Like the Puritan soldiers who became bold as lions before man in the day of battle, just because they had spent the night in fasting and tears and self-abasement before God, Ezra and his people rose from their penitential fast, calmly prepared to face all dangers in the invincible might of God. There seems to have been some enemy whom Ezra knew to be threatening his path, for when he got safely to the end of his journey he gave thanks for God's protection from this foe; § and, in any case, so wealthy a caravan as his was would provoke the cupidity of the roving hordes of Bedouin that infested the Syrian wastes. Ezra's first thought was to ask for an escort; but he tells us that he was ashamed to do so, as this would imply distrust in God. ¶ Whatever we may think of his logic, we must be struck by his splendid faith, and the loyalty which would run a great risk rather than suffer what might seem like dishonour to his God. Here was one of God's heroes. We cannot but connect the preliminary fast with this courageous attitude of Ezra's. So in tales of chivalry we read how knights were braced by prayer and fast and vigil to enter the most terrible conflicts with talismans of victory. In an age of rushing activity it is hard to find the hidden springs of strength in their calm retreats. The glare of publicity starts us on the wrong track, by tempting us to advertise our own excellences, instead of abasing ourselves in the dust before God. Yet is it not now as true as ever that no boasted might of man can be in any way comparable to the Divine strength which takes possession of those who completely surrender their wills to God? Happy are they who have the grace to walk in the valley of humiliation, for this leads to the armoury of supernatural power!

* The site of this town has not been identified. It could not have been far from Ahava.

* Judges xx. 26. † 1 Sam. vii. 6. ‡ 2 Chron. xx. 3.
§ Ezra viii. 31. ¶ Ezra viii. 22.

CHAPTER XII.

FOREIGN MARRIAGES.

EZRA ix.

THE successful issue of Ezra's undertaking was speedily followed by a bitter disappointment on the part of its leader, the experience of which urged him to make a drastic reformation that rent many a happy home asunder and filled Jerusalem with the grief of broken hearts.

During the obscure period that followed the dedication of the temple—a period of which we have no historical remains—the rigorous exclusiveness which had marked the conduct of the returned exiles when they had rudely rejected the proposal of their Gentile neighbours to assist them in rebuilding the temple was abandoned, and freedom of intercourse went so far as to permit intermarriage with the descendants of the Canaanite aborigines and the heathen population of neighbouring nations. Ezra gives a list of tribal names closely resembling the lists preserved in the history of early ages, when the Hebrews first contemplated taking possession of the promised land; * but it cannot be imagined that the ancient tribes preserved their independent names and separate existence as late as the time of the return—though the presence of the gypsies as a distinct people in England to-day shows that racial distinction may be kept up for ages in a mixed society. It is more probable that the list is literary, that the names are reminiscences of the tribes as they were known in ancient traditions. In addition to these old inhabitants of Canaan, there are Ammonites and Moabites from across the Jordan, Egyptians, and, lastly, most significantly separate from the Canaanite tribes, those strange folk, the Amorites, who are discovered by recent ethnological research to be of a totally different stock from that of the Canaanite tribes, probably allied to a light-coloured people that can be traced along the Libyan border, and possibly even of Aryan origin. From all these races the Jews had taken their wives. So wide was the gate flung open!

This freedom of intermarriage may be viewed as a sign of general laxity and indifference on the part of the citizens of Jerusalem, and so Ezra seems to have regarded it. But it would be a mistake to suppose that there was no serious purpose associated with it, by means of which grave and patriotic men attempted to justify the practice. It was a question whether the policy of exclusiveness had succeeded. The temple had been built, it is true; and a city had risen among the ruins of ancient Jerusalem. But poverty, oppression, hardship, and disappointment had settled down on the little Judæan community, which now found itself far worse off than the captives in Babylon. Feeble and isolated, the Jews were quite unable to resist the attacks of their jealous neighbours. Would it not be better to come to terms with them, and from enemies convert them into allies? Then the policy of exclusiveness involved commercial ruin; and men who knew how their brethren in Chaldea were enriching themselves by trade with the heathen, were galled by a yoke which held them back from foreign intercourse. It would seem to be advisable, on social as well as on political

* Ezra ix. 1.

grounds, that a new and more liberal course should be pursued, if the wretched garrison was not to be starved out. Leading aristocratic families were foremost in contracting the foreign alliances. It is such as they who would profit most, as it is such as they who would be most tempted to consider worldly motives and to forego the austerity of their fathers. There does not seem to have been any one recognised head of the community after Zerubbabel; the "princes" constituted a sort of informal oligarchy. Some of these princes had taken foreign wives. Priests and Levites had also followed the same course. It is a historical fact that the party of rigour is not generally the official party. In the days of our Lord the priests and rulers were mostly Sadducean, while the Pharisees were men of the people. The English Puritans were not of the Court party. But in the case before us the leaders of the people were divided. While we do not meet any priests among the purists, some of the princes disapproved of the laxity of their neighbours, and exposed it to Ezra.

Ezra was amazed, appalled. In the dramatic style which is quite natural to an Oriental, he rent both his tunic and his outer mantle, and he tore his hair and his long priestly beard. This expressed more than the grief of mourning which is shown by tearing one garment and cutting the hair. Like the high-priest when he ostentatiously rent his clothes at what he wished to be regarded as blasphemy in the words of Jesus, Ezra showed indignation and rage by his violent action. It was a sign of his startled and horrified emotions; but no doubt it was also intended to produce an impression on the people who gathered in awe to watch the great ambassador, as he sat amazed and silent on the temple pavement through the long hours of the autumn afternoon.

The grounds of Ezra's grief and anger may be learnt from the remarkable prayer which he poured out when the stir occasioned by the preparation of the vesper ceremonies roused him, and when the ascending smoke of the evening sacrifice would naturally suggest to him an occasion for drawing near to God. Welling up, hot and passionate, his prayer is a revelation of the very heart of the scribe. Ezra shows us what true prayer is—that it is laying bare the heart and soul in the presence of God. The striking characteristic of this outburst of Ezra's is that it does not contain a single petition. There is no greater mistake in regard to prayer than the notion that it is nothing more than the begging of specific favours from the bounty of the Almighty. That is but a shallow kind of prayer at best. In the deepest and most real prayer the soul is too near to God to ask for any definite thing; it is just unbosoming itself to the Great Confidant, just telling out its agony to the Father who can understand everything and receive the whole burden of the anguished spirit.

Considering this prayer more in detail, we may notice, in the first place, that Ezra comes out as a true priest, not indeed officiating at the altar with ceremonial sacrifices, but identifying himself with the people he represents, so that he takes to his own breast the shame of what he regards as the sin of his people. Prostrate with self-humiliation, he cries, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God," * and he speaks of the sins which have

* Ezra ix. 6.

just been made known to him as though he had a share in them, calling them "*our* iniquities" and "*our* trespass."* Have we not here a glimpse into that mystery of vicarious sin-bearing which is consummated in the great intercession and sacrifice of our Lord? Though himself a sinful man, and therefore at heart sharing the guilt of his people by personal participation in it, as the holy Jesus could not do, still in regard to the particular offence which he is now deploring, Ezra is as innocent as an unfallen angel. Yet he blushes for shame, and lies prostrate with confusion of face. He is such a true patriot that he completely identifies himself with his people. But in proportion as such an identification is felt, there must be an involuntary sense of the sharing of guilt. It is vain to call it an illusion of the imagination. Before the bar of strict justice Ezra was as innocent of this one sin, as before the same bar Christ was innocent of all sin. God could not really disapprove of him for it, any more than He could look with disfavour on the great Sin-bearer. But subjectively, in his own experience, Ezra did not feel less poignant pangs of remorse than he would have felt if he had been himself personally guilty. This perfect sympathy of true priesthood is rarely experienced; but since Christians are called to be priests, to make intercession, and to bear one another's burdens, something approaching it must be shared by all the followers of Christ; they who would go forth as saviours of their brethren must feel it acutely. The sin-bearing sacrifice of Christ stands alone in its perfect efficacy, and many mysteries crowd about it that cannot be explained by any human analogies. Still, here and there we come across faint likenesses in the higher experiences of the better men, enough to suggest that our Lord's passion was not a prodigy, that it was really in harmony with the laws by which God governs the moral universe.

In thus confessing the sin of the people before God, but in language which the people who shared with him a reverence for The Law could hear, no doubt Ezra hoped to move them also to share in his feelings of shame and abhorrence for the practices he was deploring. He came dangerously near to the fatal mistake of preaching through a prayer, by "praying at" the congregation. He was evidently too deeply moved to be guilty of an insincerity, a piece of profanity, at which every devout soul must revolt. Nevertheless the very exercise of public prayer—prayer uttered audibly, and conducted by the leader of a congregation—means that this is to be an inducement for the people to join in the worship. The officiating minister is not merely to pray before the congregation, while the people kneel as silent auditors. His prayer is designed to guide and help their prayers, so that there may be "common prayer" throughout the whole assembly. In this way it may be possible for him to influence men and women by praying with them, as he can never do by directly preaching to them. The essential point is that the prayer must first of all be real on the part of the leader—that he must be truly addressing God, and then that his intention with regard to the people must be not to exhort them through his prayer, but simply to induce them to join him in it.

Let us now inquire what was the nature of the sin which so grievously distressed Ezra, and

which he regarded as so heavy a slur on the character of his people in the sight of God. On the surface of it, there was just a question of policy. Some have argued that the party of rigour was mistaken, that its course was suicidal, that the only way of preserving the little colony was by means of well-adjusted alliances with its neighbours—a low view of the question which Ezra would not have glanced at for a moment, because with his supreme faith in God no consideration of worldly expediency or political diplomacy could be allowed to deflect him from the path indicated, as he thought, by the Divine will. But a higher line of opposition has been taken. It has been said that Ezra was illiberal, uncharitable, culpably narrow, and heartlessly harsh. That the man who could pour forth such a prayer as this, every sentence of which throbs with emotion, every word of which tingles with intense feeling—that this man was heartless cannot be believed. Still it may be urged that Ezra took a very different view from that suggested by the genial outlook across the nations which we meet in Isaiah. The lovely idyll of Ruth defends the course he condemned so unsparingly. The Book of Jonah was written directly in rebuke of one form of Jewish exclusiveness. Ezra was going even further than the Book of Deuteronomy, which had allowed marriages with the heathen,* and had laid down definite marriage laws in regard to foreign connections.† It cannot be maintained that all the races named by Ezra were excluded. Could it be just to condemn the Jews for not having followed the later and more exacting edition of The Law, which Ezra had only just brought up with him, and which had not been known by the offenders?

In trying to answer these questions, we must start from one clear fact. Ezra is not merely guided by a certain view of policy. He may be mistaken, but he is deeply conscientious, his motive is intensely religious. Whether rightly or wrongly, he is quite persuaded that the social condition at which he is so grievously shocked is directly opposed to the known will of God. "We have forsaken Thy commandments," he exclaims. But what commandments, we may ask, seeing that the people of Jerusalem did not possess a law that went so far as Ezra was requiring of them? His own language here comes in most appositely. Ezra does not appeal to Deuteronomy, though he may have had a passage from that book in mind.‡ neither does he produce the Law Book which he has brought up with him from Babylon and to which reference is made in our version of the decree of Artaxerxes;§ but he turns to the prophets, not with reference to any of their specific utterances, but in the most general way, implying that his view is derived from the broad stream of prophecy in its whole course and character. In his prayer he describes the broken commandments as "those which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants the prophets." This is the more remarkable because the prophets did not favour the scrupulous observance of external rules, but dwelt on great principles of righteousness. Some of them took the liberal side, and expressed decidedly cosmopolitan ideas in regard to foreign nations, as Ezra must have been aware. He may have mentally anticipated the

* Ezra ix. 6.

* Dent. xxi. 13.

† Dent. xxiii. 1-8.

‡ Dent. vii. 3.

§ Ezra vii. 14.

excuses which would be urged in reliance on isolated utterances of this character. Still, on a survey of the whole course of prophecy, he is persuaded that it is opposed to the practices which he condemns. He throws his conclusion into a definite sentence, after the manner of a verbal quotation,* but this is only in accordance with the vivid, dramatic style of Semitic literature, and what he really means is that the spirit of his national prophecy and the principles laid down by the recognised prophets support him in the position which he has taken up. These prophets fought against all corrupt practices, and in particular they waged ceaseless war with the introduction of heathenish manners to the religious and social life of Israel. It is here that Ezra finds them to be powerful allies in his stern reformation. They furnish him, so to speak, with his major premiss, and that is indisputable. His weak place is in his minor premiss, viz., in the notion that intermarriage with Gentile neighbours necessarily involves the introduction of corrupt heathenish habits. This he quietly assumes. But there is much to be said for his position, especially when we note that he is not now concerned with the Samaritans, with whom the temple-builders came into contact and who accepted some measure of the Jewish faith, but in some cases with known idolaters—the Egyptians, for instance. The complex social and moral problems which surround the quarrel on which Ezra here embarks will come before us more fully as we proceed. At present it may suffice for us to see that Ezra rests his action on his conception of the main characteristics of the teaching of the prophets.

Further, his reading of history comes to his aid. He perceives that it was the adoption of heathenish practices that necessitated the severe chastisement of the captivity. God had only spared a small remnant of the guilty people. But He had been very gracious to that remnant, giving them "a nail in His holy place"; † *i. e.*, a fixture in the restored sanctuary, though as yet, as it were, but at one small point, because so few had returned to enjoy the privileges of the sacred temple worship. Now even this nail might be drawn. Will the escaped remnant be so foolish as to imitate the sins of their forefathers, and risk the slight hold which they have as yet obtained in the renewed centre of Divine favour? So to repudiate the lessons of the captivity, which should have been branded irrevocably by the hot irons of its cruel hardships, what was this but a sign of the most desperate depravity? Ezra could see no hope even of a remnant escaping from the wrath which would consume the people who were guilty of such wilful, such open-eyed apostasy.

In the concluding sentences of his prayer Ezra appeals to the righteousness of God, who had permitted the remnant to escape at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, saying, "O Lord, the God of Israel, Thou art righteous; for we are left a remnant that is escaped, as it is this day." ‡ Some have supposed that God's righteousness here stands for His goodness, and that Ezra really means the mercy which spared the remnant. But this interpretation is contrary to usage, and quite opposed to the spirit of the prayer. Ezra has referred to the mercy of God earlier, but in his final sentences he has another thought in mind. The prayer ends in gloom and

despondency—"behold, we are before Thee in our guiltiness; for none can stand before Thee because of this."* The righteousness of God, then, is seen in the fact that *only* a remnant was spared. Ezra does not plead for the pardon of the guilty people, as Moses did in his famous prayer of intercession. † As yet they are not conscious of their sin. To forgive them before they have owned their guilt would be immoral. The first condition of pardon is confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." ‡ Then, indeed, the very righteousness of God favours the pardon of the sinner. But till this state of contrition is reached, not only can there be no thought of forgiveness, but the sternest, darkest thoughts of sin are most right and fitting. Ezra is far too much in earnest simply to wish to help his people to escape from the consequences of their conduct. This would not be salvation. It would be moral shipwreck. The great need is to be saved from the evil conduct itself. It is to this end that the very passion of his soul is directed. Here we perceive the spirit of the true reformer. But the evangelist cannot afford to dispense with something of the same spirit, although he can add the gracious encouragements of a gospel; for the only true gospel promises deliverance from sin itself in the first instance as from the greatest of all evils, and deliverance from no other evil except on condition of freedom from this.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOME SACRIFICED TO THE CHURCH.

EZRA X.

EZRA'S narrative, written in the first person, ceases with his prayer, the conclusion of which brings us to the end of the ninth chapter of our Book of Ezra; at the tenth chapter the chronicler resumes his story, describing, however, the events which immediately follow. His writing is here as graphic as Ezra's, and if it is not taken from notes left by the scribe, at all events it would seem to be drawn from the report of another eye-witness; for it describes most remarkable scenes with a vividness that brings them before the mind's eye, so that the reader cannot study them even at this late day without a pang of sympathy.

Ezra's prayer and confession, his grievous weeping and prostrate humiliation before God, deeply affected the spectators; and as the news spread through the city, a very great congregation of men, women, and children assembled together to gaze at the strange spectacle. They could not gaze unmoved. Deep emotion is contagious. The man who is himself profoundly convinced and intensely concerned with his religious ideas will certainly win disciples. Where the soundest arguments have failed to persuade, a single note of sincere faith often strikes home. It is the passion of the orator that rouses the multitude, and even where there is no oratory the passion of true feeling pleads with irresistible eloquence. Ezra had not to speak a word to the people. What he was, what he felt, his agony of shame, his agony of prayer—all this melted them

* Ezra ix. 11.

† Ezra ix. 8.

‡ Ezra ix. 15.

* Ezra ix. 15.

† Exod. xxxii. 31, 32

‡ John i. 9.

to tears, and a cry of lamentation went up from the gathered multitudes in the temple courts. Their grief was more than a sentimental reflection of the scribe's distress, for the Jews could see plainly that it was for them and for their miserable condition that this ambassador from the Persian court was mourning so piteously. His sorrow was wholly vicarious. By no calamity or offence of his own, but simply by what he regarded as their wretched fall, Ezra was now plunged into heart-broken agony. Such a result of their conduct could not but excite the keenest self-reproaches in the breasts of all who in any degree shared his view of the situation. Then the only path of amendment visible before them was one that involved the violent rupture of home ties; the cruel severance of husband and wife, of parent and child; the complete sacrifice of human love on what appeared to be the altar of duty to God. It was indeed a bitter hour for the Jews who felt themselves to be offenders, and for their innocent wives and children who would be involved in any attempted reformation.

The confusion was arrested by the voice of one man, a layman named Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, who came to the assistance of Ezra as a volunteer spokesman of the people. This man entirely surrendered to Ezra's view, making a frank and unreserved confession of his own and the people's sin. So far then Ezra has won his point. He has begun to gain assent from among the offenders. Shecaniah adds to his confession a sentence of some ambiguity, saying, "Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing."* This might be thought to mean that God was merciful, and that there was hope in the penitent attitude of the congregation that He would take pity on the people and not deal hardly with them. But the similarity of the phraseology to the words of the last verse of the previous chapter, where the expression "because of this"† plainly points to the offence as the one thing in view, shows that the allusion here is to that offence, and not to the more recent signs of penitence. Shecaniah means, then, that there is hope concerning this matter of the foreign marriages—viz., that they may be rooted out of Israel. The hope is for a reformation, not for any condoning of the offence. It means despair to the unhappy wives, the end of all home peace and joy in many a household—a lurid hope surely, and hardly worthy of the name except on the lips of a fanatic. Shecaniah now proceeds to make a definite proposal. He would have the people enter into a solemn covenant with God. They are not only to undergo a great domestic reformation, but they are to take a vow in the sight of God that they will carry it through. Shecaniah shows the unreflecting zeal of a raw convert; an officious person, a meddler, he is too bold and forward for one whose place is the penitent's bench. The covenant is to pledge the people to divorce their foreign wives. Yet the unfeeling man will not soften his proposal by any euphemism, nor will he hide its more odious features. He deliberately adds that the children should be sent away with their mothers. The nests are to be cleared of the whole brood.

Ezra had not ventured to draw out such a direful programme. But Shecaniah says that this is "according to the counsel of my lord,"‡ using terms of unwonted obsequiousness—unless, as seems less likely, the phrase is meant to apply

to God, *i. e.*, to be read, "According to the counsel of *The Lord*." Shecaniah evidently gathered the unexpressed opinion of Ezra from the language of his prayer and from his general attitude. This was the only way out of the difficulty, the logical conclusion from what was now admitted. Ezra saw it clearly enough, but it wanted a man of coarser fibre to say it. Shecaniah goes further, and claims the concurrence of all who "tremble at the words of the God of Israel." These people have been mentioned before as forming the nucleus of the congregation that gathered about Ezra.* Then this outspoken man distinctly claims the authority of The Law for his proposition. Ezra had based his view of the heathen marriages on the general character of the teaching of the prophets; Shecaniah now appeals to The Law as the authority for his scheme of wholesale divorce. This is a huge assumption of what has never been demonstrated. But such people as Shecaniah do not wait for niceties of proof before making their sweeping proposals.

The bold adviser followed up his suggestion by rallying Ezra and calling upon him to "be of good courage," seeing that he would have supporters in the great reformation. Falling in with the proposed scheme, Ezra there and then extracted an oath from the people—both clergy and laity—that they would execute it. This was a general resolution. Some time was required and many difficulties had to be faced before it could be carried into practice, and meanwhile Ezra withdrew into retirement, still fasting and mourning.

We must now allow for an interval of some months. The chronological arrangement seems to have been as follows. Ezra and his company left Babylon in the spring, as Zerubbabel had done before him—at the same season as that of the great exodus from Egypt under Moses. Each of these three great expeditions began with the opening of the natural year, in scenes of bright beauty and hopefulness. Occupying four months on his journey, Ezra reached Jerusalem in the heat of July. It could not have been very long after his arrival that the news of the foreign marriages was brought to him by the princes, because if he had spent any considerable time in Jerusalem first he must have found out the state of affairs for himself. But now we are transported to the month of December for the meeting of the people when the covenant of divorce is to be put in force. Possibly some of the powerful leaders had opposed the summoning of such a gathering, and their hindrance may have delayed it; or it may have taken Ezra and his counsellors some time to mature their plans. Long brooding over the question could not have lessened the scribe's estimate of its gravity. But the suggestion of all kinds of difficulties and the clear perception of the terrible results which must flow from the contemplated reformation did not touch his opinion of what was right, or his decision, once reached, that there must be a clearing away of the foreign elements, root and branch, although they had entwined their tendrils about the deepest affections of the people. The seclusion and mourning of Ezra is recorded in Ezra x. 6. The next verse carries us on to the preparation for the dreadful assembly, which, as we must conclude, really took place some months later. The summons was backed up by threats

* Ezra x. 2.

† Ezra ix. 15.

‡ Ezra x. 3.

* Ezra ix. 4.

of confiscation and excommunication. To this extent the great powers entrusted to Ezra by the king of Persia were employed. It looks as if the order was the issue of a conflict of counsels in which that of Ezra was victorious, for it was exceedingly peremptory in tone and it only gave three days' notice. The people came, as they were bound to do, for the authority of the supreme government was behind the summons; but they resented the haste with which they had been called together, and they pleaded the inconvenience of the season for an open-air meeting. They met in the midst of the winter rains; cold and wet they crouched in the temple courts, the picture of wretchedness. In a hot, dry country so little provision is made for inclement weather, that when it comes the people suffer from it most acutely, so that it means much more distress to them than to the inhabitants of a chill and rainy climate. Still it may seem strange that, with so terrible a question as the complete break-up of their homes presented to them, the Jews should have taken much account of the mere weather, even at its worst. History, however, does not shape itself according to proportionate proprieties, but after the course of very human facts. We are often unduly influenced by present circumstances, so that what is small in itself, and in comparison with the supreme interests of life, may become for the moment of the most pressing importance, just because it is present and making itself felt as the nearest fact. Moreover, there is a sort of magnetic connection between the external character of things and the most intangible of internal experiences. The "November gloom" is more than a meteorological fact; it has its psychological aspect. After all, are we not citizens of the great physical universe? and is it not therefore reasonable that the various phases of nature should affect us in some degree, so that the common topic of conversation, "the weather," may really be of more serious concern than we suspect? Be that as it may, it is clear that while these Jews, who usually enjoyed brilliant sunshine and the fair blue Syrian sky, were shivering in the chill December rains, wet and miserable, they were quite unable to discuss a great social question, or to brace themselves up for an act of supreme renunciation. It was a question of depression, and the people felt limp and heartless, as people often do feel at such a season. They pleaded for delay. Not only was the weather a great hindrance to calm deliberation, but, as they said, the proposed reformation was of a widespread character. It must be an affair of some time. Let it be regularly organised. Let it be conducted only before appointed courts in the several cities. This was reasonable enough, and accordingly it was decided to adopt the suggestion. It is easy to be a reformer in theory; but they who have faced a great abuse in practice know how difficult it is to uproot it. This is especially true of all attempts to affect the social order. Wild ideas are floated without an effort. But the execution of these ideas means far more toil and battle, and involves a much greater tumult in the world, than the airy dreamers who start them so confidently, and who are so surprised at the slowness of dull people to accept them, ever imagine.

Not only was there a successful plea for delay. There was also direct opposition to Ezra's stern proposal—although this did not prove to be successful. The indication of opposition is ob-

scured by the imperfect rendering of the Authorised Version. Turning to the more correct translation in the Revised Version we read, "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah stood up against this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them."* Here was a little knot of champions of the poor threatened wives, defenders of the peaceful homes so soon to be smitten by the ruthless axe of the reformer, men who believed in the sanctity of domestic life as not less real than the sanctity of ecclesiastical arrangements, men perhaps to whom love was as Divine as law, nay, was law, wherever it was pure and true.

This opposition was borne down; the courts sat; the divorces were granted; wives were torn from their husbands and sent back to their indignant parents; and children were orphaned. Priests, Levites, and other temple officers did not escape the domestic reformation; the common people were not beneath its searching scrutiny; everywhere the pruning knife lopped off the alien branches from the vine of Israel. After giving a list of families involved, the chronicler concludes with the bare remark that men put away wives *with children* as well as those who had no children.† It is baldly stated. What did it mean? The agony of separation, the lifelong division of the family, the wife worse than widowed, the children driven from the shelter of the home, the husband sitting desolate in his silent house—over all this the chronicler draws a veil; but our imaginations can picture such scenes as might furnish materials for the most pathetic tragedies.

In order to mitigate the misery of this social revolution, attention has been called to the freedom of divorce which was allowed among the Jews and to the inferior status assigned to women in the East. The wife, it is said, was always prepared to receive a bill of divorce whenever her husband found occasion to dismiss her: she would have a right to claim back her dowry; and she would return to her father's house without the slightest slur upon her character. All this may be true enough; and yet human nature is the same all the world over, and where there is the strong mutual affection of true wedded love, whether in the England of our Christian era or in the Palestine of the olden times, to sever the tie of union must mean the agony of torn hearts, the despair of blighted lives. And was this necessary? Even if it was not according to the ordinance of their religion for Jews to contract marriages with foreigners, having contracted such marriages and having seen children grow up about them, was it not a worse evil for them to break the bonds by violence and scatter the families? Is not the marriage law itself holy? Nay, has it not a prior right over against Levitical institutions or prophetic ordinances, seeing that it may be traced back to the sweet sanctities of Eden? What if the stern reformer had fallen into a dreadful blunder? Might it not be that this new Hildebrand and his fanatical followers were even guilty of a huge crime in their quixotic attempt to purge the Church by wrecking the home?

Assuredly from our point of view, and with our Christian light, no such conduct as theirs could be condoned. It was utterly indiscriminating, riding roughshod over the tenderest claims. Gentile wives such as Ruth the Moab-

* Ezra x. 15.

† Ezra x. 44.

itess might have adopted the faith of their husbands—doubtless in many cases they had done so—yet the sweeping, pitiless mandate of separation applied to them as surely as if they had been heathen sorceresses. On the other hand, we must use some historical imagination in estimating these sorrowful scenes. The great idea of Ezra was to preserve a separate people. He held that this was essential to the maintenance of pure religion and morals in the midst of the pagan abominations which surrounded the little colony. Church separation seemed to be bound up with race separation. This Ezra believed to be after the mind of the prophets, and therefore a truth of Divine inspiration. Under all the circumstances it is not easy to say that his main contention was wrong, that Israel could have been preserved as a Church if it had ceased to keep itself separate as a race, or that without Church exclusiveness religious purity could have been maintained.

We are not called upon to face any such terrible problem, although St. Paul's warning against Christians becoming "unequally yoked with unbelievers"* reminds us that the worst ill-assortment in marriage should not be thought of as only concerned with diversity of rank, wealth, or culture; that they are most ill-matched who have not common interests in the deepest concerns of the soul. Then, too, it needs to be remembered in these days, when ease and comfort are unduly prized, that there are occasions on which even the peace and love of the home must be sacrificed to the supreme claims of God. Our Lord ominously warned His disciples that He would send a sword to sever the closest domestic ties—"to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother," etc.,† and He added, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."‡ In times of early Christian persecution it was necessary to choose between the cross of Christ and the nearest domestic claims, and then faithful martyrs accepted the cross even at the cost of the dear love of home and all its priceless jewels, as, for instance, in the familiar story of Perpetua and Felicitas. The same choice had to be made again under Catholic persecution among the Huguenots, as we are reminded by Millais' well-known picture, and even in a quasi-protestant persecution in the case of Sir Thomas More. It faces the convert from Hindooism in India today. Therefore whatever opinion we may form of the particular action of Ezra, we should do well to ponder gravely over the grand principle on which it was based. God must have the first place in the hearts and lives of His people, even though in some cases this may involve the shipwreck of the dearest earthly affections.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COST OF AN IDEALIST'S SUCCESS.

EZRA iv. 6-23.

THE fourth chapter of the Book of Ezra contains an account of a correspondence between the Samaritan colonists and two kings of Persia, which follows sharply on the first mention of the intrigues of "the enemies of Judah and Benjamin" at the Persian court in the later days of

Cyrus, and which precedes the description of the fortunes of the Jews in the reign of Darius. If this has its right chronological position in the narrative, it must relate to the interval during which the temple-building was in abeyance. In that case the two kings of Persia would be Cambyses, the son and successor of Cyrus, and Pseudo-Bardes. But the names in the text are Ahasuerus (*Ahashverosh*) and Artaxerxes (*Artahshashta*). It has been suggested that these are second names for the predecessors of Darius. Undoubtedly it was customary for Persian monarchs to have more than one name. But elsewhere in the Biblical narratives these two names are invariably applied to the successors of Darius—the first standing for the well-known Xerxes and the second for Artaxerxes Longimanus. The presumption therefore is that the same kings are designated by them here. Moreover, when we examine the account of the correspondence with the Persian court, we find that this agrees best with the later period. The opening verses of the fourth chapter of Ezra deal with the building of the temple; the last verse of that chapter and the succeeding narrative of the fifth chapter resume the same topic. But the correspondence relates to the building of *the walls of the city*. There is not a word about any such work in the context. Then in the letter addressed to Artaxerxes the writers describe the builders of the walls as "the Jews which came up from thee."* This description would not fit Zerubbabel and his followers, who migrated under Cyrus. But it would apply to those who accompanied Ezra to Jerusalem in the reign of Artaxerxes. Lastly, the reign of Pseudo-Bardes is too brief for all that would have to be crowded into it. It only occupied seven months. Yet a letter is sent up from the enemies of the Jews; inquiry is made into the history of Jerusalem by Persian officials at the court; a reply based on this inquiry is transmitted to Palestine; in consequence of this reply an expedition is organised which effectually stops the works at Jerusalem, but only after the exercise of force on the spot. It is nearly impossible for all this to have happened in so short a time as seven months. All the indications therefore concur to assign the correspondence to the later period.

The chronicler must have inserted this section out of its order for some reason of his own. Probably he desired to accentuate the impression of the malignant and persistent enmity of the colonists, and with this end in view described the later acts of antagonism directly after mentioning the first outbreak of opposition. It is just possible that he perceived the unfavourable character of his picture of the Jews in their curt refusal of assistance from their neighbours, and that he desired to balance this by an accumulation of weighty indictments against the people whom the Jews had treated so ungraciously.

In his account of the correspondence with the Persian court the chronicler seems to have taken note of three separate letters from the unfriendly colonists. First, he tells us that in the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus they wrote an accusation against the Jews.† This was before the mission of Ezra; therefore it was a continuance of the old opposition that had been seen in the intrigues that preceded the reign of Darius; it shows that after the death of that friendly monarch the slumbering fires broke out afresh.

* 2 Cor. vi. 14.

† Matt. x. 35.

‡ Matt. x. 37.

* Ezra iv. 12.

† Ezra iv. 6.

Next, he names certain men who wrote to Artaxerxes, and he adds that their letter was translated and written in the Aramaic language—the language which was the common medium of intercourse in trade and official affairs among the mixed races inhabiting Syria and all the regions west of the Euphrates.* The reference to this language probably arises from the fact that the chronicler had seen a copy of the translation. He does not tell us anything either of the nationality of the writers or of the subject of their letter. It has been suggested that they were Jews in Jerusalem who wrote to plead their cause with the Persian king. The fact that two of them bore Persian names—viz., Bishlam and Mithredath—does not present a serious difficulty to this view, as we know that some Jews received such names, Zerubbabel, for example, being named Sheshbazzar. But as the previous passage refers to an accusation against the Jews, and as the following sentences give an account of a letter also written by the inimical colonists, it is scarcely likely that the intermediate colourless verse which mentions the letter of Bishlam and his companions is of a different character. We should expect some more explicit statement if that were the case. Moreover, it is most improbable that the passage which follows would begin abruptly without an adversative conjunction—as is the case—if it proceeded to describe a letter provoked by opposition to another letter just mentioned. Therefore we must regard Bishlam and his companions as enemies of the Jews. Now some who have accepted this view have maintained that the letter of Bishlam and his friends is no other than the letter ascribed to Rehum and Shimshai in the following verses. It is stated that the former letter was in the Aramaic language, and the letter which is ascribed to the two great officials is in that language. But the distinct statement that each group of men wrote a letter seems to imply that there were two letters written in the reign of Artaxerxes, or three in all.

The third letter is the only one that the chronicler has preserved. He gives it in the Aramaic language, and from Ezra iv. 8, where this is introduced, to vi. 18, his narrative proceeds in that language, probably because he found his materials in some Aramaic document.

Some have assigned this letter to the period of the reign of Artaxerxes prior to the mission of Ezra. But there are two reasons for thinking it must have been written after that mission. The first has been already referred to—viz., that the complaint about "the Jews which came up from thee" points to some large migration during the reign of Artaxerxes, which must be Ezra's expedition. The second reason arises from a comparison of the results of the correspondence with the description of Jerusalem in the opening of the Book of Nehemiah. The violence of the Samaritans recorded in Ezra iv. 23 will account for the deplorable state of Jerusalem mentioned in Nehemiah i. 3, the effects of the invasion referred to in the former passage agreeing well with the condition of the dismantled city reported to Nehemiah. But in the history of Ezra's expedition no reference is made to any such miserable state of affairs. Thus the correspondence must be assigned to the time between the close of Ezra and the beginning of Nehemiah.

* Ezra iv. 7.

It is to Ezra's company, then, that the correspondence with Artaxerxes refers. There were two parties in Jerusalem, and the opposition was against the active reforming party, which now had the upper hand in the city. Immediately we consider this, the cause of the continuance and increase of the antagonism of the colonists becomes apparent. Ezra's harsh reformation in the expulsion of foreign wives must have struck the divorced women as a cruel and insulting outrage. Driven back to their paternal homes with their burning wrongs, these poor women must have roused the utmost indignation among their people. Thus the reformer had stirred up a hornet's nest. The legislator who ventures to interfere with the sacred privacy of domestic life excites the deepest passions, and a wise man will think twice before he meddles in so dangerous a business. Only the most imperative requirements of religion and righteousness can justify such a course, and even when it is justified nobody can foresee how far the trouble it brings may spread.

The letter which the chronicler transcribes seems to have been the most important of the three. It was written by two great Persian officials. In our English versions the first of these is called "the chancellor," and the second "the scribe." "The chancellor" was probably the governor of a large district, of which Palestine was but a provincial section; and "the scribe" his secretary. Accordingly it is apparent that the persistent enmity of the colonists, their misrepresentations, and perhaps their bribes, had resulted in instigating opposition to the Jews in very high places. The action of the Jews themselves may have excited suspicion in the mind of the Persian Satrap, for it would seem from his letter that they had just commenced to fortify their city. The names of the various peoples who are associated with these two great men in the title of the letter also show how far the opposition to the Jews had spread. They are given as the peoples whom Osnappar (*Esar-bani-pal*) had brought over and set in the city of Samaria, "and in the rest of the country beyond the river."* That is to say, the settlers in the vast district west of the Euphrates are included. Here were *Apharsathchites*—who cannot be the Persians, as some have thought, because no Assyrian king ever seems to have penetrated to Persia, but may be the Paraceni of Herodotus,† a Median people; *Tarpelites*—probably the people named among the Hebrews after Tubal;‡ *Apharsites*—also wrongly identified by some with the Persians, but probably another Median people; *Archevites*, from the ancient Erech (*Uruk*);§ *Babylonians*, not only from the city of Babylon, but also from its neighbourhood; *Shushanehites*, from Shusan (*Susa*), the capital of Susiana; *Dehaines*—possibly the Dai of Herodotus,|| because, though these were Persians, they were nomads who may have wandered far; *Elamites*, from the country of which Susa was capital. A terrific array! The very names would be imposing. All these people were now united in a common bond of enmity to the Jews of Jerusalem. Anticipating the fate of the Christians in the Roman Empire, though on very different grounds, the Jews seem to have been regarded by the peoples of Western Asia with positive antipathy as enemies of the human race. Their anti-social conduct had alienated all who knew them. But the letter of indictment brought

* Ezra iv. 10. † Herodotus, i. 101. ‡ Gen. x. 2.

§ Gen. x. 10.

|| Herodotus, i. 125.

a false charge against them. The opponents of the Jews could not formulate any charge out of their real grievances sufficiently grave to secure an adverse verdict from the supreme authority. They therefore trumped up an accusation of treason. It was untrue, for the Jews at Jerusalem had always been the most peaceable and loyal subjects of the Great King. The search which was made into the previous history of the city could only have brought to light any evidence of a spirit of independence as far back as the time of the Babylonian invasions. Still this was enough to supplement the calumnies of the irritated opponents which the Satrap and his secretary had been persuaded to echo with all the authority of their high position. Moreover, Egypt was now in revolt, and the king may have been persuaded to suspect the Jews of sympathy with the rebels. So Jerusalem was condemned as a "bad city"; the Persian officials went up and forcibly stopped the building of the walls, and the Jews were reduced to a condition of helpless misery.

This was the issue of Ezra's reformation. Can we call it a success? The answer to such a question will depend on what kind of success we may be looking for. Politically, socially, regarded from the standpoint of material profit and loss, there was nothing but the most dismal failure. But Ezra was not a statesman; he did not aim at national greatness, nor did he aim even at social amelioration. In our own day, when social improvements are regarded by many as the chief ends of government and philanthropy, it is difficult to sympathise with conduct which ran counter to the home comforts and commercial prosperity of the people. A policy which deliberately wrecked these obviously attractive objects of life in pursuit of entirely different aims is so completely remote from modern habits of thought and conduct that we have to make a considerable effort of imagination if we would understand the man who promoted it. How are we to picture him?

Ezra was an idealist. Now the success of an idealist is not to be sought for in material prosperity. He lives for his idea. If this idea triumphs he is satisfied, because he has attained the one kind of success he aimed at. He is not rich; but he never sowed the seed of wealth. He may never be honoured: he has determined to set himself against the current of popular fashion; how then can he expect popular favour? Possibly he may meet with misapprehension, contempt, hatred, death. The greatest Idealist the world ever saw was excommunicated as a heretic; insulted by His opponents, and deserted by most of His friends; tortured and crucified. The best of His disciples, those who had caught the enthusiasm of His idea, were treated as the offscouring of the earth. Yet we now recognise that the grandest victory ever achieved was won at Calvary; and we now regard the travels of St. Paul, through stoning and scourging, through Jewish hatred and Christian jealousy, on to the block, as nothing less than a magnificent triumphant march. The idealist succeeds when his idea is established.

Judged by this standard—the only fair standard—Ezra's work cannot be pronounced a failure. On the contrary, he accomplished just what he aimed at. He established the separateness of the Jews. Among ourselves, more than two thousand years after his time, his great idea is still

the most marked feature of his people. All along the ages it has provoked jealousy and suspicion; and often it has been met by cruel persecution. The separate people have been treated as only too separate from the rest of mankind. Thus the history of the Jews has become one long tragedy. It is infinitely sad. Yet it is incomparably more noble than the hollow comedy of existence to which the absence of all aims apart from personal pleasure reduces the story of those people who have sunk so low that they have no ideas. Moreover, with Ezra the racial idea was really subordinate to the religious idea. To secure the worship of God, free from all contamination—this was his ultimate purpose. In accomplishing it he must have a devoted people also free from contamination, a priesthood still more separate and consecrated, and a ritual carefully guarded and protected from defilement. Hence arose his great work in publishing the authoritative codified scriptures of the Jews. To a Christian all this has its defects—formalism, externalism, needless narrowness. Yet it succeeded in saving the religion of the Jews, and in transmitting that religion to future ages as a precious casket containing the seed of the great spiritual faith for which the world was waiting. There is something of the schoolmaster in Ezra; but he is like the law he loved so devoutly—a schoolmaster who brings us to Christ. He was needed both for his times and also in order to lay the foundation of coming ages. Who shall say that such a man was not sent of God? How can we deny to his unique work the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? The harshness of its outward features must not blind us to the sublimity of its inner thought or the beneficence of its ultimate purpose.

CHAPTER XV.

NEHEMIAH THE PATRIOT.

NEHEMIAH i. 1-3.

THE Book of Nehemiah is the last part of the chronicler's narrative. Although it was not originally a separate work, we can easily see why the editor, who broke up the original volume into distinct books, divided it just where he did. An interval of twelve or thirteen years comes between Ezra's reformation and the events recorded in the opening of Nehemiah. Still a much longer period was passed over in silence in the middle of Ezra.* A more important reason for the division of the narrative may be found in the introduction of a new character. The book which now bears his name is largely devoted to the actions of Nehemiah; and it commences with an autobiographical narrative, which occupies the first six chapters and part of the seventh.

Nehemiah plunges suddenly into his story, without giving us any hints of his previous history. His father, Hachaliah, is only a name to us. It was necessary to state this name in order to distinguish the writer from other men named Nehemiah.† There is no reason to think that his privileged position at court indicates high family connections. The conjecture of Ewald that he owed his important and lucrative office to his

* At Ezra vii. 1.

† *E. g.*, the Nehemiah of Ezra ii. 2, who is certainly another person.

personal beauty and youthful attractions is enough to account for it. His appointment to the office formerly held by Zerubbabel is no proof that he belonged to the Jewish royal family. At the despotic Persian court the king's kindness towards a favourite servant would override all claims of princely rank. Besides, it is most improbable that we should have no hint of the Davidic descent if this had been one ground of the appointment. Eusebius and Jerome both describe Nehemiah as of the tribe of Judah. Jerome is notoriously inaccurate; Eusebius is a cautious historian, but it is not likely that in his late age—as long after Nehemiah as our age is after Thomas à Becket—he could have any trustworthy evidence beyond that of the Scriptures. The statement that the city of Jerusalem was the place of the sepulchres of his ancestors* lends some plausibility to the suggestion that Nehemiah belonged to the tribe of Judah. With this we must be content.

It is more to the point to notice that, like Ezra, the younger man, whose practical energy and high authority were to further the reforms of the somewhat doctrinaire scribe, was a Jew of the exile. Once more it is in the East, far away from Jerusalem, that the impulse is found for furthering the cause of the Jews. Thus we are again reminded that wave after wave sweeps up from the Babylonian plains to give life and strength to the religious and civic restoration.

The peculiar circumstances of Nehemiah deepen our interest in his patriotic and religious work. In his case it was not the hardships of captivity that fostered the aspirations of the spiritual life, for he was in a position of personal ease and prosperity. We can scarcely think of a lot less likely to encourage the principles of patriotism and religion than that of a favourite upper servant in a foreign heathen court. The office held by Nehemiah was not one of political rank. He was a palace slave, not a minister of state like Joseph or Daniel. But among the household servants he would take a high position. The cup-bearers had a special privilege of admission to the august presence of their sovereign in his most private seclusion. The king's life was in their hands; and the wealthy enemies of a despotic sovereign would be ready enough to bribe them to poison the king, if only they proved to be corruptible. The requirement that they should first pour some wine into their own hands, and drink the sample before the king, is an indication that fear of treachery haunted the mind of an Oriental monarch, as it does the mind of a Russian czar to-day. Even with this rough safeguard it was necessary to select men who could be relied upon. Thus the cup-bearers would become "favourites." At all events, it is plain that Nehemiah was regarded with peculiar favour by the king he served. No doubt he was a faithful servant, and his fidelity in his position of trust at court was a guarantee of similar fidelity in a more responsible and far more trying office.

Nehemiah opens his story by telling us that he was in "the palace,"† or rather "the fortress," at Susa, the winter abode of the Persian monarchs—an Elamite city, the stupendous remains of which astonish the traveller in the present day—eighty miles east of the Tigris and within sight of the Bakhtiyari Mountains. Here was the great hall of audience, the counterpart of another at Persepolis. These two were per-

haps the largest rooms in the ancient world next to that at Karnak. Thirty-six fluted columns, distributed as six rows of six columns each, slender and widely spaced, supported a roof extending two hundred feet each way. The month Chislew, in which the occurrence Nehemiah proceeds to relate happened, corresponds to parts of our November and December. The name is an Assyrian and Babylonian one, and so are all the names of the months used by the Jews. Further, Nehemiah speaks of what he here narrates as happening in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and in the next chapter he mentions a subsequent event as occurring in the month Nisan* in the same year. This shows that he did not reckon the year to begin at Nisan, as the Jews were accustomed to reckon it. He must have followed the general Asiatic custom, which begins the year in the autumn, or else he must have regulated his dates according to the time of the King's accession. In either case, we see how thoroughly un-Jewish the setting of his narrative is—unless a third explanation is adopted, viz., that the Jewish year, beginning in the spring, only counts from the adoption of Ezra's edition of The Law. Be this as it may, other indications of Orientalism, derived from his court surroundings, will attract our attention in our consideration of his language later on. No writer of the Bible reflects the influence of alien culture more clearly than Nehemiah. Outwardly, he is the most foreign Jew we meet with in Scripture. Yet in life and character he is the very ideal of a Jewish patriot. His patriotism shines all the more splendidly because it bursts out of a foreign environment. Thus Nehemiah shows how little his dialect and the manners he exhibits can be taken as the gauge of a man's true life.

Nehemiah states that, while he was thus at Susa, in winter residence with the court, one of his brethren, named Hanani, together with certain men of Judah, came to him.† The language here used will admit of our regarding Hanani as only a more or less distant relative of the cup-bearer; but a later reference to him at Jerusalem as "my brother Hanani"‡ shows that his own brother is meant.

Josephus has an especially graphic account of the incident. We have no means of discovering whether he drew it from an authentic source, but its picturesqueness may justify the insertion of it here: "Now there was one of those Jews who had been carried captive, who was cup-bearer to King Xerxes; his name was Nehemiah. As this man was walking before Susa, the metropolis of the Persians, he heard some strangers that were entering the city, after a long journey, speaking to one another in the Hebrew tongue; so he went to them and asked from whence they came; and when their answer was, that they came from Judæa, he began to inquire of them again in what state the multitude was, and in what condition Jerusalem was: and when they replied that they were in a bad state, for that their walls were thrown down to the ground, and that the neighbouring nations did a great deal of mischief to the Jews, while in the day-time they over-ran the country and pillaged it, and in the night did them mischief, insomuch that not a few were led away captive out of the country, and out of Jerusalem itself, and that the roads were in the day-time found full of dead men. Hereupon Nehemiah shed tears, out of commiseration of

* Neh. ii. 3.

† Neh. i. 2.

* Neh. ii. 1.

† Neh. i. 2.

‡ Neh. vii. 2.

the calamities of his countrymen; and, looking up to heaven, he said, 'How long, O Lord, wilt thou overlook our nation, while it suffers so great miseries, and while we are made the prey and the spoil of all men?' And while he staid at the gate, and lamented thus, one told him that the king was going to sit down to supper; so he made haste, and went as he was, without washing himself, to minister to the king in his office of cup-bearer," etc.*

Evidently Nehemiah was expressly sought out. His influence would naturally be valued. There was a large Jewish community at Susa, and Nehemiah must have enjoyed a good reputation among his people; otherwise it would have been vain for the travellers to obtain an interview with him. The eyes of these Jews were turned to the royal servant as the fellow-countryman of greatest influence at court. But Nehemiah anticipated their message and relieved them of all difficulty by questioning them about the city of their fathers. Jerusalem was hundreds of miles away across the desert; no regular method of communication kept the Babylonian colony informed of the condition of the advance guard at the ancient capital; therefore scraps of news brought by chance travellers were eagerly devoured by those who were anxious for the rare information. Plainly Nehemiah shared this anxiety. His question was quite spontaneous, and it suggests that amid the distractions of his court life his thoughts had often reverted to the ancient home of his people. If he had not been truly patriotic, he could have used some device, which his palace experience would have readily suggested, so as to divert the course of this conversation with a group of simple men from the country, and keep the painful subject in the background. He must have seen clearly that for one in his position of influence to make inquiries about a poor and distressed community was to raise expectations of assistance. But his questions were earnest and eager, because his interest was genuine.

The answers to Nehemiah's inquiries struck him with surprise as well as grief. The shock with which he received them reminds us of Ezra's startled horror when the lax practices of the Jewish leaders were reported to him, although the trained court official did not display the abandonment of emotion which was seen in the student suddenly plunged into the vortex of public life and unprepared for one of those dread surprises which men of the world drill themselves to face with comparative calmness.

We must now examine the news that surprised and distressed Nehemiah. His brother and the other travellers from Jerusalem inform him that the descendants of the returned captives, the residents of Jerusalem, "are in great affliction and reproach"; and also that the city walls have been broken down and the gates burnt. The description of the defenceless and dishonoured state of the city is what most strikes Nehemiah. Now the question is to what calamities does this report refer? According to the usual understanding, it is a description of the state of Jerusalem which resulted from the sieges of Nebuchadnezzar. But there are serious difficulties in the way of this view. Nehemiah must have known all about the tremendous events, one of the results of which was seen in the very existence of the Jewish colony of which he was a member. The inevitable consequences of that

* Josephus, "Ant.," XI. v. 4.

notorious disaster could not have come before him unexpectedly and as startling news. Besides, the present distress of the inhabitants is closely associated with the account of the ruin of the defences, and is even mentioned first. Is it possible that one sentence should include what was happening now, and what took place a century earlier, in a single picture of the city's misery? The language seems to point to the action of breaking through the walls rather than to such a general demolition of them as took place when the whole city was razed to the ground by the Babylonian invaders. Lastly, the action of Nehemiah cannot be accounted for on this hypothesis. He is plunged into grief by the dreadful news, and at first he can only mourn and fast and pray. But before long, as soon as he obtains permission from his royal master, he sets out for Jerusalem, and there his first great work is to restore the ruined walls. The connection of events shows that it is the information brought to him by Hanani and the other Jews from Jerusalem that rouses him to proceed to the city. All this points to some very recent troubles, which were previously unknown to Nehemiah. Can we find any indication of those troubles elsewhere?

The opening scene in the patriotic career of Nehemiah exactly fits in with the events which came under our consideration in the previous chapter. There we saw that the opposition to the Jews which is recorded as early as Ezra iv., but attributed to the reign of an "Artaxerxes," must have been carried into effect under Artaxerxes Longimanus—Nehemiah's master. This must have been subsequent to the mission of Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, as Ezra makes no mention of its distressful consequences. The news reached Nehemiah in the twentieth year of the same reign. Therefore the mischief must have been wrought some time during the intervening thirteen years. We have no history of that period. But the glimpse of its most gloomy experiences afforded by the detached paragraph in Ezra iv., exactly fits in with the description of the resulting condition of Jerusalem in the Book of Nehemiah. This will fully account for Nehemiah's surprise and grief; it will also throw a flood of light on his character and subsequent action. If he had only been roused to repair the ravages of the old Babylonian invasions, there would have been nothing very courageous in his undertaking. Babylon itself had been overthrown, and the enemy of Babylon was now in power. Anything tending to obliterate the destructive glory of the old fallen empire might be accepted with favour by the Persian ruler. But the case is quite altered when we think of the more recent events. The very work Nehemiah was to undertake had been attempted but a few years before, and it had failed miserably. The rebuilding of the walls had then excited the jealousy of neighbouring peoples, and their gross misrepresentations had resulted in an official prohibition of the work. This prohibition, however, had only been executed by acts of violence, sanctioned by the government. Worse than all else, it was from the very Artaxerxes whom Nehemiah served that the sanction had been obtained. He was an easy-going sovereign, readily accessible to the advice of his ministers; in the earlier part of his reign he showed remarkable favour towards the Jews, when he equipped and despatched Ezra on his great expedition, and it is likely enough that

in the pressure of his multitudinous affairs the King would soon forget his unfavourable despatch. Nevertheless he was an absolute monarch, and the lives of his subjects were in his hands. For a personal attendant of such a sovereign to show sympathy with a city that had come under his disapproval was a very risky thing. Nehemiah may have felt this while he was hiding his grief from Artaxerxes. But if so, his frank confession at the first opportunity reflects all the more credit on his patriotism and the courage with which he supported it.

Patriotism is the most prominent principle in Nehemiah's conduct. Deeper considerations emerge later, especially after he has come under the influence of an enthusiastic religious teacher in the person of Ezra. But at first it is the city of his fathers that moves his heart. He is particularly distressed at its desolate condition, because the burial-place of his ancestors is there. The great anxiety of the Jews about the bodies of their dead, and their horror of the exposure of a corpse, made them look with peculiar concern on the tombs of their people. In sharing the sentiments that spring out of the habits of his people in this respect, Nehemiah gives a specific turn to his patriotism. He longs to guard and honour the last resting-place of his people; he would hear of any outrage on the city where their sepulchres are with the greatest distress. Thus filial piety mingles with patriotism, and the patriotism itself is localised, like that of the Greeks, and directed to the interests of a single city. Nehemiah here represents a different attitude from that of Mordecai. It is not the Jew that he thinks of in the first instance, but Jerusalem; and Jerusalem is dear to him primarily, not because of his kinsmen who are living there, but because it is the city of his fathers' sepulchres, the city of the great past. Still the strongest feelings are always personal. Patriotism loves the very soil of the fatherland; but the depth and strength of the passion spring from association with an affection for the people that inhabit it. Without this, patriotism degenerates into a flimsy sentiment. At Jerusalem Nehemiah develops a deep personal interest in the citizens. Even on the Susa acropolis, where the very names of these people are unknown to him, the thought of his ancestry gives a sanctity to the far-off city. Such a thought is enlarging and purifying. It lifts a man out of petty personal concerns; it gives him unselfish sympathies; it prepares demands for sacrifice and service. Thus, while the mock patriotism which cares only for glory and national aggrandisement is nothing but a vulgar product of enlarged selfishness, the true patriotism that awakens large human sympathies is profoundly unselfish, and shows itself to be a part of the very religion of a devoted man.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.

NEHEMIAH i. 4-11.

NEHEMIAH records the twofold effect of the melancholy news which his brother and the other travellers from Jerusalem brought him. Its first consequence was grief; its second prayer. The

grief was expressed in the dramatic style of the Oriental by weeping, lamentations, fasting, and other significant acts and attitudes which the patriot kept up for some days. Demonstrative as all this appears to us, it was calm and restrained in comparison with Ezra's frantic outburst. Still it was the sign and fruit of heartfelt distress, for Nehemiah was really and deeply moved. Had the incident ended here, we should have seen a picture of patriotic sentiment, such as might be looked for in any loyal Jew, although the position of Nehemiah at court would have proved him loyal under exceptional circumstances. But the prayer which is the outcome of the soul-stirring thoughts and feelings of devout patriotism lifts the scene into a much higher interest. This prayer is singularly penetrating, revealing a keen insight into the secret of the calamities of Israel, and an exact perception of the relation of God to those calamities. It shows a knowledge of what we may call the theology of history, of the Divine laws and principles which are above and behind the laws and principles indicated by the expression "the philosophy of history." In form it is a combination of three elements,—the language of devotion cultivated by Persian sages; expressions culled from the venerated Hebrew law-book, Deuteronomy; and new phrases called out by the new needs of the immediate occasion. Nehemiah shows how natural it is for a person to fall into an accepted dialect of worship, even in an original prayer the end of which is novel and special.

He opens his prayer with an expression that seems to be more Persian than Jewish. He does not make his appeal to Jehovah as the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but after the sacred name he adds the descriptive title "God of heaven." This is quite a favourite phrase of Nehemiah's. Thus in describing his interview with Artaxerxes he says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven";* and at Jerusalem he answers the mockery of his opponents by exclaiming, "The God of heaven. He will prosper us."† Now the same expression is found repeatedly in the chronicler's version of royal edicts—in the edict of Cyrus,‡ in the edict of Darius,§ in the edict of Artaxerxes.¶ If it is indeed of Persian origin, the use of it by Nehemiah is most significant. In this case, while it indicates the speaker's unconscious adoption of the language of his neighbours and shows him to be a Jew of Oriental culture, it also illustrates a far-reaching process of Providence. Here is an exalted name for God, the origin of which is apparently Gentile, accepted and used by a devout Jew, and through his employment of it passing over into the Scriptures,‡ so that the religion of Israel is enriched by a phrase from abroad. It would be but a poor championship of the truth of the Hebrew revelation that would lead us to close our eyes to whatever of good is to be found outside its borders. Certainly we honour God by gladly perceiving that He has not left Himself entirely without witness in the dim-lit temple of Pagan thought. It is a ground for rejoicing that, while the science of Comparative Religion has not touched the unique pre-eminence of the

* Neh. ii. 4.

† Neh. ii. 20.

‡ Ezra vii. 12, 21, 23.

¶ It is used by the chronicler, and it is found in Jonah and Daniel, and once even in our recension of Genesis (Gen. xxiv. 7).

‡ Ezra i. 2.

§ Ezra vi. 10.

Hebrew and Christian Faith, that science has been able to recover scattered pearls of truth that lay strewn over the waste of the world's wide thinking. If in a few rare cases some such gems had been found earlier and even set in the crown of Israel, we can only be thankful that the One Spirit who is the source of all revelation has thus evinced the breadth of His activity. Nor should it disturb our faith if it could be proved that more important elements of our religion did not originate among the Jews, but came from Babylonian, Persian, or Greek sources; for why should not God speak through a Gentile if He chooses so to do? This is not a point of dogma. It is simply a question of fact to be determined by historical inquiry.

We cannot say for certain, however, that Nehemiah's phrase was coined in a Persian mint. Its novelty, its absence from earlier Hebrew literature, and its repeated appearance in the edicts of Persian kings favour the notion. But we know that before reaching us these edicts have been more or less translated into Hebrew forms of thought, so that the phrase may possibly be Jewish, after all. Still, even in that case it seems clear that it must have been first used in the East and under the Persian rule. The widening of his horizon and the elevation of his idea of Providence which resulted from the experience of the exile helped to enlarge and exalt the Jew's whole conception of God. Jehovah could no longer be thought of as a tribal divinity. The greater prophets had escaped from any such primitive notion much earlier, but not the bulk of the nation. Now the exiles saw that the domain of their God could not be limited to the hills and valleys of Palestine. They perceived how His arm reached from the river to the ends of the earth; how His might was everywhere supreme, directing the history of empires, overthrowing great monarchies, establishing new world-powers.

A more subtle movement of thought has been detected in the appearance of this suggestive phrase, "God of heaven." The idea of the transcendence of God is seen to be growing in the mind of the Jew. God appears to be receding into remote celestial regions—His greatness including distance. As yet this is only vaguely felt; but here we have the beginning of a characteristic of Judaism which becomes more and more marked in course of time, until it seems as though God were cut off from all direct connection with men on earth, and only administering the world through a whole army of intermediaries, the angels.

After this phrase with the Persian flavour, Nehemiah adds expressions borrowed from the Hebrew Book of Deuteronomy, a book with ideas and words from which his prayer is saturated throughout. God is described on the one hand as "great and terrible," and on the other hand as keeping "covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments.* The Deuteronomist adds "to a thousand generations"—a clause not needed by Nehemiah, who is now only concerned with one special occasion. The first part of the description is in harmony with the new and exalted title of God, and therefore it fits in well here. It is also suitable for the circumstances of the prayer, because in times of calamity we are impressed with the power

and terror of Providence. There is another side to these attributes, however. The mention of them suggests that the sufferers have not fallen into the hand of man. Hanani and his fellow-Jews made no allusion to a Divine action; they could not see beyond the jealousy of neighbouring people in the whole course of events. But Nehemiah at once recognised God's hand. This perception would calm him as he watched the solemn movement of the drama carried up into heavenly regions. Then, aided by the cheering thought which came to him from the book of Divine revelation on which his prayer was moulded, Nehemiah turns to the covenant-keeping mercy of God. The covenant which he appeals to here must be that of the Book of Deuteronomy; his subsequent reference to the contents of that book make this quite clear.

It is important to see that Nehemiah recognises the relation of God's mercy to His covenant. He perceives that the two go together, that the covenant does not dispense with the need of mercy any more than it forecloses the action of mercy. When the covenant people fall into sin, they cannot claim forgiveness as a right; nor can they ever demand deliverance from trouble on the ground of their pact with God. God does not bargain with His children. A Divine covenant is not a business arrangement, the terms of which can be interpreted like those of a deed of partnership, and put into force by the determinate will of either party. The covenant is, from the first, a gracious Divine promise and dispensation, conditioned by certain requirements to be observed on man's side. Its very existence is a fruit of God's mercy, not an outcome of man's haggling, and its operation is just through the continuance of that mercy. It is true a promise, a sort of pledge, goes with the covenant; but that is a promise of mercy, a pledge of grace. It does not dispense with the mercy of God by converting what would otherwise be an act of pure grace on his part into a right which we possess and act upon of our own sole will. What it does is to afford a channel for the mercy of God, and to assure us of His mercy, which, however, remains mercy throughout.

From another point of view the covenant and the mercy go together. The mercy follows the covenant. The expression "the unconvenanted mercies of God" has been used in bitter irony, as though any hope that depended on such mercies was poor indeed, a bare refuge of despair. But so to treat the unknown goodness of God is to discredit that "ceaseless, unexhausted love" which has given us the latest and highest and best name of God. We do not know how far the vast ocean of the lovingkindness of God extends. On the other hand, certain definite assurances of mercy are given along the lines of a covenant. Therefore it is clearly wise and right for people who possess the covenant to follow those lines. Other people who are outside the covenant may meet with wonderful surprises in the infinite Fatherhood of God; but those of His children who are in the home must expect to be treated according to the established order of the house. No doubt they too will have their grand surprises of Divine grace, for God does not tie Himself to forms and rules at home while He exercises liberty abroad. To do so would be to make the home a prison. But still His revelation of methods of grace is a clear in-

* Neh. i. 5. See Deut. vii. 9.

dication that it is our duty to observe those methods, and that we have no ground of complaint if we do not receive the grace we seek when we wilfully neglect them. Here then we see the necessity of studying the revelation of the will and mind of God. That prayer has most ground of hope in it which keeps nearest to the thought and spirit of Scripture.

The terms of the covenant quoted by Nehemiah require obedience on the part of those who would receive mercy under it, and this obedience is needed in those who are seeking restoration and forgiveness as well as in those who have not fallen from the covenant throughout. The reference to "mercy" makes that clear. The penitent submits, and in the surrender of his will he is made the recipient of the Divine mercy. But behind the obedience is the spirit of love that prompts it. The mercy is for them that *love* God and observe His commandments: Love is the fulfilling of the law from the first. It is expected in the Old Testament as well as in the New; it is prescribed by the Deuteronomist as decidedly as by St. John, for it is the only ground of real obedience. The slavish terror of the lash which squeezes out a reluctant utterance of submission will not open the door for the mercy of God. The divine covenant secures mercy only for those who return to their allegiance in a spirit of love.

Having thus set forth the grounds of his prayer in his address to God and his plea of the covenant, Nehemiah proceeds to invoke the Divine attention to his petition. There is an echo of the courtier, perhaps, in his request that God's ear should be attentive and His eyes open; * but his whole conduct forbids the idea of servile obsequiousness. His prayer, he here says, is offered "day and night"; so his report of it may be regarded as a sort of final summing up of a long, persevering succession of prayers. The unwearied persistence of the man reveals two favourable features in his character—his earnestness of purpose and his unflinching faith. Our Lord denounces "vain repetitions" †—i. e., repetitions the very value of which is thought to reside in their number, as though prayer could be estimated arithmetically. But the prayer that is repeated simply because the worshipper is too persistent to be satisfied till it is answered does not come into the category of "vain repetitions"; it is anything but empty.

Immediately after his invocation of God's gracious attention Nehemiah plunges into a confession of sin. Ezra's great prayer was wholly occupied with confession, ‡ and this mournful exercise takes a large place in Nehemiah's prayer. But the younger man has one special ground of confession. The startling news of the ruinous condition of the recently restored city of Jerusalem rouses a sort of national conscience in his breast. He knows that the captivity was brought about as a chastisement for the sins of the Jews. That great lesson—so recklessly ignored when it was insisted on by Jeremiah—had been burnt into the deepest convictions of the exiles. Therefore Nehemiah makes no complaint of the cruel behaviour of the enemies of Israel. He does not whine about the pitiable plight of the Jews. Their real enemies were their sins, and the explanation of their present distress was to be found in their own bad conduct. Thus

Nehemiah goes to the root of the matter, and that without a moment's hesitation.

Further, it is interesting to see how he identifies himself with his people in this confession. Living far from the seat of the evil, himself a God-fearing, upright man, he might have been tempted to treat the citizens of Jerusalem as Job's comforters treated the patriarch of Uz, and denounce their sins from the secure heights of his own virtue. In declining to assume this pharisaic attitude, Nehemiah shows that he is not thinking of recent specific sins committed by the returned exiles. The whole history of Israel's apostasy is before him; he feels that the later as truly as the earlier calamities flow from this one deep, foul fountain of iniquity. Thus he can join himself with his fathers and the whole nation in the utterance of confession. This is different from the confession of Ezra, who was thinking of one definite sin which he did not share, but which he confessed in a priestly sympathy. Nehemiah is less concerned with formal legal precepts. He is more profoundly moved by the wide and deep course of his people's sin generally. Still it is a mark of self-knowledge and true humility, as well as of patriotism, that he honestly associates himself with his fellow-countrymen. He perceives that particular sins, such as those found in the recent misconduct of the Jews, are but symptoms of the underlying sinful character; and that while circumstances may save the individual from the temptation to exhibit every one of these symptoms, they are accidental, and they cannot be set to his credit. The common sin is in him still; therefore he may well join himself to the penitents, even though he has not participated in all their evil deeds. The solidarity of the race is, unhappily, never more apparent than in its sin. This sin is especially the "one touch of" *fallen* "nature" that "makes the whole world kin." It was to a trait of frailty that Shakespeare was alluding when he coined his famous phrase, as the context proves.* The trail of the serpent is over every human life, and in this ugly mark we have a terrible sign of human brotherhood. Of all the elements of "Common Prayer," confession can be most perfectly shared by every member of a congregation, if only all the worshippers are in earnest and know their own hearts.

Nehemiah does not enter much into detail with this confession. It is sweeping and widely comprehensive. Two points, however, may be noticed. First, he refers to the Godward aspect of sin, its personal character as an offence against God. Thus he says, "We have dealt very corruptly *against Thee*." † So the prodigal first confesses that he has sinned "against heaven." ‡ Secondly, he makes mention more than once of the commandments of Moses. The name of Moses is often appealed to with reverence in the history of this period of Ezra and Nehemiah. Evidently the minds of men reverted to the great founder of the nation at the time of national penitence and restoration. Under these circumstances no new edition of The Law could have been adopted unless it was believed to have embodied the substance of the older teaching.

After his confession Nehemiah goes on to appeal to the Divine promises of restoration made

* Neh. i. 6.

† Matt. vi. 7.

‡ Ezra ix. 6-15.

* "Troilus and Cressida," Act iii., Scene 3.

† Neh. i. 7.

‡ Luke xv. 18.

to the penitent in the great national covenant. He sums them up in a definite sentence, not quoting any one utterance of Deuteronomy, but gathering together the various promises of mercy and dovetailing almost the very language of them together, so as to present us with the total result. These promises recognise the possibility of transgression and the consequent scattering of the people so often insisted on by the prophets and especially by Jeremiah. They then go on to offer restoration on condition of repentance and a return to obedient allegiance. It is to be observed that this is all laid down on national lines. The nation sins; the nation suffers; the nation is restored to its old home. This is very much a characteristic of Judaism, and it gives a breadth to the operation of great religious principles which would otherwise be unattainable when almost all regard for a future life is left out of account. Christianity dwells more on individualism, but it obtains space at once by bringing the future life into prominence. In the Old Testament the future of the nation takes much the same place as that occupied by the future of the individual in the New Testament.

In reviewing the history of God's way with Israel Nehemiah lays his finger on the great fact of redemption. The Jews are the "people whom God had redeemed by His great power and His strong hand."* Universal usage compels us to fix upon the exodus under Moses, and not Zerubabel's pilgrimage, as the event to which Nehemiah here alludes. That event, which was the birth of the nation, always comes out in Hebrew literature as the supreme act of Divine grace. In some respects its position in the religion of Israel may be likened to that of the cross of Christ in Christianity. In both cases God's great work of redeeming His children is the supreme proof of His mercy and the grand source of assurance in praying to Him for new help. On the ground of the great redemption Nehemiah advances to the special petition with which his prayer closes. This is most definite. It is on behalf of his own need; it is for immediate help—"this day"; it is for one particular need—in his proposed approach to Artaxerxes to plead the cause of his people. Here then is an instance of the most special prayer. It is "to the point," and for more pressing present requirements. We cannot but be struck with the reality of such a prayer. Having reached this definite petition Nehemiah closes abruptly.

When we glance back over the prayer as a whole, we are struck with its order and progress. As in our Lord's model prayer, the first part is absorbed with thoughts of God; it is after uplifting his thoughts to heaven that the worshipper comes down to human need. Then a large place is given to sin. This comes first in the consideration of man after the worshipper has turned his eyes from the contemplation of God and felt the contrast of darkness after light. Lastly, the human subjects of the prayer begin in the wider circle of the whole nation; only at the very last, in little more than a sentence, Nehemiah brings forward his own personal petition. Thus the prayer gradually narrows down from the Divine to the human, and from the national to the individual: as it narrows it becomes more definite, till it ends in a single point; but this point is driven home by the weight and force of all that precedes.

* Neh. i. 10.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRAYER ANSWERED.

NEHEMIAH ii. 1-8.

NEHEMIAH'S prayer had commenced on celestial heights of meditation among thoughts of Divine grace and glory, and when it had stooped to earth it had swept over the wide course of his nation's history and poured out a confession of the whole people's sin; but the final point of it was a definite request for the prospering of his contemplated interview with the king. Artaxerxes was an absolute despot, surrounded with the semi-divine honours that Orientals associate with the regal state, and yet in speaking of him before "the God of heaven," "the great and terrible God," Nehemiah loses all awe for his majestic pomp, and describes him boldly as "this man."* In the supreme splendour of God's presence all earthly glory fades out of the worshipper's sight, like a glow-worm's spark lost in the sunlight. Therefore no one can be dazzled by human magnificence so long as he walks in the light of God. Here, however, Nehemiah is speaking of an absent king. Now it is one thing to be fearless of man when alone with God in the seclusion of one's own chamber, and quite another to be equally imperturbable in the world and away from the calming influence of undisturbed communion with Heaven. We must remember this if we would do justice to Nehemiah, because otherwise we might be surprised that his subsequent action did not show all the courage we should have expected.

Four months passed away before Nehemiah attempted anything on behalf of the city of his fathers. The Jewish travellers probably thought that their visit to the court servant had been barren of all results. We cannot tell how this interval was occupied, but it is clear that Nehemiah was brooding over his plans all the time, and inwardly fortifying himself for his great undertaking. His ready reply when he was suddenly and quite unexpectedly questioned by the king shows that he had made the troubles of Jerusalem a subject of anxious thought, and that he had come to a clear decision as to the course which he should pursue. Time spent in such fruitful thinking is by no means wasted. There is a hasty sympathy that flashes up at the first sign of some great public calamity, eager "to do something," but too blind in its impetuosity to consider carefully what ought to be done; and this is often the source of greater evils, because it is inconsiderate. In social questions especially people are tempted to be misled by a blind, impatient philanthropy. The worst consequence of yielding to such an influence—and one is strongly urged to yield for fear of seeming cold and indifferent—is that the certain disappointment that follows is likely to provoke despair of all remedies, and to end in cynical callousness. Then, in the rebound, every enthusiastic effort for the public good is despised as but the froth of sentimentality.

Very possibly Nehemiah had no opportunity of speaking to the king during these four months. A Persian sovereign was waited on by several cupbearers, and it is likely enough that Nehemiah's terms of service were intermittent.

* Neh. ii. 1.

On his return to the court in due course he may have had the first occasion for presenting his petition. Still it is not to be denied that he found great difficulty in bringing himself to utter it, and then only when it was dragged out of him by the king. It was a petition of no common kind. To request permission to leave the court might be misconstrued unfavourably. Herodotus says that people had been put to death both by Darius and by Xerxes for showing reluctance to accompany their king. Then had not this very Artaxerxes sanctioned the raid upon Jerusalem which had resulted in the devastation which Nehemiah deplored and which he desired to see reversed? If the king remembered his rescript to the Syrian governors, might he not regard a proposal for the reversal of its policy as a piece of unwarrantable impertinence on the part of his household slave—nay, as an indication of treasonable designs? All this would be apparent enough to Nehemiah as he handed the wine-cup on bended knee to the Great King. Is it wonderful then that he hesitated to speak, or that he was "very sore afraid" when the king questioned him about his sadness of countenance?

There is an apparent contradiction in Nehemiah's statement concerning this sad appearance of his countenance which is obscured in our English translation by the unwarrantable insertion of the word "beforetime" in Nehemiah ii. 1, so that the sentence reads, "Now I had not been *beforetime* sad in his presence." This word is a gloss of the translators. What Nehemiah really says is simply, "Now I had not been sad in his presence"—a statement that evidently refers to the occasion then being described, and not to previous times nor to the cup-bearer's habitual bearing. Yet in the very next sentence we read how the king asked Nehemiah the reason for the sadness of his countenance. The contradiction would be as apparent to the writer as it is to us; and if he left it Nehemiah meant it to stand, no doubt intending to suggest by a dramatic description of the scene that he attempted to disguise his sorrow, but that his attempt was ineffectual—so strong, so marked was his grief. It was a rule of the court etiquette, apparently, that nobody should be sad in the king's presence. A gloomy face would be unpleasant to the monarch. Shakespeare's Cesar knew the security of cheerful associates when he said:—

"Let me have men about me that are fat;
 Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights;
 Yond' Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
 He thinks too much; such men are dangerous."

Besides, was not the sunshine of the royal countenance enough to drive away all clouds of trouble from the minds of his attendants? Nehemiah had drilled himself into the courtier's habitual pleasantness of demeanour. Nevertheless, though passing, superficial signs of emotion may be quite reined in by a person who is trained to control his features, indications of the permanent conditions of the inner life are so deeply cut in the lines and curves of the countenance that the most consummate art of an actor cannot disguise them. Nehemiah's grief was profound and enduring. Therefore he could not hide it. Moreover, it is a king's business to understand men, and long practice makes him an expert in it. So Artaxerxes was not deceived by the well-

arranged smile of his servant; it was evident to him that something very serious was troubling the man. The sickness of a favourite attendant would not be unknown to a kind and observant king. Nehemiah was not ill, then. The source of his trouble must have been mental. Sympathy and curiosity combined to urge the king to probe the matter to the bottom. Though alarmed at his master's inquiry, the trembling cup-bearer could not but give a true answer. Here was his great opportunity—thrust on him since he had not had the courage to find it for himself. Artaxerxes was not to be surprised that a man should grieve when the city of his ancestors was lying desolate. But this information did not satisfy the king. His keen eye saw that there was more behind. Nehemiah had some request which as yet he had not been daring enough to utter. With real kindness Artaxerxes invited him to declare it.

The critical moment had arrived. How much hangs upon the next sentence—not the continuance of the royal favour only, but perhaps the very life of the speaker, and, what is of far more value to a patriot, the future destiny of his people! Nehemiah's perception of its intense importance is apparent in the brief statement which he here inserts in his narrative: "So I prayed to the God of heaven."* He is accustomed to drop in suggestive notes on his own private feelings and behaviour along the course of his narrative. Only a few lines earlier we came upon one of these characteristic autobiographical touches in the words, "Now I had not been sad in his presence,"† soon followed by another, "Then I was very sore afraid."‡ Such remarks vivify the narrative, and keep up an interest in the writer. In the present case the interjection is peculiarly suggestive. It was natural that Nehemiah should be startled at the king's abrupt question, but it is an indication of his devout nature that as the crisis intensified his fear passed over into prayer. This was not a set season of prayer; the pious Jew was not in his temple, nor at any *proseuché*; there was no time for a full, elaborate, and orderly utterance, such as that previously recorded. Just at the moment of need, in the very presence of the king, with no time to spare, by a flash of thought, Nehemiah retires to that most lonely of all lonely places, "the inner city of the mind," there to seek the help of the Unseen God. And it is enough: the answer is as swift as the prayer; in a moment the weak man is made strong for his great effort.

Such a sudden uplifting of the soul to God is the most real of all prayers. This at least is genuine and heartfelt, whatever may be the case with the semiliturgical composition the thought and beauty of which engaged our attention in the previous chapter. But then the man who can thus find God in a moment must be in the habit of frequently resorting to the Divine Presence; like the patriarchs, he must be walking with God. The brief and sudden prayer reaches heaven as an arrow suddenly shot from the bow; but it goes right home, because he who lets it off in his surprise is a good marksman, well practised. This ready prayer only springs to the lips of a man who lives in a daily habit of praying. We must associate the two kinds of prayer in order to account for that which is now before us. The deliberate exercises of adoration, confession, and petition prepare for the one sudden ejaculation.

* Neh. ii. 4.

† Neh. ii. 1.

‡ Neh. ii. 2.

There we see the deep river which supplies the sea of devotion from which the momentary prayer is cast up as the spray of a wave. Therefore it was in a great measure on account of his deliberate and unwearying daily prayers that Nehemiah was prepared with his quick cry to God in the crisis of need. We may compare his two kinds of prayer with our Lord's full and calm intercession in John xvii. and the short agonised cry from the cross. In each case we feel that the sudden appeal to God in the moment of dire necessity is the most intense and penetrating prayer. Still we must recognise that this comes from a man who is much in prayer. The truth is that beneath both of these prayers—the calm, meditative utterance, and the simple cry for help—there lies the deep, true essence of prayer, which is no thing of words at all, but which lives on, even when it is voiceless, in the heart of one of whom it can be said, as Tennyson says of Mary,—

“Her eyes are homes of silent prayer.”

Fortified by his moment's communion with God, Nehemiah now makes known his request. He asks to be sent to Jerusalem to repair its ruins and fortify the city. This petition contains more than lies on the surface of the words. Nehemiah does not say that he wishes to be appointed Governor of Jerusalem in the high office which had been held by Zerubbabel, but the subsequent narrative shows that he was assigned to this position, and his report of the king's orders about the house he was to dwell in at Jerusalem almost implies as much.* For one of the royal household servants to be appointed to such a position was doubtless not so strange an anomaly in the East, in Nehemiah's day, as it would be with us now. The king's will was the fountain of all honour, and the seclusion in which the Persian monarchs lived gave unusual opportunities for the few personal attendants who were admitted into their presence to obtain great favours from them. Still Nehemiah's attitude seems to show some self-confidence in a young man not as yet holding any political office. Two or three considerations, however, will give a very different complexion to his request. In the first place, his city was in a desperate plight: deliverance was urgently needed; no help appeared to be forthcoming unless he stepped into the breach. If he failed, things could hardly become worse than they were already. Was this an occasion when a man should hold back from a sense of modesty? There is a false modesty which is really a product of the self-consciousness that is next door to vanity. The man who is entirely oblivious of self will sometimes forget to be modest. Moreover, Nehemiah's request was at the peril of his life. When it was granted he would be launched on a most hazardous undertaking. The ambition—if we must use the word—which would covet such a career is at the very antipodes of that of the vulgar adventurer who simply seeks power in order to gratify his own sense of importance. “Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.”† That humbling rebuke may be needed by many men; but it was not needed by Nehemiah, for he was not seeking the great things for *himself*.

It was a daring request; yet the king received it most favourably. Again, then, we have the pleasing spectacle of a Persian monarch showing

kindness to the Jews. This is not the first time that Artaxerxes has proved himself their friend, for there can be no doubt that he is the same sovereign as the Artaxerxes who despatched Ezra with substantial presents to the aid of the citizens of Jerusalem some twelve or thirteen years before.

Here, however, a little difficulty emerges. In the interval between the mission of Ezra and that of Nehemiah an adverse decree had been extracted from the compliant sovereign—the decree referred to in Ezra iv. Now the semi-divinity that was ascribed to a Persian monarch involved the fiction of infallibility, and this was maintained by a rule making it unconstitutional for him to withdraw any command that he had once issued. How then could Artaxerxes now sanction the building of the walls of Jerusalem, which but a few years before he had expressly forbidden? The difficulty vanishes on a very little consideration. The king's present action was not the withdrawal of his earlier decree, for the royal order to the Samaritans had been just to the effect that the building of the walls of Jerusalem should be stopped.* This order had been fully executed; moreover it contained the significant words, “until another decree shall be made by me.”† Therefore a subsequent permission to resume the work, issued under totally different circumstances, would not be a contradiction to the earlier order; and now that a trusty servant of the king was to superintend the operations, no danger of insurrection need be apprehended. Then the pointed notice of the fact that the chief wife—described as “The Queen”—was sitting by Artaxerxes, is evidently intended to imply that her presence helped the request of Nehemiah. Orientalists have discovered her name, Damaschia, but nothing about her to throw light on her attitude towards the Jews. She may have been even a proselyte, or she may have simply shown herself friendly towards the young cup-bearer. No political or religious motives are assigned for the conduct of Artaxerxes here. Evidently Nehemiah regarded the granting of his request as a direct result of the royal favour shown towards himself. “Put not your trust in princes”‡ is a wholesome warning, born of the melancholy disappointment of the pilgrims who had placed too much hope in the Messianic glamour with which the career of poor Zerubbabel opened; but it does not mean that a man is to fling away the advantages which accrue to him from the esteem he has won in high places. Ever since the Israelites showed no scruple in spoiling the Egyptians—and who could blame them for seizing at the eleventh hour the overdue wages of which they had been defrauded for generations?—“the people of God” have not been slow to reap harvests of advantage whenever persecution or cold indifference has given place to the brief, fickle favour of the world. Too often this has been purchased at the price of the loss of liberty—a ruinous exchange. Here is the critical point. The difficulty is to accept aid without any compromise of principle. Sympathy is the besetting snare of the courtier, and when the Church turns courtier she is in imminent danger of that, in her, most fatal fault. But Nehemiah affords a splendid example to the contrary. In his grand independence of character we have a fine instance of a wise, strong use of worldly advantages, entirely free from the abuses

* Neh. ii. 8.

† Jer. xlv. 5.

* Ezra iv. 21.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Psalm cxlvi. 3.

that too commonly accompany them. Thus he anticipates the idea of the Apocalypse where it is said, "The earth helped the woman."*

The interest of the king in his cup-bearer is shown by his repeated questions, and by the determined manner in which he drags out of Nehemiah all his plans and wishes. Every request is granted. The favourite servant is too much valued to get his leave of absence without some limit of time, but even that is fixed in accordance with Nehemiah's desire. He asks and obtains letters of introduction to the governors west of the Euphrates. The letters were most necessary, because these very men had bestirred themselves to obtain the adverse decree but a very few years before. It is not likely that they had all veered round to favour the hated people against whom they had just been exhibiting the most severe antagonism. Nehemiah therefore showed a wise caution in obtaining a sort of "safe conduct." The friendliness of Artaxerxes went still further. The king ordered timber to be provided for the building and fortifying operations contemplated by his cup-bearer; this was to be furnished from a royal hunting park—a "Paradise," to use the Persian word—probably one which formerly belonged to the royal demesne of Judah, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, as the head-forester bore a Hebrew name, "Asaph.† Costly cedars for the temple had to be fetched all the way from the distant mountains of Lebanon, in Phœnician territory; but the city gates and the castle and house carpentry could be well supplied from the oaks and other indigenous timber of Palestine.

All these details evince the practical nature of Nehemiah's patriotism. His last word on the happy conclusion of the interview with Artaxerxes, which he had anticipated with so much apprehension, shows that higher thoughts were not crushed out by the anxious consideration of external affairs. He concludes with a striking phrase, which we have met with earlier on the lips of Ezra.‡ "And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."§ Here is the same recognition of Divine Providence, and the same graphic image of the "hand" of God laid on the writer. It looks as though the younger man had been already a disciple of the Great Scribe. But his utterance is not the less genuine and heartfelt on that account. He perceives that his prayer has been heard and answered. The strength and beauty of his life throughout may be seen in his constant reference of all things to God in trust and prayer before the event, and in grateful acknowledgment afterwards.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE.

NEHEMIAH ii. 9-20.

NEHEMIAH's journey up to Jerusalem differed in many respects from Ezra's great expedition, with a host of emigrants, rich stores, and all the accompaniments of a large caravan. Burdened with none of these encumbrances, the newly appointed governor would be able to travel in comparative ease. Yet while Ezra was "ashamed" to ask for a military escort to protect

his defenceless multitude and the treasures which were only too likely to attract the vulture eyes of roving hordes of Bedouin, because, as he tells us, he feared such a request might be taken as a sign of distrust in his God, Nehemiah accepted a troop of cavalry without any hesitation. This difference, however, does not reflect any discredit on the faith of the younger man.

In the first place, his claims on the king were greater than those of Ezra, who would have had to petition for the help of soldiers if he had wanted it, whereas Nehemiah received his body-guard as a matter of course. Ezra had been a private subject previous to his appointment, and though he had subsequently been endowed with large authority of an indefinite character, that authority was confined to the execution of the Jewish law; it had nothing to do with the general concerns of the Persian government in Syria or Palestine. But Nehemiah came straight from the court, where he had been a favourite servant of the king, and he was now made the official governor of Jerusalem. It was only in accordance with custom that he should have an escort assigned him when he went to take possession of his district. Then, probably to save time, Nehemiah would travel by the perilous desert route through Tadmor, and thus cover the whole journey in about two months—a route which Ezra's heavy caravan may have avoided. When he reached Syria the fierce animosity which had been excited by Ezra's domestic reformation—and which therefore had been broken out after Ezra's expedition—would make it highly dangerous for a Jew who was going to aid the hated citizens of Jerusalem to travel through the mixed population.

Nevertheless, after allowing their full weight to these considerations, may we not still detect an interesting trait of the younger man's character in Nehemiah's ready acceptance of the guard with which Ezra had deliberately dispensed? In the eyes of the world the idealist Ezra must have figured as a most unpractical person. But Nehemiah, a courtier by trade, was evidently well accustomed to "affairs." Naturally a cautious man, he was always anxious in his preparations, though no one could blame him for lack of decision or promptness at the moment of action. Now the striking thing about his character in this relation—that which lifts it entirely above the level of purely secular prudence—is the fact that he closely associated his careful habits with his faith in Providence. He would have regarded the rashness which excuses itself on the plea of faith as culpable presumption. His religion was all the more real and thorough because it did not confine itself to unearthly experiences, or refuse to acknowledge the Divine in any event that was not visibly miraculous. No man was ever more impressed with the great truth that God was with him. It was this truth, deeply rooted in his heart, that gave him the joy which became the strength, the very inspiration of his life. He was sure that his commonest secular concerns were moulded by the hand of his God. Therefore to his mind the detachment of Persian cavalry was as truly assigned to him by God as if it had been a troop of angels sent straight from the hosts of heaven.

The highly dangerous nature of his undertaking and the necessity for exercising the utmost caution were apparent to Nehemiah as soon as he approached Jerusalem. Watchful enemies at

* Rev. xii. 16.

‡ Ezra vii. 28.

† Neh ii. 8.

§ Neh. ii. 8.

once showed themselves annoyed "that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."* It was not any direct injury to themselves, it was the prospect of some favour to the hated Jews that grieved these people; though doubtless their jealousy was in part provoked by dread lest Jerusalem should regain the position of pre-eminence in Palestine which had been enjoyed during her depression by the rival city of Samaria. Under these circumstances Nehemiah followed the tactics which he had doubtless learnt during his life among the treacherous intrigues of an Oriental court. He did not at first reveal his plans. He spent three days quietly in Jerusalem. Then he took his famous ride round the ruins of the city walls. This was as secret as King Alfred's exploration of the camp of the Danes. Without breathing a word of his intention to the Jews, and taking only a horse or an ass to ride on himself and a small body of trusty attendants on foot, Nehemiah set out on his tour in the dead of night. No doubt the primary purpose of this secrecy was that no suspicion of his design should reach the enemies of the Jews. Had these men suspected it they would have been beforehand with their plans for frustrating it; spies and traitors would have been in the field before Nehemiah was prepared to receive them; emissaries of the enemy would have perverted the minds even of loyal citizens. It would be difficult enough under any circumstances to rouse the dispirited people to undertake a work of great toil and danger. If they were divided in counsel from the first it would be hopeless. Moreover, in order to persuade the Jews to fortify their city, Nehemiah must be prepared with a clear and definite proposal. He must be able to show them that he understands exactly in what condition their ruined fortifications are lying. For his personal satisfaction, too, he must see the ruins with his own eyes. Ever since the travellers from Jerusalem who met him at Susa had shocked him with their evil tidings, a vision of the broken walls and charred gates had been before his imagination. Now he would really see the very ruins themselves, and ascertain whether all was as bad as it had been represented.

The uncertainty which still surrounds much of the topography of Jerusalem, owing to its very foundations having been turned over by the ploughshare of the invader, while some of its sacred sites have been buried under huge mounds of rubbish, renders it impossible to trace Nehemiah's night ride in all its details. If we are to accept the latest theory, according to which the gorge hitherto regarded as the *Tyropæon* is really the ancient Valley of Hinnom, some other sites will need considerable readjustment. The "Gate of the Valley" seems to be one near the head of the Valley of Hinnom; we know nothing of the "Dragon Well"; the "Dung Port" would be a gateway through which the city offal was flung out to the fires in the Valley of Hinnom; the "King's Pool" is very likely that afterwards known as the "Pool of Siloam." The main direction of Nehemiah's tour of inspection is fairly definite to us. He started at the western exit from the city and passed down to the left, to where the Valley of Hinnom joins the Valley of the Kidron; ascending this valley, he found the masses of stones and heaps of rubbish in such

confusion that he was compelled to leave the animal he had been riding hitherto and to clamber over the ruins on foot. Reaching the northeastern corner of the Valley of the Kidron, he would turn round by the northern side of the city, where most of the gates had been situated, because there the city, which was difficult of access to the south and the east on account of the encircling ravines, could be easily approached.

And what did he gain by his journey? He gained knowledge. The reformation which is planned by the student at his desk, without any reference to the actual state of affairs, will be, at best, a Utopian dream. But if the dreamer is also a man of resources and opportunities, his impracticable schemes may issue in incalculable mischief. "Nothing is more terrible," says Goethe, "than *active ignorance*." We can smile at a knight-errant Don Quixote; but a Don Quixote in power would be as dangerous as a Nero. Most schemes of socialism, though they spring from the brains of amiable enthusiasts, break up like empty bubbles on the first contact with the real world. It is especially necessary, too, to know the worst. Optimism is very cheering in idea, but when it is indulged in to the neglect of truth, with an impatient disregard for the shady side of life, it simply leads its devotees into a fools' paradise. The highest idealist must have something of the realist in him if he would ever have his ideas transformed into facts.

Further, it is to be noted that Nehemiah would gather his information for himself; he could not be content with hearsay evidence. Here again he reveals the practical man. It is not that he distrusts the honesty of any agents he might employ, nor merely that he is aware of the deplorable inaccuracy of observers generally and the inability of nearly all people to give an uncoloured account of what they have seen; but he knows that there is an impression to be obtained by personal observation which the most correct description cannot approach. No map or book will give a man a right idea of a place that he has never visited. If this is true of the external world, much more is it the case with those spiritual realities which the eye hath not seen, and which *therefore* it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. Wordsworth frequently refers to his sensations of surprise and disappointment passing over into a new delight when he first beheld scenes long ago described to him in verse or legend. He finds "Yarrow visited" very unlike "Yarrow unvisited." One commonplace distinction we must all have noticed under similar circumstances—viz., that the imagination is never rich and varied enough to supply us with the complications of the reality. Before we have looked at it our idea of the landscape is too simple, and an invariable impression produced by the actual sight of it is to make us feel how much more elaborate it is. Indeed a personal investigation of most phenomena reveals an amount of complication previously unexpected. Where the investigation is, like Nehemiah's, concerned with an evil we propose to attack, the result is that we begin to see that the remedy cannot be so simple as we imagined before we knew all the facts.

But the chief effect of Nehemiah's night ride would be to impress him with an overwhelming sense of the desolation of Jerusalem. We may know much by report, but we feel most keenly that of which we have had personal experience.

* Neh. ii. 10.

Thus the news of a gigantic cataclysm in China does not affect us with a hundredth part of the emotion that is excited in us by a simple street accident seen from our own windows. The man whose heart will be moved enough for him to sacrifice himself seriously in relieving misery is he who will first "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." * Then the proof that the impression is deep and real, and not a mere idle sentiment, will be seen in the fact that it prompts action. Nehemiah was moved to tears by the report of the ruinous condition of Jerusalem, which reached him in the far-off palace beyond the Euphrates. What the scene meant to him as he slowly picked his way among the huge masses of masonry is seen by his conduct immediately afterwards. It must have stirred him profoundly. The silence of the sleeping city, broken now and again by the dismal howls of packs of dogs scouring the streets, or perhaps by the half-human shrieks of jackals on the deserted hills in the outlying country; the dreary solitude of the interminable heaps of ruins; the mystery of strange objects half-described in the distance by starlight, or, at best, by moonlight; the mournful discovery, on nearer view, of huge building stones tumbled over and strewn about on mountainous heaps of dust and rubbish; the gloom, the desolation, the terror,—all this was enough to make the heart of a patriot faint with despair. Was it possible to remedy such huge calamities?

Nehemiah does not despair. He has no time to grieve. We hear no more of his weeping and lamentation and fasting. Now he is spurred on to decisive action.

Fortified by the knowledge he has acquired in his adventurous night ride, and urged by the melancholy sights he has witnessed, Nehemiah loses no time in bringing his plans before the oligarchy of nobles who held the rule in Jerusalem previous to his coming, as well as the rest of the Jews. Though he is now the officially appointed governor, he cannot arrange matters with a high hand. He must enlist the sympathy and encourage the faith, both of the leaders and of the people generally.

The following points in his speech to the Jews may be noticed. First, he calls attention to the desolate condition of Jerusalem.† This is a fact well known. "Ye see the evil case that we are in," he says, "how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." The danger was that apathy would succeed to despair, for it is possible for people to become accustomed to the most miserable condition. The reformer must infuse a "Divine discontent"; and the preliminary step is to get the evil plight well recognised and heartily disliked. In the second place, Nehemiah exhorts the nobles and people to join him in building the walls. So now he clearly reveals his plan. The charm in his utterance here is in the use of the first person plural: not the first person *singular*—he cannot do the work alone, nor does he wish to; not the *second* person—though he is the authoritative governor, he does not enjoin on others a task the toil and responsibility of which he will not share himself. In the genuine use of this pronoun "we" there lies the secret of all effective exhortation. Next Nehemiah proceeds to adduce reasons for his appeal. He calls out the sense of patriotic pride in the remark, "that we be no more a reproach"; and he goes further, for the Jews are the people

of God, and for them to fail is for reproach to be cast on the name of God Himself. Here is the great religious motive for not permitting the city of God to lie in ruins, as it is to-day the supreme motive for keeping all taint of dishonour from the Church of Christ.

But direct encouragements are needed. A sense of shame may rouse us from our lethargy, and yet in the end it will be depressing if it does not give place to the inspiration of a new hope. Now Nehemiah has two fresh grounds of encouragement. He first names that which he esteems highest—the presence and help of God in his work. "I told them," he says, "of the hand of my God which was good upon me." How could he despair, even at the spectacle of the ruined walls and gateways, with the consciousness of this great and wonderful truth glowing in his heart? Not that he was a mystic weaving fantastic dreams out of the filmy substance of his own vague feelings. It is true he felt impelled by the strong urging of his patriotism, and he knew that God was in that holy passion. Yet his was an objective mind and he recognised the hand of God chiefly in external events—in the Providence that opens doors and indicates paths, that levels mountains of difficulty and fills up impassable chasms, that even bends the wills of great kings to do its bidding. This action of Providence he had himself witnessed; his very presence at Jerusalem was a token of it. He, once a household slave in the jealous seclusion of an Oriental palace, was now the governor of Jerusalem, appointed to his post for the express purpose of restoring the miserable city to strength and safety. In all this Nehemiah felt the hand of God upon him. Then it was a gracious and merciful Providence that had led him. Therefore he could not but own further that the hand of God was "good." He perceived God's work, and that work was to him most wonderfully full of lovingkindness. Here indeed was the greatest of all encouragements to proceed. It was well that Nehemiah had the devout insight to perceive it; a less spiritually minded man might have received the marvellous favour without ever discovering the hand from which it came. Following the example of the miserable, worldly Jacob, some of us wake up in our Bethel to exclaim with surprise, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." * But even that is better than to slumber on in dull indifference, too dead to recognise the Presence that guides and blesses every footstep, provoking the melancholy lamentation: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know. My people doth not consider." †

Lastly, Nehemiah not only perceived the hand of God and took courage from his assurance of the fact; he made this glorious fact known to the nobles of Jerusalem in order to rouse their enthusiasm. He had the simplicity of earnestness, the openness of one who forgets self in advocating a great cause. Is not reticence in religion too often a consequence of the habit of turning one's thoughts inward? Such a habit will vanish at the touch of a serious purpose. The man who is in dead earnest has no time to be self-conscious; he does not indulge in sickly reflections on the effect of what he says on other people's opinions about himself; he will not care what they think about him so long as he moves them to do the thing it is laid on his soul to

* James i. 27.

† Neh. ii. 17, 18.

* Gen. xxviii. 16.

† Isa. i. 3.

urge upon them. But it is difficult to escape from the selfish subjectivity of modern religion, and recover the grand naturalness of the saints alike of Old and of New Testament times.

After this revelation of the Divine Presence, Nehemiah's second ground of encouragement is of minor interest; it can be but one link in the chain of providential leading. Yet for a man who had not reached his lofty point of view, it would have filled the whole horizon. The king had given permission to the Jews to rebuild the walls; and he had allowed Nehemiah to visit Jerusalem for the very purpose of carrying out the work. This king, Artaxerxes, whose firman had stopped the earlier attempt and even sanctioned the devastating raid of the enemies of the Jews, was now proving himself the friend and champion of Jerusalem! Here was cheering news!

It is not surprising that such a powerful appeal as this of Nehemiah's was successful. It was like the magic horn that awoke the inmates of the enchanted castle. The spell was broken. The long, listless torpor of the Jews gave place to hope and energy, and the people braced themselves to commence the work. These Jews who had been so lethargic hitherto were now the very men to undertake it. Nehemiah brought no new labourers, but he brought what was better, the one essential requisite for every great enterprise—an inspiration. He brought what the world most needs in every age. We wait for better men to arise and undertake the tasks that seem to be too great for our strength; we cry for a new race of God-sent heroes to accomplish the Herculean labours before which we faint and fail. But we might ourselves become the better men; nay, assuredly we should become God's heroes, if we would but open our hearts to receive the Spirit by the breath of which the weakest are made strong and the most indolent are fired with a Divine energy. To-day, as in the time of Nehemiah, the one supreme need is inspiration.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUILDING THE WALLS.

NEHEMIAH iii.

THE third chapter of the Book of Nehemiah supplies a striking illustration of the constructive character of the history of the Jews in the Persian period. Nor is that all. A mechanical, Chinese industry may be found side by side with indications of moral littleness. But the activity displayed in the restoration of the city walls is more than industrious, more than productive. We must be struck with the breadth of the picture. This characteristic was manifest in the earlier work of building the temple, and it pervades the subsequent religious movement of the shaping of Judaism and the development of The Law. Here it is apparent in the fact that the Jews unite in a great common work for the good of the whole community. It was right and necessary that they should rebuild their private houses; but though it would appear that some of these houses must have been in a very ruinous condition, for this was the case even with the governor's residence,* the great scheme now set on

* Neh. ii. 8.

foot was for the public advantage. There is something almost socialistic about the execution of it; at all events we meet with that comprehensiveness of view, that elevation of tone, that sinking of self in the interests of society, which we should look for in true citizenship.

This is the more noteworthy because the object of the Jews in the present undertaking was what is now called "secular." The earlier public building operations carried out by their fathers had been confessedly and formally religious. Zerubbabel and Jeshua had led a band of pilgrims up to Jerusalem for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple, and at first the returned exiles had confined their attention to this work and its associated sacrificial rites, without revealing any political ambition, and apparently without even coveting any civic privileges. Subsequently some sense of citizenship had begun to appear in Ezra's reformation, but every expression of it had been since checked by jealous and hostile influences from without. At length Nehemiah succeeded in rousing the spirit of citizenship by means of the inspiration of religious faith. The new enthusiasm was not directly concerned with the temple; it aimed at fortifying the city. Yet it sprang from prayer and faith. Thus the Jews were feeling their way to that sacredness of civic duties which we in the freer air of Christianity have been so slow to acknowledge.

The special form of this activity in the public interest is also significant. The process of drawing a line round Jerusalem by enclosing it within the definite circuit of a wall helped to mark the individuality and unity of the place as a *city*, which an amorphous congeries of houses could not be, according to the ancient estimate, because the chief distinction between a city and a village was just this, that the city was walled while the village was unwalled. The first privilege enjoyed by the city would be its security—its strength to withstand assaults. But the walls that shut out foes shut in the citizens—a fact which seems to have been present to the mind of the poet who wrote,—

"Our feet are standing
Within thy gates, O Jerusalem;
Jerusalem, that art builded
As a city that is compact together."*

The city is "compact together." City life is corporate life. It is not at all easy for us to appreciate this fact while our idea of a city is only represented by a crowd of men, women, and children crammed into a limited space, but with scarcely any sense of common life and aims; still less when we look behind the garish splendour of the streets to the misery and degradation, the disease and famine and vice, that make their nests under the very shadow of wealth and pleasure. Naturally we turn with loathing from such sights, and long for the fresh, quiet country life. But this accidental conglomerate of bricks and human beings is in no sense a city. The true city—such a city as Jerusalem, or Athens, or Rome in its best days—is a focus of the very highest development of life known to man. The word "civilisation" should remind us that it is the city which indicates the difference between the cultivated man and the savage. Originally it was the *civis*, the citizen, who marched in the van of the world's progress. Nor is it difficult to account for his

* Psalm cxxii. 2, 3.

position. Inter-communication of ideas sharpening intelligence—"as iron sharpeneth iron,"—division of labour permitting the specialisation of industry, combination in work making it possible for great undertakings to be carried out, the necessity for mutual considerateness among the members of a community and the consequent development of the social sympathies, all tend to progress. And the sense of a common life realised in this way has weighty moral issues. The larger the social unit becomes, the more will people be freed from pettiness of thought and selfishness of aim. The first step in this direction is made when we regard the family rather than the individual as the true unit. If we pass beyond this in modern times, we commonly advance straight on to the whole nation for our notion of a compact community. But the stride is too great. Very few people are able to reach the patriotism that sinks self in the larger life of a nation. With a Mazzini, and even with smaller men who are magnetised by the passion of such an enthusiast in times of excitement, this may be possible. But with ordinary men in ordinary times it is not very attainable. How many Englishmen leave legacies for the payment of the National Debt? Still more difficult is it to become really cosmopolitan, and acquire a sense of the supreme duty of living for mankind. Our Lord has come to our aid here in giving us a new unit—the Church; so that to be a citizen of this "City of God" is to be called out of the circle of the narrow, selfish interests into the large place where great, common duties and an all-comprehensive good of the whole body are set before us as the chief aims to be pursued.

In rebuilding the city walls, then, Nehemiah was accomplishing two good objects; he was fortifying the place, and he was restoring its organic unity. The two advantages would be mutually helpful, because the weakness of Jerusalem was destroying the peculiar character of her life. The aristocracy, thinking it impossible to preserve the community in isolation, had encouraged and practised intermarriage with neighbouring people, no doubt from a politic regard to the advantage of foreign alliances. Although Nehemiah was not yet prepared to grapple with this great question, his fortification of Jerusalem would help the citizens to maintain their Jewish separateness, according to the principle that only the strong can be free.

The careful report which Nehemiah has preserved of the organisation of this work shows us how complete it was. The whole circuit of the walls was restored. Of course it was most necessary that nothing less should be attempted, because, like the strength of a chain, the strength of a fortress is limited to that of its weakest part. And yet—obvious as it is—probably most failures, not only in public works, but also in private lives, are directly attributable to the neglect of this elementary principle of defence. The difficulty always is to reach that kind of perfection which is suggested by the circle, rather than the pinnacle—the perfection of completeness. Now in the present instance the completion of the circuit of the walls of Jerusalem testifies to the admirable organising power of Nehemiah, his tact in putting the right men in the right places—the most important and difficult duty of a leader of men, and his perseverance in overcoming the obstacles and objections that must have been thrust in his path—all of them

what people call secular qualities, yet all sustained and perfected by a noble zeal and by that transparent unselfishness which is the most powerful solvent of the selfishness of other people. There are more moral qualities involved in the art of organisation than they would suppose who regard it as a hard, mechanical contrivance in which human beings are treated like parts of a machine. The highest form of organisation is never attained in that brutal manner. Directly we approach men as persons endowed with rights, convictions, and feelings, an element of sympathy is called for which makes the organising process a much more delicate concern.

Another point calls for remark here. Nehemiah's description of his organisation of the people for the purpose of building the walls links the several groups of men who were responsible for the different parts with their several districts. The method of division shows a devolution of responsibility. Each gang had its own bit of wall or its own gate to see to. The rule regulating the assignment of districts was that, as far as practicable, every man should undertake the work opposite his own house. He was literally to "do the thing that lay nearest" to him in this business. It was in every way a wise arrangement. It would prevent the disorder and vexation that would be excited if people were running about to select favourite sites—choosing the easiest place, or the most prominent, or the safest, or any other desirable spot. Surely there is no principle of organisation so simple or so wise as that which directs us to work near home in the first instance. With the Jews this rule would commend itself to the instinct of self-interest. Nobody would wish the enemy to make a breach opposite his own door, of all places. Therefore the most selfish man would be likely to see to it that the wall near his house was solidly built. If, however, no other inducements had been felt in the end, the work would have failed of any great public good, as all purely selfish work must ultimately fail. There would have been gaps which it was nobody's interest in particular to fill.

Next it is to be observed that this building was done by "piece work," and that with the names of the workmen attached to it, so that if any of them did their work ill the fact would be known and recorded to their lasting disgrace; but also so that if any put an extra amount of finish on their work this too should be known and remembered to their credit. The idle and negligent workman would willingly be lost in the crowd; but this escape was not to be permitted, he must be dragged out and set in the pillory of notoriety. On the other hand, the humble and devoted citizen would crave no recognition, doing his task lovingly for the sake of his God and his city, feeling that the work was everything—the worker nothing. For his own sake one who labours in this beautiful spirit seems to deserve to be sheltered from the blaze of admiration at the thought of which he shrinks back in dismay. And yet this is not always possible. St. Paul writes of the day when *every* man's work shall be made manifest.* If the honour is really offered to God, who inspires the work, the modesty which leads the human agent to seek the shade may be overstrained, for the servant need not blush to stand in the light when all eyes are directed to his Master. But when

* 1 Cor. iii. 13.

honour is offered to the servant also, this may not be without its advantages. Rightly taken it will humble him. He will feel that his unworthiness would not have permitted this if God had not been very gracious to him. Then he will feel also that he has a character to maintain. If it is ruinous to lose a reputation—"the better part of me," as poor Cassio exclaims in his agony of remorse—it must be helpful to have one to guard from reproach. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,"* not only because of the indirect advantages it brings from the consideration of the world—its mere purchasing power in the market of human favour; this is its least advantage. Its chief value is in the very possession of it by one whose honour is involved in living worthily of it.

From another point of view the record of the names of people who have rendered good service may be valuable. It will be a stimulus to their successors. The Early Church preserved the names of her confessors and martyrs in the diptychs which were expressly provided for use in public worship, that God might be praised for their noble lives, and that the living might be stimulated to follow their example. Here is one of the great uses of history. We cannot afford to forget the loyal service of the past, because out of it we draw inspiration for the present. The people with a great history have come into a rich heritage. To be a child of a really noble house, to spring from a family truly without reproach—a family all whose sons are pure and all whose daughters are brave—surely this is to receive a high commission to cherish the good name unsullied. As the later Jews gazed at the towers of Jerusalem and marked well her bulwarks, with the thought that this massive strength was the fruit of the toil and sacrifice of their own forefathers—so that the very names of individual ancestors were linked with exact spots on the grey walls—they would hear a call to loyal service worthy of their noble predecessors.

To proceed, we may observe further that the groups of builders fall into several classes. The first place is given to the priestly order—"the high-priest and his brethren the priests."† This is quite in accordance with the sacerdotal spirit of the times, when the theocracy was emerging into power to take the place left vacant by the decay of the house of David. But the priests are not only named first. Nehemiah states that they were the first to respond to his appeal. "Then"—*i. e.*, after he had addressed the assembled Jews—"Then Eliashib the high-priest rose up," etc. This man—the grandson of Jeshua, from whom so much was expected by Zechariah—was the first to set his hand to the tremendous task. First in honour, he was first in service. The beauty of his action lies in its silence. Not a word is recorded as spoken by him. But he was not satisfied to sanction the work of humbler men. He led the people in the best possible way, by beginning the work himself, by directly taking upon him his share of it. In this noble simplicity of service Eliashib was followed by the priesthood generally. These men put forth no claims to immunity from the obligation of civic duties or secular occupations. It never occurred to them to object that such employments were in the least degree inconsistent with their high office. The priestly order was hampered by the

* Prov. xxii. 1.

† Neh. iii. 1.

strictest rules of artificial separation; but the quaint notion—so common in the East, and not quite unknown in the West—that there is something degrading in hard work did not enter into them.

There are two points to be noticed in the special work of the priests. First, *its locality*. These ministers of the temple set up the "Sheep Gate," which was the gate nearest to the temple. Thus they made themselves responsible for their own quarters, guarding what was especially entrusted to their care. This was in accordance with the plan observed all round the city, that the inhabitants should work in the neighbourhood of their respective houses. The priests, who have the honour of special connection with the temple, feel that a special charge accompanies that honour; and rightly, for responsibility always follows privilege. Second, *its consecration*. The priests "sanctified" their work—*i. e.*, they dedicated it to God. This was not in the sacred enclosure—the *Haram*, as it is now called. Nevertheless, their gate and wall, as well as their temple, were to be reckoned holy. They did not hold the strange modern notion that while the cemetery, the city of the dead, is to be consecrated, the city of the living requires no consecration. They saw that the very stones and timbers of Jerusalem belonged to God, and needed His presence to keep them safe and pure. They were wise, for is He not "the God of the living" and of all the concerns of life?

The next class of workmen is comprised of men who were taken according to their families. These would probably be all of them citizens of Jerusalem, some present by right of birth as descendants of former citizens, others perhaps sprung from the inhabitants of distant towns not yet restored to Israel who had made Jerusalem their home. Their duty to fortify their own city was indubitable.

But now, as in the earlier lists, there is another class among the laity, consisting of the inhabitants of neighbouring towns, who are arranged, not according to families, but according to their residence. Most likely these men were living in Jerusalem at the time; and yet it is probable that they retained their interest in their provincial localities. But Jerusalem was the capital, the centre of the nation, the Holy City. Therefore the inhabitants of other cities must care for her welfare. In a great scheme of religious centralisation at Jerusalem Josiah had found the best means of establishing unity of worship, and so of impressing upon the worshippers the idea of the unity of God. The same method was still pursued. People were not yet ripe for the larger thoughts of God and His worship which Jesus expressed by Jacob's well. Until that was reached, external unity with a visible centre was essential if a multiplex division of divinity was to be avoided. After these neighbours who thus helped the metropolis we have two other groups—the temple servants and the trade guilds of goldsmiths and merchants.

Now, while on all sides ready volunteers press forward to the work, just one painful exception is found to mar the harmony of the scene, or rather to lessen its volume—for this was found in abstention, not in active opposition. To their shame it is recorded that the nobles of Tekoa "put not their necks to the work of their Lord."* The general body of citizens from this

* Neh. iii. 5.

town took part. We are not told why the aristocracy held back. Did they consider the labour beneath their dignity? or was there a breach between them and the townfolk? The people of Tekoa may have been especially democratic. Ages before, a herdsman from this same town, the rough prophet Amos, had shown little respect for the great ones of the earth. Possibly the Tekoites had vexed their princes by showing a similar spirit of independence. But if so, Nehemiah would regard their conduct as affording the princes no excuse. For it was the Lord's work that these nobles refused to undertake, and there is no justification for letting God's service suffer when a quarrel has broken out between His servants. Yet how common is this miserable result of divisions among men who should be united in the service of God. Whatever was the cause—whether it was some petty personal offence or some grave difference of opinion—these nobles go down the ages, like those unhappy men in the early days of the Judges who earned the "curse of Meroz," disgraced eternally, for no positive offence, but simply because they left undone what they ought to have done. Nehemiah pronounces no curse. He chronicles the bare fact. But his ominous silence in regard to any explanation is severely condemnatory. The man who builds his house on the sand in hearing Christ's words and doing them not, the servant who is beaten with many stripes because he knows his lord's will and does not perform it, that other servant who buries his talent, the virgins who forget to fill their vessels with oil, the people represented by goats on the left hand whose sole ground of accusation is that they refused to exercise the common charities—all these illustrate the important but neglected truth that our Lord's most frequent words of condemnation were expressed for what we call negative evil—the evil of harmless but useless lives.

Happily we may set exceptional devotion in another quarter over against the exceptional remissness of the nobles of Tekoa. Brief as is his summary of the division of the work, Nehemiah is careful to slip in a word of praise for one Baruch the son of Zabbai, saying that this man "earnestly repaired" his portion.* That one word "earnestly" is a truer stamp of worth than all the honours claimed by the abstaining nobles on grounds of rank or pedigree; it goes down the centuries as the patent of true nobility in the realm of industry.

CHAPTER XX.

"MARK YE WELL HER BULWARKS."

NEHEMIAH iii.

THE book of Nehemiah is our principal authority for the ancient topography of Jerusalem. But, as we have been already reminded, the sieges from which the city has suffered, and the repeated destruction of its walls and buildings, have obliterated many of the old landmarks beyond recovery. In some places the ground is now found to be raised sixty feet above the original surface; and in one spot it was even necessary to dig down a hundred and twenty feet to reach the level of the old pavement. It is therefore not at all wonderful that the at-

tempt to identify the sites here named should have occasioned not a little perplexity. Still the explorations of underground Jerusalem have brought some important facts to light, and others can be fairly divined from a consideration of the historical record in the light of the more general features of the country, which no wars or works of man can alter.

The first, because the most obvious, thing to be noted in considering the site of Jerusalem is its mountainous character. Jerusalem is a mountain city, as high as a Dartmoor tor, some two thousand feet above the Mediterranean, with a drop of nearly four thousand feet on the farther side, beyond the Mount of Olives, towards the deep pit where the Dead Sea steams in tropical heat. Looked at from the wilderness, through a gap in the hills round Bethlehem, she soars above us, with her white domes and towers clean-cut against the burning sky, like a city of clouds. In spite of the blazing southern sunshine, the air bites keenly on that fine altitude. It would be only reasonable to suppose that the vigour of the highlanders who dwell in Jerusalem was braced by the very atmosphere of their home. And yet we have had to trace every impulse of zeal and energy after the restoration to the relaxing plains of the Euphrates and the Tigris! In all history the moral element counts for more than the material. Race is more than *habitat*; and religion is more than race.

Closely associated with this mountainous character of Jerusalem is a second feature. It is clear that the site for the city was chosen because of its singularly valuable ready-made defences. Jerusalem is a natural fortress. Protected on three sides by deep ravines, it would seem that she could be easily made impregnable. How awful, then, is the irony of her destiny! This city, so rarely favoured by nature for security against attack, has been more often assaulted and captured, and has suffered more of the horrors of war, than any other spot on earth.

The next fact to be noticed is the small size of Jerusalem. The dimensions of the city have varied in different ages. Under the Herods the buildings extended far beyond the ancient limits, and villas were dotted about on the outlying hills. But in Nehemiah's day the city was confined within a surprisingly contracted area. The discovery of the "Siloam inscription," leading to the identification of the gorge known to the Romans as the *Tyropæon* with the ancient "Valley of Hinnom" or "Tophet," cuts off the whole of the modern Zion from the site of the ancient city, and points to the conclusion that the old Zion must have been nearer Moriah, and all Jerusalem crowded in the little space to the east of the chasm which was once thought to have run up through the middle of the city. No doubt the streets were narrow; the houses may have been high. Still the population was but slender, for after the walls had been built Nehemiah found the space he had enclosed too large for the inhabitants.* But our interest in Jerusalem is in no way determined by her size, or by the number of her citizens. A little town in a remote province, she was politically insignificant enough when viewed from the standpoint of Babylon, and in comparison with the many rich and populous cities of the vast Persian dominions. It is the more remarkable, then, that successive Persian sovereigns should have be-

*Neh. iii. 20.

*Neh. xi. 1.

stowed rare favours on her. From the day when Solomon built his temple, the unique glory of this city had begun to appear. Josiah's reformation in concentrating the national worship at Jerusalem advanced her peculiar privileges, which the rebuilding of the temple before the restoration of the city further promoted. Jerusalem is the religious metropolis of the world. To be first in religious honour it was not necessary that she should be spacious or populous. Size and numbers count for very little in religion. Its valuation is qualitative, not quantitative. Even the extent of its influence, even the size and mass of this, depends mainly on its character. Moreover, in Jerusalem, as a rule, the really effective religious life was confined to a small group of the "pious": sometimes it was gathered up in a single individual—a Jeremiah, an Ezra, a Nehemiah. This is a fact replete with encouragement for faith. It is an instance of the way in which God chooses the weak things—weak as to this world—to confound the strong. If a small city could once take the unique position held by Jerusalem, then why should not a small Church now? And if a little knot of earnest men within the city could be the nucleus of her character and the source of her influence, why should not quite a small group of earnest people give a character to their Church, and, through the Church, work wonders in the world, as the grain of mustard seed could move a mountain? The secret of the miracle is, like the secret of nature, that God is in the city and the Church, as God is in the seed. When once we have discovered this truth as a certain fact of life and history, our estimate of the relative greatness of things is revolutionised. The map and the census then cease to answer our most pressing questions. The excellence we look for must be spiritual—vigour of faith, self-abnegation of love, passion of zeal.

As we follow Nehemiah round the circuit of the walls the more special features of the city are brought under our notice. He begins with the "Sheep Gate," which was evidently near the temple, and the construction of which was undertaken by the priests as the first piece of work in the great enterprise. The name of this gate agrees well with its situation. Opening on the Valley of the Kidron, and facing the Mount of Olives and the lonely pass over the hills towards Jericho, it would be the gate through which shepherds would bring in their flocks from the wide pasturage of the wilderness. Possibly there was a market at the open space just inside. The vicinity of the temple would make it easy to bring up the victims for the sacrifices by this way. As the Passover season approached, the whole neighbourhood would be alive with the bleating of thousands of lambs. Rich associations would thus cluster round the name of this gate. It would be suggestive of the pastoral life so much pursued by the men of Judah, whose favourite king had been a shepherd lad; and it would call up deeper thoughts of the mystery of sacrifice and the joy of the Paschal redemption of Israel. To us Christians the situation of the "Sheep Gate" has a far more touching significance. It seems to have stood near where the "St. Stephen's Gate" now stands; here, then, would be the way most used by our Lord in coming to and fro between Jerusalem and Bethany, the way by which He went out to Gethsemane on the last night, and probably the way

by which He was brought back "as a sheep" among her shearers, "as a lamb" led to the slaughter.

Going round from this spot northwards, we have the part of the wall built by the men of Jericho, which would still look east, towards their own city, so that they would always see their work when they got their first glimpse of Jerusalem as they passed over the ridge of the Mount of Olives on their pilgrimages up to the feasts. The task of the men of Jericho ended at one of the northern gates, the construction of which, together with the fitting of its ponderous bolts and bars, was considered enough for another group of builders. This was called the "Fish Gate." Since it faced north, it would scarcely have been used by the traders who came up from the sea fisheries in the Mediterranean; it must have received the fish supply from the Jordan, and perhaps from as far as the Sea of Galilee. Still its name suggests a wider range of commerce than the "Sheep Gate," which let in flocks chiefly from neighbouring hills. Jerusalem was in a singularly isolated spot for the capital of a country, one chosen expressly on account of its inaccessibility—the very opposite requisite from that of most capitals, which are planted by navigable rivers. Nevertheless she maintained communication, both political and commercial, with distant towns all along the ages of her chequered history.

After passing the work of one or two Jewish families and that of the Tekoites, memorable for the painful fact of the abstention of the nobles, we come to the "Old Gate." That a gate should bear such a name would lead us to think that once gates had not been so numerous as they were at this time. Yet most probably the "Old Gate" was really new, because very little of the original city remained above ground. But men love to perpetuate memories of the past. Even what is new in fact may acquire a flavour of age by the force of association. The wise reformer will follow the example of Nehemiah in linking the new on to the old, and preserving the venerable associations of antiquity wherever these do not hinder present efficiency.

Next we come to the work of men from the northern Benjamite towns of Gibeon and Mizpah,* whose volunteer service was a mark of their own brotherly spirit. It should be remembered, however, that Jerusalem originally belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Working at the northern wall, in accordance with the rule observed throughout that all the Jews from outlying places should build in the direction of their own cities, these Benjamites carried it on as far as the districts of the goldsmiths and apothecaries,† whose principal bazaars seem to have occupied the north quarter of the city—the quarter most suitable for trade, because first reached by most travellers. There, however—if we are to accept the generally received emendation of the text mentioned in the margin of the Revised Version—they found a bit of wall that had escaped destruction, and also probably the "Ephraim Gate," which is not named here, although it existed in the days of Nehemiah.‡ Inasmuch as the invasions had come from the north, and the recent Samaritan raid had also proceeded from the same quarter, it seems likely that the city had been taken on this side. If so, the enemy, after having got in through a

* Neh. iii. 7.

† Neh. iii. 8.

‡ Neh. viii. 16.

gate which they had burnt, or through a breach in the wall, did not think it necessary to waste time in the heavy labour of tearing down the wall in their rear. Perhaps, as this was the most exposed quarter, the wall was most solid here—it was known as "the broad wall." The wealthy goldsmiths would have been anxious that their bazaars should not be the first parts of the city to entertain a marauding host through any weakness in the defences. The next bit of wall was in the hands of a man of some importance, known as "the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem"; * *i. e.*, he had the management of half the land belonging to the city—either a sort of police supervision of private estates, or the direct control of land owned by the municipality, and possibly farmed for the time being on communal principles.

Still following the northern wall, we pass the work of several Jerusalem families, and so on to the potteries, as we may infer from the remark about "the tower of the furnaces." † Here we must be at the "Corner Gate," ‡ which, however, is not now named; "the tower of the furnaces" may have been part of its fortifications. Evidently this was an important position. The manager of the second half of the city estates and the villages on them—known as "his daughters"—had the charge of the work here. It was four hundred cubits from the "Ephraim Gate" to the corner. § At this point the long north wall ends, and the fortifications take a sharp turn southwards. Following the new direction, we pass by the course of the Valley of Hinnom, leaving it on our right. The next gate we meet is named after this ravine of evil omen the "Valley Gate." It would be here that the poor children, victims to the savage Moloch worship, had been led out to their fate. The name of the gate would be a perpetual reminder of the darkest passage in the old city's history of sin and shame. The gate would face west, and, in accordance with the arrangement throughout, the inhabitants of Zanoah, a town lying out from Jerusalem ten miles in that direction, undertook the erection of it. They also had charge of a thousand cubits of wall—an exceptionally long piece; but the gates were fewer on this side, and here possibly the steepness of the cliff rendered a slighter wall sufficient.

This long, unbroken stretch of wall ends at the "Dung Gate," through which the refuse of the city was flung out to the now degraded valley which once had been so famous for its pleasure gardens. Sanitary regulations are of course most necessary. We admire the minuteness with which they are attended to in the Pentateuch, and we regard the filthy condition of modern eastern cities as a sign of neglect and decay. Still the adornment of a grand gateway by the temple, or the solid building of a noble approach to the city along the main route from the north, would be a more popular undertaking than this construction of a "Dung Gate." It is to the credit of Nehemiah's admirable skill in organisation that no difficulty was found in filling up the less attractive parts of his programme, and it is even more to the credit of those who accepted the allotment of them that, as far as we know, they made no complaint. A common zeal for the public good overcame personal prejudices. The just and firm application of a

universal rule is a great preventative of complaints in such a case. When the several bands of workers were to undertake the districts opposite their own houses if they were inhabitants of the city, or opposite their own towns if they were provincial Jews, it would be difficult for any of them to frame a complaint. The builders of the "Dung Gate" came, it would seem, from the most conspicuous eminence in the wilderness of Southern Judæa—that now known as the "Frank Mountain." The people who would take to such an out-of-the-world place of abode would hardly be such as we should look to for work requiring fineness of finish. Perhaps they were more suited to the unpretentious task which fell to their lot. Still this consideration does not detract from the credit of their good-natured acquiescence, for self-seeking people are the last to admit that they are not fit for the best places.

The next gate was in a very interesting position at the southwest corner, where the *Tyropæon* runs down to the Valley of the Kidron. It was called the "Fountain Gate," perhaps after the one natural spring which Jerusalem possesses—that now known as the "Virgin's Fountain," and near to the Pool of Siloam, where the precious water from this spring was stored. The very name of the gate would call up thoughts of the value of its site in times of siege, when the fountain had to be "sealed" or covered over, to save it from being tampered with by the enemy. Close by is a flight of steps, still extant, that formerly led down to the king's garden. We are now near to Zion, in what was once the favourite and most aristocratic portion of the town. The lowering of the top of Zion in the time of the Maccabees, that it might not overlook the temple on Mount Moriah, and the filling up of the ravines, considerably detract from the once imposing height of this quarter of the city. Here ancient Jerusalem had looked superb—like an eagle perched on a rock. With such a fortress as Zion her short-sighted citizens had thought her impregnable; but Nehemiah's contemporaries were humbler and wiser men than the infatuated Jews who had rejected the warnings of Jeremiah.

The adjoining piece of wall brings us round to the tombs of the kings, which, according to the custom of antiquity, as we learn from a cuneiform inscription at Babylon, were within the city walls, although the tombs of less important people were outside—just as to this day we bury our illustrious dead in the heart of the metropolis. Nehemiah had been moved at the first report of the ruin of Jerusalem by the thought that his fathers' sepulchres were there.

From this spot it is not so easy to trace the remainder of the wall. The mention of the Levites has given rise to the opinion that Nehemiah now takes us at once to the temple again; but this is hardly possible in view of his subsequent statements. We must first work round by Ophel, the "Water," the "East," and the "Horse" Gates—all of them apparently leading out towards the Valley of the Kidron. Levites and Priests, whose quarters we are gradually approaching, and other inhabitants of houses in this district, together with people from the Jordan Valley and the east country, carried out this last piece of work as far as a great tower standing out between Ophel and the corner of the temple wall, a tower so massive that some of its masonry can be seen still standing. But the nar-

* Neh. iii. 9.

‡ 2 Chron. xxvi. 9; Jer. xxxi. 38.

† Neh. iii. 11.

§ 2 Kings xiv. 13.

rative is here so obscure, and the sites have been so altered by the ravages of war and time, that the identification of most of them in this direction baffles inquiry.

"Mark ye well her bulwarks." Alas! they are buried in a desolation so huge that the utmost skill of engineering science fails to trace their course. The latest great discovery, which has simply revolutionised the map by identifying the *Tyropon* with the Old Testament "Valley of Hinnom" or "Tophet," is the most striking sign of these topographical difficulties. The valley itself has been filled up with masses of rubbish, the sight of which to-day confirms the dreadful tragedy of the history of Jerusalem, the most tragic history on record. No city was ever more favoured by Heaven, and no city was ever more afflicted. Hers were the most magnificent endowments, the highest ideals, the fairest promises; hers too was the most miserable failure. Her beauty ravaged, her sanctity defiled, her light extinguished, her joy turned into bitterness, Heaven's bride has been treated as the scum of the streets. And now, after being abused by her own children, shattered by the Babylonian, outraged by the Syrian, demolished by the Roman, the city which stoned her prophets and clamoured successfully for the death of her Saviour has again revived in poverty and misery—the pale ghost of her past, still the victim of the oppressor. The witchery of this wonderful city fascinates us to-day, and the very syllables of her name "JERUSALEM" sound strangely sweet and ineffably sad—

"Most musical, most melancholy."

It was fitting that the tenderest, most mournful lament ever uttered should have been called forth by our Lord's contemplation of such a city—a city which, deeming herself destined to be the joy of all the earth, became the plague-spot of history

CHAPTER XXI.

ON GUARD.

NEHEMIAH ii. 10, 19; iv.

ALL his arrangements for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem show that Nehemiah was awake to the dangers with which he was surrounded. The secrecy of his night ride was evidently intended to prevent a premature revelation of his plans. The thorough organisation, the mapping out of the whole line of the wall, and the dividing of the building operations among forty-two bands of workpeople, secured equal and rapid progress on all sides. Evidently the idea was to "rush" the work, and to have it fairly well advanced, so as to afford a real protection for the citizens, before any successful attempts to frustrate it could be carried out. Even with all these precautions, Nehemiah was harassed and hindered for a time by the malignant devices of his enemies. It was only to be expected that he would meet with opposition. But a few years before all the Syrian colonists had united in extracting an order from Artaxerxes for the arrest of the earlier work of building the walls, because the Jews had made themselves intensely obnoxious to their neighbours by sending back the wives they had married from among the Gentile peoples.

The jealousy of Samaria, which had taken the lead in Palestine so long as Jerusalem was in evidence, envenomed this animosity still more. Was it likely then that her watchful foes would hear with equanimity of the revival of the hated city—a city which must have seemed to them the very embodiment of the anti-social spirit?

Now, however, since a favourite servant of the Great King had been appointed governor of Jerusalem, the Satrap of the Syrian provinces could scarcely be expected to interfere. Therefore the initiative fell into the hands of smaller men, who found it necessary to abandon the method of direct hostility, and to proceed by means of intrigues and ambushes. There were three who made themselves notorious in this undignified course of procedure. Two of them are mentioned in connection with the journey of Nehemiah up to Jerusalem.* The first, the head of the whole opposition, is Sanballat, who is called the Horonite, seemingly because he is a native of one of the Beth-horons, and who appears to be the governor of the city of Samaria, although this is not stated. Throughout the history he comes before us repeatedly as the foe of the rival governor of Jerusalem. Next to him comes Tobiah, a chief of the little trans-Jordanic tribe of the Ammonites, some of whom had got into Samaria in the strange mixing up of peoples after the Babylonian conquest. He is called the servant, possibly because he once held some post at court, and if so he may have been personally jealous of Nehemiah's promotion.

Sanballat and his supporter Tobiah were subsequently joined by an Arabian Emir named Geshem. His presence in the group of conspirators would be surprising if we had not been unexpectedly supplied with the means of accounting for it in the recently deciphered inscription which tells how Sargon imported an Arabian colony into Samaria. The Arab would scent prey in the project of a warlike expedition.

The opposition proceeded warily. At first we are only told that when Sanballat and his friend Tobiah heard of the coming of Nehemiah, "it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."† In writing these caustic words Nehemiah implies that the jealous men had no occasion to fear that he meant any harm to them, and that they knew this. It seems very hard to him, then, that they should begrudge any alleviation of the misery of the poor citizens of Jerusalem. What was that to them? Jealousy might foresee the possibility of future loss from the recovery of the rival city, and in this they might find the excuse for their action, an excuse for not anticipating which so fervent a patriot as Nehemiah may be forgiven; nevertheless the most greedy sense of self-interest on the part of these men is lost sight of in the virulence of their hatred to the Jews. This is always the case with that cruel infatuation—the Anti-Semitic rage. Here it is that hatred passes beyond mere anger. Hatred is actually pained at the welfare of its object. It suffers from a Satanic misery. The venom which it fails to plant in its victim rankles in its own breast.

At first we only hear of this odious distress of the jealous neighbours. But the prosecutions of Nehemiah's designs immediately lead to a manifestation of open hostility—verbal in the begin-

* Neh. ii. 10.

† Neh. ii. 10.

ning. No sooner had the Jews made it evident that they were responsive to their leader's appeal and intended to rise and build, than they were assailed with mockery. The Samaritan and Ammonite leaders were now joined by the Arabian, and together they sent a message of scorn and contempt, asking the handful of poor Jews whether they were fortifying the city in order to rebel against the king. The charge of a similar intention had been the cause of stopping the work on the previous occasion.* Now that Artaxerxes' favourite cup-bearer was at the head of affairs, any suspicion of treason was absurd; but since hatred is singularly blind—far more blind than love—it is barely possible that the malignant mockers hoped to raise a suspicion. On the other hand, there is no evidence to show that they followed the example of the previous opposition and reported to headquarters. For the present they seem to have contented themselves with bitter raillery. This is a weapon before which weak men too often give way. But Nehemiah was not so foolish as to succumb beneath a shower of poor, ill-natured jokes.

His answer is firm and dignified.† It contains three assertions. The first is the most important. Nehemiah is not ashamed to confess the faith which is the source of all his confidence. In the eyes of men the Jews may appear but a feeble folk, quite unequal to the task of holding their ground in the midst of a swarm of angry foes. If Nehemiah had only taken account of the political and military aspects of affairs, he might have shrunk from proceeding. But it is just the mark of his true greatness that he always has his eye fixed on a Higher Power. He knows that God is in the project, and therefore he is sure that it must prosper. When a man can reach this conviction, mockery and insult do not move him. He has climbed to a serene altitude, from which he can look down with equanimity on the boiling clouds that are now far beneath his feet. Having this sublime ground of confidence, Nehemiah is able to proceed to his second point—his assertion of the determination of the Jews to arise and build. This is quite positive and absolute. The brave man states it, too, in the clearest possible language. Now the work is about to begin there is to be no subterfuge or disguise. Nehemiah's unflinching determination is based on the religious confession that precedes it. The Jews are God's servants; they are engaged in His work; they know He will prosper them; therefore they most certainly will not stay their hand for all the gibes and taunts of their neighbours. Lastly, Nehemiah contemptuously repudiates the claim of these impertinent intruders to interfere in the work of the Jews; he tells them that they have no excuse for their meddling, for they own no property in Jerusalem, they have no right of citizenship or of control from without, and there are no tombs of their ancestors in the sacred city.

In this message of Nehemiah's we seem to hear an echo of the old words with which the temple-builders rejected the offer of assistance from the Samaritans, and which were the beginning of the whole course of jealous antagonism on the part of the irritated neighbours. But the circumstances are entirely altered. It is not a friendly offer of co-operation, but its very opposite, a hostile and insulting message designed to hinder the Jews, that is here so proudly

resented. In the reply of Nehemiah we hear the Church refusing to bend to the will of the world, because the world has no right to trespass on her territory. God's work is not to be tampered with by insolent meddlers. Jewish exclusiveness is painfully narrow, at least in our estimation of it, when it refuses to welcome strangers or to recognise the good that lies outside the sacred enclosure; but this same characteristic becomes a noble quality, with high ethical and religious aims, when it firmly refuses to surrender its duty to God at the bidding of the outside world. The Christian can scarcely imitate Nehemiah's tone and temper in this matter; and yet if he is loyal to his God he will feel that he must be equally decided and uncompromising in declining to give up any part of what he believes to be his service of Christ to please men who unhappily as yet have "no part, or right, or memorial" in the New Jerusalem; although, unlike the Jew of old, he will be only too glad that all men should come in and share his privileges.

After receiving an annoying answer it was only natural that the antagonistic neighbours of the Jews should be still more embittered in their animosity. At the first news of his coming to befriend the children of Israel, as Nehemiah says, Sanballat and Tobiah were grieved; but when the building operations were actually in process the Samaritan leader passed from vexation to rage—"he was wroth and took great indignation."* This man now assumed the lead in opposition to the Jews. His mockery became more bitter and insulting. In this he was joined by his friend the Ammonite, who declared that if only one of the foxes that prowl on the neighbouring hills were to jump upon the wall the creature would break it down.† Perhaps he had received a hint from some of his spies that the new work that had been so hastily pressed forward was not any too solid. The "Palestine Exploration Fund" has brought to light the foundations of what is believed to be a part of Nehemiah's wall at Ophel, and the base of it is seen to be of rubble, not founded on the rock, but built on the clay above, so that it has been possible to drive a mine under it from one side to the other—a rough piece of work, very different from the beautifully finished temple walls.‡

Nehemiah met the renewed shower of insults in a startling manner. He cursed his enemies.§ Deploring before God the contempt that was heaped on the Jews, he prayed that the reproach of the enemies might be turned on their own head, devoted them to the horrors of a new captivity, and even went so far as to beg that no atonement might be found for their iniquity, that their sin might not be blotted out. In a word, instead of himself forgiving his enemies, he besought that they might not be forgiven by God. We shudder as we read his terrible words. This is not the Christ spirit. It is even contrary to the less merciful spirit of the Old Testament. Yet, to be just to Nehemiah, we must consider the whole case. It is most unfair to tear his curse out of the history and gibbet it as a specimen of Jewish piety. Even strong men who will not give way before ridicule may feel its stabs—for strength is not inconsistent with sensitiveness. Evidently Nehemiah was irritated; but then he was much provoked. For the moment he lost his self-possession. We must remember

* Ezra iv. 13.

† Neh. ii. 20.

* Neh. iv. 1.

† Neh. iv. 3.

‡ Conder, "Bible Geography," p. 131

§ Neh. iv. 4.

that the strain of his great undertaking was most exhausting, and we must be patient with the utterances of one so sorely tried. If lethargic people criticise adversely the hasty utterances of a more intense nature, they forget that, though they may never lose their self-control, neither do they ever rouse themselves to the daring energy of the man whose failings they blame. Then it was not any personal insults hurled against himself that Nehemiah resented so fiercely. It was his work that the Samaritans were trying to hinder. This he believed to be really God's work, so that the insults offered to the Jews were also directed against God, who must have been angry also. We cannot justify the curse by the standard of the Christian law; but it is not reasonable to apply that standard to it. We must set it by the side of the Maledictory Psalms. From the standpoint of its author it can be fully accounted for. To say that even in this way it can be defended, however, is to go too far. We have no occasion to persuade ourselves that any of the Old Testament saints were immaculate, even in the light of Judaism. Nehemiah was a great and good man, yet he was not an Old Testament Christ.

But now more serious opposition was to be encountered. Such enemies as those angry men of Samaria were not likely to be content with venting their spleen in idle mockery. When they saw that the keenest shafts of their wit failed to stop the work of the citizens of Jerusalem, Sanballat and his friends found it necessary to proceed to more active measures, and accordingly they entered into a conspiracy for the double purpose of carrying on actual warfare and of intriguing with disaffected citizens of Jerusalem—"to cause confusion therein."* Nehemiah was too observant and penetrating a statesman not to become aware of what was going on; the knowledge that the plots existed revealed the extent of his danger, and compelled him to make active preparations for thwarting them. We may notice several important points in the process of the defence.

1. *Prayer*.—This was the first, and in Nehemiah's mind the most essential defensive measure. We find him resorting to it in every important juncture of his life. It is his sheet-anchor. But now he uses the plural number. Hitherto we have met only with his private prayers. In the present case he says, "*We* made *our* prayer unto *our* God."† Had the infection of his prayerful spirit reached his fellow-citizens, so that they now shared it? Was it that the imminence of fearful danger drove to prayer men who under ordinary circumstances forgot their need of God? Or were both influences at work? However it was brought about, this association in prayer of some of the Jews with their governor must have been the greatest comfort to him, as it was the best ground for the hope that God would not now let them fall into the hands of the enemy. Hitherto there had been a melancholy solitariness about the earnest devotion of Nehemiah. The success of his mission began to show itself when the citizens began to participate in the same spirit of devotion.

2. *Watchfulness*.—Nehemiah was not the fanatic to blunder into the delusion that prayer was a substitute for duty, instead of being its inspiration. All that followed the prayer was really based upon it. The calmness, hope, and courage

* Neh. iv. 8, 11.

† Neh. iv. 9.

won in the high act of communion with God made it possible to take the necessary steps in the outer world. Since the greatest danger was not expected as an open assault, it was most necessary that an unbroken watch should be maintained, day and night. Nehemiah had spies out in the surrounding country, who reported to him every planned attack. So thorough was this system of espionage, that though no less than ten plots were concocted by the enemy, they were all discovered to Nehemiah, and all frustrated by him.

3. *Encouragement*.—The Jews were losing heart. The men of Judah came to Nehemiah with the complaint that the labourers who were at work on the great heaps of rubbish were suffering from exhaustion. The reduction in the numbers of workmen, owing to the appointment of the guard, would have still further increased the strain of those who were left to toil among the mounds. But it would have been fatal to draw back at this juncture. That would have been to invite the enemy to rush in and complete the discomfiture of the Jews. On Nehemiah came the obligation of cheering the dispirited citizens. Even the leading men, who should have rallied the people, like officers at the head of their troops, shared the general depression. Nehemiah was again alone—or at best supported by the silent sympathy of his companions in prayer. There was very nearly a panic; and for one man to stand out under such circumstances as these in solitary courage, not only resisting the strong contagion of fear, but stemming the tide and counteracting its movement, this would be indeed the sublimity of heroism. It was a severe test for Nehemiah; and he came out of it triumphant. His faith was the inspiration of his own courage, and it became the ground for the encouragement of others. He addressed the people and their nobles in a spirited appeal. First, he exhorted them to banish fear. The very tone of his voice must have been reassuring; the presence of one brave man in a crowd of cowards often shames them out of their weakness. But Nehemiah proceeded to give reasons for his encouragement. Let the men remember their God Jehovah, how great and terrible He is! The cause is His, and His might and terror will defend it. Let them think of their people and their families, and fight for brethren and children, for wives and homes! Cowardice is unbelief and selfishness combined. Trust in God and a sense of duty to others will master the weakness.

4. *Arms*.—Nehemiah gave the first place to the spiritual and moral defences of Jerusalem. Yet his material defences were none the less thorough on account of his prayers to God or his eloquent exhortation of the people and their leaders. They were most complete.

His arrangements for the military protection of Jerusalem converted the whole city into an armed camp. Half the citizens in turn were to leave their work, and stand at arms with swords and spears and bows. Even in the midst of the building operations the clatter of weapons was heard among the stones, because the masons at work on the walls and the labourers while they poised on their heads baskets full of rubbish from the excavations had swords attached to their sashes. Residents of the suburbs were required to stay in the city instead of returning home for the night, and no man could put off a single article of clothing when he lay down

to sleep. Nor was this martial array deemed sufficient without some special provision against a surprise. Nehemiah therefore went about with a trumpeter, ready to summon all hands to any point of danger on the first alarm.

Still, though the Jews were hampered with these preparations for battle, tired with toil and watching, and troubled by dreadful apprehensions, the work went on. This is a great proof of the excellency of Nehemiah's generalship. He did not sacrifice the building to the fighting. The former was itself designed to produce a permanent defence, while the arms were only for temporary use. When the walls were up the citizens could give the laugh back to their foes. But in itself the very act of working was reassuring. Idleness is a prey to fears which industry has no time to entertain. Every man who tries to do his duty as a servant of God is unconsciously building a wall about himself that will be his shelter in the hour of peril.

CHAPTER XXII.

USURY.

NEHEMIAH V.

WE open the fifth chapter of Nehemiah with a shock of pain. The previous chapter described a scene of patriotic devotion, in which nearly all the people were united for the prosecution of one great purpose. There we saw the priests and the wealthy citizens side by side with their humble brethren engaged in the common task of building the walls of Jerusalem and guarding the city against assault. The heartiness with which the work was first undertaken, the readiness of all classes to resume it after temporary discouragements, and the martial spirit shown by the whole population in standing under arms in the prosecution of it, determined to resist any interference from without, were all signs of a large-minded zeal in which we should have expected private interests to have given place to the public necessities of the hour. But now we are compelled to look at the seamy side of city life. In the midst of the unavoidable toils and dangers occasioned by the animosity of the Samaritans, miserable internal troubles had broken out among the Jews; and the perplexing problems which seem to be inseparable from the gathering together of a number of people under any known past or present social system had developed in the most acute form. The gulf between the rich and the poor had widened ominously; for while the poor had been driven to the last extremity, their more fortunate fellow-citizens had taken a monstrously cruel advantage of their helplessness. Famine-stricken men and women not only cried to Nehemiah for the means of getting corn for themselves and their families; they had a complaint to make against their brethren. Some had lost their lands after mortgaging them to rich Jews. Others had even been forced by the money-lenders to sell their sons and daughters into slavery. They must have been on the brink of starvation before resorting to such an unnatural expedient. How wonderfully, then, do they exhibit the patience of the poor in their endurance of these agonies! There were no bread-riots. The people simply appealed to Nehemiah, who had already proved

himself their disinterested friend, and who, as governor, was responsible for the welfare of the city.

It is not difficult to see how it came about that many of the citizens of Jerusalem were in this desperate plight. In all probability most of Zerubbabel's and Ezra's pilgrims had been in humble circumstances. It is true successive expeditions had gone up with contributions to the Jerusalem colony; but most of the stores they had conveyed had been devoted to public works, and even anything that may have been distributed among the citizens could only have afforded temporary relief. War utterly paralyses industry and commerce. In Judæa the unsettled state of the country must have seriously impeded agricultural and pastoral occupations. Then the importation of corn into Jerusalem would be almost impossible while roving enemies were on the watch in the open country, so that the price of bread would rise as a result of scarcity. At the same time the presence of persons from the outlying towns would increase the number of mouths to be fed within the city. Moreover, the attention given to the building of the walls and the defence of Jerusalem from assault would prevent artisans and tradesmen from following the occupations by which they usually earned their living. Lastly, the former governors had impoverished the population by exacting grievously heavy tribute. The inevitable result of all this was debt and its miserable consequences.

Just as in the early history of Athens and later at Rome, the troubles to the state arising from the condition of the debtors were now of the most serious character. Nothing disorganises society more hopelessly than bad arrangements with respect to debts and poverty. Nehemiah was justly indignant when the dreadful truth was made known to him. We may wonder why he had not discovered it earlier, since he had been going in and out among the people. Was there a certain aloofness in his attitude? His lonely night ride suggests something of the kind. In any case his absorbing devotion to his one task of rebuilding the city walls could have left him little leisure for other interests. The man who is engaged in a grand scheme for the public good is frequently the last to notice individual cases of need. The statesman is in danger of ignoring the social condition of the people in the pursuit of political ends. It used to be the mistake of most governments that their foreign policy absorbed their attention to the neglect of home interests.

Nehemiah was not slow in recognising the public need, when it was brought under his notice by the cry of the distressed debtors. According to the truly modern custom of his time in Jerusalem, he called a public meeting, explained the whole situation, and appealed to the creditors to give back the mortgaged lands and remit the interest on their loans. This was agreed to at once, the popular conscience evidently approving of the proposal. Nehemiah, however, was not content to let the matter rest here. He called the priests, and put them on their oath to see that the promise of the creditors was carried out. This appeal to the priesthood is very significant. It shows how rapidly the government was tending towards a sacerdotal theocracy. But it is important to notice that it was a social and not a purely political matter in which Nehemiah looked to the priests. The so-

cial order of the Jews was more especially bound up with their religion, or rather with their law and its regulations, while as yet questions of quasi-foreign policy were freely relegated to the purely civil authorities, the heads of families, the nobles, and the supreme governor under the Persian administration.

Nehemiah followed the example of the ancient prophets in his symbolical method of denouncing any of the creditors who would not keep the promise he had extracted from them. Shaking out his mantle, as though to cast off whatever had been wrapped in its folds, he exclaimed, "So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise; even thus be he shaken out, and emptied." * This was virtually a threat of confiscation and excommunication. Yet the *Ecclesia* gladly assented, crying "Amen" and praising the Lord.

The extreme position here taken up by Nehemiah and freely conceded by the people may seem to us unreasonable unless we have considered all the circumstances. Nehemiah denounced the conduct of the money-lenders as morally wrong. "The thing that ye do is not good," he said. It was opposed to the will of God. It provoked the reproach of the heathen. It was very different from his own conduct, in redeeming captives and supporting the poor out of his private means. Now, wherein was the real evil of the conduct of these creditors? The primitive law of the "Covenant" forbade the Jews to take interest for loans among their brethren.† But why so? Is there not a manifest convenience in the arrangements by which those people who possess a superfluity may lend to those who are temporarily embarrassed? If no interest is to be paid for such loans, is it to be expected that rich people will run the risk and put themselves to the certain inconvenience they involve? The man who saves generally does so in order that his savings may be of advantage to him. If he consents to defer the enjoyment of them, must not this be for some consideration? In proportion as the advantages of saving are reduced the inducements to save will be diminished, and then the available lending fund of the community will be lessened, so that fewer persons in need of temporary accommodation will be able to receive it. From another point of view, may it not be urged that if a man obtains the assistance of a loan he should be as willing to pay for it as he would be to pay for any other distinct advantage? He does not get the convenience of a coach-ride for nothing, why should he not expect to pay anything for a lift along a difficult bit of his financial course? Sometimes a loan may be regarded as an act of partnership. The tradesman who has not sufficient capital to carry on his business borrows from a neighbour who possesses money which he desires to invest. Is not this an arrangement in which lending at interest is mutually advantageous? In such a case the lender is really a sort of "sleeping partner," and the interest he receives is merely his share in the business, because it is the return which has come back to him through the use of his money. Where is the wrong of such a transaction? Even when the terms are more hard on the debtor, may it not be urged that he does not accept them blindfold? He knows what he is doing when he takes upon himself the obligations of his debt

* Neh. v. 13.

† Exod. xxii. 25.

and its accompanying interest; he willingly enters into the bond, believing that it will be for his own advantage. How then can he be regarded as the victim of cruelty?

This is one side of the subject, and it is not to be denied that it exhibits a considerable amount of truth from its own point of view. Even on this ground, however, it may be doubted whether the advantages of the debtor are as great as they are represented. The system of carrying on business by means of borrowed capital is answerable for much of the strain and anxiety of modern life, and not a little of the dishonesty to which traders are now tempted when hard pressed. The offer of "temporary accommodation" is inviting, but it may be questioned whether this is not more often than not a curse to those who accept it. Very frequently it only postpones the evil day. Certainly it is not found that the multiplication of "pawn-shops" tends to the comfort and well-being of the people among whom they spring up, and possibly, if we could look behind the scenes, we should discover that lending agencies in higher commercial circles were not much more beneficial to the community.

Still, it may be urged, even if the system of borrowing and lending is often carried too far, there are cases in which it is manifestly beneficial. The borrower may be really helped over a temporary difficulty. In a time of desperate need he may even be saved from starvation. This is not to be denied. We must look at the system as a whole, however, rather than only at its favourite instances.

The strength of the case for lending money at interest rests upon certain plain laws of "Political Economy." Now it is absurd to denounce the science of "Political Economy" as "diabolical." No science can be either good or bad, for by its nature all science deals only with truth and knowledge. We do not talk of the morality of chemistry. The facts may be reprehensible; but the scientific co-ordination of them, the discovery of the principles which govern them, cannot be morally culpable. Nevertheless "Political Economy" is only a science on the ground of certain pre-suppositions. Remove those pre-suppositions, and the whole fabric falls to the ground. It is not then morally condemned; it is simply inapplicable, because its data have disappeared. Now one of the leading data of this science is the principle of self-interest. It is assumed throughout that men are simply producing and trading for their own advantage. If this assumption is allowed, the laws and their results follow with the iron necessity of fate. But if the self-seeking principle can be removed, and a social principle be made to take its place, the whole process will be altered. We see this happening with Nehemiah, who is willing to lend free of interest. In his case the strong pleas for the reasonableness, for the very necessity of the other system fall to the ground. If the contagion of his example were universal, we should have to alter our books of "Political Economy," and write on the subject from the new standpoint of brotherly kindness.

We have not yet reached the bottom of this question. It may still be urged that, though it was very gracious of Nehemiah to act as he did, it was not therefore culpable in others who failed to share his views and means not to follow suit. In some cases the lender might be depending

for a livelihood on the produce of his loans. If so, were he to decline to exact it, he himself would be absolutely impoverished. We must meet this position by taking into account the actual results of the money-lending system practised by the Jews in Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah. The interest was high—"the hundredth part of the money"*—i. e., with the monthly payments usual in the East, equivalent to twelve per cent. annual interest. Then those who could not pay this interest, having already pledged their estates, forfeited the property. A wise regulation of Deuteronomy—unhappily never practised—had required the return of mortgaged land every seven years.† This merciful regulation was evidently intended to prevent the accumulation of large estates in the hands of rich men who would "add field to field" in a way denounced by the prophets with indignation.‡ Thus the tendency to inequality of lots would be avoided, and temporary embarrassment could not lead to the permanent ruin of a man and his children after him. It was felt, too, that there was a sacred character in the land, which was the Lord's possession. It was not possible for a man to whom a portion had been allotted to wholly alienate it; for it was not his to dispose of, it was only his to hold. This mystical thought would help to maintain a sturdy race of peasants—Naboth, for example—who would feel their duty to their land to be of a religious nature, and who would therefore be elevated and strengthened in character by the very possession of it. All these advantages were missed by the customs that were found to be prevalent in the time of Nehemiah.

Far worse than the alienation of their estates was the selling of their children by the hard-pressed creditors. An ancient law of rude times recognised the fact and regulated it in regard to daughters;§ but it is not easy to see how in an age of civilisation any parents possessed of natural feeling could bring themselves to consent to such a barbarity. That some did so is a proof of the morally degrading effect of absolute penury. When the wolf is at the door, the hungry man himself becomes wolfish. The horrible stories of mothers in besieged cities boiling and eating their own children can only be accounted for by some such explanation as this. Here we have the severest condemnation of the social system which permits of the utter destitution of a large portion of the community. It is most hurtful to the characters of its victims; it de-humanises them, it reduces them to the level of beasts.

Did Ezra's stern reformation prepare the way for this miserable condition of affairs? He had dared to tamper with the most sacred domestic ties. He had attacked the sanctities of the home. May we suppose that one result of his success was to lower the sense of home duties, and even to stifle the deepest natural affections? This is at least a melancholy possibility, and it warns us of the danger of any invasion of family claims and duties by the Church or the State.

Now it was in face of the terrible misery of the Jews that Nehemiah denounced the whole practice of usury which was the root of it. He was not contemplating those harmless commercial transactions by which, in our day, capital passes from one hand to another in a way of

business that may be equally advantageous to borrower and lender. All he saw was a state of utter ruin—land alienated from its old families, boys and girls sold into slavery, and the unfortunate debtors, in spite of all their sacrifices, still on the brink of starvation. In view of such a frightful condition, he naturally denounced the whole system that led to it. What else could he have done? This was no time for a nice discrimination between the use and the abuse of the system. Nehemiah saw nothing but abuse in it. Moreover, it was not in accordance with the Hebrew way ever to draw fine distinctions. If a custom was found to be working badly, that custom was reprobated entirely: no attempt was made to save from the wreck any good elements that might have been discovered in it by a cool scientific analysis. In the Law, therefore, as well as in the particular cases dealt with by Nehemiah, lending at interest among Jews was forbidden, because as usually practised it was a cruel, hurtful practice. Nehemiah even refers to lending on a pledge, without mentioning the interest, as an evil thing, because it was taken for granted that usury went with it.* But that usury was not thought to be morally wrong in itself we may learn from the fact that Jews were permitted by their law to practise it with foreigners,† while they were not allowed to do any really wrong thing to them. This distinction between the treatment of the Jew and that of the Gentile throws some light on the question of usury. It shows that the real ground of condemnation was that the practice was contrary to brotherhood. Since then Christianity enlarges the field of brotherhood, the limits of exactions are proportionately extended. There are many things that we cannot do to a man when we regard him as a brother, although we should have had no compunction in performing them before we had owned the close relationship.

We see then that what Nehemiah and the Jewish law really condemned was not so much the practice of taking interest in the abstract as the carrying on of cruel usury among brothers. The evil that lies in that also appears in dealings that are not directly financial. The world thinks of the Jew too much as of a Shylock who makes his money breed by harsh exactions practised on Christians. But when Christians grow rich by the ill-requited toil of their oppressed fellow-Christians, when they exact more than their pound of flesh, when drop by drop they squeeze the very life-blood out of their victims, they are guilty of the abomination of usury—in a new form, but with few of its evils lightened. To take advantage of the helpless condition of a fellow-man is exactly the wickedness denounced by Nehemiah in the heartless rich men of his day. It is no excuse for this that we are within our rights. It is not always right to insist upon our rights. What is legally innocent may be morally criminal. It is even possible to get through a court of justice what is nothing better than a theft in the sight of Heaven. It can never be right to push any one down to his ruin.

But, it may be said, the miserable man brought his trouble upon himself by his own recklessness. Be it so. Still he is our brother, and we should treat him as such. We may think we are under no obligation to follow the example of Ne-

* Neh. v. 11.

† Deut. xv. 1-6.

‡ *E. g.*, Isa. v. 8.

§ Exod. xxi. 7.

* Neh. v. 7, 10, where instead of "usury" (A. V.) we should read "pledge."

† Deut. xv. 3-6.

hemiah, who refused his pay from the impoverished citizens, redeemed Israelites from slavery in foreign lands, lent money free of interest, and entertained a number of Jews at his table—all out of the savings of his old courtier days at Susa. And yet a true Christian cannot escape from the belief that there is a real obligation lying on him to imitate this royal bounty as far as his means permit.

The law in Deuteronomy commanded the Israelite to lend willingly to the needy, and not harden his heart or shut up his hands from his "poor brother."* Our Lord goes further, for He distinctly requires His disciples to lend when they do not expect that the loan will ever be returned—"If ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive," He asks, "what thanks have ye? even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much."† And St. Paul is thinking of no work of supererogation when he writes, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."‡ Yet if somebody suggests that these precepts should be taken seriously and put in practice to-day, he is shouted down as a fanatic. Why is this? Will Christ be satisfied with less than His own requirements?

CHAPTER XXIII.

WISE AS SERPENTS.

NEHEMIAH VI.

OPEN opposition had totally failed. The watchful garrison had not once permitted a surprise. In spite of the persistent malignity of his enemies, Nehemiah had raised the walls all round the city till not a breach remained anywhere. The doors had yet to be hung at the great gateways, but the fortification of Jerusalem had proceeded so far that it was hopeless for the enemy to attempt any longer to hinder it by violence. Accordingly the leading antagonists changed their tactics. They turned from force to fraud—a method of strategy which was a confession of weakness. The antagonism to the Jews was now in a very different position from that which it had attained before Nehemiah had appeared on the scene, and when all Syria was moved and Artaxerxes himself won over to the Samaritan view. It had no support from the Satrap. It was directly against the policy sanctioned by the king. In its impotence it was driven to adopt humiliating devices of cunning and deceit; and even these expedients proved to be ineffectual. It has been well remarked that the rustic tricksters from Samaria were no match for a trained courtier. Nehemiah easily detected the clumsy snares that were set to entrap him. Thus he illustrates that wisdom of the serpent which our Lord commends to His disciples as a useful weapon for meeting the temptations and dangers they must be prepared to encounter. The serpent, repulsive and noxious, the common symbol of sin, to some the very incarnation of the devil, was credited with a quality worthy of imitation by One who could see the "soul of goodness in things evil." The subtlety of the keen-eyed, sinuous beast appeared to Him in the light of a real excellence, which should be rescued from its degradation in the crawling reptile and set to a worthy use. He rejoiced in the

revelation made to babes; but it would be an insult to the children whom He set before us as the typical members of the kingdom of heaven to mistake this for a benediction of stupidity. The fact is, dulness is often nothing but the result of indolence; it comes from negligence in the cultivation of faculties God has given to men more generously than they will acknowledge. Surely, true religion, since it consists in a Divine life, must bring vitality to the whole man, and thus quicken the intellect as well as the heart. St. James refers to the highest wisdom as a gift which God bestows liberally and without upbraiding on those who ask for it.* Our plain duty, therefore, is not to permit ourselves to be fooled to our ruin.

But when we compare the wisdom of Nehemiah with the cunning of his enemies we notice a broad distinction between the two qualities. Sanballat and his fellow-conspirator, the Arab Geshem, condescend to the meanness of deceit; they try to allure their victim into their power; they invite him to trust himself to their hospitality while intending to reward his confidence with treachery; they concoct false reports to blacken the reputation of the man whom they dare not openly attack; with diabolical craft one of their agents endeavours to tempt Nehemiah to an act of cowardice that would involve apparently a culpable breach of religious propriety, in order that his influence may be undermined by the destruction of his reputation. From beginning to end this is all a policy of lies. On the other hand, there is not a shadow of insincerity in Nehemiah's method of frustrating it. He uses his keen intelligence in discovering the plots of his foes; he never degrades it by weaving counterplots. In the game of diplomacy he outwits his opponents at every stage. If he would lend himself to their mendacious methods, he might turn them round his finger. But he will do nothing of the kind. One after another he breaks up the petty schemes of the dishonest men who continue to worry him with their devices, and quietly hands them back the fragments, to their bitter chagrin. His replies are perfectly frank; his policy is clear as the day. Wise as the serpent, he is harmless as the dove. A man of astounding discernment, he is nevertheless "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile."

The first proposal had danger written on the face of it, and the persistence with which so lame a device was repeated does not do much credit to the ingenuity of the conspirators. Their very malignity seems to have blinded them to the fact that they were not deceiving Nehemiah. Perhaps they thought that he would yield to sheer importunity. Their suggestion was that he should come out of Jerusalem and confer with Sanballat and his friends some miles away in the plain of Sharon.† The Jews were known to be hard-pressed, weary, and famine-stricken, and any overtures that promised an amicable settlement, or even a temporary truce, might be viewed acceptably by the anxious governor on whose sole care the social troubles of the citizens as well as the military protection of the city depended. Very likely information gleaned from spies within Jerusalem guided the

* James i. 5.

† At Ono. This place has not yet been found. It cannot well be *Beit Unia*, northwest of Jerusalem, near *Beitin* (Bethel). Its association with Lod (Lydda) in 1 Chron. viii. 12 and Neh. xi. 35, points to the neighbourhood of the latter place.

* Deut. xv. 7. 8.

† Luke vi. 34.

‡ Gal. vi. 2.

conspirators in choosing the opportunities for their successive overtures. These would seem most timely when the social troubles of the Jews were most serious. In another way the invitation to a parley might be thought attractive to Nehemiah. It would appeal to his nobler feelings. A generous man is unwilling to suspect the dishonesty of his neighbours.

But Nehemiah was not caught by the "confidence trick." He knew the conspirators intended to do him mischief. Yet as this intention was not actually proved against them, he put no accusation into his reply. The inference from it was clear enough. But the message itself could not be construed into any indication of discourtesy. Nehemiah was doing a great work. Therefore he could not come down. This was a perfectly genuine answer. For the governor to have left Jerusalem at the present crisis would have been disastrous to the city. The conspirators then tried another plan for getting Nehemiah to meet them outside Jerusalem. They pretended that it was reported that his work of fortifying the city was carried on with the object of rebelling against the Persian government, and that this report had gone so far as to convey the impression that he had induced prophets to preach his kingship. Some such suspicion had been hinted at before, at the time of Nehemiah's coming up to Jerusalem,* but then its own absurdity had prevented it from taking root. Now the actual appearance of the walls round the once ruinous city, and the rising reputation of Nehemiah as a man of resource and energy, might give some colour to the calumny. The point of the conspirators' device, however, is not to be found in the actual spreading of the dangerous rumour, but in the alarm to be suggested to Nehemiah by the thought that it was being spread. Nehemiah would know very well how much mischief is wrought by idle and quite groundless talk. The libel may be totally false, and yet it may be impossible for its victim to follow it up and clear his character in every nook and cranny to which it penetrates. A lie, like a weed, if it is not nipped in the bud, sheds seeds which every wind of gossip will spread far and wide, so that it soon becomes impossible to stamp it out.

In their effort to frighten Nehemiah the conspirators suggested that the rumour would reach the king. They as much as hinted that they would undertake the business of reporting it themselves if he would not come to terms with them. This was an attempt at extracting blackmail. Having failed in their appeal to his generous instincts, the conspirators tried to work on his fears. For any one of less heroic mind than Nehemiah their diabolical threat would have been overwhelmingly powerful. Even he could not but feel the force of it. It calls to mind the last word of the Jews that determined Pilate to surrender Jesus to the death he knew was not merited: "If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." The suspicion that always haunts the mind of an autocratic sovereign gives undue weight to any charges of treason. Artaxerxes was not a Tiberius. But the good-natured monarch was liable to persuasion. Nehemiah must have had occasion to witness many instances of the fatal consequences of royal displeasure. Could he rely on the continuance of his master's favour now he was far from the

* Neh. ii. 19.

court, while lying tongues were trying to poison the ears of the king? Before first speaking of his project for helping his people, he had trembled at the risk he was about to incur; how then could he now learn with equanimity that a cruelly mendacious representation of it was being made to Artaxerxes? His sense of the gravity of the situation is seen in the way in which he met it. Nehemiah indignantly repudiated the charge. He boldly asserted that it had been invented by the conspirators. To them he showed an unwavering front. But we are able to look behind the scenes. It is one advantage of this autobiographical sketch of Nehemiah's that in it the writer repeatedly lifts the veil and reveals to us the secret of his thoughts. Heroic in the world, before men, he still knew his real human weakness. But he knew too that his strength was in God. Such heroism as his is not like the stolidity of the lifeless rock. It resembles the strength of the living oak, which grows more massive just in proportion as it is supplied with fresh sap. According to his custom in every critical moment of his life, Nehemiah resorted to prayer, and thus again we come upon one of those brief ejaculations uttered in the midst of the stress and strain of a busy life that light up the pages of his narrative from time to time. The point of his prayer is simple and definite. It is just that *his hands may be strengthened*. This would have a twofold bearing. In the first place, it would certainly seek a revival of inward energy. Nehemiah waits on the Lord that He may renew his strength. He knows that God helps him through his own exercise of energy, so that if he is to be protected he must be made strong. But the prayer means more than this. For the hands to be strengthened is for their work to prosper. Nehemiah craves the aid of God that all may go right in spite of the terrible danger from lying calumnies with which he is confronted; and his prayer is answered. The second device was frustrated.

The third was managed very differently. This time Nehemiah was attacked within the city, for it was now apparent that no attempts to lure him outside the walls could succeed. A curious characteristic of the new incident is that Nehemiah himself paid a visit to the man who was the treacherous instrument of his enemies' devices. He went in person to the house of Shemaiah the prophet—a most mysterious proceeding. We have no explanation of his reason for going. Had the prophet sent for Nehemiah? or is it possible that in the dread perplexity of the crisis, amid the snares that surrounded him, oppressed with the loneliness of his position of supreme responsibility, Nehemiah hungered for a Divine message from an inspired oracle? It is plain from this chapter that the common, everyday prophets—so much below the great messengers of Jehovah whose writings represent Hebrew prophecy to us to-day—had survived the captivity, and were still practising divination much after the manner of heathen soothsayers, as their fathers had done before them from the time when a young farmer's son was sent to Samuel to learn the whereabouts of a lost team of asses. If Nehemiah had resorted to the prophet of his own accord, his danger was indeed serious. In this case it would be the more to his credit that he did not permit himself to be duped.

Another feature of the strange incident is not very clear to us. Nehemiah tells us that the

prophet was "shut up."* What does this mean? Was the man ceremonially unclean? or ill? or in custody under some accusation? None of these three explanations can be accepted, because Shemaiah proposed to proceed at once to the temple with Nehemiah, and thus confessed his seclusion to be voluntary. Can we give a metaphorical interpretation to the expression, and understand the prophet to be representing himself as under a Divine compulsion, the thought of which may give the more urgency to the advice he tenders to Nehemiah? In this case we should look for a more explicit statement, for the whole force of his message would depend upon the authority thus attributed to it. A simpler interpretation, to which the language of Shemaiah points, and one in accordance with all the wretched, scheming policy of the enemies of Nehemiah, is that the prophet pretended that he was himself in personal danger as a friend and supporter of the governor, and that therefore he found it necessary to keep himself in seclusion. Thus by his own attitude he would try to work on the fears of Nehemiah.

The proposal that the prophet should accompany Nehemiah to the shelter of the temple, even into the "Holy Place," was temptingly plausible. The heathen regarded the shrines of their gods as sanctuaries, and similar notions seem to have attached themselves to the Jewish altar. Moreover, the massive structure of the temple was itself a defence—the temple of Herod was the last fortress to be taken in the great final siege. In the temple, too, Nehemiah might hope to be safe from the surprise of a street *émeute* among the disaffected sections of the population. Above all, the presence and counsel of a prophet would seem to sanction and authorise the course indicated. Yet it was all a cruel snare. This time the purpose was to discredit Nehemiah in the eyes of the Jews, inasmuch as his influence depended largely on his reputation. But again Nehemiah could see through the tricks of his enemies. He was neither blinded by self-interest nor overawed by prophetic authority. The use of that authority was the last arrow in the quiver of his foes. They would attack him through his religious faith. Their mistake was that they took too low a view of that faith. This is the common mistake of the irreligious in their treatment of truly devout men. Nehemiah knew that a prophet could err. Had there not been lying prophets in the days of Jeremiah? It is a proof of his true spiritual insight that he could discern one in his pretended protector. The test is clear to a man with so true a conscience as we see in Nehemiah. If the prophet says what we know to be morally wrong, he cannot be speaking from God. It is not the teaching of the Bible—not the teaching of the Old Testament any more than that of the New—that revelation supersedes conscience, that we are ever to take on authority what our moral nature abhors. The humility that would lay conscience under the heel of authority is false and degrading, and it is utterly contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture. One great sign of the worth of a prophecy is its character. Thus the devout man is to try the spirits, whether they be of God.† Nehemiah has the clear, serene conscience that detects sin when it appears in the guise of sanctity. He sees at a glance that it

*Neh. vi. 10.

† 1 John iv. 1.

would be wrong for him to follow Shemaiah's advice. It would involve a cowardly desertion of his post. It would also involve a desecration of the sacred temple enclosure. How could he, being such as he was—i. e., a layman—go into the temple, even to save his life? * But did not our Lord excuse David for an analogous action in eating the shewbread? True. But Nehemiah did not enjoy the primitive freedom of David, nor the later enlightened liberty of Christ. In his intermediate position, in his age of nascent ceremonialism, it was impossible for him to see that simple human necessities could ever override the claims of ritual. His duty was shaped to him by his beliefs. So is it with every man. To him that esteemeth anything sin it is sin.†

Nehemiah's answer to the proposal of the wily prophet is very blunt—"I will not go in." Bluntness is the best reply to sophistry. The whole scheme was open to Nehemiah. He perceived that God had not sent the prophet, that this man was but a tool in the hands of the Samaritan conspirators. In solemnly committing the leaders of the vile conspiracy to the judgment of Heaven, Nehemiah includes a prophetic, Noadiah—degenerate successor of the patriotic Deborah!—and the whole gang of corrupt, traitorous prophets. Thus the wrongness of Shemaiah's proposal not only discredited his mission; it also revealed the secret of his whole undertaking and that of his unworthy coadjutors. While Nehemiah detected the character of the false prophecy by means of his clear perceptions of right and wrong, those perceptions helped him to discover the hidden band of his foe. He was not to be sheltered in the temple, as Shemaiah suggested; but he was saved through the keenness of his own conscience. In this case the wisdom of the serpent in him was the direct outcome of his high moral nature and the care with which he kept "conscience as the noontide clear."

Nehemiah adds two items by way of postscripts to his account of the building of the walls. The first is the completion of the work, with its effect on the jealous enemies of the Jews. It was finished in fifty-two days—an almost incredibly short time, especially when the hindrances of internal troubles and external attacks are taken into account. The building must have been hasty and rough. Still it was sufficient for its purpose. The moral effect of it was the chief result gained. The sense of discouragement now passed over to the enemy. It was the natural reaction from the mockery with which they had assailed the commencement of the work, that at the sight of the completion of it they should be "much cast down."‡ We can imagine the grim satisfaction with which Nehemiah would write these words. But they tell of more than the humiliation of insulting and deceitful enemies; they complete an act in a great drama of Providence, in which the courage that stands to duty in face of all danger and the faith that looks to God in prayer are vindicated.

The second postscript describes yet another source of danger to Nehemiah—one possibly remaining after the walls were up. Tobiah, "the servant," had not been included in the previous conspiracies. But he was playing a little game of his own. The intermarriage of leading Jewish families with foreigners was bearing dangerous fruit in his case. Tobiah had married a Jew-

*Neh. vi. 11.

† Rom. xiv. 14.

‡ Neh. vi. 10.

ess, and his son had followed his example. In each case the alliance had brought him into connection with a well-known family in Jerusalem. These two families pleaded his merits with Nehemiah, and at the same time acted as spies and reported the words of the governor to Tobiah. The consequence was the receipt of alarmist letters from this man by Nehemiah. The worst danger might thus be found among the disaffected citizens within the walls who were irritated at the rigorously exclusive policy of Ezra, which Nehemiah had not discouraged, although he had not yet had occasion to push it further. The stoutest walls will not protect from treason within the ramparts. So after all the labour of completing the fortifications Nehemiah's trust must still be in God alone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAW.

NEHEMIAH viii. 1-8.

THE fragmentary nature of the chronicler's work is nowhere more apparent than in that portion of it which treats of the events immediately following on the completion of the fortifications of Jerusalem. In Nehemiah vii. we have a continuation of the governor's personal narrative of his work, describing how the watch was organised after the walls had been built and the gates set up.* This is followed by a remark on the sparseness of the city population,† which leads Nehemiah to insert the list of Zerubbabel's pilgrims that the chronicler subsequently copies out in his account of Zerubbabel's expedition.‡ Here the subject is dropped, to be resumed at Nehemiah xi., where the arrangements for increasing the population of Jerusalem are described. Thus we might read right on with a continuous narrative—allowing for the insertion of the genealogical record, the reason for which is obvious—and omit the three intermediate chapters without any perceptible hiatus, but, on the contrary, with a gain in consecutiveness.

These three chapters stand by themselves, and they are devoted to another matter, and that a matter marked by a certain unity and distinctive character of its own. They are written in the third person, by the chronicler himself. In them Ezra suddenly reappears without any introduction, taking the leading place, while Nehemiah recedes into the background, only to be mentioned once or twice, and then as the loyal supporter of the famous scribe. The style has a striking resemblance to that of Ezra, from whom therefore, it has been conjectured, the chronicler may here have derived his materials.

These facts, and minor points that seem to support them, have raised the question whether the section Nehemiah viii.-x. is found in its right place; whether it should not have been joined on to the Book of Ezra as a description of what followed immediately after the events there recorded and before the advent of Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Ezra brought the book of The Law with him from Babylon. It would be most reasonable to suppose that he would seize the first opportunity for making it known. Accordingly we find that the corresponding section in 1 Es-

dras is in this position.* Nevertheless it is now generally agreed that the three chapters as they stand in the Book of Nehemiah are in their true chronological position. Twice Nehemiah himself appears in the course of the narrative they contain. He is associated with Ezra and the Levites in teaching The Law,† and his name stands first in the list of the covenanters.‡ The admission of these facts is only avoided in 1 Esdras by an alteration of the text. If we were to suppose that the existence of the name in our narrative is the result of an interpolation by a later hand, it would be difficult to account for this, and it would be still more difficult to discover why the chronicler should introduce confusion into his narrative by an aimless misplacement of it. His methods of procedure are sometimes curious, it must be admitted, and that we met with a misplaced section in an earlier chapter cannot be reasonably questioned.§ But the motive which probably prompted that peculiar arrangement does not apply here. In the present case it would result in nothing but confusion.

The question is of far more than literary interest. The time when The Law was first made known to the people in its entirety is a landmark of the first importance for the History of Israel. There is a profound significance in the fact that though Ezra had long been a diligent student and a careful, loving scribe, though he had carried up the precious roll to Jerusalem, and though he had been in great power and influence in the city, he had not found a fitting opportunity for revealing his secret to his people before all his reforming efforts were arrested, and the city and its inhabitants trampled under foot by their envious neighbours. Then came Nehemiah's reconstruction. Still the consideration of The Law remained in abeyance. While Jerusalem was an armed camp, and while the citizens were toiling at the walls or mounting guard by turn, there was no opportunity for a careful attention to the sacred document. All this time Ezra was out of sight, and his name not once mentioned. Yet he was far too brilliant a star to have been eclipsed even by the rising of Nehemiah. We can only account for the sudden and absolute vanishing of the greatest figure of the age by supposing that he had retired from the scene, perhaps gone back to Babylon alone with his grief and disappointment. Those were not days for the scholar's mission. But now, with the return of some amount of security and its accompanying leisure, Ezra emerges again, and immediately he is accorded the front place and Nehemiah—the "Saviour of Society"—modestly assumes the attitude of his disciple. A higher tribute to the exalted position tacitly allowed to the scribe, or a finer proof of the unselfish humility of the young statesman, cannot be imagined. Though at the height of his power, having frustrated the many evil designs of his enemies and completed his stupendous task of fortifying the city of his fathers in spite of the most vexatious difficulties, the successful patriot is not in the least degree flushed with victory. In the quietest manner possible he steps aside and yields the first place to the recluse, the student, the writer, the teacher. This is a sign of the importance that ideas will assume in the new age. The man of action gives place to the man of thought. Still more is it

* Neh. vii. 1-3.

† Neh. vii. 4.

* 1 Esdras ix. 37-55.

‡ Neh. x. 1.

‡ Neh. vii. 5-73 = Ezra ii.

† Neh. viii. 9.

§ Ezra iv. 7-23.

a hint of the coming ecclesiasticism of the new Jewish order. As the civil ruler thus takes a lower ground in the presence of the religious leader, we seem to be anticipating those days of the triumph of the Church when a king would stand like a groom to hold the horse of a pope. And yet this is not officially arranged. It is not formally conceded on the one side, nor is it formally demanded on the other side. The situation may be rather compared with that of Saverio in Florence when by sheer moral force he overtopped the power of the Medici, or that of Calvin at Geneva when the municipal council willingly yielded to the commanding spirit of the minister of religion because it recognised the supremacy of religion.

In such a condition of affairs the city was ripe for the public exposition of The Law. But even then Ezra only published it after having been requested to do so by the people. We cannot assign this delay of his to any reluctance to let his fellow-countrymen know the law which he had long loved and studied in private. We may rather conclude that he perceived the utter inutility of any attempt to thrust it upon inattentive hearers—nay, the positive mischievousness of such a proceeding. This would approach the folly described by our Lord when He warned His disciples against casting pearls before swine. Very much of the popular indifference to the Bible among large sections of the population to-day must be laid at the doors of those unwise zealots who have dinned the mere letter of it into the ears of unwilling auditors. The conduct of Ezra shows that, with all his reverence for The Law, the Great Scribe did not consider that it was to be imposed, like a civil code, by magisterial authority. The decree of Artaxerxes had authorised him to enforce it in this way on every Jew west of the Euphrates.* But either the unsettled state of the country or the wisdom of Ezra had not permitted the application of the power thus conferred. The Law was to be voluntarily adopted. It was to be received, as all true religion must be received, in living faith, with the acquiescence of the conscience, judgment, and will of those who acknowledged its obligations.

The occasion for such a reception of it was found when the Jews were freed from the toil and anxiety that accompanied the building of their city walls. The chronicler says that this was in the seventh month; but he does not give the year. Considering the abrupt way in which he has introduced the section about the reading of The Law, we cannot be certain in what year this took place. If we may venture to take the narrative continuously, in connection with Nehemiah's story in the previous chapters, we shall get this occurrence within a week after the completion of the fortifications. That was on "the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul"† —i. e., the sixth month. The reading began on "the first day of the seventh month."‡ That is to say, on this supposition, it followed immediately on the first opportunity of leisure. Then the time was specially appropriate, for it was the day of the Feast of Trumpets, which was observed as a public holiday and an occasion for an assembly—"a holy convocation."§ On this day the citizens met in a favourite spot, the open space just inside the Water Gate, at the east end of the city,

close to the temple, and now part of the Haram, or sacred enclosure. They were unanimous in their desire to have no more delay before hearing the law which Ezra had brought up to Jerusalem as much as thirteen years before. Why were they all on a sudden thus eager, after so long a period of indifference? Was it that the success of Nehemiah's work had given them a new hope and confidence, a new idea, indeed? They now saw the compact unity of Jerusalem established. Here was the seal and centre of their separateness. Accepting this as an accomplished fact, the Jews were ready and even anxious to know that sacred law in which their distinction from other people and their consecration to Jehovah were set forth.

Not less striking is the manner in which Ezra met this welcome request of the Jews. The scene which follows is unique in history—the Great Scribe with the precious roll in his hand standing on a temporary wooden platform so that he may be seen by everybody in the vast crowd—seven Levites supporting him on either side*—other select Levites going about among the people after each section of The Law has been read in order to explain it to separate groups of the assembly †—the motley gathering comprising the bulk of the citizens, not men only but women also, for the brutal Mohammedan exclusiveness that confines religious knowledge to one sex was not anticipated by the ancient Jews; not adults only, but children also, "those that could understand," for The Law is for the simplest minds, the religion of Israel is to be popular and domestic—the whole of this multitude assembling in the cool, fresh morning when the first level rays of the sun smite the city walls from over the Mount of Olives, and standing reverently hour after hour, till the hot autumn noon puts an end to the lengthy meeting.

In all this the fact which comes out most prominently, accentuated by every detail of the arrangements, is the popularisation of The Law. Its multiplex precepts were not only recited in the hearing of men, women, and children; they were carefully expounded to the people. Hitherto it had been a matter of private study among learned men; its early development had been confined to a small group of faithful believers in Jehovah; its customary practices had been privately elaborated through the ages almost like the mysteries of a secret cult; and therefore its origin had been buried in hopeless obscurity. So it was like the priestly ritual of heathenism. The priest of Eleusis guarded his secrets from all but those who were favoured by being solemnly initiated into them. Now this unwholesome condition was to cease. The most sacred rites were to be expounded to all the people. Ezra knew that the only worship God would accept

* In Neh. viii. 4, six names are given for the right-hand contingent and seven for the left-hand. But since in the corresponding account of Esdras fourteen names occur, one name would seem to have dropped out of Nehemiah. The prominence given to the Levites in all these scenes and the absence of reference to the priests should be noted. The Levites were still important personages, although degraded from the priesthood. The priests were chiefly confined to ritual functions; later they entered on the duties of civil government. The Levites were occupied with teaching the people, with whom they came into closer contact. Their work corresponded more to that of the pastoral office. In these times, too, most of the scribes seem to have been Levites.

† Not translating it into the Aramaic dialect. That would have been a superfluous task, for the Jews certainly knew Hebrew at this time. Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets down to Malachi wrote in Hebrew.

* Ezra vii. 25, 26.

† Neh. vi. 15.

‡ Neh. viii. 2.

§ Lev. xxiii. 24.

must be offered with the mind and the heart. Moreover, The Law concerned the actions of the people themselves, their own minute observance of purifications and careful avoidance of defilements, their own offerings and festivals. No priestly performances could avail as a substitute for these popular religious observances.

Yet much of The Law was occupied with directions concerning the functions of the priests and the sacrificial ritual. By acquainting the laity with these directions, Ezra and his helpers were doing their best to fortify the nation against the tyranny of sacerdotalism. The Levites, who at this time were probably still sore at the thought of their degradation and jealous of the favoured line of Zadok, would naturally fall in with such a policy. It was the more remarkable because the new theocracy was just now coming into power. Here would be a powerful protection against the abuse of its privileges by the hierarchy. Priests, all the world over, have made capital out of their exclusive knowledge of the ritual of religion. They have jealously guarded their secrets from the uninitiated multitude, so as to make themselves necessary to anxious worshippers who dreaded to give offence to their gods or to fail in their sacrifices through ignorance of the prescribed methods. By committing the knowledge of The Law to the people, Ezra protected the Jews against this abuse. Everything was to be above board, in broad daylight; and the degradation of ignorant worship was not to be encouraged, much as a corrupt priesthood in later times might desire it. An indirect consequence of this publication of The Law with the careful instruction of the people in its contents was that the element of knowledge took a more exalted position in religion. It is not the magical priest, it is the logical scribe who really leads the people now. Ideas will mean more than in the old days of obscure ritual. There is an end to the "dim religious light." Henceforth *Torah—Instruction*—is to be the most fundamental ground of faith.

It is important that we should see clearly what was contained in this roll of The Law out of which Ezra read to the citizens of Jerusalem. The distress with which its contents were received would lead us to suppose that the grave minatory passages of Deuteronomy were especially prominent in the reading. We cannot gather from the present scene any further indications of the subjects brought before the Jews. But from other parts of the Book of Nehemiah we can learn for certain that the whole of the Pentateuch was now introduced to the people. If it was not all read out of the Ecclesia, it was all in the hands of Ezra, and its several parts were made known from time to time as occasion required. First, we may infer that in addition to Deuteronomy Ezra's law contained the ancient Jehovistic narrative, because the treatment of mixed marriages * refers to the contents of this portion of the Pentateuch.† Secondly, we may see that it included "The Law of Holiness," because the regulations concerning the sabbatic year‡ are copied from that collection of rules about defilement and consecration.§ Thirdly, we may be equally sure that it did not lack "The Priestly Code"—the elaborate system of ritual which occupies the greater part of Numbers and Leviticus—because the law of the first-

fruits * is taken from that source.† Here, then, we find allusions to the principal constituent elements of the Pentateuch scattered over the brief Book of Nehemiah. It is clear, therefore, that the great accretion of customs and teachings, which only reached completion after the close of the captivity, was the treasure Ezra now introduced to his people. Henceforth nothing less can be understood when the title "The Law" is used. From this time obedience to the Torah will involve subjection to the whole system of priestly and sacrificial regulations, to all the rules of cleanness and consecration and sacrifice contained in the Pentateuch.‡

A more difficult point to be determined is, how far this Pentateuch was really a new thing when it was introduced by Ezra. Here we must separate two very different questions. If they had always been kept apart, much confusion would have been avoided. The first is the question of the novelty of The Law to the Jews. There is little difficulty in answering this question. The very process of reading The Law and explaining it goes on the assumption that it is not known. The people receive it as something strange and startling. Moreover, this scene of the revelation of The Law to Israel is entirely in harmony with the previous history of the nation. Whenever The Law was shaped as we now know it, it is clear that it was not practised in its present form by the Jews before Ezra's day. We have no contemporary evidence of the use of it in the earlier period. We have clear evidence that conduct contrary to many of its precepts was carried on with impunity, and even encouraged by prophets and religious leaders without any protest from priests or scribes. The complete law is new to Israel. But there is a second question—viz., how far was this law *new in itself*? Nobody can suppose that it was an absolutely novel creation of the exile, with no roots in the past. Their repeated references to Moses show that its supporters relegated its origin to a dim antiquity, and we should belie all we know of their character if we did not allow that they were acting in good faith. But we have no evidence that The Law had been completed, codified, and written out in full before the time of Ezra. In antiquity, when writing was economised and memory cultivated to a degree of accuracy that seems to us almost miraculous, it would be possible to hand down a considerable system of ritual or of jurisprudence by tradition. Even this stupendous act of memory would not exceed that of the rhapsodists who preserved and transmitted the unwritten *Iliad*. But we are not driven to such an extreme view. We do not know how much of The Law may have been committed to writing in earlier ages. Some of it was, certainly. It bears evidence of its history in the several strata of which it is composed, and which must have been deposited successively. Deuteronomy, in its essence and original form, was certainly known before the captivity. So were the Jehovistic narrative and the Law of the Covenant. The only question as regards Ezra's day turns on the novelty of the Priestly Code, with the

* Neh. x. 35-39.

† Lev. xxvii. 30; Num. xv. 20 ff., xviii. 11-32.

‡ Strictly speaking, the Hexateuch, as "Joshua" was undoubtedly included in the volume. But the familiar term Pentateuch may serve here, as it is to the legal requirements contained in the earlier books that reference is made.

* Neh. x. 30.

† Exod. xxxiv. 16.

‡ Neh. x. 31.

§ Lev. xxv. 2-7.

Law of Holiness, and the final editing and redaction of the whole. This is adumbrated in Ezekiel and the degradation of the Levites, who are identified with the priests in Deuteronomy, but set in a lower rank in Leviticus, assigned to its historical occasion. Here, then, we see the latest part of Ezra's law in the making. It was not created by the scribe. It was formed out of traditional usages of the priests, modified by recent directions from a prophet. The origin of these usages was lost in antiquity, and therefore it was natural to attribute them to Moses, the great founder of the nation. We cannot even affirm that Ezra carried out the last redaction of The Law with his own hand, that he codified the traditional usages, the "Common Law" of Israel. What we know is, that he published this law. That he also edited it is an inference drawn from his intimate connection with the work as student and scribe, and supported by the current of later traditions. But while this is possible, what is indubitable is that to Ezra is due the glory of promulgating the law and making it pass into the life of the nation. Henceforth Judaism is legalism. We know this in its imperfection and its difference from the spiritual faith of Christ. To the contemporaries of Ezra it indicated a stage of progress—knowledge in place of superstitious bondage to the priesthood, conscientious obedience to ordinances instituted for the public welfare instead of careless indifference or obstinate self-will. Therefore its appearance marked a forward step in the course of Divine revelation.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE JOY OF THE LORD.

NEHEMIAH viii. 9-18.

"ALL the people wept when they heard the words of the law." Was it for this mournful end that Ezra had studied the sacred law and guarded it through the long years of political unrest, until at length he was able to make it known with all the pomp and circumstance of a national festival? Evidently the leaders of the people had expected no such result. But disappointing as it was, it might have been worse. The reading might have been listened to with indifference; or the great, stern law might have been rejected with execration, or scoffed at with incredulity. Nothing of the kind happened. There was no doubt as to the rightness of The Law, no reluctance to submit to its yoke, no disposition to ignore its requirements. This law had come with all the authority of the Persian government to sanction it; and yet it is evidently no fear of the magistrate, but their own convictions, their confirming consciences, that here influence the people and determine their attitude to it. Thus Ezra's labours were really honoured by the Jews, though their fruits were received so sorrowfully.

We must not suppose that the Jews of Ezra's day anticipated the ideas of St. Paul. It was not a Christian objection to law that troubled them; they did not complain of its externalism, its bondage, its formal requirements and minute details. To imagine that these features of The Law were regarded with disapproval by the first hearers of it is to credit them with an immense advance in thought beyond their leaders—Ezra,

Nehemiah, and the Levites. It is clear that their grief arose simply from their perception of their own miserable imperfections in contrast to the lofty requirements of The Law, and in view of its sombre threats of punishment for disobedience. The discovery of a new ideal of conduct above that with which we have hitherto been satisfied naturally provokes painful stings of conscience, which the old salve, compounded of the comfortable little notions we once cherished, will not neutralise. In the new light of the higher truth we suddenly discover that the "robe of righteousness" in which we have been parading is but as "filthy rags." Then our once vaunted attainments become despicable in our own eyes. The eminence on which we have been standing so proudly is seen to be a wretched mole-hill compared with the awful snow-peak from which the clouds have just dispersed. Can we ever climb that? Goodness now seems to be hopelessly unattainable; yet never before was it so desirable, because never before did it shine with so rare and fascinating a lustre.

But, it may be objected, was not the religious and moral character of the teaching of the great prophets—of Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah—larger and higher and more spiritual than the legalism of the Pentateuch? That may be granted; but it is not to the point here. The lofty prophetic teaching had never been accepted by the nation. The prophets had been voices crying in the wilderness. Their great spiritual thoughts had never been seriously followed except by a small group of devout souls. It was the Christian Church that first built on the foundation of the prophets. But in Ezra's day the Jews as a body frankly accepted The Law. Whether this were higher or lower than the ideal of prophetism does not affect the case. The significant fact is that it was higher than any ideal the people had hitherto adopted in practice. The perception of this fact was most distressing to them.

Nevertheless the Israelite leaders did not share the feeling of grief. In their eyes the sorrow of the Jews was a great mistake. It was even a wrong thing for them thus to distress themselves. Ezra loved The Law, and therefore it was to him a dreadful surprise to discover that the subject of his devoted studies was regarded so differently by his brethren. Nehemiah and the Levites shared his more cheerful view of the situation. Lyrics of this and subsequent ages bear testimony to the passionate devotion with which the sacred Torah was cherished by loyal disciples. The author of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm ransacks his vocabulary for varying phrases on which to ring the changes in praise of the law, the judgments, the statutes, the commandments of God. He cries:—

"I will delight in Thy statutes:
I will not forget Thy word.

"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold
Wondrous things out of Thy law.

"Unless Thy law had been my delight,
I should have perished in mine affliction.

"Great peace have they that love Thy law,
And they have none occasion of stumbling."

Moreover, the student of The Law to-day can perceive that its intention was beneficent. It maintained righteousness; and righteousness is the chief good. It regulated the mutual relations of men with regard to justice; it ordained purity;

it contained many humane rules for the protection of men and even of animals; it condescended to most wholesome sanitary directions. Then it declared that he who kept its ordinances should live, not merely by reason of an arbitrary arrangement, but because it pointed out the natural and necessary way of life and health. The Divine Spirit that had guided the development of it had presided over something more inviting than the forging of fetters for a host of miserable slaves, something more useful than the creation of a tantalising exemplar that should be the despair of every copyist. Ezra and his fellow-leaders knew the *intention* of The Law. This was the ground of their joyous confidence in contemplation of it. They were among those who had been led by their personal religion into possession of "the secret of the Lord." They had acquainted themselves with Him, and therefore they were at peace. Their example teaches us that we must penetrate beyond the letter to the spirit of revelation if we would discover its hidden thoughts of love. When we do so even The Law will be found to enshrine an evangel. Not that these men of the olden times perceived the fanciful symbolism which many Christians have delighted to extract from the most mechanical details of the tabernacle ritual. Their eyes were fixed on the gracious Divine purpose of creating a holy nation—separate and pure—and The Law seemed to be the best instrument for accomplishing that purpose. Meanwhile its impracticability did not strike them, because they thought of the thing in itself rather than of the relation of men to it. Religious melancholy springs from habits of subjectivity. The joyous spirit is that which forgets self in the contemplation of the thoughts of God. It is our meditation of Him—not of self—that is sweet.

Of course this would have been unreasonable if it had totally ignored human conditions and their relation to the Divine. In that case Ezra and his companions would have been vain dreamers, and the sorrowing multitude people of common-sense perceptions. But we must remember that the new religious movement was inspired by faith. It is faith that bridges the vast chasm between the real and the ideal. God had given The Law in lovingkindness and tender mercy. Then God would make the attainment of His will revealed in it possible. The part of brave and humble men was to look away from themselves to the revelation of God's thought concerning them with grateful admiration of its glorious perfection.

While considerations of this sort would make it possible for the leaders to regard The Law in a very different spirit from that manifested by the rest of the Jews, other reflections led them to go further and check the outburst of grief as both unseemly and hurtful.

It was unseemly, because it was marring the beauty of a great festival. The Jews were to stay their grief seeing that the day was holy unto the Lord.* This was as much as to say that sorrow was defiling. The world had to wait for the religion of the cross to reveal to it the sanctity of sorrow. Undoubtedly the Jewish festivals were joyous celebrations. It is the greatest mistake to represent the religion of the Old Testament as a gloomy cult overshadowed by the thunder-clouds of Sinai. On the contrary, its greatest offices were celebrated with music,

dancing, and feasting. The high day was a holiday, sunny and mirthful. It would be a pity to spoil such an occasion with unseasonable lamentations. But Nehemiah and Ezra must have had a deeper thought than this in their deprecation of grief at the festival. To allow such behaviour is to entertain unworthy feelings towards God. A day sacred to the Lord is a day in which His presence is especially felt. To draw near to God with no other feelings than emotions of fear and grief is to misapprehend His nature and His disposition towards His people. Worship should be inspired with the gladness of grateful hearts praising God, because otherwise it would discredit His goodness.

This leads to a thought of wider range and still more profound significance, a thought that flashes out of the sacred page like a brilliant gem, a thought so rich and glad and bountiful that it speaks for its own inspiration as one of the great Divine ideas of Scripture—"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Though the unseemliness of mourning on a feast day was the first and most obvious consideration urged by the Jewish leaders in their expostulation with the distressed multitude, the real justification for their rebukes and exhortations is to be found in the magnificent spiritual idea that they here give expression to. In view of such a conviction as they now gladly declare they would regard the lamentation of the Jews as more than unseemly, as positively hurtful and even wrong.

By the expression "the joy of the Lord" it seems clear that Nehemiah and his associates meant a joy which may be experienced by men through their fellowship with God. The phrase could be used for the gladness of God Himself; as we speak of the righteousness of God or the love of God, so we might speak of His joy in reference to His own infinite life and consciousness. But in the case before us the drift of the passage directs our thoughts to the moods and feelings of men. The Jews are giving way to grief, and they are rebuked for so doing and encouraged to rejoice. In this situation some thoughts favourable to joy on their part are naturally suitable. Accordingly they are called to enter into a pure and lofty gladness in which they are assured they will find their strength.

This "joy of the Lord," then, is the joy that springs up in our hearts by means of our relation to God. It is a God-given gladness, and it is found in communion with God. Nevertheless the other "joy of the Lord" is not to be left out of account when we think of the gladness which comes to us from God, for the highest joy is possible to us just because it is first experienced by God. There could be no joy in communion with a morose divinity. The service of Moloch must have been a terror, a perfect agony to his most loyal devotees. The feelings of a worshipper will always be reflections from what he thinks he perceives in the countenance of his god. They will be gloomy if the god is a sombre personage, and cheerful if he is a glad being. Now the revelation of God in the Bible is the unveiling with growing clearness of a countenance of unspeakable love and beauty and gladness. He is made known to us as "the blessed God"—the happy God. Then the joy of His children is the overflow of His own deep gladness streaming down to them. This is the "joy in the presence of the angels" which, springing from the great heart of God, makes the happiness of re-

* Neh. viii. 9.

turning penitents, so that they share in their Father's delight, as the prodigal shares in the home festivities when the fatted calf is killed. This same communication of gladness is seen in the life of our Lord, not only during those early sunny days in Galilee when His ministry opened under a cloudless sky, but even amid the darkness of the last hours at Jerusalem, for in His final discourse Jesus prayed that His joy might be in His disciples in order that their joy might be full. A more generous perception of this truth would make religion like sunshine and music, like the blooming of spring flowers and the outburst of woodland melody about the path of the Christian pilgrim. It is clear that Jesus Christ expected this to be the case since He commenced His teaching with the word "Blessed." St. Paul, too, saw the same possibility, as his repeated encouragements to "Rejoice" bear witness. Religion may be compared to one of those Italian city churches which are left outwardly bare and gloomy, while within they are replete with treasures of art. We must cross the threshold, push aside the heavy curtain, and tread the sacred pavement, if we would see the beauty of sculptured column and mural fresco and jewelled altarpiece. Just in proportion as we draw near to God shall we behold the joy and love that ever dwell in Him, till the vision of these wonders kindles our love and gladness.

Now the great idea that is here suggested to us connects this Divine joy with strength—the joy is an inspiration of energy. By the nature of things joy is exhilarating, while pain is depressing. Physiologists recognise it as a law of animal organisms that happiness is a nerve tonic. It would seem that the same law obtains in spiritual experience. On the other hand, nothing is more certain than that there are enervating pleasures, and that the free indulgence in pleasure generally weakens the character; with this goes the equally certain truth that men may be braced by suffering, that the east wind of adversity may be a real stimulant. How shall we reconcile these contradictory positions? Clearly there are different kinds and grades of delight, and different ways of taking and using every form of gladness. Pure hedonism cannot but be a weak system of life. It is the Spartan, not the Sybarite, who is capable of heroic deeds. Even Epicurus, whose name has been abused to shelter low pleasure-seeking, perceived, as clearly as "The Preacher," the melancholy truth that the life that is given over to the satisfaction of personal desires is but "vanity of vanities." The joy that exhilarates is not sought as a final goal. It comes in by the way when we are pursuing some objective end. Then this purest joy is as far above the pleasure of the self-indulgent as heaven is above hell. It may even be found side by side with bodily pain, as when martyrs exult in their flames, or when stricken souls in more prosaic circumstances awake to the wonderful perception of a rare Divine gladness. It is this joy that gives strength. There is enthusiasm in it. Such a joy, not being an end in itself, is a means to a great practical end. God's glad children are strong to do and bear His will, strong in their very gladness.

This was good news to the Jews, outwardly but a feeble flock and a prey to the ravening wolves from neighbouring lands. They had recovered hope after building their walls; but these hastily constructed fortifications did not afford

them their most secure stronghold. Their refuge was God. They carried bows and spears and swords; but the strength with which they wielded these weapons consisted in the enthusiasm of a Divine gladness—not the orgiastic fury of the heathen, but the deep, strong joy of men who knew the secret of their Lord, who possessed what Wordsworth calls "inward glee." This joy was essentially a moral strength. It bestowed the power wherewith to keep the law. Here was the answer to the discouragement of the people in their dawning perception of the lofty requirements of God's holy will. The Christian can best find energy for service, as well as the calm strength of patience, in that still richer Divine gladness which is poured into his heart by the grace of Christ. It is not only unfortunate for anybody to be a mournful Christian; it is dangerous, hurtful, even wrong. Therefore the gloomy servant of God is to be rebuked for missing the Divine gladness. Seeing that the source of it is in God, and not in the Christian himself, it is attainable and possible to the most sorrowful. He who has found this "pearl of great price" can afford to miss much else in life and yet go on his way rejoicing.

It was natural that the Jews should have been encouraged to give expression to the Divine joy at a great festival. The final harvest-home of the year, the merry celebration of the vintage, was then due. No Jewish feast was more cheerful than this, which expressed gratitude for "wine that maketh glad the heart of man." The superiority of Judaism over heathenism is seen in the tremendous contrast between the simple gaiety of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles and the gross debauchery of the Bacchanalian orgies which disgraced a similar occasion in the pagan world. It is to our shame in modern Christendom that we dare not imitate the Jews here, knowing too well that if we tried to do so we should only sink to the heathen level. Our Feast of Tabernacles would certainly become a Feast of Bacchus, bestial and wicked. Happily the Jews did not feel the Teutonic danger of intemperance. Their festival recognised the Divine bounty in nature, in its richest, ripest autumn fruitfulness, which was like the smile of God breaking out through His works to cheer His children. Bivouacking in greenwood bowers, the Jews did their best to return to the life of nature and share its autumn gladness. The chronicler informs us that since the days of Joshua the Jews had never observed the feast as they did now—never with such great gladness and never so truly after the directions of their law. Although the actual words he gives as from The Law* are not to be found in the Pentateuch, they sum up the regulations of that work. This then is the first application of The Law which the people have received with so much distress. It ordains a glad festival. So much brighter is religion when it is understood and practised than when it is only contemplated from afar! Now the reading of The Law can go on day by day, and be received with joy.

Finally, like the Christians who collected food and money at the *Agapé* for their poorer brethren and for the martyrs in prison, the Jews were to "send portions" to the needy.† The rejoicing was not to be selfish; it was to stimulate practical kindness. Here was its safeguard. We shrink from accepting joy too freely lest it should be

* Neh. viii. 14, 15.

† Neh. viii. 12.

followed by some terrible Nemesis; but if, instead of gloating over it in secret, selfishly and greedily, we use it as a talent, and endeavour to lessen the sorrows of others by inviting them to share it, the heathenish dread is groundless. He who is doing his utmost to help his brother may dare to be very happy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RELIGION OF HISTORY.

NEHEMIAH ix.

AFTER the carnival—Lent. This Catholic procedure was anticipated by the Jews in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. The merry feast of Tabernacles was scarcely over, when, permitting an interval of but a single day, the citizens of Jerusalem plunged into a demonstration of mourning—fasting, sitting in sackcloth, casting dust on their heads, abjuring foreign connections, confessing their own and their fathers' sins. Although the singular revulsion of feeling may have been quite spontaneous on the part of the people, the violent reaction to which it gave rise was sanctioned by the authorities. In an open-air meeting which lasted for six hours—three of Bible-reading and three of confession and worship—the Levites took the lead, as they had done at the publication of The Law a few weeks earlier. But these very men had rebuked the former outburst of lamentation. Must we suppose that their only objection on that occasion was that the mourning was then untimely, because it was indulged in at a festival, whereas it ought to have been postponed to a fast day? If that were all, we should have to contemplate a miserably artificial condition of affairs. Real emotions refuse to come and go at the bidding of officials pedantically set on regulating their alternate recurrence in accordance with a calendar of the church year. A theatrical representation of feeling may be drilled into some such orderly procession. But true feeling itself is of all things in the universe the most restive under direct orders.

We must look a little deeper. The Levites had given a great spiritual reason for the restraint of grief in their wonderful utterance, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." This noble thought is not an elixir to be administered or withheld according to the recurrence of ecclesiastical dates. If it is true at all, it is eternally true. Although the application of it is not always a fact of experience, the reason for the fluctuations in our personal relations to it is not to be looked for in the almanac; it will be found in those dark passages of human life which, of their own accord, shut out the sunlight of Divine gladness. There is then no absolute inconsistency in the action of the Levites. And yet perhaps they may have perceived that they had been hasty in their repression of the first outburst of grief; or at all events that they did not then see the whole truth of the matter. There was some ground for lamentation after all, and though the expression of sorrow at a festival seemed to them untimely, they were bound to admit its fitness a little later. It is to be observed that another subject was now brought under the notice of the people. The contemplation of the revelation of God's will should not produce grief. But the

consideration of man's conduct cannot but lead to that result. At the reading of the Divine law the Jews' lamentation was rebuked; at the recital of their own history it was encouraged. Yet even here it was not to be abject and hopeless. The Levites exhorted the people to shake off the lethargy of sorrow, to *stand up* and bless the Lord their God. Even in the very act of confessing sin we have a special reason for praising God, because the consciousness of our guilt in His sight must heighten our appreciation of His marvellous forbearance.

The Jews' confession of sin led up to a prayer which the Septuagint ascribes to Ezra. It does so, however, in a phrase that manifestly breaks the context, and thus betrays its origin in an interpolation.* Nevertheless the tone of the prayer, and even its very language, remind us forcibly of the Great Scribe's outpouring of soul over the mixed marriages of his people recorded in Ezra ix. No one was more fitted to lead the Jews in the later act of devotion, and it is only reasonable to conclude that the work was undertaken by the one man to whose lot it would naturally fall.

The prayer is very like some of the historical psalms. By pointing to the variegated picture of the History of Israel, it shows how God reveals Himself through events. This suggests the probability that the three hours' reading of the fast day had been taken from the historical parts of the Pentateuch. The religious teachers of Israel knew what riches of instruction were buried in the history of their nation, and they had the wisdom to unearth those treasures for the benefit of their own age. It is strange that we English have made so little use of a national history that is not a whit less providential, although it does not glitter with visible miracles. God has spoken to England as truly through the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the Puritan Wars, and the Revolution, as ever He spoke to Israel by means of the Exodus, the Captivity, and the Return.

The arrangement and method of the prayer lend themselves to a singularly forcible presentation of its main topics, with heightening effect as it proceeds in a recapitulation of great historical landmarks. It opens with an outburst of praise to God. In saying that Jehovah is God alone, it makes more than a cold pronouncement of Jewish monotheism; it confesses the practical supremacy of God over His universe, and therefore over His people and their enemies. God is adored as the Creator of heaven; and, perhaps with an allusion to the prevalent Gentile title "God of heaven," as even the Maker of the heaven of heavens, of that higher heaven of which the starry firmament is but the gold-sprinkled floor. There, in those far-off, unseen heights, He is adored. But earth and sea, with all that inhabit them, are also God's works. From the highest to the lowest, over great and small, He reigns supreme. This glowing expression of adoration constitutes a suitable exordium. It is right and fitting that we should approach God in the attitude of pure worship, for the moment entirely losing ourselves in the contemplation of Him. This is the loftiest act of prayer, far above the selfish shriek for help in dire distress to which unspiritual men confine their utterance before God. It is also the most enlightening preparation for those lower forms

* LXX. Ezra ix. 6-15.

of devotion that cannot be neglected so long as we are engaged on earth with our personal needs and sins, because it is necessary for us first of all to know what God is, and to be able to contemplate the thought of His being and nature, if we would understand the course of His action among men, or see our sins in the only true light—the light of His countenance. We can best trace the course of low-lying valleys from a mountain height. The primary act of adoration illumines and directs the thanksgiving, confession, and petition that follow. He who has once seen God knows how to look at the world and his own heart, without being misled by earthly glamour or personal prejudice.

In tracking the course of revelation through history, the author of the prayer follows two threads. First one and then the other is uppermost, but it is the interweaving of them that gives the definite pattern of the whole picture. These are God's grace and man's sin. The method of the prayer is to bring them into view alternately, as they are illustrated in the History of Israel. The result is like a drama of several acts, and three scenes in each act. Although we see progress and a continuous heightening of effect, there is a startling resemblance between the successive acts, and the relative characters of the scenes remain the same throughout. In the *first* scene we always behold the free and generous favour of God offered to the people He condescends to bless, altogether apart from any merits or claims on their part. In the *second* we are forced to look at the ugly picture of Israel's ingratitude and rebellion. But this is invariably followed by a *third* scene, which depicts the wonderful patience and long-suffering of God, and His active aid in delivering His guilty people from the troubles they have brought on their own heads by their sins, whenever they turn to Him in penitence.

The recital opens where the Jews delighted to trace their origin, in Ur of the Chaldees. These returned exiles from Babylon are reminded that at the very dawn of their ancestral history the same district was the starting-point. The guiding hand of God was seen in bringing up the Father of the Nation in that far-off tribal migration from Chaldaea to Canaan. At first the Divine action did not need to exhibit all the traits of grace and power that were seen later, because Abraham was not a captive. Then, too, there was no rebellion, for Abraham was faithful. Thus the first scene opens with the mild radiance of early morning. As yet there is nothing tragic on either side. The chief characteristic of this scene is its promise, and the author of the prayer anticipates some of the later scenes by interjecting a grateful recognition of the faithfulness of God in keeping His word. "For Thou art righteous," he says.* This truth is the keynote to the prayer. The thought of it is always present as an undertone, and it emerges clearly again towards the conclusion, where, however, it wears a very different garb. There we see how in view of man's sin God's righteousness inflicts chastisement. But the intention of the author is to show that throughout all the vicissitudes of history God holds on to His straight line of righteousness, unwavering. It is just because He does not change that His action must be modified in order to adjust itself to the shifting behaviour of men and women. It is the very

* Neh. ix. 8.

immutability of God that requires Him to show Himself forward with the forward, although He is merciful with the merciful.

The chief events of the Exodus are next briefly recapitulated, in order to enlarge the picture of God's early goodness to Israel. Here we may discern more than promise; the fulfilment now begins. Here, too, God is seen in that specific activity of deliverance which comes more and more to the front as the history proceeds. While the calamities of the people grow worse and worse, God reveals Himself with ever-increasing force as the Redeemer of Israel. The plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the drowning of the Egyptians, the cloud-pillar by day and the pillar of fire by night, the descent on Sinai for the giving of The Law—in which connection the one law of the Sabbath is singled out, a point to be noted in view of the great prominence given to it later on—the manna, and the water from the rock, are all signs and proofs of God's exceeding kindness towards His people.

But now we are directed to a very different scene. In spite of all this never-ceasing, this ever-accumulating goodness of God, the infatuated people rebel, appoint a captain to take them back to Egypt, and relapse into idolatry. This is the human side of the history, shown up in its deep blackness against the luminous splendour of the heavenly background.

Then comes the marvellous third scene, the scene that should melt the hardest heart. God does not cast off His people. The privileges enumerated before are carefully repeated, to show that God has not withdrawn them. Still the cloud-pillar guides by day and the fire-pillar by night. Still the manna and the water are supplied. But this is not all. Between these two pairs of favours a new one is now inserted. God gives His "good Spirit" to instruct the people. The author does not seem to be referring to any one specific event, as that of the Spirit falling on the elders, or the incident of the unauthorised prophet, or the bestowal of the Spirit on the artists of the tabernacle. We should rather conclude from the generality of his terms that he is thinking of the gift of the Spirit in each of these cases, and also in every other way in which the Divine Presence was felt in the hearts of the people. Prone to wander, they needed and they received this inward monitor. Thus God showed His great forbearance, by even extending His grace and giving more help because the need was greater.

From this picture of the wilderness life we are led on to the conquest of the Promised Land. The Israelites overthrow the kings east of the Jordan, and take possession of their territories. Growing in numbers, after a time they are strong enough to cross the Jordan, seize the land of Canaan, and subdue the aboriginal inhabitants. Then we see them settling down in their new home and inheriting the products of the labours of their more civilised predecessors. All this is a further proof of the favour of God. Yet again the dreadful scene of ingratitude is repeated, and that in an aggravated form. A wild fury of rebellion takes hold of the wicked people. They rise up against their God, fling His Torah behind their backs, murder the prophets He sends to warn them, and sink down into the greatest wickedness. The head and front of their offence is the rejection of the sacred Torah. The word Torah—law or instruction—must here be taken

in its widest sense to comprehend both the utterances of the prophets and the tradition of the priests, although it is represented to the contemporaries of Ezra by its crown and completion, the Pentateuch. In this second act of heightened energy on both sides, while the characters of the actors are developing with stronger features, we have a third scene—forgiveness and deliverance from God.

Then the action moves more rapidly. It becomes almost confused. In general terms, with a few swift strokes, the author sketches a succession of similar movements—indeed he does little more than hint at them. We cannot see how often the threefold process was repeated; only we perceive that it always recurred in the same form. Yet the very monotony deepens the impression of the whole drama—so madly persistent was the backsliding habit of Israel, so grandly continuous was the patient long-suffering of God. We lose all count of the alternating scenes of light and darkness as we look at them down the long vista of the ages. And yet it is not necessary that we should assort them. The perspective may escape us; all the more must we feel the force of the process which is characterized by so powerful a unity of movement.

Coming nearer to his own time, the author of the prayer expands into detail again. While the kingdom lasted God did not cease to plead with His people. They disregarded His voice, but His Spirit was in the prophets, and the long line of heavenly messengers was a living testimony to the Divine forbearance. Heedless of this greatest and best means of bringing them back to their forsaken allegiance, the Jews were at length given over to the heathen. Yet that tremendous calamity was not without its mitigations. They were not utterly consumed. Even now God did not forsake them. He followed them into their captivity. This was apparent in the continuous advent of prophets—such as the Second Isaiah and Ezekiel—who appeared and delivered their oracles in the land of exile; it was most gloriously manifest in the return under Cyrus. Such long-continued goodness, beyond the utmost excess of the nation's sin, surpassed all that could have been hoped for. It went beyond the promises of God; it could not be wholly comprehended in His faithfulness. Therefore another Divine attribute is now revealed. At first the prayer made mention of God's righteousness, which was seen in the gift of Canaan as a fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, so that the author remarked, in regard to the performance of the Divine word, "for Thou art righteous." But now he reflects on the greater kindness, the uncovenanted kindness of the Exile and the Return; "for Thou art a gracious and merciful God."* We can only account for such extended goodness by ascribing it to the infinite love of God.

Having thus brought his review down to his own day, in the concluding passage of the prayer the author appeals to God with reference to the present troubles of His people. In doing so he first returns to his contemplation of the nature of God. Three Divine characteristics rise up before him,—first, *majesty* ("the great, the mighty, the terrible God"); second, *fidelity* (keeping "covenant"); third, *compassion* (keeping "mercy").† On this threefold plea he beseeches God that all the national trouble which

has been endured since the first Assyrian invasion may not "seem little" to Him. The greatness of God might appear to induce disregard of the troubles of His poor human children, and yet it would really lead to the opposite result. It is only the limited faculty that cannot stoop to small things because its attention is confined to large affairs. Infinity reaches to the infinitely little as readily as to the infinitely great. With the appeal for compassion goes a confession of sin, which is national rather than personal. All sections of the community on which the calamities have fallen—with the significant exception of the prophets who had possessed God's Spirit, and who had been so grievously persecuted by their fellow-countrymen—all are united in a common guilt. The solidarity of the Jewish race is here apparent. We saw in the earlier case of the sin-offering that the religion of Israel was national rather than personal. The punishment of the captivity was a national discipline; now the confession is for national sin. And yet the sin is confessed distributively, with regard to the several sections of society. We cannot feel our national sin in the bulk. It must be brought home to us in our several walks of life.

After this confession the prayer deploras the present state of the Jews. No reference is now made to the temporary annoyance occasioned by the attacks of the Samaritans. The building of the walls has put an end to that nuisance. But the permanent evil is more deeply rooted. The Jews are mournfully conscious of their subject state beneath the Persian yoke. They have returned to their city; but they are no more free men than they were in Babylon. Like the *fellahcen* of Syria to-day, they have to pay heavy tribute, which takes the best of the produce of their labour. They are subject to the conscription, having to serve in the armies of the Great King—Herodotus tells us that there were "Syrians of Palestine" in the army of Xerxes.* Their cattle are seized by the officers of the government, arbitrarily, "at their pleasure." Did Nehemiah know of this complaint? If so, might there not be some ground for the suspicion of the informers after all? Was that suspicion one reason for his recall to Susa? We cannot answer these questions. As to the prayer, this leaves the whole case with God. It would have been dangerous to have said more in the hearing of the spies who haunted the streets of Jerusalem. And it was needless. It is not the business of prayer to try to move the hand of God. It is enough that we lay bare our state before Him, trusting His wisdom as well as His grace—not dictating to God, but confiding in Him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COVENANT.

NEHEMIAH X.

THE tenth chapter of Nehemiah introduces us to one of the most vital crises in the History of Israel. It shows us how the secret cult of the priests of Jehovah became a popular religion. The process was brought to a focus in the public reading of The Law; it was completed in the acceptance of The Law which the sealing of the covenant ratified. This event may be compared

* Neh. ix. 31.

† Neh. ix. 32.

* Herodotus, vii. 39.

with the earlier scene, when the lawbook discovered in the temple by Hilkiah was accepted and enforced by Josiah. Undoubtedly that book is included in Ezra's complete edition of The Law. Generations before Ezra, then, though nothing more than Deuteronomy may have been forthcoming, that vital section of The Law, containing as it did the essential principles of Judaism, was adopted. But how was this result brought about? Not by the intelligent conviction, nor by the voluntary action of the nation. It was the work of a king, who thought to drive his ideas into his subjects. No doubt Josiah acted in a spirit of genuine loyalty to Jehovah; and yet the method he followed could not lead to success. The transient character of his spasmodic attempt to save his people at the eleventh hour, followed by the total collapse of the fabric he had built up, shows how insecure a foundation he had obtained. It was a royal reformation, not a revival of religion on the part of the nation. We have an instance of a similar course of action in the English reformation under Edward VI., which was swept away in a moment when his Catholic sister succeeded to the throne, because it was a movement originating in the court and not supported by the country, as was that under Elizabeth when Mary had opened the eyes of the English nation to the character of Romanism.

But now a very different scene presents itself to our notice. The sealing of the covenant signifies the voluntary acceptance of The Law by the people of Israel, and their solemn promise to submit to its yoke. There are two sides to this covenant arrangement. The first is seen in the conduct of the people in entering into the covenant. This is absolutely an act of free will on their part. We have seen that Ezra never attempted to force The Law upon his fellow-countrymen—that he was slow in producing it; that when he read it he only did so at the urgent request of the people; and that even after this he went no further, but left it with the audience for them to do with it as they thought fit. It came with the authority of the will of God, which to religious men is the highest authority; but it was not backed by the secular arm, even though Ezra possessed a *firman* from the Persian court which would have justified him in calling in the aid of the civil government. Now the acceptance of The Law is to be in the same spirit of freedom. Of course somebody must have started the idea of forming a covenant. Possibly it was Nehemiah who did so. Still this was when the people were ripe for entering into it, and the whole process was voluntary on their part. The only religion that can be real to us is that which we believe in with personal faith and surrender ourselves to with willing obedience. Even when the law is recorded on parchment, it must also be written on the fleshy table of the heart if it is to be effective.

But there is another side to the covenant-sealing. The very existence of a covenant is significant. The word "covenant" suggests an agreement between two parties, a mutual arrangement to which each is pledged. So profound was the conviction of Israel that in coming to an agreement with God it was not possible for man to bargain with his Maker on equal terms, that in translating the Hebrew name for covenant into Greek the writers of the Septuagint did not use the term that elsewhere stands for an

agreement among equals (*συνθήκη*), but employed one indicative of an arrangement made by one party to the transaction and submitted to the other (*διαθήκη*). The covenant, then, is a Divine disposition, a Divine ordinance. Even when, as in the present instance, it is formally made by men, this is still on lines laid down by God; the covenanting is a voluntary act of adhesion to a law which comes from God. Therefore the terms of the covenant are fixed, and not to be discussed by the signatories. This is of the very essence of Judaism as a religion of Divine law. Then, though the sealing is voluntary, it entails a great obligation; henceforth the covenant people are bound by the covenant which they have deliberately entered into. This, too, is a characteristic of the religion of law. It is a bondage, though a bondage willingly submitted to by those who stoop to its yoke. To St. Paul it became a crushing slavery. But the burden was not felt at first, simply because neither the range of The Law, nor the searching force of its requirements, nor the weakness of men to keep their vows, was yet perceived by the sanguine Jews who so unhesitatingly surrendered to it. As we look back to their position from the vantage ground of Christian liberty, we are astounded at the Jewish love of law, and we rejoice in our freedom from its irksome restraints. And yet the Christian is not an antinomian; he is not a sort of free lance, sworn to no obedience. He too has his obligation. He is bound to a lofty service—not to a law, indeed, but to a personal Master; not in the servitude of the letter, but, though with the freedom of the spirit, really with far higher obligations of love and fidelity than were ever recognised by the most rigorous covenant-keeping Jews. Thus he has a new covenant, sealed in the blood of his Saviour; and his communion with his Lord implies a sacramental vow of loyalty. The Christian covenant, however, is not visibly exhibited, because a formal pledge is scarcely in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. We find it better to take a more self-distrustful course, one marked by greater dependence of faith on the preserving grace of God, by turning our vows into prayers. While the Jews "entered into a curse and into an oath" to keep the law, we shrink from anything so terrible; yet our duty is not the less because we limit our professions of it.

The Jews were prepared for their covenant by two essential preliminaries. The first was knowledge. The reading of The Law preceded the covenant, which was entered into intelligently. There is no idea of what is called "implicit faith." The whole situation is clearly surveyed and The Law is adopted with a consciousness of what it means as far as the understanding of its requirements by the people will yet penetrate into its signification. It is necessary to count the cost before entering on a course of religious service. With a view to this our Lord spoke of the "narrow way" and the "cross," much to the disappointment of His more sanguine disciples, but as a real security for genuine loyalty. With religion, of all things, it is foolish to take a leap in the dark. Judaism and Christianity absolutely contradict the idea that "Ignorance is the mother of devotion."

The second preparation consisted in the moral effect on the Jews of the review of their history in the light of religion, and their consequent confession of sin and acknowledgment of God's

goodness. Here was the justification for the written law. The old methods had failed. The people had not kept the desultory *Torah* of the prophets. They needed a more formal system of discipline. Here too were the motives for adopting the covenant. Penitence for the nation's miserable past prompted the desire for a better future, and gratitude for the overwhelming goodness of God roused an enthusiasm of devotion. Nothing urges us to surrender ourselves to God so much as these two motives—our repentance and His goodness. They are the two powerful magnets that draw souls to Christ.

The chronicler—always delighting in any opportunity to insert his lists of names—records the names of the signatories of the covenant. The seals of these men were of importance so long as the original document to which they were affixed was preserved, and so long as any recognised descendants of the families they represented were living. To us they are of interest because they indicate the orderly arrangement of the nation and the thoroughness of procedure in the ratification of the covenant. Nehemiah, who is again called by his Persian title Tirshatha, appears first. This fact is to be noted as a sign that as yet even in a religious document the civil ruler takes precedence of the hierarchy. At present it is allowed for a layman to head the list of leading Israelites. We might have looked for Ezra's name in the first place, for he it was who had taken the lead in the introduction of The Law, while Nehemiah had retreated into the background during the whole month's proceedings. But the name of Ezra does not appear anywhere on the document. The probable explanation of its absence is that only heads of houses affixed their seals, and that Ezra was not accounted one of them. Nehemiah's position in the document is official. The next name, Zedekiah, possibly stands for Zadok the Scribe mentioned later,* who may have been the writer of the document, or perhaps Nehemiah's secretary. Then come the priests. It was not the business of these men to assist in the reading of The Law. While the Levites acted as scribes and instructors of the people, the priests were chiefly occupied with the temple ritual and the performance of the other ceremonies of religion. The Levites were teachers of The Law; the priests were its administrators. In the question of the execution of The Law, therefore, the priests have a prominent place, and after remaining in obscurity during the previous engagements, they naturally come to the front when the national acceptance of the Pentateuch is being confirmed. The hierarchy is so far established that, though the priests follow the lay ruler of Jerusalem, they precede the general body of citizens, and even the nobility. No doubt many of the higher families were in the line of the priesthood. But this was not the case with all of them, and therefore we must see here a distinct clerical precedence over all but the very highest rank.

Most of the names in this list of priests occur again in a list of those who came up with Zerubbabel and Jeshua,† from which fact we must infer that they represent families, not individuals. But some of the names in the other list are missing here. A most significant omission is that of the high-priest. Are we merely to suppose that some names have dropped out in course of transcription? Or was the high-priest, with some

of his brethren, unwilling to sign the covenant? We have had earlier signs that the high-priest did not enjoy the full confidence of Ezra.* The heads of the hierarchy may have resented the popularising of The Law. Since formerly, while the people were often favoured with the moral *Torah* of the prophets, the ceremonial *Torah* of the priests was kept among the *arcana* of the initiated, the change may not have been pleasing to its old custodians. Then these conservatives may not have approved of Ezra's latest recension of The Law. A much more serious difficulty lay with those priests who had contracted foreign marriages, and who had favoured the policy of alliance with neighbouring peoples which Ezra had so fiercely opposed. Old animosities from this source were still smouldering in the bosoms of some of the priests. But apart from any specific grounds of disaffection, it is clear that there never was much sympathy between the scribes and the priests. Putting all these considerations together, it is scarcely too much to conjecture that the absentees were decidedly holding back when the covenant was signed. The only wonder is that the disaffected minority was so small.

According to the new order advised by Ezekiel and now established, the Levites take the second place and come after the priests, as a separate and inferior order of clergy. Yet the hierarchy is so far honoured that even the lowest of the clergy precede the general body of the laity. We come down to the porters, the choristers, and the temple-helots before we hear of the mass of the people. When this lay element is reached, the whole of it is included. Men, women, and children are all represented in the covenant. The Law had been read to all classes, and now it is accepted by all classes. Thus again the rights and duties of women and children in religion are recognised, and the thoroughly domestic character of Judaism is provided for. There is a solidity in the compact. A common obligation draws all who are included in it together. The population generally follows the example of the leaders. "They clave to their brethren, their nobles,"‡ says the chronicler. The most effective unifying influence is a common enthusiasm in a great cause. The unity of Christendom will only be restored when the passion of loyalty to Christ is supreme in every Christian, and when every Christian acknowledges that this is the case with all his brother-Christians.

It is clear that the obligation of the covenant extended to the whole law. This is called "God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God."‡ Nothing can be clearer than that in the eyes of the chronicler, at all events, it was the Mosaic law. We have seen many indications of this view in the chronicler's narrative. Can we resist the conclusion that it was held by the contemporaries of Ezra and Nehemiah? We are repeatedly warned against the mistake of supposing that the Pentateuch was accepted as a brand-new document. On the contrary, it was certainly received on the authority of the Mosaic origin of its contents, and because of the Divine authority that accompanied this origin. By the Jews it was viewed as the law of Moses, just as in Roman jurisprudence every law was considered to be derived from the "Twelve Tables."

* *E. g.*, Ezra viii. 33; where the high-priest is passed over in silence.

† Neh. x. 29.

‡ *Ibid.*

* Neh. xiii. 13.

† Neh. xii. 1-7.

No doubt Ezra also considered it to be a true interpretation of the genius of Mosaism adapted to modern requirements. If we keep this clearly before our minds, the Pentateuchal controversy will lose its sharpest points of conflict. The truth here noted once more is so often disregarded that it needs to be repeatedly insisted on at the risk of tautology.

After the general acceptance of the whole law, the covenant specifies certain important details. First comes the separation from the heathen—the burning question of the day. Next we have Sabbath observance—also made especially important, because it was distinctive of Judaism as well as needful for the relief of poor and oppressed labourers. But the principal part of the schedule is occupied with pledges for the provision of the temple services. Immense supplies of fuel would be required for the numerous sacrifices, and therefore considerable prominence was given to the collecting of wood; subsequently a festival was established to celebrate this action. According to a later tradition, Nehemiah kindled the flames on the great altar of the burnt-offerings with supernatural fire.* Like the Vestal virgins at Rome, the temple officials were to tend the sacred fire as a high duty, and never let it go out. "Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually," † was the Levitical rule. Thus the very greatest honour was given to the rite of sacrifice. As the restoration of the religion of Israel began with the erection of the altar before the temple was built, so the preservation of that religion was centred in the altar fire—and so, we may add, its completion was attained in the supreme sacrifice of Christ.

Finally, special care was taken for what we may call "Church finance" in the collection of the tithes. This comes last; yet it has its place. Not only is it necessary for the sake of the work that is to be carried on; it is also important in regard to the religious obligation of the worshipper. The cry for a cheap religion is irreligious, because real religion demands sacrifices, and, indeed, necessarily promotes the liberal spirit from which those sacrifices flow. But if the contributions are to come within the range of religious duties, they must be voluntary. Clearly this was the case with the Jewish tithes, as we may see for two reasons. First, they were included in the covenant; and adhesion to this was entirely voluntary. Secondly, Malachi rebuked the Jews for withholding the payment of tithes as a sin against God, ‡ showing that the payment only rested on a sense of moral obligation on the part of the people. It would have been difficult to go further while a foreign government was in power, even if the religious leaders had desired to do so. Moreover, God can only accept the offerings that are given freely with heart and will, for all He cares for is the spirit of the gift.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HOLY CITY.

NEHEMIAH vii. 1-4; xi.

WE have seen that though the two passages that deal with the sparsity of the population of Jerusalem are separated in our Bibles by the in-

sertion of the section on the reading of The Law and the formation of the covenant, they are, in fact, so closely related that, if we skip the intermediate section, the one runs on into the other quite smoothly, as by a continuous narrative; * that is to say, we may pass from Nehemiah vii. 4 to Nehemiah xi. 1 without the slightest sign of a junction of separate paragraphs. So naive and crude is the chronicler's style, that he has left the raw edges of the narrative jagged and untrimmed, and thereby he has helped us to see distinctly how he has constructed his work. The foreign matter which he has inserted in the great gash is quite different in style and contents from that which precedes and follows it. This is marked with the Ezra stamp, which indicates that in all probability it is founded on notes left by the scribe; but the broken narrative in the midst of which it appears is derived from Nehemiah, the first part consisting of memoirs written by the statesman himself, and the second part being an abbreviation of the continuation of Nehemiah's writing. The beginning of this second part directly links it on to the first part, for the word "and" has no sort of connection with the immediately preceding Ezra section, while it exactly fits into the broken end of the previous Nehemiah section; only with his characteristic indifference to secular affairs, in comparison with matters touching The Law and the temple worship, the chronicler abbreviates the conclusion of Nehemiah's story. It is easy to see how he constructs his book in this place. He has before him two documents—one written by Nehemiah, the other written either by Ezra or by one of his close associates. At first he follows Nehemiah, but suddenly he discovers that he has reached the date when the Ezra record should come in. Therefore, without any concern for the irregularity of style that he is perpetrating, he suddenly breaks off Nehemiah's narrative to insert the Ezra material, at the end of which he simply goes back to the Nehemiah document, and resumes it exactly where he has left it, except that now, after introducing it in the language of the original writer, he compresses the fragment, so that the composition passes over into the third person. It is not to be supposed that this is done arbitrarily or for no good reason. The chronicler here intends to tell his story in chronological order. He shows that the course of events referred to at the opening of the seventh chapter really was broken by the occurrences the record of which then follows. The interruptions in the narrative just correspond to the real interruptions in the historical facts. History is not a smooth-flowing river; its course is repeatedly broken by rocks and shoals, and sometimes entirely deflected by impassable cliffs. In the earlier part of the narrative we read of Nehemiah's anxiety on account of the sparsity of the population of Jerusalem; but before he was able to carry out any plans for the increase of the number of inhabitants the time of the great autumn festivals was upon him, and the people were eager to take advantage of the public holidays that then fell due in order to induce Ezra to read to them the wonderful book he had brought up from Babylon years before, and of which he had not yet divulged the contents. This was not waste time as regards Nehemiah's project. Though the civil governor stood in the background during the course of the great religious movement, he

* 2 Macc. i. 19-22.

† Lev. vi. 13.

‡ Mal. iii. 8-12.

* Page 655.

heartily seconded the clerical leaders of it in their efforts to enlighten and encourage the people, and he was the first to seal the covenant which was its fruit. Then the people who had been instructed in the principles of their faith and consecrated to its lofty requirements were fitted to take their places as citizens of the Holy City.

The "population question" which troubled Nehemiah at this time is so exactly opposite to that which gives concern to students of social problems in our own day, that we need to look into the circumstances in which it emerged in order to understand its bearings. The powerful suction of great towns, depleting the rural districts and gorging the urban, is a source of the greatest anxiety to all who seriously contemplate the state of modern society; and consequently one of the most pressing questions of the day is how to scatter the people over the land. Even in new countries the same serious condition is experienced—in Australia, for instance, where the crowding of the people into Melbourne is rapidly piling up the very difficulties sanguine men hoped the colonies would escape. If we only had these modern facts to draw upon, we might conclude that a centripetal movement of population was inevitable. That it is not altogether a novelty we may learn from the venerable story of the Tower of Babel, from which we may also gather that it is God's will that men should spread abroad and replenish the earth.

It is one of the advantages of the study of history that it lifts us out of our narrow grooves and reveals to us an immense variety of modes of life, and this is not the least of the many elements of profit that come to us from the historical embodiment of revelation as we have it in the Bible. The width of vision that we may thus attain to will have a double effect. It will save us from being wedded to a fixed policy under all circumstances; and it will deliver us from the despair into which we should settle down, if we did not see that what looks to us like a hopeless and interminable drift in the wrong direction is not the permanent course of human development. It is necessary to consider that if the dangers of a growing population are serious, those of a dwindling population are much more grave.

Nehemiah was in a position to see the positive advantages of city life, and he regarded it as his business to make the most of them for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen. We have seen that each of the three great expeditions from Babylon up to Jerusalem had its separate and distinctive purpose. The aim of the first, under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, was the rebuilding of the temple; the object of the second, under Ezra, was the establishment of The Law; and the end of the third, under Nehemiah, was the fortification and strengthening of the city. This end was before the patriotic statesman's mind from the very first moment when he was startled and grieved at hearing the report of the ruinous condition of the walls of Jerusalem which his brother brought to him in the palace at Susa. We may be sure that with so practical a man it was more than a sentimental reverence for venerated sites that led Nehemiah to undertake the great work of fortifying the city of his fathers' sepulchres. He had something else in view than to construct a huge mausoleum. His aim had too much to do with the living present to resemble that of Rizzpah guarding the corpses of her sons from the hovering vultures. Nehemiah believed in the

future of Jerusalem, and therefore he would not permit her to remain a city of ruin, unguarded, and a prey to every chance comer. He saw that she had a great destiny yet to fulfil, and that she must be made strong if ever she was to accomplish it. It is to the credit of his keen discernment that he perceived this essential condition of the firm establishment of Israel as a distinctive people in the land of Palestine. Ezra was too literary, too abstract, too much of an idealist to see it, and therefore he struggled on with his teaching and exhorting till he was simply silenced by the unlooked-for logic of facts. Nehemiah perfectly comprehended this logic, and knew how to turn it to the advantage of his own cause.

The fierce antagonism of the Samaritans is an indirect confirmation of the wisdom of Nehemiah's plans. Sanballat and his associates saw clearly enough that, if Jerusalem were to become strong again, the metropolitan pre-eminence—which had shifted from this city to Samaria after the Babylonian conquest—would revert to its old seat among the hills of Judah and Benjamin. Now this pre-eminence was of vital importance to the destinies of Israel. It was not possible for the people in those early days to remain separate and compact, and to work out their own peculiar mission, without a strong and safe centre. We have seen Judaism blossoming again as a distinctive phenomenon in the later history of the Jews, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. But this most wonderful fact in ethnology is indirectly due to the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. The readiness to intermarry with foreigners shown by the contemporaries of the two great reformers proves conclusively that, unless the most stringent measures had been taken for the preservation of its distinctive life, Israel would have melted away into the general mass of amalgamated races that made up the Chaldean and Persian empires. The military protection of Jerusalem enabled her citizens to maintain an independent position in defiance of the hostile criticism of her neighbours, and the civil importance of the city helped to give moral weight to her example in the eyes of the scattered Jewish population outside her walls. Then the worship at the temple was a vital element in the newly modelled religious organisation, and it was absolutely essential that this should be placed beyond the danger of being tampered with by foreign influences, and at the same time that it should be adequately supported by a sufficient number of resident Jews. Something like the motive that induces the Pope to desire the restoration of the temporal power of the Papacy—perfectly wise and reasonable from his point of view—would urge the leaders of Judaism to secure as far as possible the political independence of the centre of their religion.

It is to be observed that Nehemiah desired an increase of the population for the immediate purpose of strengthening the garrison of Jerusalem. The city had been little better than "a lodge in a garden of cucumbers" till her new governor had put forth stupendous efforts which resulted in converting her into a fortress. Now the fortress required to be manned. Everything indicates anxiety about the means of defence. Nehemiah placed two men at the head of this vital function—his own brother Hanani, whose concern about the city had been evinced in his report of its condition to Nehemiah at Susa, and

Hananiah the commandant of the citadel. This Hananiah was known to be "faithful"—a great point while traitors in the highest places were intriguing with the enemy. He was also exceptionally God-fearing, described as one who "feared God above many"—another point recognised by Nehemiah as of supreme importance in a military officer. Here we have an anticipation of the Puritan spirit which required the Cromwellian soldiers to be men of sterling religious character. Nehemiah would have had no hesitation if he had been placed in the dilemma of the Athenians when they were called to choose between Aristides the good and Themistocles the clever. With him—much as brains were needed, and he showed this in his own sleepless astuteness—integrity and religion were the first requisites for an office of responsibility.

The danger of the times is further indicated by the new rule with regard to the opening of the gates. Oriental custom would have permitted this at dawn. Nehemiah would not allow it before the full daytime, "until the sun be hot." Levites were to mount guard by day—an indication of the partially ecclesiastical character of the civil government. The city was a sort of extended temple, and its citizens constituted a Church watched over by the clergy. At night the citizens themselves were to guard the walls, as more watchers would be needed during the hours of darkness to protect the city against an assault by surprise. Now these facts point to serious danger and arduous toil. Naturally many men would shrink from the yoke of citizenship under such circumstances. It was so much pleasanter, so much easier, so much quieter for people to live in the outlying towns and villages, near to their own farms and vineyards. Therefore it was necessary to take a tenth of the rural population in order to increase that of the town. The chronicler expressly notes that "the rulers of the people" were already dwelling in Jerusalem. These men realised their responsibility. The officers were to the fore; the men who needed to be urged to their duty were the privates. No doubt there was more to attract the upper classes to the capital, while their agricultural occupations would naturally draw many of the poorer people into the country, and we must not altogether condemn the latter as less patriotic than the former. We cannot judge the relative merits of people who act differently till we know their several circumstances. Still it remains true that it is often the man with the one talent who buries his charge, because with him the sense of personal insignificance becomes a temptation to the neglect of duty. Hence arises one of the most serious dangers to a democracy. When this danger is not mastered, the management of public affairs falls into the hands of self-seeking politicians, who are ready to wreck the state for their private advantage. It is most essential, therefore, that a public conscience should be aroused and that people should realise their duty to their community—to the town in which they live, the country to which they belong.

Nehemiah's simple expedient succeeded, and praise was earned by those Jews who yielded to the sacred decision of the lot and abandoned their pleasant rustic retreats to take up the more trying posts of sentinels in a garrison. According to his custom, the chronicler proceeds to show us how the people were organised. His

many names have long ceased to convey the living interest that must have clustered round them when the families they represented were still able to recognise their ancestors in the roll of honour. But incidentally he imports into his register a note about the Great King's concern for the temple worship, from which we learn that Artaxerxes made special provision for the support of the choristers, and that he entertained a Jewish representative in his court to keep him informed on the condition of the distant city. Thus we have another indication of the royal patronage which was behind the whole movement for the restoration of the Jews. Nevertheless the piteous plaint of the Jews on their great fast day shows us that their servitude galled them sorely. Men who could utter that cry would not be bribed into a state of cheerful satisfaction by the kindness of their master in subscribing to their choir fund, although doubtless the contribution was made in a spirit of well-meaning generosity. The ideal City of God had not yet appeared, and the hint of the dependence of Jerusalem on royal patronage is a significant reminder of the sad fact. It never did appear, even in the brightest days of the earthly Jerusalem. But God was teaching His people through the history of that unhappy city how high the true ideal must be, and so preparing them for the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem.

Now we may take the high ideal that was slowly emerging throughout the ages, and see how God intends to have it realised in the City of God which, from the days of Saint Augustine, we have learnt to look for in the Church of Christ. The two leading thoughts connected with the Holy City in the phase of her history that is now passing under our notice are singularly applicable to the Christian community.

First, *the characteristic life of the city*. Enclosed within walls, the city gained a peculiar character and performed a distinctive mission of her own. Our Lord was not satisfied to rescue stray sheep on the mountains only to brand them with His mark and then turn them out again to graze in solitude. He drew them as a flock after Himself, and His disciples gathered them into the fold of Church fellowship. This is of as vital importance to the cause of Christianity as the civic organisation of Jerusalem was to that of Judaism. The Christian City of God stands out before the world on her lofty foundation, the Rock of Ages—a beacon of separation from sin, a testimony to the grace of God, a centre for the confession of faith, a home for social worship, a rallying point for the forces of holy warfare, a sanctuary for the helpless and oppressed.

Second, *the public duty of citizenship*. The reluctance of Christians to accept the responsibilities of Church membership may be compared to the backwardness of the Jews to dwell in their metropolis. Like Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah, the City of God to-day is an outpost in the battle-field, a fortress surrounded by the enemy's territory. It is traitorous to retire to the calm cultivation of one's private garden-plot in the hour of stress and strain when the citadel is threatened on all sides. It is the plain duty of the people of God to mount guard and take their turn as watchmen on the walls of the Holy City.

May we carry the analogy one step further? The king of Persia, though his realm stretched from the Tigris to the Ægean, could not give much effectual help to the true City of God. But

the Divine King of kings sends her constant supplies, and she too, like Jerusalem, has her Representative at court, One who ever lives to make intercession for her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEGINNINGS.

NEHEMIAH xii. 27-47.

A CURIOUS feature of the history of the restoration of Israel already met with several times is postponement. Thus in the days of Cyrus Zerubbabel leads up an expedition for the express purpose of building the temple at Jerusalem; but the work is not executed until the reign of Darius. Again, Ezra brings the book of The Law with him when he comes to the city; yet he does not find an opportunity for publishing it till some years later. Once more, Nehemiah sets to work on the fortifications with the promptitude of a practical man and executes his task with astonishing celerity; still, even in his case the usual breach of sequence occurs; here, too, we have interruption and the intrusion of alien matters, so that the crowning act of the dedication of the walls is delayed.

In this final instance we do not know how long a postponement there was. Towards the end of his work the chronicler is exceptionally abrupt and disconnected. In the section xii. 27-43 he gives us an extract from Nehemiah's memoirs, but without any note of time. The preservation of another bit of the patriot's original writing is interesting, not only because of its assured historicity, but further because exceptional importance is given to the records that have been judged worthy of being extracted and made portions of permanent scripture, although other sources are only used by the chronicler as materials out of which to construct his own narrative in the third person. While we cannot assign its exact date to the subject of this important fragment, one thing is clear from its position in the story of the days of Nehemiah. The reading of The Law, the great fast, the sealing of the covenant, the census, and the regulations for peopling Jerusalem, all came between the completion of the fortifications and the dedication of them. The interruption and the consequent delay were not without meaning and object. After what had occurred in the interval, the people were better prepared to enter into the ceremony of dedication with intelligence and earnestness of purpose. This act, although it was immediately directed to the walls, was, as a matter of fact, the re-consecration of the city; because the walls were built in order to preserve the distinct individuality, the unique integrity of what they included. Now the Jews needed to know The Law in order to understand the destiny of Jerusalem; they needed to devote themselves personally to the service of God, so that they might carry out that destiny; and they needed to recruit the forces of the Holy City, for the purpose of giving strength and volume to its future. Thus the postponement of the dedication made that event, when it came about, a much more real thing than it would have been if it had followed immediately on the building of the walls. May we not say that in every similar case the personal consecration must precede the material? The city is

what its citizens make it. They, and not its site or its buildings, give it its true character. Jerusalem and Babylon, Athens and Rome, are not to be distinguished in their topography and architecture in anything approaching the degree in which they are individualised by the manners and deeds of their respective peoples. Most assuredly the New Jerusalem will just reflect the characters of her citizens. This City of God will be fair and spotless only when they who tread her streets are clad in the beauty of holiness. In smaller details, too, and in personal matters, we can only dedicate aright that which we are handling in a spirit of earnest devotion. The miserable superstition that clouds our ideas of this subject rises out of the totally erroneous notion that it is possible to have holy things without holy persons, that a mystical sanctity can attach itself to any objects apart from an intelligent perception of some sacred purpose for which they are to be used. This materialistic notion degrades religion into magic; it is next door to fetishism.

It is important, then, that we should understand what we mean by dedication. Unfortunately in our English Bible the word "dedicate" is made to stand for two totally distinct Hebrew terms, one * of which means to "consecrate," to make holy, or set apart for God; while the other † means to "initiate," to mark the beginning of a thing. The first is used of functions of ritual, priestly and sacrificial; but the second has a much wider application, one that is not always directly connected with religion. Thus we meet with this second word in the regulations of Deuteronomy which lay down the conditions on which certain persons are to be excused from military service. The man who has built a new house but who has not "dedicated" it is placed side by side with one who has planted a vineyard and with a third who is on the eve of his marriage. ‡ Now the first word—that describing real consecration—is used of the priests' action in regard to their portion of the wall, and in this place our translators have rendered it "sanctified." § But in the narrative of the general dedication of the walls the second and more secular word is used. The same word is used, however, we must notice, in the account of the dedication of the temple. ¶ In both these cases, and in all other cases of the employment of the word, the chief meaning conveyed by it is just initiation. ¶ It signals a commencement. Therefore the ceremony at the new walls was designed in the first instance to direct attention to the very fact of their newness, and to call up those thoughts and feelings that are suitable in the consideration of a time of commencement. We must all acknowledge that such a time is one for very earnest thought. All our beginnings in life—the birth of a child, a young man's start in the world, the wedding that founds the home, the occupation of a new house, the entrance on a fresh line of business—all such beginnings come to rouse us from the indifference of routine, to speak to us with the voice of Providence, to bid us look forward and prepare ourselves for the future. We have rounded

* קדש, Piel of קדש.

† הנהי.

‡ Deut. xx. 5-7.

§ Neh. iii. 1.

¶ Ezra vi. 16.

¶ Still, in the earlier scene, the dedication of the temple, the sacred use of the building makes the act of initiation to be equivalent to consecration. There the connection gives the special association.

a corner, and a new vista has opened up to our view. As we gaze down the long aisle we must be heedless indeed if we can contemplate the vision without a thrill of emotion, without a thought of anticipation. The new departure in external affairs is an opportunity for a new turn in our inner life, and it calls for a reconsideration of our resources and methods.

One of the charms of the Bible is that, like nature, it is full of fresh starts. Inasmuch as a perennial breath of new life plays among the pages of these ancient scriptures, we have only to drink it in to feel what inspiration there is here for every momentous beginning. Just as the fading, dank autumn gives way to the desolation of winter in order that in due time the sleeping seeds and buds may burst out in the birth of spring with the freshness of Eden, God has ordained that the decaying old things of human life shall fall away and be forgotten, while He calls us into the heritage of the new—giving a new covenant, creating a new heart, promising a new heaven and a new earth. The mistake of our torpor and timidity is that we will cling to the rags of the past and only patch them with shreds of the later age, instead of boldly flinging them off to clothe ourselves in the new garment of praise which is to take the place of the old spirit of heaviness.

The method in which a new beginning was celebrated by the Jews in relation to their restored walls is illustrative of the spirit in which such an event should always be contemplated.

In the first place, as a preparation for the whole of the subsequent ceremonies, the priests and Levites carried out a great work of purification. They began with themselves, because the men who are first in any dealings with religion must be first in purity. Judged by the highest standard, the only real difference of rank in the Church is determined by varying degrees of holiness; merely official distinctions and those that arise from the unequal distribution of gifts cannot affect anybody's position of honour in the sight of God. The functions of the recognised ministry, in particular, demand purity of character for their right discharge. They that bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. And not only so in general; especially in the matter of purification it is necessary that those who carry out the work should first be pure themselves. What here applies to priests and Levites ceremonially applies in prosaic earnestness to all who feel called to purge society in the interest of true morality. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? The leaders of moral reforms must be themselves morally clean. Only regenerate men and women can regenerate society. If the salt has lost its savour it will not arrest corruption in the sacrifice that is salted with it. But the purification does not cease with the leaders. In ceremonial symbolism all the people and even the very walls are also cleansed. This is done in view of the new departure, the fresh beginning. Such an occasion calls for much heart-searching and spiritual cleansing—a truth which must have been suggested to the minds of thoughtful people by the Levitical ceremonies. It is a shame to bring the old stains into the new scenes. The fresh, clean start calls for a new and better life.

Next, it is to be observed, there was an organised procession round the walls, a procession that included citizens of every rank—princes, priests, Levites, and representatives of the

general community, described as "Judah and Benjamin." Starting at the west end of the city, these people were divided into two sections, one led by Nehemiah going round by the north, and the other conducted by Ezra proceeding by the south, so that they met at the eastern side of the city; where opposite the Mount of Olives and close to the temple, they all united in an enthusiastic outburst of praise. This arrangement was not carried out for any of the idle ends of a popular pageant—to glorify the processionists, or to amuse the spectators. It was to serve an important practical purpose. By personal participation in the ceremony of initiation, all sections of the community would be brought to perceive its real significance. Since the walls were in the keeping of the citizens, it was necessary that the citizens should acknowledge their privileges and responsibilities. Men and women need to come individually and directly face to face with new conditions of life. Mere dulness of imagination encourages the lazy sense of indifference with which so many people permit themselves to ignore the claims of duty, and the same cause accounts for a melancholy failure to appreciate the new blessings that come from the untiring bounty of God.

In the third place, the behaviour of the processionists invites our attention. The whole ceremony was one of praise and gratitude. Levites were called in from the outlying towns and villages where they had got themselves homes, and even from that part of the Jordan valley that lay nearest to Jerusalem. Their principal function was to swell the chorus of the temple singers. Musical instruments added emphasis to the shout of human voices; clashing cymbals and finer toned harps supported the choral song with a rich and powerful orchestral accompaniment, which was augmented from another quarter by a young band of trumpeters consisting of some of the priests' sons. The immediate aim of the music and singing was to show forth the praises of God. The two great companies were to give thanks while they went round the walls. Sacrifices of thanksgiving completed the ceremony when the processions were united and brought to a standstill near the temple. The thanksgiving would arise out of a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God in leading the work of building the walls through many perils and disappointments to its present consummation. Rarely does anything new spring up all of a sudden without some relation to our own past life and action; but even that which is the greatest novelty and wonder to us must have a cause somewhere. If we have done nothing to prepare for the happy surprise, God has done much. Thus the new start is an occasion for giving thanks to its great Originator. But the thankfulness also looks forward. The city was now in a very much more hopeful condition than when Nehemiah took his lonely night ride among its ghostly ruins. By this time it was a compact and strongly fortified centre, with solid defences and a good body of devoted citizens pledged to do their part in pursuing its unique destiny. The prospect of a happy future which this wonderful transformation suggested afforded sufficient reasons for the greatest thankfulness. The spirit of praise thus called forth would be one of the best guarantees of the fulfilment of the high hopes that it inspired. There is nothing that so surely foredooms people to failure as a

despairing blindness to any perception of their advantages. The grateful soul will always have most ground for a renewal of gratitude. It is only just and reasonable that God should encourage those of His children who acknowledge His goodness, with fresh acts of favour over and above what He does for all in making His sun to shine and His rain to fall on the bad as well as the good. But apart from considerations of self-interest, the true spirit of praise will delight to pour itself out in adoration of the great and good Father of all blessings. It is a sign of sin or selfishness or unbelief when the element of praise fails in our worship. This is the purest and highest part of a religious service, and it should take the first place in the estimation of the worshippers. It will do so directly a right sense of the goodness of God is attained. Surely the best worship is that in which man's needs and hopes and fears are all swallowed up in the vision of God's love and glory, as the fields and woods are lost in a dim purple haze when the sky is aglow with the rose and saffron of a brilliant sunset.

Further, it is to be observed that a note of gladness rings through the whole ceremony. The account of the dedication concludes with the perfectly jubilant verse, "And they offered great sacrifices that day, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; and the women also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."* The joy would be mingled with the praise, because when people see the goodness of God enough to praise Him from their hearts they cannot but rejoice; and then the joy would react on the praise, because the more blessedness God sends the more heartily must His grateful children thank Him. Now the outburst of joy was accompanied with sacrifices. In the deepest sense, a sense almost unknown till it was revealed by Christ, there is a grand, solemn joy in sacrifice. But even to those who have only reached the Jewish standpoint, the self-surrender expressed by a ceremonial sacrifice as a symbol of glad thankfulness in turn affects the offerer so as to heighten his gladness. No doubt there were mundane and secular elements in this joy of a jubilant city. A laborious and dangerous task had been completed; the city had been fortified and made able to defend itself against the horrors of an assault; there was a fair prospect of comfort and perhaps even honour for the oppressed and despised citizens of Jerusalem. But beyond all this and beneath it, doubtless many had discovered Nehemiah's great secret for themselves; they had found their strength in the joy of the Lord. In face of heathenish pleasure and superstitious terrors it was much to know that God expected His holy people to be happy, and more, to find that the direct road to happiness was holiness. This was the best part of the joy which all the people experienced with more or less thought and appreciation of its meaning. Joy is contagious. Here was a city full of gladness. Nehemiah expressly takes note of the fact that the women and children shared in the universal joy. They must have been among the most pitiable sufferers in the previous calamities; and they had taken their place in the great *Ecclesia* when The Law was read, and again when the sad confession of the nation's sin was poured forth. It was well that they should not be left out of the

*Neh. xii. 43.

later scene, when joy and praise filled the stage. For children especially who would not covet this gladness in religion? It is only a miserable short-sightedness that allows any one to put before children ideas of God and spiritual things which must repel, because of their gloom and sternness. Let us reserve these ideas for the castigation of Pharisees. A scene of joyous worship is truly typical of the perfect City of God of which children are the typical citizens—the New Jerusalem of whose inhabitants it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

Lastly, following his extract from the memoirs of Nehemiah, the chronicler shows how the glad spirit of this great day of dedication flowed out and manifested itself in those engagements to which he was always delighted to turn—the Levitical services. Thus the tithe-gathering and the temple psalmody were helped forward. The gladness of religion is not confined to set services of public worship; but when those services are held it must flood them with the music of praise. It is impossible for the worship of God's house to be limp and depressed when the souls of His children are joyous and eager. A half-hearted, melancholy faith may be content with neglected churches and slovenly services—but not a joyous religion which men and women love and glory in. While "The joy of the Lord" has many happy effects on the world, it also crowds churches, fills treasuries, sustains various ministries, inspires hymns of praise, and brings life and vigour into all the work of religion.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RIGOUR OF THE REFORMER.

NEHEMIAH xiii.

THERE is no finality in history. The chapter that seems to be rounded off with a perfect conclusion always leaves room for an appendix, which in its turn may serve as an introduction to another chapter. Ezra's and Nehemiah's work seemed to have reached its climax in the happy scene of the dedication of the walls. All difficulties had vanished; the new order had been greeted with widespread enthusiasm; the future promised to be smooth and prosperous. If the chronicler had laid down his pen at this point, as any dramatist before Ibsen who was not bound by the exigencies of prosaic facts would have done, his work might have presented a much more artistic appearance than it now wears. And yet it would have been artificial, and therefore false to the highest art of history. In adding a further extract from Nehemiah's memoirs that discloses a revival of the old troubles, and so shows that the evils against which the reformers contend had not been stamped out, the writer mars the literary effect of his record of their triumph; but, at the same time, he satisfies us that he is in contact with real life, its imperfections and its disappointments.

It is not easy to settle the time of the incident mentioned in chapter xiii. 1-3. The phrase "on that day" with which the passage opens seems to point back to the previous chapter. If so it cannot be taken literally, because what it describes

must be assigned to a later period than the contents of the paragraph that follows it. It forms an introduction to the extract from Nehemiah's memoirs, and its chronological position is even later than the date of the first part of the extract, because that begins with the words "And before this," * *i. e.*, before the incident that opens the chapter. Now it is clear that Nehemiah's narrative here refers to a time considerably after the transactions of the previous chapter, inasmuch as he states that when the first of the occurrences he now records happened he was away in the court of Artaxerxes.† Still later, then, must that event be placed *before* which this new incident occurred. We might perhaps suppose that the phrase "at that day" is carried over directly from the chronicler's original source and belongs to its antecedents in that document; but so clumsy a piece of joinery is scarcely admissible. It is better to take the phrase quite generally. Whatever it meant when first penned, it is clear that the events it introduces belong only indefinitely to the times previously mentioned. We are really landed by them in a new state of affairs. Here we must notice that the introductory passage is immediately connected with the Nehemiah record. It tells how the law from Deuteronomy requiring the exclusion of the Ammonite and the Moabite was read and acted on. This is to be remembered when we are studying the subsequent events.

When Nehemiah's extended leave of absence had come to an end, or when perhaps he had been expressly summoned back by Artaxerxes, his return to Babylon was followed by a melancholy relapse in the reformed city of Jerusalem. This is not by any means astonishing. Nothing so hinders and distresses the missionary as the repeated outbreak of their old heathen vices among his converts. The drunkard cannot be reckoned safe directly he has signed the pledge. Old habits may be damped down without being extinguished, and when this is the case they will flame up again as soon as the repressive influence is removed. In the present instance there was a distinct party in the city, consisting of some of the most prominent and influential citizens, which disapproved of the separatist, puritanical policy of the reformers and advocated a more liberal course. Some of its members may have been conscientious men, who honestly deplored what they would regard as the disastrous state of isolation brought about by the action of Ezra and Nehemiah. After having been silenced for a time by the powerful presence of the great reformers, these people would come out and declare themselves when the restraining influences were removed. Meanwhile we hear no more of Ezra. Like Zerubbabel in the earlier period, he drops out of the history without a hint as to his end. He may have returned to Babylon, thinking his work complete; possibly he had been recalled by the king.

It is likely that some rumours of the declension of Jerusalem reached Nehemiah at the Persian court. But he did not discover the whole extent of this retrograde movement until he was once more in the city, with a second leave of absence from Artaxerxes. Then there were four evils that he perceived with great grief.

The first was that Tobiah had got a footing in the city. In the earlier period this "servant" had been carrying on intrigue with some mem-

bers of the aristocracy. The party of opposition had done its best to represent him in a favourable light to Nehemiah, and all the while this party had been traitorously keeping Tobiah informed of the state of affairs in the city. But now a further step was taken. Though one of the three leading enemies of Nehemiah, the ally and supporter of the Samaritan governor Sanballat, this man was actually permitted to have a lodging in the precincts of the temple. The locality was selected, doubtless, because it was within the immediate jurisdiction of the priests, among whom the Jewish opponents of Nehemiah were found. It is as though, in his quarrel with Henry, Thomas à Becket had lodged a papal envoy in the cathedral close at Canterbury. To a Jew who did not treat the ordinances of religion with the Sadducean laxity that was always to be found in some of the leading members of the priesthood, this was most abhorrent. He saw in it a defilement of the neighbourhood of the temple, if not of the sacred enclosure itself, as well as an insult to the former governor of the city. Tobiah may have used his room for the purpose of entertaining visitors in state; but it may only have been a warehouse for trade stores, as it had previously been a place in which the bulky sacrificial gifts were stowed away. Such a degradation of it, superseding its previous sacred use, would aggravate the evil in the sight of so strict a man as Nehemiah.

The outrage was easily accounted for. Tobiah was allied by marriage to the priest who was the steward of this chamber. Thus we have a clear case of trouble arising out of the system of foreign marriages which Ezra had so strenuously opposed. It seems to have opened the eyes of the younger reformer to the evil of these marriages, for hitherto we have not found him taking any active part in furthering the action of Ezra with regard to them. Possibly he had not come across an earlier instance. But now it was plain enough that the effect was to bring a pronounced enemy of all he loved and advocated into the heart of the city, with the rights of a tenant, too, to back him up. If "evil communications corrupt good manners," this was most injurious to the cause of the reformation. The time had not arrived when a generous spirit could dare to welcome all-comers to Jerusalem. The city was still a fortress in danger of siege. More than that, it was a Church threatened with dissolution by reason of the admission of unfit members. Whatever we may say to the social and political aspects of the case, ecclesiastically regarded, laxity at the present stage would have been fatal to the future of Judaism, and the mere presence of such a man as Tobiah, openly sanctioned by a leading priest, was a glaring instance of laxity; Nehemiah was bound to stop the mischief.

The second evil was the neglect of the payments due to the Levites. It is to be observed again that the Levites are most closely associated with the reforming position. Religious laxity and indifference had had an effect on the treasury for which these men were the collectors. The financial thermometer is a very rough test of the spiritual condition of a religious community, and we often read it erroneously, not only because we cannot gauge the amount of sacrifice made by people in very different circumstances, nor just because we are unable to discover the motives that prompt the giving of

* *14:23* *20:22* *24*† *Nob* *xii. 6*

aims "before men"; but also, when every allowance is made for these causes of uncertainty, because the gifts which are usually considered most generous rarely involve enough strain and effort to bring the deepest springs of life into play. And yet it must be allowed that a declining subscription list is usually to be regarded as one sign of waning interest on the part of the supporters of any public movement. When we consider the matter from the other side, we must acknowledge that the best way to improve the pecuniary position of any religious enterprise is not to work the exhausted pump more vigorously, but to drive the well deeper and tap the resources of generosity that lie nearer the heart—not to beg harder, but to awaken a better spirit of devotion.

The third indication of backsliding that vexed the soul of Nehemiah was Sabbath profanation. He saw labour and commerce both proceeding on the day of rest—Jews treading the winepress, carrying their sheaves, lading their asses, and bringing loads of wine, grapes, and figs, and all sorts of wares, into Jerusalem for sale; and fish-mongers and pedlars from Tyre—not, of course, themselves to be blamed for failing to respect the festival of a people whose religion they did not share—pouring into the city, and opening their markets as on any weekday. Nehemiah was greatly alarmed. He went at once to the nobles, who seem to have been governing the city, as a sort of oligarchy, during his absence, and expostulated with them on their danger of provoking the wrath of God again, urging that Sabbath-breaking had been one of the offences which had called down the judgment of Heaven on their fathers. Then he took means to prevent the coming of foreign traders on the Sabbath, by ordering the gates to be kept closed from Friday evening till the sacred day was over. Once or twice these people came up as usual and camped just outside the city; but as this was disturbing to the peace of the day, Nehemiah threatened that if they repeated the annoyance he would lay hands on them. Lastly, he charged the Levites, first to cleanse themselves that they might be ready to undertake a work of purification, and then to take charge of the gates on the Sabbath and see that the day was hallowed in the cessation of all labour. Thus both by persuasion and by vigorous active measures Nehemiah put an end to the disorder.

The importance attached to this matter is a sign of the prominence given to Sabbath-keeping in Judaism. The same thing was seen earlier in the selection of the law of the Sabbath as one of the two or three rules to be specially noted, and to which the Jews were to particularly pledge themselves in the covenant.* Reference was then made to the very act of the Tyrians now complained of, the offering of wares and food for sale in Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. Putting these two passages together, we can see where the Sabbath-breaking came from. It was the invasion of a foreign custom—like the dreaded introduction of the "Continental Sunday" into England. Now to Nehemiah the fact of the foreign origin of the custom would be a heavy condemnation for it. Next to circumcision, Sabbath-keeping was the principal mark of the Jew. In the days of our Lord it was the most highly prized feature of the ancient faith. This was then so obvious that it was laid hold of

*Neh. x. 31.

by Roman satirists, who knew little about the strange traders in the *Ghetto* except that they "sabbatised." Nehemiah saw that if the sacred day of rest were to be abandoned, one of his bulwarks of separation would be lost. Thus for him, with his fixed policy, and in view of the dangers of his age, there was a very urgent reason for maintaining the Sabbath, a reason which of course does not apply to us in England to-day. We must pass on to the teaching of Christ to have this question put on a wider and more permanent basis. With that Divine insight of His which penetrated to the root of every matter, our Lord saw through the miserable formalism that made an idol of a day, and in so doing turned a boon into a burden; and at the same time He rescued the sublimely simple truth which contains both the justification and the limitation of the Sabbath, when He declared, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." In resisting the rigour of legal-minded Sabbatarianism, the modern mind seems to have confined its attention to the second clause of this great utterance, to the neglect of its first clause. Is it nothing, then, that Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man"—not for the Jew only, but for *man*? Although we may feel free from the religion of law in regard to the observance of days as much as in other external matters, is it not foolish for us to minimise a blessing that Jesus Christ expressly declared to be for the good of the human race? If the rest day was needed by the Oriental in the slow-moving life of antiquity, is it any less requisite for the Western in the rush of these later times? But if it is necessary to our welfare, the neglect of it is sinful. Thus not because of the inherent sanctity of seasons, but on our Lord's own ground of the highest utilitarianism—a utilitarianism which reaches to other people, and even to animals, and affects the soul as well as the body—the reservation of one day in seven for rest is a sacred duty. "The world is too much with us" for the six days. We can ill afford to lose the recurrent escape from its blighting companionship originally provided by the seventh and now enjoyed on our Sunday.

Lastly, Nehemiah was confronted by the social effects of foreign marriage alliances. These alliances had been contracted by Jews resident in the southwestern corner of Judæa, who may not have come under the influence of Ezra's drastic reformation in Jerusalem, and who probably were not married till after that event. They afford another evidence of the counter-current that was running so strongly against the regulations of the party of rigour while Nehemiah was away. The laxity of the border people may be accounted for without calling in any subtle motives. But their fault was shared by a member of the *gens* of the high-priest, who had actually wedded the daughter of Nehemiah's arch-enemy Sanballat! Clearly this was a political alliance, and it indicated a defiant reversal of the policy of the reformers in the very highest circles. The offender, after being expelled from Jerusalem, is said to have been the founder of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim.

Then the social mischief of the mixed marriages was showing itself in the corruption of the Hebrew language. The Philistine language was not allied to the Egyptian, as some have thought, nor was it Indo-Germanic, as others have supposed, but it was Semitic, and only a

different dialect from the Hebrew; and yet the difficulty persons from the south of England feel in understanding the speech of Yorkshiremen in remote parts of the county will help us to account for a practical loss of mutual intelligence between people of different dialects, when these dialects were still more isolated by having grown up in two separate and hostile nations. For the children of Jewish parents to be talking with the tones and accents of the hereditary enemies of Israel was intolerable. When he heard the hated sounds, Nehemiah simply lost his temper. With a curse on his lips he rushed at the fathers, striking them and tearing their hair. It was the rage of bitter disappointment; but behind it lay the grim set purpose in holding to which with dogged tenacity Ezra and Nehemiah saved Judaism from extinction. Separatism is never gracious; yet it may be right. The reformer is not generally of a mild temperament. We may regret his harshness; but we should remember that the world has only seen one perfectly meek and yet thoroughly effective Revolutionist, only one "Lamb of God" who could be also named "the Lion of the tribe of Judah."

The whole situation was disappointing to Nehemiah and his memoir ends in a prayer beneath which we can detect an undertone of melancholy. Three times during this last section he appeals to God to remember him—not to wipe out his good deeds,* to spare him according to the greatness of the Divine mercy,† and finally to remember him for good.‡ The memories of the Jerusalem covenants had been brief; during the short interval of their leader's absence they had forgotten his discipline and fallen back into negligent ways. It was vain to trust to the fickle fancies of men. With a sense of weary loneliness, taught to feel his own insignificance in that great tide of human life that flows on in its own course though the most prominent figures drop out of notice, Nehemiah turned to his God, the one Friend who never forgets. He was learning the vanity of the world's fame; yet he shrank from the idea of falling into oblivion. Therefore it was his prayer that he might abide in the memory of God. This was by itself a restful thought. It is cheering to think that we may dwell in the memory of those we love. But to be held in the thought of God is to have a place in the heart of infinite love. And yet this was not the conclusion of the whole matter to Nehemiah. It is really nothing better than a frivolous vanity, that can induce any one to be willing to sacrifice the prospect of a real eternal life in exchange for the pallid shadow of immortality ascribed to the "choir invisible" of those who are only thought of as living in the memory of the world they have influenced enough to win "a niche in the temple of fame." What is fame to a dead man mouldering in his coffin? Even the higher thought of being remembered by God is a poor consolation in prospect of blank non-existence. Nehemiah expects something better, for he begs God to remember him in *mercy* and for *good*. It is a very narrow, prosaic interpretation of this prayer to say that he only means that he desires a blessing during the remainder of his life in the court at Susa. On the other hand, it may be too much to ascribe the definite hope of a future life to this Old Testament saint. And yet, vague as his thought may be, it is the utterance of a profound yearning of the soul that breaks out in moments

of disappointment with an intensity never to be satisfied within the range of our cramped mortal state. In this utterance of Nehemiah we have, at least, a seed thought that should germinate into the great hope of immortality. If God could forget His children, we might expect them to perish, swept aside like the withered leaves of autumn. But if He continues to remember them, it is not just to His Fatherhood to charge Him with permitting such a fate to fall upon His offspring. No human father who is worthy of the name would willingly let go the children whom he cherishes in mind and heart. Is it reasonable to suppose that the perfect Divine Father, who is both almighty and all-loving, would be less constant? But if He *remembers* His children, and remembers them *for good*, He will surely preserve them. If His memory is unfading, and if His love and power are eternal, those who have a place in His immortal thought must also have a share in His immortal life.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER: INTRODUCTORY.

THERE is a striking contrast between the high estimation in which the Book of Esther is now cherished among the Jews and the slighting treatment that is often meted out to it in the Christian Church. According to the great Maimonides, though the Prophets and the Hagiographa will pass away when the Messiah comes, this one book will share with The Law in the honour of being retained. It is known as "The Roll" *par excellence*, and the Jews have a proverb, "The Prophets may fail, but not The Roll." The peculiar importance attached to the book may be explained by its use in the Feast of Purim—the festival which is supposed to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews from the murderous designs of Haman, and their triumph over their Gentile enemies—for it is then read through in the synagogue. On the other hand, the grave doubts which were once felt by some of the Jews have been retained and even strengthened in the Christian Church. Esther was omitted from the Canon by some of the Oriental Fathers. Luther, with the daring freedom he always manifested in pronouncing sentence on the books of the Bible, after referring to the Second Book of Maccabees, says, "I am so hostile to this book and that of Esther, that I wish they did not exist; they are too Judaising, and contain many heathenish improprieties." In our own day two classes of objections have been raised.

The first is historical. By many the Book of Esther is regarded as a fantastic romance; by some it is even relegated to the category of astronomical myths; and by others it is considered to be a mystical allegory. Even the most sober criticism is troubled at its contents. There can be no question that the Ahasterus (*Ahashverosh*) of Esther is the well-known Xerxes of history, the invader of Greece who is described in the pages of Herodotus. But then, it is asked, what room have we for the story of Esther in the life of that monarch? His wife was a cruel and superstitious woman, named Amestris. We cannot identify her with Esther, because she was the daughter of one of the Persian generals, and also because she was married to Xerxes many years before the date of Esther's

* Neh. xiii. 14.

† Neh. xiii. 22.

‡ Neh. xiii. 31.

appearance on the scene. Two of her sons accompanied the expedition to Greece, which must have preceded the introduction of Esther to the harem. Moreover, it was contrary to law for a Persian sovereign to take a wife except from his own family, or from one of five noble families. Can Amestris be identified with Vashti? If so, it is certain that she must have been restored to favour, because Amestris held the queen's place in the later years of Xerxes, when the uxorious monarch came more and more under her influence. Esther, it is clear, can only have been a secondary wife in the eyes of the law, whatever position she may have held for a season in the court of the king. The predecessors of Xerxes had several wives; our narrative makes it evident that Ahasuerus followed the Oriental custom of keeping a large harem. To Esther, at best, therefore, must be assigned the place of a favourite member of the seraglio.

Then it is difficult to think that Esther would not have been recognised as a Jewess by Haman, since the nationality of Mordecai, whose relationship to her had not been hidden, was known in the city of Susa. Moreover the appalling massacre of "their enemies" by the Jews, carried on in cold blood, and expressly including "women and children," has been regarded as highly improbable. Finally, the whole story is so well knit together, its successive incidents arrange themselves so perfectly and lead up to the conclusion with such neat precision, that it is not easy to assign it to the normal course of events. We do not expect to meet with this sort of thing outside the realm of fairy tales. Putting all these facts together, we must feel that there is some force in the contention that the book is not strictly historical.

But there is another side to the question. This book is marvellously true to Persian manners. It is redolent of the atmosphere of the court at Susa. Its accuracy in this respect has been traced down to the most minute details. The character of Ahasuerus is drawn to the life; point after point in it may be matched in the Xerxes of Herodotus. The opening sentence of the book shows that it was written some time after the date of the king in whose reign the story is set, because it describes him in language only suited to a later period—"this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India unto Ethiopia," etc. But the writer could not have been far removed from the Persian period. The book bears evidence of having been written in the heart of Persia, by a man who was intimately acquainted with the scenery he described. There seems to be some reason for believing in the substantial accuracy of a narrative that is so true to life in these respects.

The simplest way out of the dilemma is to suppose that the story of Esther stands upon a historical basis of fact, and that it has been worked up into its present literary form by a Jew of later days who was living in Persia, and who was perfectly familiar with the records and traditions of the reign of Xerxes. It is only an unwarrantable *a priori* theory that can be upset by our acceptance of this conclusion. We have no right to demand that the Bible shall not contain anything but what is strictly historical. The Book of Job has long been accepted as a sublime poem, founded on fact perhaps, but owing its chief value to the divinely inspired thoughts of its author. The Book of Jonah is regarded by many

cautious and devout readers as an allegory replete with important lessons concerning a very ugly aspect of Jewish selfishness. These two works are not the less valuable because men are coming to understand that their places in the library of the Hebrew Canon are not among the strict records of history. And the Book of Esther need not be dishonoured when some room is allowed for the play of the creative imagination of its author. In these days of the theological novel we are scarcely in a position to object to what may be thought to partake of the character of a romance, even if it is found in the Bible. No one asks whether our Lord's parable of the Prodigal Son was a true story of some Galilean family. The Pilgrim's Progress has its mission, though it is not to be verified by any authentic Annals of Elstow. It is rather pleasing than otherwise to see that the compilers of the Jewish Canon were not prevented by Providence from including a little anticipation of that work of the imagination which has blossomed so abundantly in the highest and best culture of our own day.

A much more serious objection is urged on religious and moral grounds. It is indisputable that the book is not characterised by the pure and lofty spirit that gives its stamp to most of the other contents of the Bible. The absence of the name of God from its pages has been often commented on. The Jews long ago recognised this fact, and they tried to discover the sacred name in acrostic form at one or two places where the initial letters of a group of words were found to spell it. But quite apart from all such fantastic trifling, it has been customary to argue that, though unnamed, the presence of God is felt throughout the story in the wonderful Providence that protects the Jews and frustrates the designs of their arch-enemy Haman. The difficulty, however, is wider and deeper. There is no reference to religion, it is said, even where it is most called for; no reference to prayer in the hour of danger, when prayer should have been the first resource of a devout soul; in fact no indication of devoutness of thought or conduct. Mordecai fasts; we are **not** told that he prays. The whole narrative is immersed in a secular atmosphere. The religious character of apocryphal additions that were inserted by later hands is a tacit witness to a deficiency felt by pious Jews.

These charges have been met by the hypothesis that the author found it necessary to disguise his religious beliefs in a work that was to come under the eyes of heathen readers. Still we cannot imagine that an Isaiah or an Ezra would have treated this subject in the style of our author. It must be admitted that we have a composition on a lower plane than that of the prophetic and priestly histories of Israel. The theory that all parts of the Bible are inspired with an equal measure of the Divine Spirit halts at this point. But what was to prevent a composition analogous to secular literature taking its place in the Hebrew Scriptures? Have we any evidence that the obscure scribes who arranged the Canon were infallibly inspired to include only devotional works? It is plain that the Book of Esther was valued on national rather than on religious grounds. The Feast of Purim was a social and national occasion of rejoicing, not a solemn religious ceremony like the Passover; and this document obtains its place of honour through its connection with the feast. The

book, then, stands to the Hebrew Psalms somewhat as Macaulay's ballad of the Armada stands to the hymns of Watts and the Wesleys. It is mainly patriotic rather than religious; its purpose is to stir the soul of national enthusiasm through the long ages of the oppression of Israel.

It is not just, however, to assert that there are no evidences of religious faith in the story of Esther. Mordecai warns his cousin that if she will not exert herself to defend her people, "then shall there relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place."* What can this be but a reserved utterance of a devout man's faith in that Providence which has always followed the "favoured people"? Moreover, Mordecai seems to perceive a Divine destiny in the exaltation of Esther when he asks, "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"† The old commentators were not wrong when they saw the hand of Providence in the whole story. If we are to allow some license to the imagination of the author in the shaping and arrangement of the narrative, we must assign to him also a real faith in Providence, for he describes a wonderful interlinking of events all leading up to the deliverance of the Jews. Long before Haman has any quarrel with Mordecai, the disgusting degradation of a drinking bout issues in an insult offered to a favourite queen. This shameful occurrence is the occasion of the selection of a Jewess, whose high position at court thus acquired enables her to save her people. But there is a secondary plot. Mordecai's discovery of the conspirators who would have assassinated Ahasuerus gives him a claim on the king's generosity, and so prepares the way, not only for his escape from the clutches of Haman, but also for his triumph over his enemy. And this is brought about—as we should say—"by accident." If Xerxes had not had a sleepless night just at the right time, if the part of his state records selected for reading to him in his wakefulness had not been just that which told the story of Mordecai's great service, the occasion for the turn in the tide of the fortune of the Jews would not have arisen. But all was so fitted together as to lead step by step on to the victorious conclusion. No Jew could have penned such a story as this without having intended his co-religionists to recognise the unseen presence of an over-ruling Providence throughout the whole course of events.

But the gravest charge has yet to be considered. It is urged against the Book of Esther that the moral tone of it is unworthy of Scripture. It is dedicated to nothing higher than the exaltation of the Jews. Other books of the Bible reveal God as the Supreme, and the Jews as His servants, often unworthy and unfaithful servants. This book sets the Jews in the first place; and Providence, even if tacitly recognised, is quite subservient to their welfare. Israel does not appear as living for the glory of God, but all history works for the glory of Israel. In accordance with the spirit of the story, everything that opposes the Jews is condemned, everything that favours them is honoured. Worst of all, this practical deification of Israel permits a tone of heartless cruelty. The doctrine of separatism is monstrously exaggerated. The Jews are seen to be surrounded by their "enemies." Haman, the chief of them, is not only punished as he richly deserves to be punished, but he is made the

recipient of unrestrained scorn and rage, and his sons are impaled on their father's huge stake. The Jews defended themselves from threatened massacre by a legalised slaughter of their "enemies." We cannot imagine a scene more foreign to the patience and gentleness inculcated by our Lord. Yet we must remember that the quarrel did not begin with the Jews; or if we must see the origin of it in the pride of a Jew, we must recollect that his offence was slight and only the act of one man. As far as the narrative shows, the Jews were engaged in their peaceable occupations when they were threatened with extinction by a violent outburst of the mad *Judenhetze* that has pursued this unhappy people through all the centuries of history. In the first instance, their act of vengeance was a measure of self-defence. If they fell upon their enemies with fierce anger, it was after an order of extermination had driven them to bay. If they indulged in a wholesale bloodshed, not even sparing women or children, exactly the same doom had been hanging over their own heads, and their own wives and children had been included in its ferocious sentence. This fact does not excuse the savagery of the action of the Jews; but it amply accounts for their conduct. They were wild with terror, and they defended their homes with the fury of madmen. Their action did not go beyond the prayer of the Psalmist who wrote, in trim metrical order, concerning the hated Babylon—

"Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones
Against the rock."*

It is more difficult to account for the responsible part taken by Mordecai and Esther in begging permission for this awful massacre. The last pages of the Book of Esther reek with blood. A whole empire is converted into shambles for human slaughter. We turn with loathing from this gigantic horror, glad to take refuge in the hope that the author has dipped his brush in darker colours than the real events would warrant. Nevertheless such a massacre as this is unhappily not at all beyond the known facts of history on other occasions—not in its extent; the means by which it is here carried out are doubtless exceptional. Xerxes himself was so heartless and so capricious that any act of folly or wickedness could be credited of him.

After all that can be said for it, clearly this Book of Esther cannot claim the veneration that we attach to the more choice utterances of Old Testament literature. It never lifts us with the inspiration of prophecy; it never commands the reverence which we feel in studying the historical books. Yet we must not therefore assume that it has not its use. It illustrates an important phase in the development of Jewish life and thought. It also introduces us to characters and incidents that reveal human nature in very various lights. To contemplate such a revelation should not be without profit. After the Bible, what book should we regard as, on the whole, most serviceable for our enlightenment and nurture? Since next to the knowledge of God the knowledge of man is most important, might we not assign this second place of honour to the works of Shakespeare rather than to any theological treatise? And if so may we not be grate-

* Esther iv. 14.

† *Ibid.*

* Psalm cxxxvii. 9.

ful that something after the order of a Shakespearian revelation of man is contained even in one book of the Bible?

It may be best to treat a book of this character in a different manner from the weighty historical work that precedes it, and, instead of expounding its chapters seriatim, to gather up its lessons in a series of brief character studies.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AHASUERUS AND VASHTI.

ESTHER i.

THE character of Ahasuerus illustrates the Nemesis of absolutism, by showing how unlimited power is crushed and dissolved beneath the weight of its own immensity. The very vastness of his domains overwhelms the despot. While he thinks himself free to disport according to his will, he is in reality the slave of his own machinery of government. He is so entirely dependent for information on subordinates, who can deceive him to suit their own private ends, that he often becomes a mere puppet of the political wire-pullers. In the fury of his passion he issues his terrible mandates, with the confidence of a master whose slightest whim is a law to the nations, and yet that very passion has been cleverly worked up by some of his servants, who are laughing in their sleeves at the simplicity of their dupe, even while they are fawning on him with obsequious flattery. In the story of Esther Ahasuerus is turned about hither and thither by his courtiers, according as one or another is clever enough to obtain a temporary hearing. In the opening scene he is the victim of a harem plot which deprives him of his favourite consort. Subsequently Haman poisons his mind with calumnies about a loyal, industrious section of his subjects. He is only undecieved by another movement in the harem. Even the jealously guarded women of the royal household know more of the actual state of affairs in the outside world than the bewildered monarch. The king is so high above his realm that he cannot see what is going on in it; and all that he can learn about it passes through such a variety of intermediary agents that it is coloured and distorted in the process.

But this is not all. The man who is exalted to the pedestal of a god is made dizzy by his own altitude. Absolutism drove the Roman Emperor Caligula mad; it punished the Xerxes of Herodotus with childishness. The silly monarch who would decorate a tree with the jewellery of a prince in reward for its fruitfulness, and flog and chain the Hellespont as a punishment for its tempestuousness, is not fit to be let out of the nursery. Such conduct as his discovers an ineptitude that is next door to idiocy. When the same man appears on the pages of Scripture under the name of Ahasuerus, his weakness is despicable. The most keen-sighted ruler of millions is liable to be misinformed; the strongest administrator of a gigantic empire is compelled to move with difficulty in the midst of the elaborate organisation of his government. But Ahasuerus is neither keen-sighted nor strong. He is a victim of the last court intrigue, a believer in the idlest gossip; and he is worse, for even on the suppositions presented to him he

behaves with folly and senseless fury. His conduct to Vashti is first insulting and then ungrateful; for fidelity to her worthless husband would prompt her to decline to risk herself among a crew of drunken revellers. His consent to the diabolical proposal of his grand vizier for a massacre, without an atom of proof that the victims are guilty, exhibits a hopeless state of mental feebleness. His equal readiness to transfer the mandate of wholesale murder to persons described indefinitely as the "enemies" of these people shows how completely he is twisted about by the latest breeze. As the palace plots develop we see this great king in all his pride and majesty tossed to and fro like a shuttlecock. And yet he can sting. It is a dangerous game for the players, and the object of it is to get the deadly venom of the royal rage to light on the head of the opposite party. We could not have a more certain proof of the vanity of "ambition that o'erleaps itself" than this conversion of immeasurable power into helpless weakness on the part of the Persian sovereign.

We naturally start with this glaring exhibition of the irony of fate in our study of Ahasuerus, because it is the most pronounced factor in his character and career. There are other elements of the picture, however, which are not, like this, confined to the abnormal experience of solitary rulers. Next to the revenge of absolutism on its possessor, the more vulgar effects of extravagant luxury and self-indulgence are to be seen in the degraded Persian court life. Very likely the writer of our Book of Esther introduces these matters with the primary object of enhancing the significance of his main theme by making us feel how great a danger the Jews were in, and how magnificent a triumph was won for them by the heroic Jewess of the harem. But the scene that he thus brings before us throws light on the situation all round. Xerxes' idea of unbridled power is that it admits of unlimited pleasure. Our author's picture of the splendid palace, with its richly coloured awnings stretched across from marble pillars to silver rods over the tessellated pavement, where the most exalted guests recline in the shade on gold and silver seats, while they feast hugely and drink heavily day after day, shows us how the provinces were being drained to enrich the court, and how the royal treasury was being lavished on idle festivity. That was bad enough, but its effects were worse. The law was license. "The drinking was according to the law," and this law was that there should be no limit to it, everybody taking just as much wine as he pleased. Naturally such a rule ostentatiously paraded before a dissolute company led to a scene of downright bestial debauchery. According to Herodotus, the Persians were addicted to drunkenness, and the incident described in the first chapter of Esther is quite in accordance with the Greek historian's account of the followers of Xerxes.

The worst effect of this vice of drunkenness is its degrading influence on the conduct and character of men. It robs its victims of self-respect and manliness, and sends them to wallow in the mire with swinish obscenity. What they would not dream of stooping to in their sober moments, they revel in with shameless ostentation when their brains are clouded with intoxicating drink. Husbands, who are gentle and considerate at other times, are then transformed into brutes, who can take pleasure in trampling

on their wives. It is no excuse to plead that the drunkard is a madman unaccountable for his actions; he is accountable for having put himself in his degraded condition. If he is temporarily insane, he has poisoned his own intellect by swallowing a noxious drug with his eyes open. He is responsible for that action, and therefore he must be held to be responsible for its consequences. If he had given due consideration to his conduct, he might have foreseen whither it was tending. The man who has been foolish enough to launch his boat on the rapids cannot divert its course when he is startled by the thunder of the falls he is approaching; but he should have thought of that before leaving the safety of the shore.

The immediate consequence of the disgusting degradation of drunkenness, in the case of Ahasuerus, is that the monarch grossly insults his queen. A moment's consideration would have suggested the danger as well as the scandal of his behaviour. But in his heedless folly the debauchee hurls himself over the precipice, from the height of his royal dignity down to the very pit of ignominy, and then he is only enraged that Vashti refuses to be dragged down with him. It is a revolting scene, and one to show how the awful vice of drunkenness levels all distinctions; here it outrages the most sacred rules of Oriental etiquette. The seclusion of the harem is to be violated for the amusement of the dissolute king's boon companions.

In the story of Esther poor Vashti's fall is only introduced in order to make way for her Hebrew rival. But after-ages have naturally sided with the wronged queen. Was it true modesty that prompted her daring refusal, or the lawful pride of womanhood? If so, all women should honour Vashti as the vindicator of their dues. Whatever "woman's rights" may be maintained in the field of politics, the very existence of the home, the basis of society itself, depends on those more profound and inalienable rights that touch the character of pure womanliness. The first of a woman's rights is the right to her own person. But this right is ignored in Oriental civilisation. The sweet English word "home" is unknown in the court of such a king as Ahasuerus. To think of it in this connection is as incongruous as to imagine a daisy springing up through the boards of a dancing saloon. The unhappy Vashti had never known this choicest of words; but she may have had a due conception of a woman's true dignity, as far as the perverted ideas of the East permitted. And yet even here a painful suspicion obtrudes itself on our notice. Vashti had been feasting with the women of the harem when she received the brutal mandate from her lord. Had she too lost her balance of judgment under the bewitching influence of the wine-cup? Was she rendered reckless by the excitement of her festivities? Was her refusal the result of the factitious courage that springs from an unwholesome excitement or an equally effective mental stupor? Since one of the commonest results of intoxication is a quarrelsomeness of temper, it must be admitted that Vashti's flat refusal to obey may have some connection with her previous festivities. In that case, of course, something must be detracted from her glory as the martyr of womanliness. A horrible picture is this—a drunken king quarrelling with his drunken queen; these two people, set in the

highest places in their vast realm, descending from the very pinnacle of greatness to grovel in debased intemperance! It would not be fair to the poor, wronged queen to assert so much without any clear evidence in support of the darker view of her conduct. Still it must be admitted that it is difficult for any of the members of a dissolute society to keep their garments clean. Unhappily it is only too frequently the case that even in a Christian land, womanhood is degraded by becoming the victim of intemperance. No sight on earth is more sickening. A woman may be loaded with insults, and yet she may keep her soul white as the soul of St. Agnes. It is not an outrage on her dignity, offered by the drunken king to his queen, that really marks her degradation. To all fair judgments, that only degrades the brute who offers it; but the white lily is bruised and trampled in the dust when she who wears it herself consents to fling it away.

The action of Ahasuerus on receipt of his queen's refusal reveals another trait in his weak character. Jealous eyes—always watching the favourite of the harem—discover an opportunity for a gleeful triumph. The advisers of the king are cunning enough to set the action of Vashti in the light of a public example. If a woman in so exalted a position is permitted to disobey her husband with impunity, other wives will appeal to her case and break out of bounds. It is a mean plea, the plea of weakness on the part of the speaker, Memucan, the last of the seven princes. Is this man only finding an excuse for the king? or may it be supposed that his thoughts are travelling away to a shrew in his own home? The strange thing is that the king is not content with wreaking his vengeance on the proud Vashti. He is persuaded to utilise the occasion of her act of insubordination in order to issue a decree commanding the subjection of all wives to their husbands. The queen's conduct is treated as an instance of a growing spirit of independence on the part of the women of Persia, which must be crushed forthwith. One would think that the women were slaves, and that the princes were acting like the Romans when they issued repressive measures from dread of a "Servile War."

If such a law as this had ever been passed, we might well understand the complaint of those who say it is unjust that the function of legislation should be monopolised by one sex. Even in the West, where women are comparatively free and are supposed to be treated on an equality with men, wrong is often done because the laws which concern them more especially are all made by men. In the East, where they are regarded as property, like their husbands' camels and oxen, cruel injustice is inevitable. But this injustice cannot go unpunished. It must react on its perpetrators, blunting their finer feelings, lowering their better nature, robbing them of those sacred confidences of husband and wife which never spring up on the territory of the slave-driver.

But we have only to consider the domestic edict of Ahasuerus to see its frothy vanity. When it was issued it must have struck everybody who had the faintest sense of humour as simply ridiculous. It is not by the rough instrumentality of the law that difficult questions of the relations between the sexes can be adjusted. The law can see that a formal contract is not violated with impunity. The law can protect the individual parties to the contract from the most brutal forms

of cruelty—though even this is very difficult between husband and wife. But the law cannot secure real justice in the home. This must be left to the working of principles of righteousness and to the mutual considerateness of those who are concerned. Where these elements are wanting, no legislation on matrimony can restore the peace of a shattered home.

The order of Ahasuerus, however, was too indefinite to have very serious results. The tyrannical husband would not have waited for any such excuse as it might afford him for exacting obedience from his oppressed household drudge. The strong-minded woman would mock at the king's order, and have her own way as before. Who could hinder her? Certainly not her husband. The yoke of years of meek submission was not to be broken in a day by a royal proclamation. But wherever the true idea of marriage was realised—and we must have sufficient faith in human nature to be assured that this was sometimes the case even in the realm of Xerxes—the husband and wife who knew themselves to be one, united by the closest ties of love and sympathy and mutual confidence, would laugh in their happiness and perhaps spare a thought of pity for the poor, silly king who was advertising his domestic troubles to the world, and thereby exhibiting his shallow notions of wedded life—blind, absolutely blind, to the sweet secret that was heaven to them.

We may be sure that the singular edict remained a dead letter. But the king would be master in his own palace. So Vashti fell. We hear no more of her, but we can guess too well what her most probable fate must have been.* The gates of death are never difficult to find in an Oriental palace; there are always jealous rivals eager to triumph over the fall of a royal favourite. Still Ahasuerus had been really fond of the queen who paid so dearly for her one act of independence. Repenting of his drunken rage, the king let his thoughts revert to his former favourite, a most dangerous thing for those who had hastened her removal. The easiest escape for them was to play on his coarse nature by introducing to his notice a bevy of girls from whom he might select a new favourite. This was by no means a dignified proceeding for Esther, the maiden to whom the first prize in the exhibition of beauty was awarded by the royal fancier. But it gave her the place of power from which to help her people in their hour of desperate need. And here we come to some redeeming features in the character of the king. He is not lacking in generosity; and he owns to a certain sense of justice. In the crowd of royal cares and pleasures, he has forgotten how an obscure Jew saved his life by revealing one of the many plots that make the pleasures of a despot as hollow a mockery as the feast of Damocles. On the chance discovery of his negligence, Ahasuerus hastens to atone for it with ostentatious generosity. Again, no sooner does he find that he has been duped by Haman into an act of cruel injustice than he tries to counteract the mischief by an equally savage measure of retaliation. A strange way of administering justice! Yet it must be admitted that in this the capricious, blundering king means honestly. The bitter irony of it all is that so awful a power of

life and death should be lodged in the hands of one who is so totally incapacitated for a wise use of it.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HAMAN.

ESTHER iii. 1-6; v. 9-14; vii. 5-10.

HAMAN is the Judas of Israel. Not that his conduct or his place in history would bring him into comparison with the traitor apostle, for he was an open foe and a foreigner. But he is treated by popular Judaism as the Arch-Enemy, just as Judas is treated by popular Christianity. Like Judas, he has assigned to him a solitary pre-eminence in wickedness, which is almost inhuman. As in the case of Judas, there is thought to be no call for charity or mercy in judging Haman. He shares with Judas the curse of Cain. Boundless execration is heaped on his head. Horror and hatred have almost transformed him into Satan. He is called "The Agagite," an obscure title which is best explained as a later Jewish nickname derived from a reference to the king of Amalek who was hewn in pieces before the Lord. In the Septuagint he is surnamed "The Macedonian," because when that version was made the enemies of Israel were the representatives of the empire of Alexander and his successors. During the dramatic reading of the Book of Esther in a Jewish synagogue at the Feast of Purim, the congregation may be found taking the part of a chorus and exclaiming at every mention of the name of Haman, "May his name be blotted out." "Let the name of the ungodly perish," while boys with mallets will pound stones and bits of wood on which the odious name is written. This frantic extravagance would be unaccountable but for the fact that the people whose "badge is suffering" has summed up under the name of the Persian official the malignity of their enemies in all ages. Very often this name has served to veil a dangerous reference to some contemporary foe, or to heighten the rage felt against an exceptionally odious person by its accumulation of traditional hatred, just as in England on the fifth of November the "Guy" may represent some unpopular person of the day.

When we turn from this unamiable indulgence of spiteful passion to the story that lies behind it, we have enough that is odious without the conception of a sheer monster of wickedness, a very demon. Such a being would stand outside the range of human motives, and we could contemplate him with unconcern and detachment of mind, just as we contemplate the destructive forces of nature. There is a common temptation to clear ourselves of all semblance to the guilt of very bad people by making it out to be inhuman. It is more humiliating to discover that they act from quite human motives—nay, that those very motives may be detected, though with other bearings, even in our own conduct. For see what were the influences that stirred in the heart of Haman. He manifests by his behaviour the intimate connection between vanity and cruelty.

The first trait in his character to reveal itself is vanity, a most inordinate vanity. Haman is introduced at the moment when he has been ex-

* On the supposition that the writer is not here recording historical facts in the life of Amestris, the real queen of Xerxes, who we know was not murdered.

alted to the highest position under the king of Persia; he has just been made grand vizier. The tremendous honour turns his brain. In the consciousness of it he swells out with vanity. As a necessary consequence he is bitterly chagrined when a porter does not do homage to him as to the king. His elation is equally extravagant when he discovers that it is to be the only subject invited to meet Ahasuerus at Esther's banquet. When the king inquires how exceptional honour is to be shown to some one whose name is not yet revealed, this infatuated man jumps to the conclusion that it can be for nobody but himself. In all his behaviour we see that he is just possessed by an absorbing spirit of vanity.

Then at the first check he suffers an annoyance proportionate to the boundlessness of his previous elation. He cannot endure the sight of indifference or independence in the meanest subject. The slender fault of Mordecai is magnified into a capital offence. This again is so huge that it must be laid to the charge of the whole race to which the offender belongs. The rage which it excites in Haman is so violent that it will be satisfied with nothing short of a wholesale massacre of men, women, and children. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth"—when it is fanned by the breath of vanity. The cruelty of the vain man is as limitless as his vanity.

Thus the story of Haman illustrates the close juxtaposition of these two vices, vanity and cruelty; it helps us to see by a series of lurid pictures how fearfully provocative the one is of the other. As we follow the incidents, we can discover the links of connection between the cause and its dire effects.

In the first place, it is clear that vanity is a form of magnified egotism. The vain man thinks supremely of himself, not so much in the way of self-interest, but more especially for the sake of self-glorification. When he looks out on the world, it is always through the medium of his own vastly magnified shadow. Like the Bröcken Ghost, this shadow becomes a haunting presence standing out before him in huge proportions. He has no other standard of measurement. Everything must be judged according as it is related to himself. The good is what gives him pleasure; evil is what is noxious to him. This self-centred attitude, with the distortion of vision that it induces, has a double effect, as we may see in the case of Haman.

Egotism utilises the sufferings of others for its own ends. No doubt cruelty is often a consequence of sheer callousness. The man who has no perception of the pain he is causing or no sympathy with the sufferers will trample them under foot on the least provocation. He feels supremely indifferent to their agonies when they are writhing beneath him, and therefore he will never consider it incumbent on him to adjust his conduct with the least reference to the pain he gives. That is an entirely irrelevant consideration. The least inconvenience to himself outweighs the greatest distress of other people, for the simple reason that that distress counts as nothing in his calculation of motives. In Haman's case, however, we do not meet with this attitude of simple indifference. The grand vizier is irritated, and he vents his annoyance in a vast explosion of malignity that must take account of the agony it produces, for in that agony its own thirst for vengeance is to be slaked. But

this only shows the predominant selfishness to be all the greater. It is so great that it reverses the engines that drive society along the line of mutual helpfulness, and thwarts and frustrates any amount of human life and happiness for the sole purpose of gratifying its own desires.

Then the selfishness of vanity promotes cruelty still further by another of its effects. It destroys the sense of proportion. Self is not only regarded as the centre of the universe; like the sun surrounded by the planets, it is taken to be the greatest object, and everything else is insignificant when compared to it. What is the slaughter of a few thousand Jews to so great a man as Haman, grand vizier of Persia? It is no more than the destruction of as many flies in a forest fire that the settler has kindled to clear his ground. The same self-magnification is visibly presented by the Egyptian bas-reliefs, on which the victorious Pharaohs appear as tremendous giants driving back hordes of enemies or dragging pigmy kings by their heads. It is but a step from this condition to insanity, which is the apotheosis of vanity. The chief characteristic of insanity is a diseased enlargement of self. If he is elated the madman regards himself as a person of supreme importance—as a prince, as a king, even as God. If he is depressed he thinks that he is the victim of exceptional malignity. In that case he is beset by watchers of evil intent; the world is conspiring against him; everything that happens is part of a plot to do him harm. Hence his suspiciousness; hence his homicidal proclivities. He is not so mad in his inferences and conclusions. These may be rational and just, on the ground of his premisses. It is in the fixed ideas of these premisses that the root of his insanity may be detected. His awful fate is a warning to all who venture to indulge in the vice of excessive egotism.

In the second place, vanity leads to cruelty through the entire dependence of the vain person on the good opinion of others; and this we may see clearly in the career of Haman. Vanity is differentiated from pride in one important particular—by its outward reference. The proud man is satisfied with himself; but the vain man is always looking outside himself with feverish eagerness to secure all the honours that the world can bestow upon him. Thus Mordecai may have been proud in his refusal to bow before the upstart premier: if so his pride would not need to court admiration; it would be self-contained and self-sufficient. But Haman was possessed by an insatiable thirst for homage. If a single obscure individual refused him this honour, a shadow rested on everything. He could not enjoy the queen's banquet for the slight offered him by the Jew at the palace gate, so that he exclaimed, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."* A selfish man in this condition can have no rest if anything in the world outside him fails to minister to his honour. While a proud man in an exalted position scarcely deigns to notice the "dim common people," the vain man betrays his vulgarity by caring supremely for popular adulation. Therefore, while the haughty person can afford to pass over a slight with contempt, the vain creature who lives on the breath of applause is mortally offended by it and roused to avenge the insult with corresponding rage.

* Esther v. 13.

Selfishness and dependence on the external, these attributes of vanity inevitably develop into cruelty wherever the aims of vanity are opposed. And yet the vice that contains so much evil is rarely visited with a becoming severity of condemnation. Usually it is smiled at as a trivial frailty. In the case of Haman it threatened the extermination of a nation, and the reaction from its menace issued in a terrific slaughter of another section of society. History records war after war that has been fought on the ground of vanity. In military affairs this vice wears the name of glory; but its nature is unaltered. For what is the meaning of a war that is waged for "la gloire" but one that is designed in order to minister to the vanity of the people who undertake it? A more fearful wickedness has never blackened the pages of history. The very frivolity of the occasion heightens the guilt of those who plunge nations into misery on such a paltry pretext. It is vanity that urges a savage warrior to collect skulls to adorn the walls of his hut with the ghastly trophies; it is vanity that impels a restless conqueror to march to his own triumph through a sea of blood; it is vanity that rouses a nation to fling itself on its neighbour in order to exalt its fame by a great victory. Ambition at its best is fired by the pride of power; but in its meaner forms ambition is nothing but an uprising of vanity clamouring for wider recognition. The famous invasion of Greece by Xerxes was evidently little better than a huge exhibition of regal vanity. The childish fatuity of the king could seek for no exalted ends. His assemblage of swarms of men of all races in an ill-disciplined army too big for practical warfare showed that the thirst for display occupied the principal place in his mind, to the neglect of the more sober aims of a really great conqueror. And if the vanity that lives on the world's admiration is so fruitful in evil when it is allowed to deploy on a large scale, its essential character will not be improved by the limitation of its scope in humbler spheres of life. It is always mean and cruel.

Two other features in the character of Haman may be noticed. First, he shows energy and determination. He bribes the king to obtain the royal consent to his deadly design, bribes with an enormous present equal to the revenue of a kingdom, though Ahasuerus permits him to recoup himself by seizing the property of the proscribed nation. Then the murderous mandate goes forth: it is translated into every language of the subject peoples; it is carried to the remotest parts of the kingdom by the posts, the excellent organisation of which, under the Persian government, has become famous. Thus far everything is on a large scale, betokening a mind of resource and daring. But now turn to the sequel. "And the king and Haman sat down to drink."* It is a horrible picture—the king of Persia and his grand vizier at this crisis deliberately abandoning themselves to their national vice. The decree is out; it cannot be recalled—let it go and do its fell work. As for its authors, they are drowning all thought of its effect on public opinion in the wine-cup; they are boozing together in a disgusting companionship of debauchery on the eve of a scene of wholesale bloodshed. This is what the glory of the Great King has come to. This is the anticlimax of his minister's vanity at the moment

* Esther iii. 15.

of supreme success. After such an exhibition we need not be surprised at the abject humiliation, the terror of cowardice, the frantic effort to extort pity from a woman of the very race whose extermination he had plotted, manifested by Haman in the hour of his exposure at Esther's banquet. Beneath all his braggart energy he is a weak man. In most cases self-indulgent, vain, and cruel people are essentially weak at heart.

Looking at the story of Haman from another point of view, we see how well it illustrates the confounding of evil devices and the punishment of their author in the drama of history. It is one of the most striking instances of what is called "poetic justice," the justice depicted by the poets, but not always seen in prosaic lives, the justice that is itself a poem because it makes a harmony of events. Haman is the typical example of the schemer who "falls into his own pit," of the villain who is "hoist on his own petard." Three times the same process occurs, to impress its lesson with threefold emphasis. We have it first in the most moderate form when Haman is forced to assist in bestowing on Mordecai the honours he has been coveting for himself, by leading the horse of the hated Jew in his triumphant procession through the city. The same lesson is impressed with tragic force when the grand vizier is condemned to be impaled on the stake erected by him in readiness for the man whom he has been compelled to honour. Lastly, the design of murdering the whole race to which Mordecai belongs is frustrated by the slaughter of those who sympathise with Haman's attitude towards Israel—the "Hamanites," as they have been called. We rarely meet with such a complete reversal of fate, such a climax of vengeance. In considering the course of events here set forth we must distinguish between the old Jewish view of it and the significance of the process itself.

The Jews were taught to look on all this with fierce, vindictive glee, and to see in it the prophecy of the like fate that was treasured up for their enemies in later times. This rage of the oppressed against their oppressors, this almost fiendish delight in the complete overthrow of the enemies of Israel, this total extinction of any sentiment of pity even for the helpless and innocent sufferers who are to share the fate of their guilty relatives—in a word, this utterly un-Christlike spirit of revenge, must be odious in our eyes. We cannot understand how good men could stand by with folded arms while they saw women and children tossed into the seething cauldron of vengeance; still less how they could themselves perpetrate the dreadful deed. But then we cannot understand that tragedy of history, the oppression of the Jews, and its deteriorating influence on its victims, nor the hard, cruel spirit of blank indifference to the sufferings of others that prevailed almost everywhere before Christ came to teach the world pity.

When we turn to the events themselves we must take another view of the situation. Here was a rough and sweeping, but still a complete and striking punishment of cruel wrong. The Jews expected this too frequently on earth. We have learnt that it is more often reserved for another world and a future state of existence. Yet sometimes we are startled to see how apt it can be even in this present life. The cruel man breeds foes by his very cruelty; he rouses his own executioners by the rage that he provokes

in them. It is the same with respect to many other forms of evil. Thus vanity is punished by the humiliation it receives from those people who are irritated at its pretensions; it is the last failing that the world will readily forgive, partly perhaps because it offends the similar failing in other people. Then we see meanness chastised by the odium it excites, lying by the distrust it provokes, cowardice by the attacks it invites, coldness of heart by a corresponding indifference on the side of other people. The result is not always so neatly effected nor so visibly demonstrated as in the case of Haman; but the tendency is always present, because there is a Power that makes for righteousness presiding over society and inherent in the very constitution of nature.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

QUEEN ESTHER.

ESTHER iv. 10-v.; vii. 1-4; ix. 12, 13.

THE young Jewess who wins the admiration of the Persian king above all the chosen maidens of his realm, and who then delivers her people in the crisis of supreme danger at the risk of her own life, is the central figure in the story of the origin of Purim. It was a just perception of the situation that led to the choice of her name as the title of the book that records her famous achievements. Esther first appears as an obscure orphan who has been brought up in the humble home of her cousin Mordecai. After her guardian has secured her admission to the royal harem—a doubtful honour! we might think, but a very real honour in the eyes of an ancient Oriental—she receives a year's training with the use of the fragrant unguents that are esteemed so highly in a voluptuous Eastern court. We should not expect to see anything better than the charms of physical beauty after such a process of development, charms not of the highest type—languid, luscious, sensuous. The new name bestowed on this finished product of the chief art cultivated in the palace of Ahasuerus points to nothing higher, for "Esther" (*Istar*) is the name of a Babylonian goddess equivalent to the Greek "Aphrodite." And yet our Esther is a heroine—capable, energetic, brave, and patriotic. The splendour of her career is seen in this very fact, that she does not succumb to the luxury of her surroundings. The royal harem among the lily-beds of Shushan is like a palace in the land of the lotus-eaters, "where it is always afternoon"; and its inmates, in their dreamy indolence, are tempted to forget all obligations and interests beyond the obligation to please the king and their own interest in securing every comfort wealth can lavish on them. We do not look for a Boadicea in such a hot-house of narcotics. And when we find there a strong, unselfish woman such as Esther, conquering almost insuperable temptations to a life of ease, and choosing a course of terrible danger to herself for the sake of her oppressed people, we can echo the admiration of the Jews for their national heroine.

It is a woman, then, who plays the leading part in this drama of Jewish history. From Eve to Mary, women have repeatedly appeared in the most prominent places on the pages of Scripture.

The history of Israel finds some of its most powerful situations in the exploits of Deborah, Jael, and Judith. On the side of evil, Delilah, Athaliah, and Jezebel are not less conspicuous. There was a freedom enjoyed by the women of Israel that was not allowed in the more elaborate civilisation of the great empires of the East, and this developed an independent spirit and a vigour not usually seen in Oriental women. In the case of Esther these good qualities were able to survive the external restraints and the internal relaxing atmosphere of her court life. The scene of her story is laid in the harem. The plots and intrigues of the harem furnish its principal incidents. Yet if Esther had been a shepherdess from the mountains of Judah, she could not have proved herself more energetic. But her court life had taught her skill in diplomacy, for she had to pick her way among the greatest dangers like a person walking among concealed knives.

The beauty of Esther's character is this, that she is not spoiled by her great elevation. To be the one favourite out of all the select maidens of the kingdom, and to know that she owes her privileged position solely to the king's fancy for her personal charms, might have spoiled the grace of a simple Jewess. Haman, we saw, was ruined by his honours becoming too great for his self-control. But in Esther we do not light on a trace of the silly vanity that became the most marked characteristic of the grand vizier. It speaks well for Mordecai's sound training of the orphan girl that his ward proved to be of stable character where a weaker person would have been dizzy with selfish elation.

The unchanged simplicity of Esther's character is first apparent in her submissive obedience to her guardian even after her high position has been attained. Though she is treated as his Queen by the Great King, she does not forget the kind porter who has brought her up from childhood. In the old days she had been accustomed to obey this grave Jew, and she has no idea of throwing off the yoke now that he has no longer any recognised power over her. The habit of obedience persists in her after the necessity for it has been removed. This would not have been so remarkable if Esther had been a weak-minded woman, readily subdued and kept in subjection by a masterful will. But her energy and courage at a momentous crisis entirely forbid any such estimate of her character. It must have been genuine humility and unselfishness that prevented her from rebelling against the old home authority when a heavy injunction was laid upon her. She undertakes the dangerous part of the champion of a threatened race solely at the instance of Mordecai. He urges the duty upon her, and she accepts it meekly. She is no rough Amazon. With all her greatness and power, she is still a simple, unassuming woman.

But when Esther has assented to the demands of Mordecai, she appears in her people's cause with the spirit of true patriotism. She scorns to forget her humble origin in all the splendour of her later advancement. She will own her despised and hated people before the king; she will plead the cause of the oppressed, though at the risk of her life. She is aware of the danger of her undertaking; but she says, "If I perish, I perish." The habit of obedience could not have been strong enough to carry her through the terrible ordeal if Mordecai's hard requirement

had not been seconded by the voice of her own conscience. She knows that it is right that she should undertake this difficult and dangerous work. How naturally might she have shrunk back with regret for the seclusion and obscurity of the old days when her safety lay in her insignificance? But she saw that her new privileges involved new responsibilities. A royal harem is the last place in which we should look for the recognition of this truth. Esther is to be honoured because even in that palace of idle luxury she could acknowledge the stern obligation that so many in her position would never have glanced at. It is always difficult to perceive and act on the responsibility that certainly accompanies favour and power. This difficulty is one reason why "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." For while unusual prosperity brings unusual responsibility, simply because it affords unusual opportunities for doing good, it tends to cultivate pride and selfishness, and the miserable worldly spirit that is fatal to all high endeavour and all real sacrifice. Our Lord's great principle, "Unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required," is clear as a mathematical axiom when we look at it in the abstract; but nothing is harder than for people to apply it to their own cases. If it were freely admitted, the ambition that grasps at the first places would be shamed into silence. If it were generally acted on, the wide social cleft between the fortunate and the miserable would be speedily bridged over. The total ignoring of this tremendous principle by the great majority of those who enjoy the privileged positions in society is undoubtedly one of the chief causes of the ominous unrest that is growing more and more disturbing in the less favoured ranks of life. If this supercilious contempt for an imperative duty continues, what can be the end but an awful retribution? Was it not the wilful blindness of the dancers in the Tuileries to the misery of the serfs on the fields that caused revolutionary France to run red with blood?

Esther was wise in taking the suggestion of her cousin that she had been raised up for the very purpose of saving her people. Here was a faith, reserved and reticent, but real and powerful. It was no idle chance that had tossed her on the crest of the wave while so many of her sisters were weltering in the dark floods beneath. A clear, high purpose was leading her on to a strange and mighty destiny, and now the destiny was appearing, sublime and terrible, like some awful mountain peak that must be climbed unless the soul that has come thus far will turn traitor and fall back into failure and ignominy. When Esther saw this, she acted on it with the promptitude of the founder of her nation, who esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"; but with this difference, that, while Moses renounced his high rank in Pharaoh's court in order to identify himself with his people, the Queen of Ahasuerus retained her perilous position and turned it to good account in her saving mission. Thus there are two ways in which an exalted person may serve others. He may come down from his high estate like Moses, like Christ who was rich and for our sakes became poor; or he may take advantage of his privileged position to use it for the good of his brethren, regarding it as a trust to be held for those whom he can benefit, like

Joseph, who was able in this way to save his father and his brothers from famine, and like Esther in the present case. Circumstances will guide the willing to a decision as to which of these courses should be chosen.

We must not turn from this subject without remembering that Mordecai plied Esther with other considerations besides the thought of her mysterious destiny. He warned her that she should not escape if she disowned her people. He expressed his confidence that if she shrank from her high mission deliverance would "come from another place," to her eternal shame. Duty is difficult, and there is often a call for the comparatively lower, because more selfish, considerations that urge to it. The reluctant horse requires the spur. And yet the noble courage of Esther could not have come chiefly from fear or any other selfish motive. It must have been a sense of her high duty and wonderful destiny that inspired her. There is no inspiration like that of the belief that we are called to a great mission. This is the secret of the fanatical heroism of the Madhist dervishes. In a more holy warfare it makes heroes of the weakest.

Having once accepted her dreadful task, Esther proceeded to carry it out with courage. It was a daring act for her to enter the presence of the king unsummoned. Who could tell but that the fickle monarch might take offence at the presumption of his new favourite, as he had done in the case of her predecessor? Her lonely position might have made the strongest of women quail as she stepped forth from her seclusion and ventured to approach her lord. Her motive might be shamefully misconstrued by the low-minded monarch. Would the king hold out the golden sceptre to her? The chances of life and death hung on the answer to that question. Nehemiah, though a courageous man and a favourite of his royal master, was filled with apprehension at the prospect of a far less dangerous interview with a much more reasonable ruler than the half-mad Xerxes. These Oriental autocrats were shrouded in the terror of divinities. Their absolute power left the lives of all who approached them at the mercy of their caprice. Ahasuerus had just sanctioned a senseless, blood-thirsty decree. Very possibly he had murdered Vashti, and that on the offence of a moment. Esther was in favour, but she belonged to the doomed people, and she was committing an illegal action deliberately in the face of the king. She was Fatima risking the wrath of Bluebeard. We know how Nehemiah would have acted at this trying moment. He would have strengthened his heart with one of those sudden ejaculations of prayer that were always ready to spring to his lips on any emergency. It is not in accordance with the secular tone of the story of Esther's great undertaking that any hint of such an action on her part should have been given. Therefore we cannot say that she was a woman of no religion, that she was prayerless, that she launched on this great enterprise entirely relying on her own strength. We must distinguish between reserve and coldness in regard to religion. The fire burns while the heart muses, even though the lips are still. At all events, if it is the intention of the writer to teach that Esther was mysteriously raised up for the purpose of saving her people, it is a natural inference to conclude that she was supported in the

execution of it by unseen and silent aid. Her name does not appear in the honour roll of Hebrews xi. We cannot assert that she acted in the strength of faith. And yet there is more evidence of faith, even though it is not professed, in conduct that is true and loyal, brave and unselfish, than we can find in the loudest profession of a creed without the confirmation of corresponding conduct. "I will show my faith by my works," says St. James, and he may show it without once naming it.

It is to be noted, further, that Esther was a woman of resources. She did not trust to her courage alone to secure her end. It was not enough that she owned her people, and was willing to plead their cause. She had the definite purpose of saving them to effect. She was not content to be a martyr to patriotism; a sensible, practical woman, she did her utmost to be successful in effecting the deliverance of the threatened Jews. With this end in view, it was necessary for her to proceed warily. Her first step was gained when she had secured an audience with the king. We may surmise that her beautiful countenance was lit up with a new, rare radiance when all self-seeking was banished from her mind and an intense, noble aim fired her soul; and thus, it may be, her very loftiness of purpose helped to secure its success. Beauty is a gift, a talent, to be used for good, like any other Divine endowment; the highest beauty is the splendour of soul that sometimes irradiates the most commonplace countenance, so that, like Stephen's, it shines as the face of an angel. Instead of degrading her beauty with foolish vanity, Esther consecrated it to a noble service, and thereby it was glorified. This one talent was not lodged with her useless.

The first point was gained in securing the favour of Ahasuerus. But all was not yet won. It would have been most unwise for Esther to have burst out with her daring plea for the condemned people in the moment of the king's surprised welcome. But she was patient and skilful in managing her delicate business. She knew the king's weakness for good living, and she played upon it for her great purpose. Even when she had got him to a first banquet, she did not venture to bring out her request. Perhaps her courage failed her at the last moment. Perhaps, like a keen, observant woman, she perceived that she had not yet wheedled the king round to the condition in which it would be safe to approach the dangerous topic. So she postponed her attempt to another day and a second banquet. Then she seized her opportunity. With great tact, she began by pleading for her own life. Her piteous entreaty amazed the dense-minded monarch. At the same time the anger of his pride was roused. Who would dare to touch his favourite queen? It was a well-chosen moment to bring such a notion into the mind of a king who was changeable as a child. We may be sure that Esther had been doing her very best to please him throughout the two banquets. Then she had Haman on the spot. He, too, prime minister of Persia as he was, had to find that for once in his life he had been outwitted by a woman. Esther meant to strike while the iron was hot. So the arch-enemy of her people was there, that the king might carry out the orders to which she was skilfully leading him on without the delay which would give the party of Haman an opportunity to turn him the

other way. Haman saw it all in a moment. He confessed that the queen was mistress of the situation by appealing to her for mercy, in the frenzy of his terror even so far forgetting his place as to fling himself on her couch. That only aggravated the rage of the jealous king. Haman's fate was sealed on the spot. Esther was completely triumphant.

After this it is painful to see how the woman who had saved her people at the risk of her own life pushed her advantage to the extremity of a bloodthirsty vengeance. It is all very well to say that, as the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be altered, there was no alternative but a defensive slaughter. We may try to shelter Esther under the customs of the times; we may call to mind the fact that she was acting on the advice of Mordecai, whom she had been taught to obey from childhood, so that his was by far the greater weight of responsibility. Still, as we gaze on the portrait of the strong, brave, unselfish Jewess, we must confess that beneath all the beauty and nobility of its expression certain hard lines betray the fact that Esther is not a Madonna, that the heroine of the Jews does not reach the Christian ideal of womanhood.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MORDECAI.

ESTHER ii. 5, 6; iv. 1, 2; vi. 10, 11; ix. 1-4.

THE hectic enthusiast who inspires Daniel De-ronda with his passionate ideas is evidently a reflection in modern literature of the Mordecai of Scripture. It must be admitted that the reflection approaches a caricature. The dreaminess and morbid excitability of George Eliot's consumptive hero have no counterpart in the wise, strong Mentor of Queen Esther; and the English writer's agnosticism has led her to exclude all the Divine elements of the Jewish faith, so that on her pages the sole object of Israelite devotion is the race of Israel. But the very extravagance of the portraiture keenly accentuates what is, after all, the most remarkable trait in the original Mordecai. We are not in a position to deny that this man had a living faith in the God of his fathers; we are simply ignorant as to what his attitude towards religion was, because the author of the Book of Esther draws a veil over the religious relations of all his characters. Still the one thing prominent and pronounced in Mordecai is patriotism, devotion to Israel, the expenditure of thought and effort on the protection of his threatened people.

The first mention of the name of Mordecai introduces a hint of his national connections. We read, "There was a certain Jew in Shushan the palace, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away."* Curious freaks of exegesis have been displayed in dealing with this passage. It has been thought that the Kish mentioned in it is no other than the father of Saul, in which case the ages of the ancestors of Mordecai must rival those of the antediluvians; and it has been sug-

* Esther ii. 5, 6.

gested that Mordecai is here represented as one of the original captives from Jerusalem in the reign of Jeconiah, so that at the time of Xerxes he must have been a marvellously old man, tottering on the brink of the grave. On these grounds the genealogical note has been treated as a fanatical fiction invented to magnify the importance of Mordecai. But there is no necessity to take up any such position. It would be strange to derive Mordecai from the far-off Benjamite farmer Kish, who shines only in the reflected glory of his son, whereas we have no mention of Saul himself. There is no reason to say that another Kish may not have been found among the captives. Then it is quite possible to dispose of the second difficulty by connecting the relative clause at the beginning of verse 6—"who had been carried away"—with the nearest antecedent in the previous sentence—viz., "Kish the Benjamite." If we remove the semicolon from the end of verse 5, the clauses will run on quite smoothly and there will be no reason to go back to the name of Mordecai for the antecedent of the relative; we can read the words thus—"Kish the Benjamite who had been carried away," etc. In this way all difficulty vanishes. But the passage still retains a special significance. Mordecai was a true Jew, of the once royal tribe of Benjamin, a descendant of one of the captive contemporaries of Jeconiah, and therefore most likely a scion of a princely house. The preservation of his ancestral record gives us a hint of the sort of mental pabulum on which the man had been nurtured. Living in the palace, apparently as a porter, and possibly as a eunuch of the harem, Mordecai would have been tempted to forget his people. Nevertheless it is plain that he had cherished traditions of the sad past, and trained his soul to cling to the story of his fathers' sufferings in spite of all the distractions of a Persian court life. Though in a humbler sphere, he thus resembled Artaxerxes' cup-bearer, the great patriot Nehemiah.

The peculiarity of Mordecai's part in the story is this, that he is the moving spirit of all that is done for the deliverance of Israel at a time of desperate peril without being at first a prominent character. Thus he first appears as the guardian of his young cousin, whom he has cherished and trained, and whom he now introduces to the royal harem where she will play her more conspicuous part. Throughout the whole course of events Mordecai's voice is repeatedly heard, but usually as that of Esther's prompter. He haunts the precincts of the harem, if by chance he may catch a glimpse of his foster child. He is a lonely man now, for he has parted with the light of his home. He has done this voluntarily, unselfishly—first, to advance the lovely creature who has been committed to his charge, and secondly, as it turns out, for the saving of his people. Even now his chief thought is not for the cheering of his own solitude. His constant aim is to guide his young cousin in the difficult path of her new career. Subsequently he receives the highest honours the king can bestow; but he never seeks them, and he would be quite content to remain in the background to the end, if only his eager desire for the good of his people could be accomplished by the queen who has learnt to lean upon his counsel from her childhood. Such self-effacement is most rare and beautiful. A subtle temptation to self-regarding ambition besets the

path of every man who attempts some great public work for the good of others in a way that necessarily brings him under observation. Even though he believes himself to be inspired by the purest patriotism, it is impossible for him not to perceive that he is exposing himself to admiration by the very disinterestedness of his conduct. The rare thing is to see the same earnestness on the part of a person in an obscure place, willing that the whole of his energy should be devoted to the training and guiding of another, who alone is to become the visible agent of some great work.

The one action in which Mordecai momentarily takes the first place throws light on another side of his character. There is a secondary plot in the story. Mordecai saves the king's life by discovering to him a conspiracy. The value of this service is strikingly illustrated by the historical fact that, at a later time, just another such conspiracy issued in the assassination of Xerxes. In the distractions of his foreign expeditions and his abandonment to self-indulgence at home, the king forgets the whole affair, and Mordecai goes on his quiet way as before, never dreaming of the honour with which it is to be rewarded. Now this incident seems to be introduced to show how the intricate wheels of Providence all work on for the ultimate deliverance of Israel. The accidental discovery of Mordecai's unrequited service, when the king is beguiling the long hours of a sleepless night by listening to the chronicles of his reign, leads to the recognition of Mordecai and the first humiliation of Haman, and prepares the king for further measures. But the incident reflects a side light on Mordecai in another direction. The humble porter is loyal to the great despot. He is a passionately patriotic Jew; but his patriotism does not make a rebel of him, nor does it permit him to stand aside silently and see a villainous intrigue go on unmolested, even though it is aimed at the monarch who is holding his people in subjection. Mordecai is the humble friend of the great Persian king in the moment of danger. This is the more remarkable when we compare it with his ruthless thirst for vengeance against the known enemies of Israel. It shows that he does not treat Ahasuerus as an enemy of his people. No doubt the writer of this narrative wished it to be seen that the most patriotic Jew could be perfectly loyal to a foreign government. The shining examples of Joseph and Daniel have set the same idea before the world for the vindication of a grossly maligned people, who, like the Christians in the days of Tacitus, have been most unjustly hated as the enemies of the human race. The capacity to adapt itself loyally to the service of foreign governments, without abandoning one iota of its religion or its patriotism, is a unique trait in the genius of this wonderful race. The Zealot is not the typical Jew-patriot. He is a secretion of diseased and decayed patriotism. True patriotism is large enough and patient enough to recognise the duties that lie outside its immediate aims. Its fine perfection is attained when it can be flexible without becoming servile.

We see that in Mordecai the flexibility of Jewish patriotism was consistent with a proud scorn of the least approach to servility. He would not kiss the dust at the approach of Haman, grand vizier though the man was. It may be that he regarded this act of homage as idolatrous

—for it would seem that Persian monarchs were not unwilling to accept the adulation of Divine honours; and the vain minister was aping the airs of his royal master. But, perhaps, like those Greeks who would not humble their pride by prostrating themselves at the bidding of an Oriental barbarian, Mordecai held himself up from a sense of self-respect. In either case it must be evident that he showed a daringly independent spirit. He could not but know that such an affront as he ventured to offer to Haman would annoy the great man. But he had not calculated on the unfathomable depths of Haman's vanity. Nobody who credits his fellows with rational motives would dream that so simple an offence as this of Mordecai's could provoke so vast an act of vengeance as the massacre of a nation. When he saw the outrageous consequences of his mild act of independence, Mordecai must have felt it doubly incumbent upon him to strain every nerve to save his people. Their danger was indirectly due to his conduct. Still he could never have foreseen such a result, and therefore he should not be held responsible for it. The tremendous disproportion between motive and action in the behaviour of Haman is like one of those fantastic freaks that abound in the impossible world of "The Arabian Nights," but for the occurrence of which we make no provision in real life, simply because we do not act on the assumption that the universe is nothing better than a huge lunatic asylum.

The escape from this altogether unexpected danger is due to two courses of events. One of them—in accordance with the reserved style of the narrative—appears to be quite accidental. Mordecai got the reward he never sought in what seems to be the most casual way. He had no hand in obtaining for himself an honour which looks to us quaintly childish. For a few brief hours he was paraded through the streets of the royal city as the man whom the king delighted to honour, with no less a person than the grand vizier to serve as his groom. It was Haman's silly vanity that had invented this frivolous proceeding. We can hardly suppose that Mordecai cared much for it. After the procession had completed its round, in true Oriental fashion Mordecai put off his gorgeous robes, like a poor actor returning from the stage to his garret, and settled down to his lowly office exactly as if nothing had happened. This must seem to us a foolish business, unless we can look at it through the magnifying glass of an Oriental imagination, and even then there is nothing very fascinating in it. Still it had important consequences. For, in the first place, it prepared the way for a further recognition of Mordecai in the future. He was now a marked personage. Ahasuerus knew him, and was gratefully disposed towards him. The people understood that the king delighted to honour him. His couch would not be the softer nor his bread the sweeter; but all sorts of future possibilities lay open before him. To many men the possibilities of life are more precious than the actualities. We cannot say, however, that they meant much to Mordecai, for he was not ambitious, and he had no reason to think that the king's conscience was not perfectly satisfied with the cheap settlement of his debt of gratitude. Still the possibilities existed, and before the end of the tale they had blossomed out to very brilliant results.

But another consequence of the pageant was

that the heart of Haman was turned to gall. We see him livid with jealousy, inconsolable until his wife—who evidently knows him well—proposes to satisfy his spite by another piece of fanciful extravagance. Mordecai shall be impaled on a mighty stake, so high that all the world shall see the ghastly spectacle. This may give some comfort to the wounded vanity of the grand vizier. But consolation to Haman will be death and torment to Mordecai.

Now we come to the second course of events that issued in the deliverance and triumph of Israel, and therewith in the escape and exaltation of Mordecai. Here the watchful porter is at the spring of all that happens. His fasting, and the earnest counsels he lays upon Esther, bear witness to the intensity of his nature. Again the characteristic reserve of the narrative obscures all religious considerations. But, as we have seen already, Mordecai is persuaded that deliverance will come to Israel from some quarter and he suggests that Esther has been raised to her high position for the purpose of saving her people. We cannot but feel that these hints veil a very solid faith in the providence of God with regard to the Jews. On the surface of them they show faith in the destiny of Israel. Mordecai not only loves his nation; he believes in it. He is sure it has a future. It has survived the most awful disasters in the past. It seems to possess a charmed life. It must emerge safely from the present crisis. But Mordecai is not a fatalist whose creed paralyses his energies. He is most distressed and anxious at the prospect of the great danger that threatens his people. He is most persistent in pressing for the execution of measures of deliverance. Still in all this he is buoyed up by a strange faith in his nation's destiny. This is the faith that the English novelist has transferred to her modern Mordecai. It cannot be gainsaid that there is much in the marvellous history of the unique people, whose vitality and energy astonish us even to-day, to justify the sanguine expectation of prophetic souls that Israel has yet a great destiny to fulfil in future ages.

The ugly side of Jewish patriotism is also apparent in Mordecai, and it must not be ignored. The indiscriminate massacre of the "enemies" of the Jews is a savage act of retaliation that far exceeds the necessity of self-defence, and Mordecai must bear the chief blame of this crime. But then the considerations in extenuation of its guilt which have already come under our notice may be applied to him.* The danger was supreme. The Jews were in a minority. The king was cruel, fickle, senseless. It was a desperate case. We cannot be surprised that the remedy was desperate also. There was no moderation on either side, but then "sweet reasonableness" is the last thing to be looked for in any of the characters of the Book of Esther. Here everything is extravagant. The course of events is too grotesque to be gravely weighed in the scales that are used in the judgment of average men under average circumstances.

The Book of Esther closes with an account of the establishment of the Feast of Purim and the exaltation of Mordecai to the vacant place of Haman. The Israelite porter becomes grand vizier of Persia! This is the crowning proof of the triumph of the Jews consequent on their deliverance. The whole process of events that is-

sues so gloriously is commemorated in the annual Feast of Purim. It is true that doubts have been thrown on the historical connection between that festival and the story of Esther. It has been said that the word "Purim" may represent the portions assigned by lot, but not the lottery itself; that so trivial an accident as the method followed by Haman in selecting a day for his massacre of the Jews could not give its name to the celebration of their escape from the threatened danger; that the feast was probably more ancient, and was really the festival of the new moon for the month in which it occurs. With regard to all of these and any other objections, there is one remark that may be made here. They are solely of archaeological interest. The character and meaning of the feast as it is known to have been celebrated in historical times is not touched by them, because it is beyond doubt that throughout the ages Purim has been inspired with passionate and almost dramatic reminiscences of the story of Esther. Thus for all the celebrations of the feast that come within our ken this is its sole significance.

The worthiness of the festival will vary according to the ideas and feelings that are encouraged in connection with it. When it has been used as an opportunity for cultivating pride of race, hatred, contempt, and gleeful vengeance over humiliated foes, its effect must have been injurious and degrading. When, however, it has been celebrated in the midst of grievous oppressions, though it has embittered the spirit of animosity towards the oppressor—the Christian Haman in most cases—it has been of real service in cheering a cruelly afflicted people. Even when it has been carried through with no seriousness of intention, merely as a holiday devoted to music and dancing and games and all sorts of merry-making, its social effect in bringing a gleam of light into lives that were as a rule dimly sordid may have been decidedly healthy.

But deeper thoughts must be stirred in devout hearts when brooding over the profound significance of the national festival. It celebrates a famous deliverance of the Jews from a fearful danger. Now deliverance is the keynote of Jewish history. This note was sounded as with a trumpet blast at the very birth of the nation, when, emerging from Egypt no better than a body of fugitive slaves, Israel was led through the Red Sea and Pharaoh's hosts with their horses and chariots were overwhelmed in the flood. The echo of the triumphant burst of praise that swelled out from the exodus pealed

down the ages in the noblest songs of Hebrew Psalmists. Successive deliverances added volume to this richest note of Jewish poetry. In all who looked up to God as the Redeemer of Israel the music was inspired by profound thankfulness, by true religious adoration. And yet Purim never became the Eucharist of Israel. It never approached the solemn grandeur of Passover, that prince of festivals, in which the great primitive deliverance of Israel was celebrated with all the pomp and awe of its Divine associations. It was always in the main a secular festival, relegated to the lower plane of social and domestic entertainments, like an English bank-holiday. Still even on its own lines it could serve a serious purpose. When Israel is practically idolised by Israelites, when the glory of the nation is accepted as the highest ideal to work up to, the true religion of Israel is missed, because that is nothing less than the worship of God as He is revealed in Hebrew history. Nevertheless, in their right place, the privileges of the nation and its destinies may be made the grounds of very exalted aspirations. The nation is larger than the individual, larger than the family. An enthusiastic national spirit must exert an expansive influence on the narrow, cramped lives of the men and women whom it delivers from selfish, domestic, and parochial limitations. It was a liberal education for Jews to be taught to love their race, its history and its future. If—as seems probable—our Lord honoured the Feast of Purim by taking part in it,* He must have credited the national life of His people with a worthy mission. Himself the purest and best fruit of the stock of Israel, on the human side of His being, He realised in His own great mission of redemption the end for which God had repeatedly redeemed Israel. Thus He showed that God had saved His people, not simply for their own selfish satisfaction, but that through Christ they might carry salvation to the world.

Purged from its base associations of blood and cruelty, Purim may symbolise to us the triumph of the Church of Christ over her fiercest foes. The spirit of this triumph must be the very opposite of the spirit of wild vengeance exhibited by Mordecai and his people in their brief season of unwonted elation. The Israel of God can never conquer her enemies by force. The victory of the Church must be the victory of brotherly love, because brotherly love is the note of the true Church. But this victory Christ is winning throughout the ages, and the historical realisation of it is to us the Christian counterpart of the story of Esther.

* John v. 1.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CONTENTS.

<i>PROLOGUE.</i>	PAGE	PAGE
CHAPTER I.		CHAPTER XVI.
The Author and His Work,	693	" My Redeemer Liveth," 746
CHAPTER II.		CHAPTER XVII.
The Opening Scene on Earth,	697	Ignorant Criticism of Life, 751
CHAPTER III.		CHAPTER XVIII.
The Opening Scene in Heaven,	700	Are the Ways of the Lord Equal? 754
CHAPTER IV.		<i>THE THIRD COLLOQUY.</i>
The Shadow of God's Hand,	704	CHAPTER XIX.
CHAPTER V.		Dogmatic and Moral Error, 757
The Dilemma of Faith,	709	CHAPTER XX.
<i>THE FIRST COLLOQUY.</i>		Where is Eloah? 760
CHAPTER VI.		CHAPTER XXI.
The Cry from the Depth,	712	The Dominion and the Brightness, 704
CHAPTER VII.		CHAPTER XXII.
The Things Eliphaz had Seen,	716	The Outskirts of His Ways, 765
CHAPTER VIII.		CHAPTER XXIII.
Men False : God Overbearing,	720	Choral Interlude, 768
CHAPTER IX.		CHAPTER XXIV.
Venturesome Theology,	725	As a Prince before the King, 770
CHAPTER X.		<i>ELIHU INTERVENES.</i>
The Thought of a Daysman,	726	CHAPTER XXV.
CHAPTER XI.		Post-Exilic Wisdom, 774
A Fresh Attempt to Convict,	728	CHAPTER XXVI.
CHAPTER XII.		The Divine Prerogative, 779
Beyond Fact and Fear to God,	731	<i>THE VOICE FROM THE STORM.</i>
<i>THE SECOND COLLOQUY.</i>		CHAPTER XXVII.
CHAPTER XIII.		" Music in the Bounds of Law," 783
The Tradition of a Pure Race,	737	CHAPTER XXVIII.
CHAPTER XIV.		The Reconciliation, 786
" My Witness in Heaven,"	741	CHAPTER XXIX.
CHAPTER XV.		Epilogue, 789
A Scheme of World-Rule,	744	

THE BOOK OF JOB.

BY THE REV. ROBERT A. WATSON, D. D.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK.

THE Book of Job is the first great poem of the soul in its mundane conflict, facing the inexorable of sorrow, change, pain, and death, and feeling within itself at one and the same time weakness and energy, the hero and the serf, brilliant hopes, terrible fears. With entire veracity and amazing force this book represents the never-ending drama renewed in every generation and every genuine life. It breaks upon us as out of the old world and dim muffled centuries with all the vigour of the modern soul and that religious impetuosity which none but Hebrews seem fully to have known. Looking for precursors of Job we find a seeming spiritual burden and intensity in the Accadian psalms, their confessions and prayers; but if they prepared the way for Hebrew psalmists and for the author of Job, it was not by awaking the cardinal thoughts that make this book what it is, nor by supplying an example of the dramatic order, the fine sincerity and abounding art we find here welling up out of the desert. The Accadian psalms are fragments of a polytheistic and ceremonial world; they spring from the soil which Abraham abandoned that he might found a race of strong men and strike out a new clear way of life. Exhibiting the fear, superstition, and ignorance of our race, they fall away from comparison with the marvellous later work and leave it unique among the legacies of man's genius to man's need. Before it a few notes of the awakening heart, athirst for God, were struck in those Chaldaean entreaties, and more finely in Hebrew psalm and oracle: but after it have come in rich multiplying succession the Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ecclesiastes, the Apocalypse, the Confessions of Augustine, the Divina Commedia, Hamlet, Paradise Regained, the Grace Abounding of Bunyan, the Faust of Goethe and its progeny, Shelley's poems of revolt and freedom, Sartor Resartus, Browning's Easter Day and Rabbi Ben Ezra, Amiel's Journal, with many other writings, down to "Mark Rutherford" and the "Story of an African Farm." The old tree has sent forth a hundred shoots, and is still full of sap to our most modern sense. It is a chief source of the world's penetrating and poignant literature.

But there is another view of the book. It may well be the despair of those who desire above all things to separate letters from theology. The surpassing genius of the writer is seen not in his fine calm of assurance and self-possession, nor in the deft gathering and arranging of beautiful images, but in his sense of elemental realities and the daring with which he launches on a painful conflict. He is convinced of Divine sovereignty, and yet has to seek room for faith in a world shadowed and confused. He is

a prophet in quest of an oracle, a poet, a maker, striving to find where and how the man for whom he is concerned shall sustain himself. And yet, with this paradox wrought into its very substance, his work is richly fashioned, a type of the highest literature, drawing upon every region natural and supernatural, descending into the depths of human woe, rising to the heights of the glory of God, never for one moment insensible to the beauty and sublimity of the universe. It is literature with which theology is so blended that none can say, Here is one, there the other. The passion of that race which gave the world the idea of the soul, which clung with growing zeal to the faith of the One Eternal God as the fountain of life and equally of justice, this passion in one of its rarest modes pours through the Book of Job like a torrent, forcing its way towards the freedom of faith, the harmony of intuition with the truth of things. The book is all theology, one may say, and all humanity no less. Singularly liberal in spirit and awake to the various elements of our life, it is moulded, notwithstanding its passion, by the artist's pleasure in perfecting form, adding wealth of allusion and ornament to strength of thought. The mind of the writer has not hastened. He has taken long time to brood over his torment and seek deliverance. The fire burns through the sculpture and carved framework and painted windows of his art with no loss of heat. Yet, as becomes a sacred book, all is sobered and restrained to the rhythmic flow of dramatic evolution, and it is as if the eager soul had been chastened, even in its fieriest endeavour, by the regular procession of nature, sunrise and sunset, spring and harvest, and by the sense of the Eternal One, Lord of light and darkness, life and death. Built where, before it, building had never been reared in such firmness of structure and glow of orderly art, with such design to shelter the soul, the work is a fresh beginning in theology as well as literature, and those who would separate the two must show us how to separate them here, must explain why their union in this poem is to the present moment so richly fruitful. An origin it stands by reason of its subject no less than its power, sincerity, and freedom.

A phenomenon in Hebrew thought and faith—to what age does it belong? No record or reminiscence of the author is left from which the least hint of time may be gathered. He, who by his marvellous poem struck a chord of thought deep and powerful enough to vibrate still and stir the modern heart, is uncelebrated, nameless. A traveller, a master of his country's language, and versed no less in foreign learning, foremost of the men of his day whensoever it was, he passed away as a shadow, though he left an imperishable monument. "Like a star of the first magnitude," says Dr. Samuel Davidson, "the brilliant genius of the writer of Job attracts the admiration of men as it points to the Almighty Ruler chastening yet loving His people. Of one whose sublime conceptions (mounting the height where Jehovah is enthroned in light, inaccessible to mortal

eye) lift him far above his time and people—who climbs the ladder of the Eternal, as if to open heaven—of this giant philosopher and poet we long to know something, his habitation, name, appearance. The very spot where his ashes rest we desire to gaze upon. But in vain." Strange, do we say? And yet how much of her great poet, Shakespeare, does England know? It is not seldom the fate of those whose genius lifts them highest to be unrecognised by their own time. As English history tells us more of Leicester than of Shakespeare, so Hebrew history records by preference the deeds of its great King Solomon. A greater than Solomon was in Israel, and history knows him not. No prophet who followed him and wrought sentences of his poem into lamentation or oracle, no chronicler of the exile or the return, preserving the names and lineage of the nobles of Israel, has mentioned him. Literary distinction, the praise of service to his country's faith could not have been in his mind. They did not exist. He was content to do his work, and leave it to the world and to God.

And yet the man lives in his poem. We begin to hope that some indication of the period and circumstances in which he wrote may be found when we realise that here and there beneath the heat and eloquence of his words may be heard those undertones of personal desire and trust which once were the solemn music of a life. His own, not his hero's, are the philosophy of the book, the earnest search for God, the sublime despondency, the bitter anguish, and the prophetic cry that breaks through the darkness. We can see that it is vain to go back to Mosaic or pre-Mosaic times for life and thought and words like his; at whatever time Job lived, the poet-biographer deals with the perplexities of a more anxious world. In the imaginative light with which he invests the past no distinct landmarks of time are to be seen. The treatment is large, general, as if the burden of his subject carried the writer not only into the great spaces of humanity, but into a region where the temporal faded into insignificance as compared with the spiritual. And yet, as through openings in a forest, we have glimpses here and there, vaguely and momentarily showing what age it was the author knew. The picture is mainly of timeless patriarchal life; but, in the foreground or the background, objects and events are sketched that help our inquiry. "His troops come together and cast up their way against me." "From out of the populous city men groan, and the soul of the wounded crieth out." "He looseth the bond of kings, and bindeth their loins with a girdle; He leadeth priests away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. . . . He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them; He spreadeth the nations abroad and bringeth them in." No quiet patriarchal life in a region sparsely peopled, where the years went slow and placid, could have supplied these elements of the picture. The writer has seen the woes of the great city in which the tide of prosperity flows over the crushed and dying. He has seen, and, indeed, we are almost sure has suffered in, some national disaster like those to which he refers. A Hebrew, not of the age after the return from exile,—for the style of his writing, partly through the use of Arabic and Aramaic forms, has more of rude vigour and spontaneity on the whole than fits so late a date,—he appears to have felt all the sorrows

of his people when the conquering armies of Assyria or of Babylon overran their land.

The scheme of the book helps to fix the time of the composition. A drama so elaborate could not have been produced until literature had become an art. Such complexity of structure as we find in Psalm cxix. shows that by the time of its composition much attention was paid to form. It is no longer the pure lyric cry of the unlearned singer, but the ode, extremely artificial notwithstanding its sincerity. The comparatively late date of the Book of Job appears in the orderly balanced plan, not indeed so laboured as the psalm referred to, but certainly belonging to a literary age.

Again, a note of time has been found by comparing the contents of Job with Proverbs, Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, and other books. Proverbs, chapters iii. and viii., for example, may be contrasted with chap. xxviii. of the Book of Job. Placing them together we can hardly escape the conclusion that the one writer had been acquainted with the work of the other. Now, in Proverbs it is taken for granted that wisdom may easily be found: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. . . . Keep sound wisdom and discretion; so shall they be life unto thy soul and grace to thy neck." The author of the panegyric has no difficulty about the Divine rules of life. Again, Proverbs viii. 15, 16: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." In Job xxviii., however, we find a different strain. There it is: "Where shall wisdom be found? . . . It is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air;" and the conclusion is that wisdom is with God, not with man. Of the two it seems clear that the Book of Job is later. It is occupied with questions which make wisdom, the interpretation of providence and the ordering of life, exceedingly hard. The writer of Job, with the passages in Proverbs before him, appears to have said to himself: Ah! it is easy to praise wisdom and advise men to choose wisdom and walk in her ways. But to me the secrets of existence are deep, the purposes of God unfathomable. He is fain, therefore, to put into the mouth of Job the sorrowful cry, "Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof. . . . It cannot be gotten for gold." Both in Proverbs and Job, indeed, the source of Hokhma or wisdom is ascribed to the fear of Jehovah; but the whole contention in Job is that man fails in the intellectual apprehension of the ways of God. Referring the earlier portions of Proverbs to the post-Solomonic age we should place the Book of Job at a later date.

It is not within our scope to consider here all the questions raised by parallel passages and discuss the priority and originality in each case. Some resemblances in Isaiah may, however, be briefly noticed, because we seem on the whole to be led to the conclusion that the Book of Job was written between the periods of the first and second series of Isaian oracles. They are such as these. In Isaiah xix. 5, "The waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and become dry,"—referring to the Nile: parallel in Job xiv. 11, "As the waters fail from the sea, and the river decayeth and drieth up,"—referring to the passing of human life. In Isaiah xix. 13,

"The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have caused Egypt to go astray,"—an oracle of specific application: parallel in Job xii. 24. "He taketh away the heart of the chiefs of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way,"—a description at large. In Isaiah xxviii. 29. "This also cometh forth from Jehovah of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom"; parallel in Job xi. 5, 6, "Oh that God would speak, and open His lips against thee; and that He would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that it is manifold in effectual working!" The resemblance between various parts of Job and "the writing of Hezekiah when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness," are sufficiently obvious, but cannot be used in any argument of time. And on the whole, so far, the generality and, in the last case, somewhat stiff elaboration of the ideas in Job as compared with Isaiah are almost positive proof that Isaiah went first. Passing now to the fortieth and subsequent chapters of Isaiah we find many parallels and much general similarity to the contents of our poem. In Job xxvi. 12. "He stirreth up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He smiteth through Rahab"; parallel in Isaiah li. 9, 10. "Art thou not it that cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon? Art thou not it which dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep?" In Job ix. 8, "Which alone stretcheth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea"; parallel in Isaiah xl. 22, "That stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." In these and other cases the resemblance is clear, and on the whole the simplicity and apparent originality lie with the Book of Job. Professor Davidson claims that Job, called by God "My servant," resembles in many points the servant of Jehovah in Isaiah liii., and the claim must be admitted. But on what ground Kuenen can affirm that the writer of Job had the second portion of Isaiah before him and painted his hero from it one fails to see. There are many obvious differences.

It has now become almost clear that the book belongs either to the period (favoured by Ewald, Renan, and others) immediately following the captivity of the northern tribes, or to the time of the captivity of Judah (fixed upon by Dr. A. B. Davidson, Professor Cheyne, and others). We must still, however, seek further light by glancing at the main problem of the book, which is to reconcile the justice of Divine providence with the sufferings of the good, so that man may believe in God even in sorest affliction. We must also consider the hint of time to be found in the importance attached to personality, the feelings and destiny of the individual and his claim on God.

Taking first the problem,—while it is stated in some of the psalms and, indeed, is sure to have occurred to many a sufferer, for most think themselves undeserving of great pain and affliction,—the attempt to grapple with it is first made in Job. The Proverbs, Deuteronomy, and the historical books take for granted that prosperity follows religion and obedience to God, and that suffering is the punishment of disobedience. The prophets also, though they have their own view of national success, do not dispense with it as an evidence of Divine favour. Cases no doubt were before the mind of inspired writers which

made any form of the theory difficult to hold. But these were regarded as temporary and exceptional, if indeed they could not be explained by the rule that God sends earthly prosperity to the good, and suffering to the bad in the long run. To deny this and to seek another rule was the distinction of the author of Job, his bold and original adventure in theology. And the attempt was natural, one may say necessary, at a time when the Hebrew states were suffering from those shocks of foreign invasion which threw their society, commerce, and politics into the direst confusion. The old ideas of religion no longer sufficed. Overcome in war, driven out of their own land, they needed a faith which could sustain and cheer them in poverty and dispersion. A generation having no outlook beyond captivity was under a curse from which penitence and renewed fidelity could not secure deliverance. The assurance of God's friendship in affliction had to be sought.

The importance attached to personality and the destiny of the individual is on two sides a guide to the date of the book. In some of the psalms, undoubtedly belonging to an earlier period, the personal cry is heard. No longer content to be part and parcel of the class or nation, the soul in these psalms asserts its direct claim on God for light and comfort and help. And some of them, the thirteenth for example, insist passionately on the right of a believing man to a portion in Jehovah. Now in the dispersion of the northern tribes or the capture of Jerusalem this personal question would be keenly accentuated. Amidst the disasters of such a time those who are faithful and pious suffer along with the rebellious and idolatrous. Because they are faithful to God, virtuous and patriotic beyond the rest, they may indeed have more affliction and loss to endure. The psalmist among his own people, oppressed and cruelly wronged, has the need of a personal hope forced upon him, and feels that he must be able to say, "The Lord is *my* shepherd." Yet he cannot entirely separate himself from his people. When those of his own house and kindred rise against him, still they too may claim Jehovah as their God. But the homeless exile, deprived of all, a solitary wanderer on the face of the earth, has need to seek more earnestly for the reason of his state. The nation is broken up; and if he is to find refuge in God, he must look for other hopes than hinge on national recovery. It is the God of the whole earth he must now seek as his portion. A unit not of Israel but of humanity, he must find a bridge over the deep chasm that seems to separate his feeble life from the Almighty, a chasm all the deeper that he has been plunged into sore trouble. He must find assurance that the unit is not lost to God among the multitudes, that the life broken and prostrate is neither forgotten nor rejected by the Eternal King. And this precisely corresponds with the temper of our book and the conception of God we find in it. A man who has known Jehovah as the God of Israel seeks his justification, cries for his individual right to Eloah, the Most High, the God of universal nature and humanity and providence.

Now, it has been alleged that through the Book of Job there runs a constant but covert reference to the troubles of the Jewish Church in the Captivity, and especially that Job himself represents the suffering flock of God. It is not

proposed to give up entirely the individual problem, but along with that, superseding that, the main question of the poem is held to be why Judah should suffer so keenly and lie on the *mezbele* or ash-heap of exile. With all respect to those who hold this theory one must say that it has no substantial support; and, on the other hand, it seems incredible that a member of the Southern Kingdom (if the writer belonged to it), expending so much care and genius on the problem of his people's defeat and misery, should have passed beyond his own kin for a hero, should have set aside almost entirely the distinctive name Jehovah, should have forgotten the ruined temple and the desolate city to which every Jew looked back across the desert with brimming eyes, should have let himself appear, even while he sought to reassure his compatriots in their faith, as one who set no store by their cherished traditions, their great names, their religious institutions, but as one whose faith was purely natural like that of Edom. Among the good and true men who, at the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, were left in penury, childless and desolate, a poet of Judah would have found a Jewish hero. To his drama what embellishment and pathos could have been added by genius like our author's, if he had gone back on the terrible siege and painted the Babylonian victors in their cruelty and pride, the misery of the exiles in the land of idolatry. One cannot help believing that to this writer Jerusalem was nothing, that he had no interest in its temple, no love for its ornate religious services and growing exclusiveness. The suggestion of Ewald may be accepted, that he was a member of the Northern Kingdom driven from his home by the overthrow of Samaria. Undeniable is the fact that his religion has more sympathy with Teman than with Jerusalem as it was. If he belonged to the north this seems to be explained. To seek help from the priesthood and worship of the temple did not occur to him. Israel broken up, he has to begin afresh. For it is with his own religious trouble he is occupied; and the problem is universal.

Against the identification of Job with the servant of Jehovah in Isaiah liii. there is one objection, and it is fatal. The author of Job has no thought of the central idea in that passage—vicarious suffering. New light would have been thrown on the whole subject if one of the friends had been made to suggest the possibility that Job was suffering for others, that the "chastisement of their peace" was laid on him. Had the author lived after the return from captivity and heard of this oracle, he would surely have wrought into his poem the latest revelation of the Divine method in helping and redeeming men.

The distinction of the Book of Job we have seen to be that it offers a new beginning in theology. And it does so not only because it shifts faith in the Divine justice to a fresh basis, but also because it ventures on a universalism for which indeed the Proverbs had made way, which however stood in sharp contrast to the narrowness of the old state religion. Already it was admitted that others than Hebrews might love the truth, follow righteousness, and share the blessings of the heavenly King. To that broader faith, enjoyed by the thinkers and prophets of Israel, if not by the priests and people, the author of the Book of Job added the bold-

ness of a more liberal inspiration. He went beyond the Hebrew family for his hero to make it clear that man, as man, is in direct relation to God. The Psalms and the Book of Proverbs might be read by Israelites and the belief still retained that God would prosper Israel alone, at any rate in the end. Now, the man of Uz, the Arabian sheikh, outside the sacred fraternity of the tribes, is presented as a fearer of the true God—His trusted witness and servant. With the freedom of a prophet bringing a new message of the brotherhood of men our author points us beyond Israel to the desert oasis.

Yes: the creed of Hebraism had ceased to guide thought and lead the soul to strength. The Hokhma literature of Proverbs, which had become fashionable in Solomon's time, possessed no dogmatic vigour, fell often to the level of moral platitude, as the same kind of literature does with us, and had little help for the soul. The state religion, on the other hand, both in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, was ritualistic, again like ours, clung to the old tribal notion, and busied itself about the outward more than the inward, the sacrifices rather than the heart, as Amos and Isaiah clearly indicate. Hokhma of various kinds, plus energetic ritualism, was falling into practical uselessness. Those who held the religion as a venerable inheritance and national talisman did not base their action and hope on it out in the world. They were beginning to say, "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life—all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" A new theology was certainly needed for the crisis of the time.

The author of the Book of Job found no school possessed of the secret of strength. But he sought to God, and inspiration came to him. He found himself in the desert like Elijah, like others long afterwards, John the Baptist, and especially Saul of Tarsus, whose words we remember, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem, . . . but I went into Arabia." There he met with a religion not confined by rigid ceremony as that of the southern tribes, not idolatrous like that of the north, a religion elementary indeed, but capable of development. And he became its prophet. He would take the wide world into council. He would hear Teman and Shuach and Naamah; he would also hear the voice from the whirlwind, and the swelling sea, and the troubled nations, and the eager soul. It was a daring dash beyond the ramparts. Orthodoxy might stand aghast within its fortress. He might appear a renegade in seeking tidings of God from the heathen, as one might now who went from a Christian land to learn from the Brahman and the Buddhist. But he would go nevertheless; and it was his wisdom. He opened his mind to the sight of fact, and reported what he found, so that theology might be corrected and made again a handmaid of faith. He is one of those Scripture writers who vindicate the universality of the Bible, who show it to be a unique foundation, and forbid the theory of a closed record or dried-up spring, which is the error of Bibliolatry. He is a man of his age and of the world, yet in fellowship with the Eternal Mind.

An exile, let us suppose, of the Northern Kingdom, escaping with his life from the sword of the Assyrian, the author of our book has taken his way into the Arabian wilderness and there

found the friendship of some chief and a safe retreat among his people. The desert has become familiar to him, the sandy wastes and vivid oases, the fierce storms and affluent sunshine, the animal and vegetable life, the patriarchal customs and legends of old times. He has travelled through Idumæa, and seen the desert tombs, on to Midian and its lonely peaks. He has heard the roll of the Great Sea on the sands of the Shefelah, and seen the vast tide of the Nile flowing through the verdure of the Delta and past the pyramids of Memphis. He has wandered through the cities of Egypt and viewed their teeming life, turning to the use of imagination and religion all he beheld. With a relish for his own language, yet enriching it by the words and ideas of other lands, he has practised himself in the writer's art, and at length, in some hour of burning memory and revived experience, he has caught at the history of one who, yonder in a valley of the eastern wilderness, knew the shocks of time and pain though his heart was right with God; and in the heat of his spirit the poet-exile makes the story of that life into a drama of the trial of human faith,—his own endurance and vindication, his own sorrow and hope.

CHAPTER II.

THE OPENING SCENE ON EARTH.

JOB i. 1-5.

THE land of Uz appears to have been a general name for the great Syro-Arabian desert. It is described vaguely as lying "east of Palestine and north of Edom," or as "corresponding to the *Arabia Deserta* of classical geography, at all events so much of it as lies north of the 30th parallel of latitude." In Jer. xxv. 20, among those to whom the wine-cup of fury is sent, are mentioned "all the mingled people and all the kings of the land of Uz." But within this wide region, extending from Damascus to Arabia, from Palestine to Chaldæa, it seems possible to find a more definite locality for the dwelling-place of Job. Eliphaz, one of his friends, belonged to Teman, a district or city of Idumæa. In Lam. iv. 21, the writer, who may have had the Book of Job before him, says, "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz"; a passage that seems to indicate a habitable region, not remote from the gorges of Idumæa. It is necessary also to fix on a district which lay in the way of the caravans of Sheba and Tema, and was exposed to the attacks of lawless bands of Chaldæans and Sabeans. At the same time there must have been a considerable population, abundant pasturage for large flocks of camels and sheep, and extensive tracts of arable land. Then, the dwelling of Job lay near a city at the gate of which he sat with other elders to administer justice. The attention paid to details by the author of the book warrants us in expecting that all these conditions may be satisfied.

A tradition which places the home of Job in the Hauran, the land of Bashan of Scripture, some score of miles from the Sea of Galilee, has been accepted by Delitzsch. A monastery, there, appears to have been regarded from early Christian times as authentically connected with the

name of Job. But the tradition has little value in itself, and the locality scarcely agrees in a single particular with the various indications found in the course of the book. The Hauran does not belong to the land of Uz. It was included in the territory of Israel. Nor can it by any stretch of imagination be supposed to lie in the way of wandering bands of Sabeans, whose home was in the centre of Arabia.

But the conditions are met—one has no hesitation in saying, fully met—in a region hitherto unidentified with the dwelling-place of Job, the valley or oasis of Jauf (Palgrave, *Djowf*), lying in the North Arabian desert about two hundred miles almost due east from the modern Maan and the ruins of Petra. Various interesting particulars regarding this valley and its inhabitants are given by Mr. C. M. Doughty in his "Travels in Arabia Deserta." But the best description is that by Mr. Palgrave, who, under the guidance of Bedawin, visited the district in 1862. Travelling from Maan by way of the Wadi Sirhan, after a difficult and dangerous journey of thirteen days, their track in the last stage following "endless windings among low hills and stony ledges," brought them to greener slopes and traces of tillage, and at length "entered a long and narrow pass, whose precipitous banks shut in the view on either side." After an hour of tedious marching in terrible heat, turning a huge pile of crags, they looked down into the Jauf.

"A broad, deep valley, descending ledge after ledge till its innermost depths are hidden from sight amid far-reaching shelves of reddish rock, below everywhere studded with tufts of palm groves and clustering fruit trees in dark green patches, down to the farthest end of its windings; a large brown mass of irregular masonry crowning a central hill; beyond, a tall and solitary tower overlooking the opposite bank of the hollow, and farther down, small round turrets and flat house-roofs, half buried amid the garden foliage, the whole plunged in a perpendicular flood of light and heat; such was the first aspect of the Djowf as we now approached it from the west." The principal town bears the name of the district, and is composed of eight villages, once distinct, which have in process of time coalesced into one. The principal quarter includes the castle, and numbers about four hundred houses. "The province is a large oval depression, of sixty or seventy miles long by ten or twelve broad, lying between the northern desert that separates it from Syria and Euphrates, and the southern Nefood, or sandy waste." Its fertility is great and is aided by irrigation, so that the dates and other fruits produced in the Jauf are famed throughout Arabia. The people "occupy a half-way position between Bedouins and the inhabitants of the cultivated districts." Their number is reckoned at about forty thousand, and there can be no question that the valley has been a seat of population from remote antiquity. To the other points of identification may be added this, that in the Wadi Sirhan, not far from the entrance to the Jauf, Mr. Palgrave passed a poor settlement with the name Oweysit, or Owsit, which at least suggests the *ἔρ χάρα τῆ Αὐσίτιδι* of the Septuagint, and the Outz, or Uz, of our text. With population, an ancient city, fertile fields, and ample pasturage in the middle of the desert, the nearest habitable region to Edom, in the way of caravans, gen-

erally safe from predatory tribes, yet exposed to those from the east and south that might make long expeditions under pressure of great need, the valley of the Jauf appears to correspond in every important particular with the dwelling-place of the man of Uz.

The question whether such a man as Job ever lived has been variously answered, one Hebrew rabbi, for example, affirming that he was a mere parable. But Ezekiel names him along with Noah and Daniel, James in his epistle says, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job"; and the opening words of this book, "There was a man in the land of Uz," are distinctly historical. To know, therefore, that a region in the Arabian desert corresponds so closely with the scene of Job's life is to be reassured that a true history forms the basis of the poem. The tradition with which the author began his work probably supplied the name and dwelling-place of Job, his wealth, piety, and afflictions, including the visit of his friends, and his restoration after sore trial from the very gate of despair to faith and prosperity. The rest comes from the genius of the author of the drama. This is a work of imagination based on fact. And we do not proceed far till we find, first ideal touches, then bold flights into a region never opened to the gaze of mortal eye.

Job is described in the third verse as one of the Children of the East or Bene-Kedem, a vague expression denoting the settled inhabitants of the North Arabian desert, in contrast to the wandering Bedawin and the Sabæans of the South. In Genesis and Judges they are mentioned along with the Amalekites, to whom they were akin. But the name as used by the Hebrews probably covered the inhabitants of a large district very little known. Of the Bene-Kedem Job is described as the greatest. His riches meant power, and in the course of the frequent alternations of life in those regions one who had enjoyed unbroken prosperity for many years would be regarded with veneration not only for his wealth, but for what it signified—the constant favour of Heaven. He had his settlement near the city, and was the acknowledged emeer of the valley, taking his place at the gate as chief judge. How great a chief one might become who added to his flocks and herds year by year and managed his affairs with prudence we learn from the history of Abraham; and to the present day, where the patriarchal mode of living and customs continue, as among the Kurds of the Persian highland, examples of wealth in sheep and oxen, camels and asses almost approaching that of Job are sometimes to be met with. The numbers—seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she-asses—are probably intended simply to represent his greatness. Yet they are not beyond the range of possibility.

The family of Job—his wife, seven sons, and three daughters—are about him when the story begins, sharing his prosperity. In perfect friendliness and idyllic joy the brothers and sisters spend their lives, the shield of their father's care and religion defending them. Each of the sons has a day on which he entertains the others, and at the close of the circle of festivities, whether weekly or once a year, there is a family sacrifice. The father is solicitous lest his children, speaking or even thinking irreverently, may have dishonoured God. For this reason he makes the

periodic offering, from time to time keeping on behalf of his household a day of atonement. The number of the children is not necessarily ideal, nor is the round of festivals and sacred observances. Yet the whole picture of happy family life and unbroken joy begins to lift the narrative into an imaginative light. So fine a union of youthful enjoyment and fatherly sympathy and puritanism is seldom approached in this world. The poet has kept out of his picture the shadows which must have lurked beneath the sunny surface of life. It is not even suggested that the recurring sacrifices were required. Job's thoughtfulness is precautionary: "It may be that my sons have sinned, and renounced God in their hearts." The children are dear to him, so dear that he would have nothing come between them and the light of heaven.

For the religion of Job, sincere and deep, disclosing itself in these offerings to the Most High, is, above his fatherly affection and sympathy, the distinction with which the poet shows him invested. He is a fearer of the One Living and True God, the Supremely Holy. In the course of the drama the speeches of Job often go back on his faithfulness to the Most High; and we can see that he served his fellow-men justly and generously because he believed in a Just and Generous God. Around him were worshippers of the sun and moon, whose adoration he had been invited to share. But he never joined in it, even by kissing his hand when the splendid lights of heaven moved with seeming Divine majesty across the sky. For him there was but One God, unseen yet ever present, to whom, as the Giver of all, he did not fail to offer thanksgiving and prayer with deepening faith. In his worship of this God the old order of sacrifice had its place, simple, unceremonious. Head of the clan, he was the priest by natural right, and offered sheep or bullock that there might be atonement, or maintenance of fellowship with the Friendly Power who ruled the world. His religion may be called a nature religion of the finest type—reverence, faith, love, freedom. There is no formal doctrine beyond what is implied in the names Eloah, the Lofty One, Shaddai, Almighty, and in those simple customs of prayer, confession, and sacrifice in which all believers agreed. Of the law of Moses, the promises to Abraham, and those prophetic revelations by which the covenant of God was assured to the Hebrew people Job knows nothing. His is a real religion, capable of sustaining the soul of man in righteousness, a religion that can save; but it is a religion learned from the voices of earth and sky and sea, and from human experience through the inspiration of the devout obedient heart. The author makes no attempt to reproduce the beliefs of patriarchal times as described in Genesis, but with a sincere and sympathetic touch he shows what a fearer of God in the Arabian desert might be. Job is such a man as he may have personally known.

In the region of Idumæa the faith of the Most High was held in remarkable purity by learned men, who formed a religious caste or school of wide reputation; and Teman, the home of Eliphaz, appears to have been the centre of the cultus. "Is wisdom no more in Teman?" cries Jeremiah. "Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom (hokhma) vanished?" And Obadiah makes a similar reference: "Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, destroy the

wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?" In Isaiah the darkened wisdom of some time of trouble and perplexity is reflected in the "burden of Dumah," that is, Idumæa: "One calleth unto me out of Seir," as if with the hope of clearer light on Divine providence, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" And the answer is an oracle in irony, almost enigma: "The morning cometh, and also the night. If ye will inquire, inquire; turn, come." Not for those who dwell in shadowed Dumah was the clear light of Hebrew prophecy. But the wisdom or hokhma of Edom and its understanding were nevertheless of the kind in Proverbs and elsewhere constantly associated with true religion and represented as almost identical with it. And we may feel assured that when the Book of Job was written there was good ground for ascribing to sages of Teman and Uz an elevated faith.

For a Hebrew like the author of Job to lay aside for a time the thought of his country's traditions, the law and the prophets, the covenant of Sinai, the sanctuary, and the altar of witness, and return in writing his poem to the primitive faith which his forefathers grasped when they renounced the idolatry of Chaldea was after all no grave abandonment of privilege. The beliefs of Teman, sincerely held, were better than the degenerate religion of Israel against which Amos testified. Had not that prophet even pointed the way when he cried in Jehovah's name—"Seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba. . . . Seek Him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; Jehovah is His name?" Israel after apostasy may have needed to begin afresh, and to seek on the basis of the primal faith a new atonement with the Almighty. At all events there were many around, not less the subjects of God and beloved by Him, who stood in doubt amidst the troubles of life and the ruin of earthly hopes. Teman and Uz were in the dominion of the heavenly King. To correct and confirm their faith would be to help the faith of Israel also and give the true religion of God fresh power against idolatry and superstition.

The book which returned thus to the religion of Teman found an honourable place in the roll of sacred Scriptures. Although the canon was fixed by Hebrews at a time when the narrowness of the post-exilic age drew toward Pharisaism, and the law and the temple were regarded with veneration far greater than in the time of Solomon, room was made for this book of broad human sympathy and free faith. It is a mark at once of the wisdom of the earlier rabbis and their judgment regarding the essentials of religion. To Israel, as St. Paul afterwards said, belonged "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." But he too shows the same disposition as the author of our poem to return on the primitive and fundamental—the justification of Abraham by his faith, the promise made to him, and the covenant that extended to his family: "They which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham"; "They which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham"; "Not through the law was the promise

to Abraham or to his seed": "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." A greater than St. Paul has shown us how to use the Old Testament, and we have perhaps misunderstood the intent with which our Lord carried the minds of men back to Abraham and Moses and the prophets. He gave a religion to the whole world. Was it not then the spiritual dignity, the religious breadth of the Israelite fathers, their sublime certainty of God, their glow and largeness of faith for which Christ went back to them? Did He not for these find them preparers of His own way?

From the religion of Job we pass to consider his character described in the words, "That man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." The use of four strong expressions, cumulatively forming a picture of the highest possible worth and piety, must be held to point to an ideal life. The epithet *perfect* is applied to Noah, and once and again in the Psalms to the disposition of the good. Generally, however, it refers rather to the scheme or plan by which conduct is ordered than to the fulfilment in actual life; and a suggestive parallel may be found in the "perfection" or "entire sanctification" of modern dogma. The word means *complete*, built up all round so that no gaps are to be seen in the character. We are asked to think of Job as a man whose uprightness, goodness, and fidelity towards man were unimpeachable, who was also towards God reverent, obedient, grateful, wearing his religion as a white garment of unsullied virtue. Then is it meant that he had no infirmity of will or soul, that in him for once humanity stood absolutely free from defect? Scarcely. The perfect man in this sense, with all moral excellences and without weakness, would as little have served the purpose of the writer as one marred by any gross or deforming fault. The course of the poem shows that Job was not free from errors of temper and infirmities of will. He who is proverbially known as the most patient failed in patience when the bitter cup of reproach had to be drained. But undoubtedly the writer exalts the virtue of his hero to the highest range, a plane above the actual. In order to set the problem of the book in a clear light such purity of soul and earnest dutifulness had to be assumed as would by every reckoning deserve the rewards of God, the "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The years of Job have passed hitherto in unbroken prosperity. He has long enjoyed the bounty of providence, his children about him, his increasing flocks of sheep and camels, oxen and asses feeding in abundant pastures. The stroke of bereavement has not fallen since his father and mother died in ripe old age. The dreadful simoom has spared his flocks, the wandering Bedawin have passed them by. An honoured chief, he rules in wisdom and righteousness, ever mindful of the Divine hand by which he is blessed, earning for himself the trust of the poor and the gratitude of the afflicted. Enjoying unbounded respect in his own country, he is known beyond the desert to a circle of friends who admire him as a man and honour him as a servant of God. His steps are washed with butter, and the rock pours him out rivers of oil. The lamp of God shines upon his head, and by His light he walks through darkness. His root is spread

out to the waters, and the dew lies all night upon his branch.

Now let us judge this life from a point of view which the writer may have taken, which at any rate it becomes us to take, with our knowledge of what gives manhood its true dignity and perfectness. Obedience to God, self-control and self-culture, the observance of religious forms, brotherliness and compassion, uprightness and purity of life, these are Job's excellences. But all circumstances are favourable, his wealth makes beneficence easy and moves him to gratitude. His natural disposition is towards piety and generosity; it is pure joy to him to honour God and help his fellow-men. The life is beautiful. But imagine it as the unclouded experience of years in a world where so many are tried with suffering and bereavement, foiled in their strenuous toil and disappointed in their dearest hopes, and is it not evident that Job's would tend to become a kind of dream-life, not deep and strong, but on the surface, a broad stream, clear, glittering with the reflection of moon and stars or of the blue heaven, but shallow, gathering no force, scarcely moving towards the ocean? When a Psalmist says, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath: we bring our years to an end as a tale that is told," he depicts the common experience of men, a sad experience, yet needful to the highest wisdom and the noblest faith. No dreaming is there when the soul is met with sore rebuffs and made aware of the profound abyss that lies beneath, when the limbs fail on the steep hills of difficult duty. But a long succession of prosperous years, immunity from disappointment, loss, and sorrow, lulls the spirit to repose. Earnestness of heart is not called for, and the will, however good, is never braced to endurance. Whether by subtle intention or by an instinctive sense of fitness, the writer has painted Job as one who with all his virtue and perfectness spent his life as in a dream and needed to be awakened. He is a Pygmalion's statue of flawless marble, the face divinely calm and not without a trace of self-conscious remoteness from the suffering multitudes, needing the hot blast of misfortune to bring it to life. Or, let us say, he is a new type of humanity in paradise, an Adam enjoying a Garden of Eden fenced in from every storm, as yet undiscovered by the enemy. We are to see the problem of the primitive story of Genesis revived and wrought out afresh, not on the old lines, but in a way that makes it real to the race of suffering men. The dream-life of Job in his time of prosperity corresponds closely with that ignorance of good and evil which the first pair had in the garden eastward in Eden while as yet the forbidden tree bore its fruit untouched, undesired, in the midst of the greenery and flowers.

When did the man Job live? Far back in the patriarchal age, or but a short time before the author of the book came upon his story and made it immortal? We may incline to the later date, but it is of no importance. For us the interest of the book is not antiquarian but humane, the relation of pain and affliction to the character of man, the righteous government of God. The life and experiences of Job are idealised so that the question may be clearly understood; and the writer makes not the slightest

attempt to give his book the colour of remote antiquity.

But we cannot fail to be struck from the outset with the genius shown in the choice of a life set in the Arabian desert. For breadth of treatment, for picturesque and poetic effect, for the development of a drama that was to exhibit the individual soul in its need of God, in the shadow of deep trouble as well as the sunshine of success, the scenery is strikingly adapted, far better than if it had been laid in some village of Israel. Inspiration guided the writer's choice. The desert alone gave scope for those splendid pictures of nature, those noble visions of Divine Almightyness, and those sudden and tremendous changes which make the movement impressive and sublime.

The modern analogue in literature is the philosophic novel. But Job is far more intense, more operatic, as Ewald says, and the elements are even simpler. Isolation is secured. Life is bared to its elements. The personality is entangled in disaster with the least possible machinery or incident. The dramatising altogether is singularly abstract. And thus we are enabled to see, as it were, the very thought of the author, lonely, resolute, appealing, under the widespread Arabian sky and the Divine infinitude.

CHAPTER III.

THE OPENING SCENE IN HEAVEN.

JOB i. 6-12.

WITH the presentation of the scene in heaven, the genius, the pious daring, and fine moral insight of the writer at once appear—in one word, his inspiration. From the first we feel a sure yet deeply reverent touch, a spirit composed in its high resolve. The thinking is keen, but entirely without strain. In no mere flash did the over-world disclose itself and those decrees that shape man's destiny. There is constructive imagination. Wherever the idea of the heavenly council was found, whether in the vision Micaiah narrated to Jehoshaphat and Ahab, or in the great vision of Isaiah, it certainly was not unsought. Through the author's own study and art the inspiration came that made the picture what it is. The calm sovereignty of God, not tyrannical but most sympathetic, is presented with simple felicity. It was the distinction of Hebrew prophets to speak of the Almighty with a confidence which bordered on familiarity yet never lost the grace of profound reverence; and here we find that trait of serious naïveté. The writer ventures on the scene he paints with no consciousness of daring nor the least air of difficult endeavour, but quietly, as one who has the thought of the Divine government of human affairs constantly before his mind and glories in the majestic wisdom of God and His friendliness to men. In a single touch the King is shown, and before Him the hierarchies and powers of the invisible world in their responsibility to His rule. Centuries of religious culture are behind the words, and also many years of private meditation and philosophic thought. To this man, because he gave himself to the highest discipline, revelations came, uplifting, broad, and deep.

In contrast to the Almighty we have the figure of the Adversary, or Satan, depicted with suf-

ficient clearness, notably coherent, representing a phase of being not imaginary but actual. He is not, as the Satan of later time came to be, the head of a kingdom peopled with evil spirits, a nether world separated from the abode of the heavenly angels by a broad, impassable gulf. He has no distinctive hideousness, nor is he painted as in any sense independent, although the evil bent of his nature is made plain, and he ventures to dispute the judgment of the Most High. This conception of the Adversary need not be set in opposition to those which afterwards appear in Scripture as if truth must lie entirely there or here. But we cannot help contrasting the Satan of the Book of Job with the grotesque, gigantic, awful, or despicable fallen angels of the world's poetry. Not that the mark of genius is wanting in these; but they reflect the powers of this world and the accompaniments of malignant human despotism. The author of Job, on the contrary, moved little by earthly state and grandeur, whether good or evil, solely occupied with the Divine sovereignty, never dreams of one who could maintain the slightest shadow of authority in opposition to God. He cannot trifle with his idea of the Almighty in the way of representing a rival to Him; nor can he degrade a subject so serious as that of human faith and well-being by painting with any touch of levity a super-human adversary of men.

Dante in his "Inferno" attempts the portraiture of the monarch of hell:—

"That emperor who sways
The realm of sorrow, at mid-breast from the ice
Stood forth; and I in stature, am more like
A giant than the giants are to his arms. . . .
 . . . If he were beautiful
As he is hideous now, and yet did dare
To scowl upon his Maker, well from him
May all our misery flow."

The enormous size of this figure is matched by its hideousness; the misery of the arch-fiend, for all its horror, is grotesque:—

"At six eyes he wept; the tears
Adown three faces rolled in bloody foam."

Passing to Milton, we find sublimity in his pictures of the fallen legions, and it culminates in the vision of their king:—

"Above them all the archangel; but his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride
Waiting revenge: cruel his eye, but cast
Signs of remorse and passion, to behold
The fellows of his crime, . . .
Millions of spirits for his fault amerced
Of heaven, and from eternal splendours flung
For his revolt."

The picture is magnificent. It has, however, little justification from Scripture. Even in the Book of Revelation we see a kind of contempt of the Adversary, where an angel from heaven with a great chain in his hand lays hold on the dragon, that old serpent which is the devil, and Satan, and binds him a thousand years. Milton has painted his Satan largely, as not altogether unfit to take arms against the Omnipotent, grown gigantic, even sublime, in the course of much theological speculation that had its source far back in Chaldæan and Iranian myths. Perhaps, too, the sympathies of the poet, playing about the fortunes of fallen royalty, may have unconsciously coloured the vision which he saw and drew with such marvellous

power, dipping his pencil "in the hues of earthquake and eclipse."

This splendid regal arch-fiend has no kinship with the Satan of the Book of Job; and, on the other hand, the Mephistopheles of the "Faust," although bearing an outward resemblance to him, is, for a quite different reason, essentially unlike. Obviously Goethe's picture of a cynical devil gaily perverting and damning a human mind is based on the Book of Job. The "Prologue in Heaven," in which he first appears, is an imitation of the passage before us. But while the vulgarity and insolence of Mephistopheles are in contrast to the demeanour of the Adversary in presence of Jehovah, the real distinction lies in the kind of power ascribed to the one and the other. Mephistopheles is a cunning tempter. He receives permission to mislead if he can, and not only places his victim in circumstances fitted to ruin his virtue, but plies him with arguments intended to prove that evil is good, that to be pure is to be a fool. No such power of evil suggestion is given to the Adversary of Job. His action extends only to the outward events by which the trial of faith is brought about. Cynical he is and bent on working evil, but not by low cunning and sophistry. He has no access to the mind. While it cannot be said that Goethe has descended beneath the level of possibility, since a contemporary and friend of his own, Schopenhauer, might almost have sat for the portrait of Mephistopheles, the realism in Job befits the age of the writer and the serious purpose he had in view. "Faust" is a work of genius and art, and succeeds in its degree. The author of Job succeeds in a far higher sense, by the charm of simple sincerity and the strength of Divine inspiration, keeping the play of supernatural agency beyond human vision, making the Satan a mere instrument of the Divine purpose, in no sense free or intellectually powerful.

The scene opens with a gathering of the "sons of the Elohim" in presence of their King. Professor Cheyne thinks that these are "supernatural Titanic beings who had once been at strife with Jehovah, but who now at stated times paid him their enforced homage"; and this he illustrates by reference to Chap. xxi. 22 and Chap. xxv. 2. But the question in the one passage, "Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing He judgeth those that are high" [רמים, the heights of heaven, highnesses], and the affirmation in the other, "He maketh peace in His high places," can scarcely be held to prove the supposition. The ordinary view that they are heavenly powers or angels, willing servants, not unwilling vassals of Jehovah, is probably correct. They have come together at an appointed time to give account of their doings and to receive commands, and among them the Satan or Adversary presents himself, one distinguished from all the rest by the name he bears and the character and function it implies. There is no hint that he is out of place, that he has impudently forced his way into the audience chamber. Rather does it appear that he, like the rest, has to give his account. The question "Whence comest thou?" expresses no rebuke. It is addressed to the Satan as to the others. We see, therefore, that this "Adversary," to whomsoever he is opposed, is not a being excluded from communication with God, engaged in a princely revolt. When the reply is put into his mouth

that he has been "going to and fro in the earth, and pacing up and down in it," the impression conveyed is that a certain task of observing men, perhaps watching for their misdeeds, has been assumed by him. He appears a spirit of restless and acute inquiry into men's lives and motives, with a keen eye for the weaknesses of humanity and a fancy quick to imagine evil.

Evidently we have here a personification of the doubting, misbelieving, misreading spirit which, in our day, we limit to men and call pessimism. Now Koheleth gives so finished an expression to this temper that we can hardly be wrong in going back some distance of time for its growth; and the state of Israel before the northern captivity was a soil in which every kind of bitter seed might spring up. The author of Job may well have drawn from more than one cynic of his day when he set his mocking figure in the blaze of the celestial court. Satan is the pessimist. He exists, so far as his intent goes, to find cause against man, and therefore, in effect, against God, as man's Creator. A shrewd thinker is this Adversary, but narrowed to one line and that singularly like some modern criticism of religion, the resemblance holding in this that neither shows any feeling of responsibility. The Satan sneers away faith and virtue; the modern countenances both, and so has an excellent reason for pronouncing them hollow; or he avoids both, and is sure there is nothing but emptiness where he has not sought. Either way, all is *habël habalim*—vanity of vanities. And yet Satan is so held and governed by the Almighty that he can only strike where permission is given. Evil, as represented by him, is under the control of Divine wisdom and goodness. He appears as one to whom the words of Christ, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," would bring home a sense neither of duty nor privilege, but of a sheer necessity, to be contested to the last. Nevertheless he is a vassal of the Almighty. Here the touch of the author is firm and true.

So of pessimistic research and philosophy now. We have writers who follow humanity in all its base movements and know nothing of its highest. The research of Schopenhauer and even the psychology of certain modern novelists are mischievous, depraving, for this reason, if no other, that they evaporate the ideal. They promote generally that diseased egotism to which judgment and aspiration are alike unknown. Yet this spirit too serves where it has no dream of serving. It provokes a healthy opposition, shows a hell from which men recoil, and creates so deadly ennui that the least gleam of faith becomes acceptable, and even Theosophy, because it speaks of life, secures the craving mind. Moreover, the pessimist keeps the church a little humble, somewhat awake to the error that may underlie its own glory and the meanness that mingles too often with its piety. A result of the freedom of the human mind to question and deny, pessimism has its place in the scheme of things. Hostile and often railing, it is detestable enough, but needs not alarm those who know that God takes care of His world.

The challenge which begins the action of the drama—by whom is it thrown out? By the Almighty. God sets before the Satan a good life: "Hast thou considered My servant Job? that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and

escheweth evil." The source of the whole movement, then, is a defiance of unbelief by the Divine Friend of men and Lord of all. There is such a thing as human virtue, and it is the glory of God to be served by it, to have His power and divinity reflected in man's spiritual vigour and holiness.

Why does the Almighty throw out the challenge and not wait for Satan's charge? Simply because the trial of virtue must begin with God. This is the first step in a series of providential dealings fraught with the most important results, and there is singular wisdom in attributing it to God. Divine grace is to be seen thrusting back the chaotic falsehoods that darken the world of thought. They exist; they are known to Him who rules; and He does not leave humanity to contend with them unaided. In their keenest trials the faithful are supported by His hand, assured of victory while they fight His battles. Ignorant pride, like that of the Adversary, is not slow to enter into debate even with the All-wise. Satan has the question ready which implies a lie, for his is the voice of that scepticism which knows no reverence. But the entire action of the book is in the line of establishing faith and hope. The Adversary is challenged to do his worst; and man, as God's champion, will have to do his best,—the world and angels looking on.

And this thought of a Divine purpose to confound the falsehoods of scepticism answers another inquiry which may readily occur. From the first the Almighty knows and asserts the virtue of His servant,—that he is one who fears God and eschews evil. But why, then, does He condescend to ask of Satan, "Hast thou considered My servant Job?" Since He has already searched the heart of Job and found it faithful, He does not need for His own satisfaction to hear Satan's opinion. Nor are we to suppose that the expression of this Adversary's doubt can have any real importance. But if we take the Satan as representing all those who depreciate faith and undermine virtue, the challenge is explained. Satan is of no account in himself. He will go on cavilling and suspecting. But for the sake of the race of men, its emancipation from the miserable suspicions that prey on the heart, the question is proposed. The drama has its prophetic design; it embodies a revelation; and in this lies the value of all that is represented. Satan, we shall find, disappears, and thereafter the human reason is alone addressed, solely considered. We pass from scene to scene, from controversy to controversy, and the great problem of man's virtue, which also involves the honour of God Himself, is wrought out that our despondency and fear may be cured; that we may never say with Koheleth, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

To the question of the Almighty, Satan replies by another: "Doth Job fear God for nought?" With a certain air of fairness he points to the extraordinary felicity enjoyed by the man. "Hast Thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." It is a thought naturally arising in the mind that very prosperous people have all on the side of their virtue, and may be less pure and faithful than they seem. Satan adopts this thought, which is not only blameless, but sug-

gested by what we see of God's government. He is base and captious in using it, and turns it with a sneer. Yet on the surface he only hints that God should employ His own test, and so vindicate His action in making this man so prosperous. For why should Job show anything but gratitude towards God when all is done for him that heart can desire? The favourites of kings, indeed, who are loaded with titles and wealth, sometimes despise their benefactors, and, being raised to high places, grow ambitious of one still higher, that of royalty itself. The pampered servant becomes an arrogant rival, a leader of revolt. Thus too great bounty is often met with ingratitude. It does not, however, suit the Adversary to suggest that pride and rebellion of this kind have begun to show themselves in Job, or will show themselves. He has no ground for such an accusation, no hope of proving it true. He confines himself, therefore, to a simpler charge, and in making it implies that he is only judging this man on general principles and pointing to what is sure to happen in the case. Yes; he knows men. They are selfish at bottom. Their religion is selfishness. The blameless human fear is that much may be due to favourable position. The Satan is sure that all is due to it.

Now, the singular thing here is the fact that the Adversary's accusation turns on Job's enjoyment of that outward felicity which the Hebrews were constantly desiring and hoping for as a reward of obedience to God. The writer comes thus at once to show the peril of the belief which had corrupted the popular religion of his time, which may even have been his own error once, that abundant harvests, safety from enemies, freedom from pestilence, such material prosperity as many in Israel had before the great disasters, were to be regarded as the evidence of accepted piety. Now that the crash has fallen and the tribes are scattered, those left in Palestine and those carried into exile alike sunk in poverty and trouble, the author is pointing out what he himself has come to see, that Israel's conception of religion had hitherto admitted and may even have gendered a terrible mistake. Piety might be largely selfishness—was often mingled with it. The message of the author to his countrymen and to the world is that a nobler mind must replace the old desire for happiness and plenty, a better faith the old trust that God would fill the hands that served Him well. He teaches that, whatever may come, though trouble after trouble may fall, the great true Friend is to be adored for what He is, obeyed and loved though the way lies through storm and gloom.

Striking is the thought that, while the prophets Amos and Hosea were fiercely or plaintively assailing the luxury of Israel and the lives of the nobles, among those very men who excited their holy wrath may have been the author of the Book of Job. Dr. Robertson Smith has shown that from the "gala days" of Jeroboam II. to the fall of Samaria there were only some thirty years. One who wrote after the Captivity as an old man may therefore have been in the flush of youth when Amos prophesied, may have been one of the rich Israelites who lay upon beds of ivory and stretched themselves upon their couches, and ate lambs out of the flock and calves out of the midst of the stall, for whose gain the peasant and the slave were oppressed by stewards and officers. He may have been

one of those on whom the blindness of prosperity had fallen so that the storm-cloud from the east with its vivid lightning was not seen, who held it their safety to bring sacrifices every morning and tithes every three days, to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which was leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings and publish them (Amos iv. 4, 5). The mere possibility that the author of Job may have had this very time of prosperity and religious security in his own past and heard Hosea's trumpet blast of doom is very suggestive, for if so he has learned how grandly right the prophets were as messengers of God. By the way of personal sorrow and disaster he has passed to the better faith he urges on the world. He sees what even the prophets did not fully comprehend, that desolation might be gain, that in the most sterile wilderness of life the purest light of religion might shine on the soul, while the tongue was parched with fatal thirst and the eye glazed with the film of death. The prophets looked always beyond the shadows of disaster to a new and better day when the return of a penitent people to Jehovah should be followed by a restoration of the blessings they had forfeited—fruitful fields and vineyards, busy and populous cities, a general distribution of comfort if not of wealth. Even Amos and Hosea had no clear vision of the prophetic hope the first exile was to yield out of its darkness to Israel and the world.

The question, then, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" sending a flash of penetrating light back on Israel's history, and especially on the glowing pictures of prosperity in Solomon's time, compelling all to look to the foundation and motives of their faith, marks a most important era in Hebrew thought. It is, we may say, the first note of a piercing strain which thrills on to the present time. Taking rise here, the spirit of inquiry and self-examination has already sifted religious belief and separated much of the chaff from the wheat. Yet not all. The comfort and hope of believers are not yet lifted above the reach of Satan's javelin. While salvation is thought of mainly as self-enjoyment, can we say that the purity of religion is assured? When happiness is promised as the result of faith, whether happiness now, or hereafter in heavenly glory, the whole fabric of religion is built on a foundation insecure, because it may be apart from truth, holiness, and virtue. It does not avail to say that holiness is happiness, and so introduce personal craving under cover of the finest spiritual idea. To grant that happiness is in any sense the distinctive issue of faith and faithfulness, to keep happiness in view in submitting to the restraints and bearing the burdens of religion, is to build the highest and best on the shifting sand of personal taste and craving. Make happiness that for which the believer is to endure and strive, allow the sense of personal comfort and immunity from change to enter into his picture of the reward he may expect, and the question returns, Doth this man serve God for nought? Life is not happiness, and the gift of God is everlasting life. Only when we keep to this supreme word in the teaching of Christ, and seek the fulness and liberty and purity of life, apart from that happiness which is at bottom the satisfaction of predominant desires, shall we escape from the constantly recurring doubt that threatens to undermine and destroy our faith.

If we look further, we find that the very error

which has so long impoverished religion prevails in philanthropy and politics, prevails there at the present time to an alarming extent. The favourite aim of social meliorists is to secure happiness for all. While life is the main thing, everywhere and always, strength and breadth and nobleness of life, their dream is to make the warfare and service of man upon the earth so easy that he shall have no need for earnest personal endeavour. He is to serve for happiness, and have no service to do that may even in the time of his probation interfere with happiness. The pity bestowed on those who toil and endure in great cities and on bleak hillsides is that they fail of happiness. Persons who have no conception that vigour and endurance are spiritually profitable, and others who once knew but have forgotten the benefits of vigour and the gains of endurance, would undo the very order and discipline of God. Are human beings to be encouraged to seek happiness, taught to doubt God because they have little pleasure, given to understand that those who enjoy have the best of the universe, and that they must be lifted up to this level or lose all? Then the sweeping condemnation will hang over the world that it is following a new god and has said farewell to the stern Lord of Providence.

Much may be justly said in condemnation of the jealous, critical spirit of the Adversary. Yet it remains true that his criticism expresses what would be a fair charge against men who passed this stage of existence without full trial. And the Almighty is represented as confirming this when He puts Job into the hands of Satan. He has challenged the Adversary, opening the question of man's fidelity and sincerity. He knows what will result. It is not the will of some eternal Satan that is the motive, but the will of God. The Adversary's scornful question is woven into God's wise ordinance, and made to subserve a purpose which completely transcends the base hope involved in it. The life of Job has not yet had the difficult and strenuous probation necessary to assured faith, or rather to the consciousness of a faith immovably rooted in God. It would be utterly inconsistent with the Divine wisdom to suppose God led on and beguiled by the sneer of His own creature to do what was needless or unfair, or indeed in any sense opposed to His own plan for His creation. And we shall find that throughout the book it is assumed by Job, implied by the author, that what is done is really the doing of God Himself. The Satan of this Divine poem remains altogether subsidiary as an agent. He may propose, but God disposes. He may pride himself on the keenness of his intellect; but wisdom, compared to which his subtlety is mere blundering, orders the movement of events for good and holy ends.

The Adversary makes his proposal: "Put forth now Thine hand, and touch all that he hath, and he will bid Thee farewell." He does not propose to make use of sensual temptation. The only method of trial he ventures to suggest is deprivation of the prosperity for which he believes Job has served God. He takes on him to indicate what the Almighty may do, acknowledging that the Divine power, and not his, must bring into Job's life those losses and troubles that are to test his faith.

After all some may ask, Is not Satan endeavouring to tempt the Almighty? And if it were true that the prosperous condition of Job, or

any man, implies God's entire satisfaction with his faith and dutifulness and with his character as a man, if, further, it must be taken as true that sorrow and loss are evil, then this proposal of the Satan is a temptation. It is not so in reality, for "God cannot be tempted to evil." No creature could approach His holiness with a temptation. But Satan's intention is to move God. He considers success and happiness to be intrinsically good, and poverty and bereavement to be intrinsically evil. That is to say, we have here the spirit of unfaith endeavouring to destroy God as well as man. For the sake of truth professedly, for his own pride of will really, he would arrest the righteousness and grace of the Divine. He would unmake God and orphan man. The scheme is futile of course. God can allow his proposal, and be no less the Infinitely generous, wise, and true. The Satan shall have his desire; but not a shadow shall fall on the ineffable glory.

At this point, however, we must pause. The question that has just arisen can only be answered after a survey of human life in its relation to God, and especially after an examination of the meaning of the term *evil* as applied to our experiences. We have certain clear principles to begin with: that "God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man"; that all God does must show not less beneficence, not less love, but more as man. These principles will have to be vindicated when we proceed to consider the losses, what may be called the disasters that follow each other in quick succession and threaten to crush the life they try.

Meanwhile, casting a glance at those happy dwellings in the land of Uz, we see all going on as before, no mind darkened by the shadow that is gathering, or in the least aware of the controversy in heaven so full of moment to the family circle. The pathetic ignorance, the blessed ignorance in which a man may live hangs upon the picture. The cheerful bustle of the homestead goes on, the feasts and sacrifices, diligent labour rewarded with the produce of fields, the wine and oil of vineyards and olive gardens, fleeces of the flock and milk of the kine.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW OF GOD'S HAND.

Job i. 13-22.

COMING now to the sudden and terrible changes which are to prove the faithfulness of the servant of God, we must not fail to observe that in the development of the drama the trial of Job personally is the sole consideration. No account is taken of the character of those who, being connected with his fortunes and happiness, are now to be swept away that he may suffer. To trace their history and vindicate Divine righteousness in reference to each of them is not within the scope of the poem. A typical man is taken as hero, and we may say the discussion covers the fate of all who suffer, although attention is fixed on him alone.

The writer is dealing with a story of patriarchal life, and himself is touched with the Semitic way of thinking. A certain disregard of the subordinate human characters must not be

reckoned strange. His thoughts, far-reaching as they are, run in a channel very different from ours. The world of his book is that of family and clan ideas. The author saw more than any man of his time; but he could not see all that engages modern speculation. Besides, the glory of God is the dominant idea of the poem; not men's right to joy, or peace, or even life; but God's right to be wholly Himself and greatly true. In the light of this high thought we must be content to have the story of one soul traced with such fulness as might be compassed, the others left practically untouched. If the sufferings of the man whom God approves can be explained in harmony with the glory of Divine justice, then the sudden calamities that fall upon his servants and children will also be explained. For, although death is in a sense an ultimate thing, and loss and affliction, however great, do not mean so much as death; yet, on the other hand, to die is the common lot, and the quick stroke appears merciful in comparison with Job's dreadful experiences. Those who are killed by lightning or by the sword do but swiftly and without protracted pain fall into the hands of God. We need not conclude that the writer means us to regard the sons and daughters of Job and his servants as mere chattels, like the camels and sheep, although the people of the desert would have so regarded them. But the main question presses; the range of the discussion must be limited; and the tradition which forms the basis of the poem is followed by the author whenever it supplies the elements of his inquiry.

We have entirely refused the supposition that the Almighty forgot His righteousness and grace in putting the wealth and happiness of Job into the hands of Satan. The trials we now see falling one after the other are not sent because the Adversary has suggested them, but because it is right and wise, for the glory of God and for the perfecting of faith, that Job should suffer them. What is God's doing is not in this case nor in any case evil. He cannot wrong His servant that glory may come to Himself.

And just here arises a problem which enters into all religious thought, the wrong solution of which depraves many a philosophy, while the right understanding of it sheds a flood of light on our life in this world. A thousand tongues, Christian, non-Christian, and neo-Christian, affirm that life is for enjoyment. What gives enjoyment is declared to be good, what gives most enjoyment is reckoned best, and all that makes for pain and suffering is held to be evil. It is allowed that pain endured now may bring pleasure hereafter, and that for the sake of future gain a little discomfort may be chosen. But it is evil nevertheless. One doing his best for men would be expected to give them happiness at once and, throughout life, as much of it as possible. If he inflicted pain in order to enhance pleasure by and by, he would have to do so within the strictest limits. Whatever reduces the strength of the body, the capacity of the body for enjoyment and the delight of the mind accompanying the body's vigour, is declared bad, and to do anything which has this effect is to do evil or wrong. Such is the ethic of the philosophy finally and powerfully stated by Mr. Spencer. It has penetrated as widely as he could wish; it underlies volumes of Christian sermons and semi-Christian schemes. If it be true, then the

Almighty of the Book of Job, bringing affliction, sorrow, and pain upon His servant, is a cruel enemy of man, to be hated, not revered. This matter needs to be considered at some length.

The notion that pain is evil, that he who suffers is placed at moral disadvantage, appears very plainly in the old belief that those conditions and surroundings of our life which minister to enjoyment are the proofs of the goodness of God on which reliance must be placed so far as nature and providence testify of Him. Pain and sorrow, it was held, need to be accounted for by human sin or otherwise; but we know that God is good because there is enjoyment in the life He gives. Paley, for example, says that the proof of the Divine *goodness* rests upon contrivances everywhere to be seen for the purpose of giving us pleasure. He tells us that, when God created the human species, "either He wished them happiness, or He wished them misery, or He was indifferent and unconcerned about either"; and he goes on to prove that it must be our happiness He desired, for, otherwise, wishing our misery, "He might have made everything we tasted, bitter; everything we saw, loathsome; everything we touched, a sting; every smell, a stench; and every sound, a discord;" while, if He had been indifferent about our happiness we must impute all enjoyment we have "to our good fortune," that is, to bare chance, an impossible supposition. Paley's further survey of life leads to the conclusion that God has it as His chief aim to make His creatures happy and, in the circumstances, does the best He can for them, better far than they are commonly disposed to think. The agreement of this position with that of Spencer lies in the presupposition that goodness can be proved only by arrangements for giving pleasure. If God is good for this reason, what follows when He appoints pain, especially pain that brings no enjoyment in the long run? Either He is not altogether "good" or He is not all-powerful.

The author of the Book of Job does not enter into the problem of pain and affliction with the same deliberate attempt to exhaust the subject as Paley has made; but he has the problem before him. And in considering the trial of Job as an example of the suffering and sorrow of man in this world of change, we find a strong ray of light thrown upon the darkness. The picture is a Rembrandt; and where the radiance falls all is sharp and bright. But the shadows are deep; and we must seek, if possible, to make out what lies in those shadows. We shall not understand the Book of Job, nor form a just opinion of the author's inspiration, nor shall we understand the Bible as a whole, unless we reach a point of view clear of the mistakes that stultify the reasoning of Paley and plunge the mind of Spencer, who refuses to be called a materialist, into the utter darkness of materialism.

Now, as to enjoyment, we have the capacity for it, and it flows to us from many external objects as well as from the operation of our own minds and the putting forth of energy. It is in the scheme of things ordained by God that His creatures shall enjoy. On the other hand, trouble, sorrow, loss, bodily and mental pain, are also in the scheme of things. They are provided for in numberless ways—in the play of natural forces causing injuries, dangers from which we cannot escape; in the limitations of our

power; in the antagonisms and disappointments of existence; in disease and death. They are provided for by the very laws that bring pleasure, made inevitable under the same Divine ordinance. Some say it detracts from the goodness of God to admit that as He appoints means of enjoyment so He also provides for pain and sorrow and makes these inseparable from life. And this opinion runs into the extreme dogmatic assertion that "good," by which we are to understand *happiness*,

"Shall fall
At last far off, at last to all.

Many hold this to be necessary to the vindication of God's goodness. But the source of the whole confusion lies here, that we prejudge the question by calling pain evil. The light-giving truth for modern perplexity is that pain and loss are not *evil*, are in no sense *evil*.

Because we desire happiness and dislike pain, we must not conclude that pain is bad and that, when any one suffers, it is because he or another has done wrong. There is the mistake that vitiates theological thought, making men run to the extreme either of denying God altogether because there is suffering in the world, or of framing a rose-water eschatology. Pain is one thing, moral evil is quite another thing. He who suffers is not necessarily a wrong-doer; and when, through the laws of nature, God inflicts pain, there is no evil nor anything approaching wrong. In Scripture, indeed, pain and evil are apparently identified. "Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" "Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them." In these and many other passages the very thing seems to be meant which has just been denied, for evil and suffering appear to be made identical. But human language is not a perfect instrument of thought, any more than thought is a perfect channel of truth. One word has to do duty in different senses. Moral evil, wrongness, on the one hand; bodily pain, the misery of loss and defeat, on the other hand—both are represented by one Hebrew word [ע]—root meaning, *displeased*. In the following passages, where moral evil is clearly meant, it occurs just as in those previously quoted: "Wash you, make you clean, cease to do evil, learn to do well"; "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." The different meanings which one Hebrew word may bear are not generally confused in translation. In this case, however, the confusion has entered into the most modern language. From a highly esteemed thinker the following sentence may be quoted by way of example: "The other religions did not feel evil like Israel; it did not stand in such complete antagonism to their idea of the Supreme, the Creator and Sovereign of man, nor in such absolute contradiction to their notion of what ought to be; and so they either reconciled themselves as best they could to the evil that was necessary, or invented means by which men could escape from it by escaping from existence." The singular misapprehension of Divine providence which underlies a statement like this can only be got rid of by recognising that enjoyment and suffering are not the good and evil of life, that both of them stand quite apart from what

is intrinsically good and bad in a moral sense, and that they are simply means to an end in the providence of God.

It is not difficult, of course, to see how the idea of pain and the idea of moral evil have been linked together. It is by the thought that suffering is punishment for evil done; and that the suffering is therefore itself evil. Pain was simply penalty inflicted by an offended heavenly power. The evil of a man's doings came back to him, made itself felt in his suffering. This was the explanation of all that was unpleasant, disastrous, and vexing in the lot of man. He would enjoy always, it was conceived, if wrong-doing or failure in duty to the higher powers did not kindle divine anger against him. True, the wrong-doing might not be his own. The son might suffer for the parent's fault. Iniquity might be remembered to children's children and fall terribly on those who had not themselves transgressed. The fates pursued the descendants of an impious man. But wrong done somewhere, rebellion of some one against a divinity, was always the antecedent of pain and sorrow and disaster. And as the other religions thought, so, in this matter, did that of Israel. To the Hebrew the deep conviction of this, as Dr. Fairbairn has said, made poverty and disease peculiarly abhorrent. In Psalm lxxxix. the prosperity of David is depicted, and Jehovah speaks of the covenant that must be kept: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments: . . . then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." The trouble has fallen, and out of the depth of it, attributing to past sin all defeat and disaster from which the people suffer—the breaking down of the hedges, curtailment of the vigour of youth, overthrow in war—the Psalmist cries, "How long, O Lord, wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever? How long shall Thy wrath burn like fire? O remember how short my time is: for what vanity hast Thou created all the children of men?" There is here no thought that anything painful or afflictive could manifest the fatherhood of God; it must proceed from His anger and force the mind back upon the memory of sin, some transgression that has caused the Almighty to suspend His kindness for a time.

Here it was the author of Job found the thought of his people. With this he had to harmonise the other beliefs—peculiarly theirs—that the lovingkindness of the Lord is over all His works, that God who is supremely good cannot inflict moral injury on any of His covenanted servants. And the difficulty he felt survives. The questions are still urged: Is not pain bound up with wrong-doing? Is not suffering the mark of God's displeasure? Are they not evil, therefore? And, on the other hand, Is not enjoyment appointed to him who does right? Does not the whole scheme of Divine providence, as the Bible sets it forth, including the prospect it opens into the eternal future, associate happiness with well-doing and pain with evil-doing? We desire enjoyment, and cannot help desiring it. We dislike pain, disease, and all that limits our capacity for pleasure. Is it not in accordance with this that Christ appears as the Giver of light and peace and joy to the race of men?

These questions look difficult enough. Let us attempt to answer them.

Pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering, are elements of creaturely experience appointed by

God. The right use of them makes life, the wrong use of them mars it. They are ordained, all of them in equal degree, to a good end; for all that God does is done in perfect love as well as in perfect justice. It is no more wonderful that a good man should suffer than that a bad man should suffer: for the good man, the man who believes in God and therefore in goodness, making a right use of suffering, will gain by it in the true sense; he will reach a deeper and nobler life. It is no more wonderful that a bad man, one who disbelieves in God and therefore in goodness, should be happy than that a good man should be happy, the happiness being God's appointed means for both to reach a higher life. The main element of this higher life is vigour, but not of the body. The Divine purpose is *spiritual* evolution. That gratification of the sensuous side of our nature for which physical health and a well-knit organism are indispensable—paramount in the pleasure-philosophy—is not neglected, but is made subordinate in the Divine culture of life. The grace of God aims at the life of the spirit—power to love, to follow righteousness, to dare for justice' sake, to seek and grasp the true, to sympathise with men and bear with them, to bless them that curse, to suffer and be strong. To promote this vitality all God appoints is fitted—pain as well as pleasure, adversity as well as prosperity, sorrow as well as joy, defeat as well as success. We wonder that suffering is so often the result of imprudence. On the ordinary theory the fact is inexplicable, for imprudence has no dark colour of ethical faultiness. He who by an error of judgment plunges himself and his family into what appears irretrievable disaster, may, by all reckoning, be almost blameless in character. If suffering is held to be penal, no reference to the general sin of humanity will account for the result. But the reason is plain. The suffering is disciplinary. The nobler life at which Divine providence aims must be sagacious no less than pure, guided by sound reason no less than right feeling.

And if it is asked how from this point of view we are to find the punishment of sin, the answer is that happiness as well as suffering is punishment to him whose sin and the unbelief that accompanies it pervert his view of truth, and blind him to the spiritual life and the will of God. The pleasures of a wrong-doer who persistently denies obligation to Divine authority and refuses obedience to the Divine law are no gain, but loss. They dissipate and attenuate his life. His sensuous or sensual enjoyment, his delight in selfish triumph and gratified ambition are real, give at the time quite as much happiness as the good man has in his obedience and virtue, perhaps a great deal more. But they are penal and retributive nevertheless; and the conviction that they are so becomes clear to the man whenever the light of truth is flashed upon his spiritual state. We read Dante's pictures of the Inferno, and shudder at the dreadful scenes with which he has filled the descending circles of woe. He has omitted one that would have been the most striking of all,—unless indeed an approach to it is to be found in the episode of Paolo and Francesca,—the picture of souls self-doomed to seek happiness and to enjoy, on whose life the keen light of eternity shines, revealing the gradual wasting away of existence, the certain degeneration to which they are condemned.

On the other hand, the pains and disasters which fall to the lot of evil men, intended for their correction, if in perversity or in blindness they are misunderstood, again become punishment: for they, too, dissipate and attenuate life. The real good of existence slips away while the mind is intent on the mere pain or vexation and how it is to be got rid of. In Job we find a purpose to reconcile affliction with the just government of God. The troubles into which the believing man is brought urge him to think more deeply than he has ever thought, become the means of that intellectual and moral education which lies in discovery of the will and character of God. They also bring him by this way into deeper humility, a fine tenderness of spiritual nature, a most needful kinship with his fellows. See then the use of suffering. The impenitent, unbelieving man has no such gains. He is absorbed in the distressing experience, and that absorption narrows and debases the activity of the soul. The treatment of this matter here is necessarily brief. It is hoped, however, that the principle has been made clear.

Does it require any adaptation or under-reading of the language of Scripture to prove the harmony of its teaching with the view just given of happiness and suffering as related to punishment? Throughout the greater part of the Old Testament the doctrine of suffering is that old doctrine which the author of Job found perplexing. Not infrequently in the New Testament there is a certain formal return to it; for even under the light of revelation the meaning of Divine providence is learnt slowly. But the emphasis rests on *life* rather than happiness, and on *death* rather than suffering, in the gospels; and the whole teaching of Christ pointed to the truth. This world and our discipline here, the trials of men, the doctrine of the cross, the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, are not fitted to introduce us into a state of existence in which mere enjoyment, the gratification of personal tastes and desires, shall be the main experience. They are fitted to educate the spiritual nature for life, fulness of life. Immortality becomes credible when it is seen as progress in vigour, progress towards that profound compassion, that fidelity, that unquenchable devotion to the glory of God the Father which marked the life of the Divine Son in this world.

Observe, it is not denied that joy is and will be desired, that suffering and pain are and will remain experiences from which human nature must recoil. The desire and the aversion are wrought into our constitution; and just because we feel them our whole mortal discipline has its value. In the experience of them lies the condition of progress. On the one hand pain urges, on the other joy attracts. It is in the line of desire for joy of a finer and higher kind that civilisation realises itself, and even religion lays hold of us and lures us on. But the conditions of progress are not to be mistaken for the end of it. Joy assumes sorrow as a possibility. Pleasure can only exist as alternative to the experience of pain. And the life that expands and reaches finer power and exaltation in the course of this struggle is the main thing. The struggle ceases to be acute in the higher ranges of life; it becomes massive, sustained, and is carried on in the perfect peace of the soul. Therefore the future state of the redeemed is a state of blessedness. But the blessedness accompanying the life

is not the glory. The glory of the perfected is life itself. The heaven of the redeemed appears a region of existence in which the exaltation, enlargement, and deepening of life shall constantly and consciously go on. Conversely the hell of evil-doers will not be simply the pain, the suffering, the defeat to which they have doomed themselves, but the constant attenuation of their life, the miserable wasting of which they shall be aware, though they find some pitiful pleasure, as Milton imagined his evil angels finding theirs, in futile schemes of revenge against the Highest.

Pain is not in itself an evil. But our nature recoils from suffering and seeks life in brightness and power, beyond the keen pangs of mortal existence. The creation hopes that itself "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." The finer life is, the more sensible it must be of association with a body doomed to decay, the more sensible also of that gross human injustice and wrong which dare to pervert God's ordinance of pain and His sacrament of death, usurping His holy prerogative for the most unholy ends. And so we are brought to the Cross of Christ. When He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree," when He "suffered for sins once, the Righteous for the unrighteous," the sacrifice was real, awful, immeasurably profound. Yet, could death be in any sense degrading or debasing to Him? Could evil touch His soul? Over its most insolent assumption of the right to injure and destroy He stood, spiritually victorious in the presence of His enemies, and rose, untouched in soul, when His body was broken on the cross. His sacrifice was great because He bore the sins of men and died as God's atonement. His sublime devotion to the Father whose holy law was trampled under foot, His horror and endurance of human iniquity which culminated in His death, made the experience profoundly terrible. Thus the spiritual dignity and power He gained provided new life for the world.

It is now possible to understand the trials of Job. So far as the sufferer is concerned, they are no less beneficial than His joys; for they provide that necessary element of probation by which life of a deeper and stronger kind is to be reached, the opportunity of becoming, as a man and a servant of the Almighty, what he had never been, what otherwise he could not become. The purpose of God is entirely good; but it will remain with the sufferer himself to enter by the fiery way into full spiritual vigour. He will have the protection and grace of the Divine Spirit in his time of sore bewilderment and anguish. Yet his own faith must be vindicated while the shadow of God's hand rests upon his life.

And now the forces of nature and the wild tribes of the desert gather about the happy settlement of the man of Uz. With dramatic suddenness and cumulative terror stroke after stroke descends. Job is seen before the door of his dwelling. The morning broke calm and cloudless, the bright sunshine of Arabia filling with brilliant colour the far horizon. The day has been peaceful, gracious, another of God's gifts. Perhaps, in the early hours, the father, as priest of his family, offered the burnt-offerings of atonement lest his sons should have renounced God in their hearts; and now, in the evening, he is sitting calm and glad, hearing the appeals of

those who need his help and dispensing alms with a generous hand. But one comes in haste, breathless with running, scarcely able to tell his tale. Out in the fields the oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding. Suddenly a great band of Sabeans fell upon them, swept them away, slew the servants with the edge of the sword: this man alone has escaped with his life. Rapidly has he spoken; and before he has done another appears, a shepherd from the more distant pastures, to announce a second calamity. "The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped to tell thee." They scarcely dare to look on the face of Job, and he has no time to speak, for here is a third messenger, a camel-driver, swarthy and naked to the loins, crying wildly as he runs, The Chaldeans made three bands—fell upon the camels—swept them away—the servants are slain—I only am left. Nor is this the last. A fourth, with every mark of horror in his face, comes slowly and brings the most terrible message of all. The sons and daughters of Job were feasting in their eldest brother's house; there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell. The young men and women are all dead. One only has escaped, he who tells the dreadful tale.

A certain idealism appears in the causes of the different calamities and their simultaneous, or almost simultaneous, occurrence. Nothing, indeed, is assumed which is not possible in the north of Arabia. A raid from the south, of Sabeans, the lawless part of a nation otherwise engaged in traffic; an organised attack by Chaldeans from the east, again the lawless fringe of the population of the Euphrates valley, those who, inhabiting the margin of the desert, had taken to desert ways; then, of natural causes, the lightning or the fearful hot wind which coming suddenly stifles and kills, and the whirlwind, possible enough after a thunderstorm or simoom,—all of these belong to the region in which Job lived. But the grouping of the disasters and the invariable escape of one only from each belong to the dramatic setting, and are intended to have a cumulative effect. A sense of the mysterious is produced, of supernatural power, discharging bolt after bolt in some inscrutable mood of antagonism. Job is a mark for the arrows of the Unseen. And when the last messenger has spoken, we turn in dismay and pity to look on the rich man made poor, the proud and happy father made childless, the fearer of God on whom the enemy seems to have wrought his will.

In the stately Oriental way, as a man who bows to fate or the irresistible will of the Most High, Job seeks to realise his sudden and awful deprivations. We watch him with silent awe as first he rends his mantle, the acknowledged sign of mourning and of the disorganisation of life, then shaves his head, renouncing in his grief even the natural ornament of the hair, that the sense of loss and resignation may be indicated. This done, in deep humiliation he bows and falls prone on the earth and worships, the fit words falling in a kind of solemn chant from his lips: "Naked came I forth from my mother's womb, and naked I return thereto. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away. Let Jehovah's name be blessed." The silence of grief and of death has fallen about him. No more shall be heard the bustle of the homestead to which, when the

evening shadows were about to fall, a constant stream of servants and laden oxen used to come, where the noise of cattle and asses and the shouts of camel-drivers made the music of prosperity. His wife and the few who remain, with bowed heads, dumb and aimless, stand around. Swiftly the sun goes down, and darkness falls upon the desolate dwelling.

Losses like these are apt to leave men distracted. When everything is swept away, with the riches those who were to inherit them, when a man is left, as Job says, naked, bereft of all that labour had won and the bounty of God had given, expressions of despair do not surprise us, nor even wild accusations of the Most High. But the faith of this sufferer does not yield. He is resigned, submissive. The strong trust that has grown in the course of a religious life withstands the shock, and carries the soul through the crisis. Neither did Job accuse God nor did he sin, though his grief was great. So far he is master of his soul, unbroken though desolated. The first great round of trial has left the man a believer still.

CHAPTER V.

THE DILEMMA OF FAITH.

Job ii.

As the drama proceeds to unfold the conflict between Divine grace in the human soul and those chaotic influences which hold the mind in doubt or drag it back into denial, Job becomes a type of the righteous sufferer, the servant of God in the hot furnace of affliction. All true poetry runs thus into the typical. The interest of the movement depends on the representative character of the life, passionate in jealousy, indignation, grief, or ambition, pressing on exultantly to unheard-of success, borne down into the deepest circles of woe. Here it is not simply a man's constancy that has to be established, but God's truth against the Adversary's lie, the "everlasting yea" against the negations that make all life and virtue seem the mere blossoming of dust. Job has to pass through profoundest trouble, that the drama may exhaust the possibilities of doubt, and lead the faith of man towards liberty.

Yet the typical is based on the real; and the conflict here described has gone on first in the experience of the author. Not from the outside, but from his own life has he painted the sorrows and struggles of a soul urged to the brink of that precipice beyond which lies the blank darkness of the abyss. There are men in whom the sorrows of a whole people and of a whole age seem to concentrate. They suffer with their fellow-men that all may find a way of hope. Not unconsciously, but with the most vivid sense of duty, a Divine necessity brought to their door, they must undergo all the anguish and hew a track through the dense forest to the light beyond. Such a man in his age was the writer of this book. And when he now proceeds to the second stage of Job's affliction every touch appears to show that, not merely in imagination, but substantially he endured the trials which he paints. It is his passion that strives and cries, his sorrowful soul that longs for death. Imaginary, is this work of his? Nothing so true,

vehement, earnest, can be imaginary. "Sublime sorrow," says Carlyle, "sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind." But it shows more than "the seeing eye and the mildly understanding heart." It reveals the spirit battling with terrible enemies, doubts that spring out of the darkness of error, brood of the primæval chaos. The man was one who "in this wild element of a life had to struggle onwards; now fallen, deep abased; and ever with tears, repentance, with bleeding heart, rise again, struggle again, still onwards." Not to this writer, any more than to the author of "Sartor Resartus," did anything come in his dreams.

A second scene in heaven is presented to our view. The Satan appears as before with the "sons of the Elohim," is asked by the Most High whence he has come, and replies in the language previously used. Again he has been abroad amongst men in his restless search for evil. The challenge of God to the Adversary regarding Job is also repeated; but now it has an addition: "Still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." The expression "although thou movedst me against him" is startling. Is it an admission after all that the Almighty can be moved by any consideration less than pure right, or to act in any way to the disadvantage or hurt of His servant? Such an interpretation would exclude the idea of supreme power, wisdom, and righteousness which unquestionably governs the book from first to last. The words really imply a charge against the Adversary of malicious untruth. The saying of the Almighty is ironical, as Schultens points out: "Although thou, forsooth, didst incite Me against him." He who flings sharp javelins of detraction is pierced with a sharper javelin of judgment. Yet he goes on with his attempt to ruin Job, and prove his own penetration the keenest in the universe.

And now he pleads that it is the way of men to care more for themselves, their own health and comfort, than for anything else. Bereavement and poverty may be like arrows that glance off from polished armour. Let disease and bodily pain attack himself, and a man will show what is really in his heart. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for himself. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce Thee openly."

The proverb put into Satan's mouth carries a plain enough meaning, and yet is not literally easy to interpret. The sense will be clear if we translate it "Hide for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for himself." The hide of an animal, lion or sheep, which a man wears for clothing will be given up to save his own body. A valued article of property often, it will be promptly renounced when life is in danger; the man will flee away naked. In like manner all possessions will be abandoned to keep one's self unharmed. True enough in a sense, true enough to be used as a proverb, for proverbs often express a generalisation of the earthly prudence not of the higher ideal, the saying, nevertheless, is in Satan's use of it a lie—that is, if he includes the children when he says, "all that a man hath will he give for himself." Job would have died for his children. Many a father and mother, with far less pride in their children than Job had in his, would die for them. Possessions indeed, mere worldly gear, find their real value

or worthlessness when weighed against life, and human love has Divine depths which a sneering devil cannot see. The portraiture of soulless human beings is one of the recent experiments in fictitious literature, and it may have some justification; when the design is to show the dreadful issue of unmitigated selfishness, a distinctly moral purpose. If, on the other hand, "art for art's sake" is the plea, and the writer's skill in painting the vacant ribs of death is used with a sinister reflection on human nature as a whole, the approach to Satan's temper marks the degradation of literature. Christian faith clings to the hope that Divine grace may create a soul in the ghastly skeleton. The Adversary gloats over the lifeless picture of his own imagining and affirms that man can never be animated by the love of God. The problem which the Satan of Job long ago presented haunts the mind of our age. It is one of those ominous symptoms that point to times of trial in which the experience of humanity may resemble the typical affliction and desperate struggle of the man of Uz.

A grim possibility of truth lies in the taunt of Satan that, if Job's flesh and bone are touched, he will renounce God openly. The test of sore disease is more trying than loss of wealth at least. And, besides, bodily affliction, added to the rest, will carry Job into yet another region of vital experience. Therefore it is the will of God to send it. Again Satan is the instrument, and the permission is given, "Behold, he is in thine hand: only save his life—imperil not his life." Here, as before, when causes are to be brought into operation that are obscure and may appear to involve harshness, the Adversary is the intermediary agent. On the face of the drama a certain formal deference is paid to the opinion that God cannot inflict pain on those whom He loves. But for a short time only is the responsibility, so to speak, of afflicting Job partly removed from the Almighty to Satan. At this point the Adversary disappears: and henceforth God is acknowledged to have sent the disease as well as all the other afflictions to His servant. It is only in a poetic sense that Satan is represented as wielding natural forces and sowing the seeds of disease; the writer has no theory and needs no theory of malignant activity. He knows that "all is of God."

Time has passed sufficient for the realisation by Job of his poverty and bereavement. The sense of desolation has settled on his soul as morning after morning dawned, week after week went by, emptied of the loving voices he used to hear, and the delightful and honourable tasks that used to engage him. In sympathy with the exhausted mind, the body has become languid, and the change from sufficiency of the best food to something like starvation gives the germs of disease an easy hold. He is stricken with elephantiasis, one of the most terrible forms of leprosy, a tedious malady attended with intolerable irritation and loathsome ulcers. The disfigured face, the blackened body, soon reveal the nature of the infection; and he is forthwith carried out according to the invariable custom and laid on the heap of refuse, chiefly burnt litter, which has accumulated near his dwelling. In Arab villages this *mezbel* is often a mound of considerable size, where, if any breath of wind is blowing, the full benefit of its coolness can be enjoyed. It is the common playground of the children, "and there the outcast, who has been

stricken with some loathsome malady, and is not allowed to enter the dwellings of men, lays himself down, begging alms of the passers-by, by day, and by night sheltering himself among the ashes which the heat of the sun has warmed." At the beginning Job was seen in the full stateliness of Oriental life; now the contrasting misery of it appears, the abjectness into which it may rapidly fall. Without proper medical skill or appliances, the houses no way adapted for a case of disease like Job's, the wealthiest pass like the poorest into what appears the nadir of existence. Now at length the trial of faithfulness is in the way of being perfected. If the helplessness, the torment of disease, the misery of this abject state do not move his mind from its trust in God, he will indeed be a bulwark of religion against the atheism of the world.

But in what form does the question of Job's continued fidelity present itself now to the mind of the writer? Singularly, as a question regarding his integrity. From the general wreck one life has been spared, that of Job's wife. To her it appears that the wrath of the Almighty has been launched against her husband, and all that prevents him from finding refuge in death from the horrors of lingering disease is his integrity. If he maintains the pious resignation he showed under the first afflictions and during the early stages of his malady, he will have to suffer on. But it will be better to die at once. "Why," she asks, "dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God, and die." It is a different note from that which runs through the controversy between Job and his friends: Always on his integrity he takes his stand; against his right to affirm it they direct their arguments. They do not insist on the duty of a man under all circumstances to believe in God and submit to His will. Their sole concern is to prove that Job has not been sincere and faithful and deserving of acceptance before God. But his wife knows him to have been righteous and pious; and that, she thinks, will serve him no longer. Let him abandon his integrity; renounce God. On two sides the sufferer is plied. But he does not waver. Between the two he stands, a man who has integrity and will keep it till he die.

The accusations of Satan, turning on the question whether Job was sincere in religion or one who served God for what he got, prepare us to understand why his integrity is made the hinge of the debate. To Job his upright obedience was the heart of his life, and it alone made his indefeasible claim on God. But faith, not obedience, is the only real claim a man can advance. And the connection is to be found in this way. As a man perfect and upright, who feared God and eschewed evil, Job enjoyed the approval of his conscience and the sense of Divine favour. His life had been rooted in the steady assurance that the Almighty was his friend. He had walked in freedom and joy, cared for by the providence of the Eternal, guarded by His love, his soul at peace with that Divine Lawgiver whose will he did. His faith rested like an arch on two piers—one, his own righteousness which God had inspired; the other, the righteousness of God which his own reflected. If it were proved that he had not been righteous, his belief that God had been guarding him, teaching him, filling his soul with light, would break under him like a withered branch. If he had not been righteous indeed, he could not know what

righteousness is, he could not know whether God is righteous or not, he could not know God nor trust in Him. The experience of the past was, in this case, a delusion. He had nothing to rest upon, no faith. On the other hand, if those afflictions, coming why he could not tell, proved God to be capricious, unjust, all would equally be lost. The dilemma was that holding to the belief in his own integrity, he seemed to be driven to doubt God; but if he believed God to be righteous he seemed to be driven to doubt his own integrity. Either was fatal. He was in a narrow strait between two rocks, on one or other of which faith was like to be shattered.

But his integrity was clear to him. That stood within the region of his own consciousness. He knew that God had made him of dutiful heart and given him a constant will to be obedient. Only while he believed this could he keep hold of his life. As the one treasure saved out of the wreck, when possessions, children, health were gone, to cherish his integrity was the last duty. Renounce his conscience of goodwill and faithfulness? It was the one fact bridging the gulf of disaster, the safeguard against despair. And is this not a true presentation of the ultimate inquiry regarding faith? If the justice we know is not an adumbration of Divine justice, if the righteousness we do is not taught us by God, of the same kind as His, if loving justice and doing righteousness we are not showing faith in God, if renouncing all for the right, clinging to it though the heavens should fall, we are not in touch with the Highest, then there is no basis for faith, no link between our human life and the Eternal. All must go if these deep principles of morality and religion are not to be trusted. What a man knows of the just and good by clinging to it, suffering for it, rejoicing in it, is indeed the anchor that keeps him from being swept into the waste of waters.

The woman's part in the controversy is still to be considered; and it is but faintly indicated. Upon the Arab soul there lay no sense of woman's life. Her view of providence or of religion was never asked. The writer probably means here that Job's wife would naturally, as a woman, complicate the sum of his troubles. She expresses ill-considered resentment against his piety. To her he is "righteous over much," and her counsel is that of despair. Was this all that the Great God whom he trusted could do for him? Better bid farewell to such a God. She can do nothing to relieve the dreadful torment and can see but the one possible end. But it is God who is keeping her husband alive, and one word would be enough to set him free. Her language is strangely illogical, meant indeed to be so,—a woman's desperate talk. She does not see that, though Job renounced God, he might yet live on, in greater misery than ever, just because he would then have no spiritual stay.

Well, some have spoken very strongly about Job's wife. She has been called a helper of the Devil, an organ of Satan, an infernal fury. Chrysostom thinks that the Enemy left her alive because he deemed her a fit scourge to Job by which to plague him more acutely than by any other. Ewald, with more point, says: "Nothing can be more scornful than her words which mean, 'Thou, who under all the undeserved sufferings which have been inflicted on thee by thy God, hast been faithful to Him even in fatal sickness, as if He would help or desired to help

thee who art beyond help,—to thee, fool, I say. Bid God farewell, and die!'" There can be no doubt that she appears as the temptress of her husband, putting into speech the atheistic doubt which the Adversary could not directly suggest. And the case is all the worse for Job that affection and sympathy are beneath her words. Brave and true life appears to her to profit nothing if it has to be spent in pain and desolation. She does not seem to speak so much in scorn as in the bitterness of her soul. She is no infernal fury, but one whose love, genuine enough, does not enter into the fellowship of his sufferings. It was necessary to Job's trial that the temptation should be presented, and the ignorant affection of the woman serves the needful purpose. She speaks not knowing what she says, not knowing that her words pierce like sharp arrows into his very soul. As a figure in the drama she has her place, helping to complete the round of trial.

The answer of Job is one of the fine touches of the book. He does not denounce her as an instrument of Satan nor dismiss her from his presence. In the midst of his pain he is the great chief of Uz and the generous husband. "Thou speakest," he mildly says, "as one of the foolish, that is, godless, women speaketh." It is not like thee to say such things as these. And then he adds the question born of sublime faith, "Shall we receive gladness at the hand of God, and shall we not receive affliction?"

One might declare this affirmation of faith so clear and decisive that the trial of Job as a servant of God might well close with it. Earthly good, temporal joy, abundance of possessions, children, health,—these he had received. Now in poverty and desolation, his body wrecked by disease, he lies tormented and helpless. Suffering of mind and physical affliction are his in almost unexampled keenness, acute in themselves and by contrast with previous felicity. His wife, too, instead of helping him to endure, urges him to dishonour and death. Still he does not doubt that all is wisely ordered by God. He puts aside, if indeed with a strenuous effort of the soul, that cruel suggestion of despair, and affirms anew the faith which is supposed to bind him to a life of torment. Should not this repel the accusations brought against the religion of Job and of humanity? The author does not think so. He has only prepared the way for his great discussion. But the stages of trial already passed show how deep and vital is the problem that lies beyond. The faith which has emerged so triumphantly is to be shaken as by the ruin of the world.

Strangely and erroneously has a distinction been drawn between the previous afflictions and the disease which, it is said, "opens or reveals greater depths in Job's reverent piety." One says: "In his former trial he blessed God who took away the good He had added to naked man; this was strictly no evil: now Job bows beneath God's hand when He inflicts positive evil." Such literalism in reading the words "shall we not receive evil?" implies a gross slander on Job. If he had meant that the loss of health was "evil" as contrasted with the loss of children, that from his point of view bereavement was no "evil," then indeed he would have sinned against love, and therefore against God. It is the whole course of his trial he is reviewing. Shall we receive "good"—joy, prosperity,

the love of children, years of physical vigour, and shall we not receive pain—this burden of loss, desolation, bodily torment? Herein Job sinned not with his lips. Again, had he meant moral evil, something involving cruelty and unrighteousness, he would have sinned indeed, his faith would have been destroyed by his own false judgment of God. The words here must be interpreted in harmony with the distinction already drawn between physical and mental suffering, which, as God appoints them, have a good design, and moral evil, which can in no way have its source in Him.

And now the narrative passes into a new phase. As a chief of Uz, the greatest of the Bene-Kedem, Job was known beyond the desert. As a man of wisdom and generosity he had many friends. The tidings of his disasters and finally of his sore malady are carried abroad; and after months, perhaps (for a journey across the sandy waste needs preparation and time), three of those who know him best and admire him most, "Job's three friends," appear upon the scene. To sympathise with him, to cheer and comfort him, they come with one accord, each on his camel, not unattended, for the way is beset with dangers.

They are men of mark all of them. The emeer of Uz has chiefs, no doubt, as his peculiar friends, although the Septuagint colours too much in calling them kings. It is, however, their piety, their likeness to himself, as men who fear and serve the True God, that binds them to Job's heart. They will contribute what they can of counsel and wise suggestion to throw light on his trials and lift him into hope. No arguments of unbelief or cowardice will be used by them, nor will they propose that a stricken man should renounce God and die. Eliphaz is from Teman, that centre of thought and culture where men worshipped the Most High and meditated upon His providence. Shuach, the city of Bildad, can scarcely be identified with the modern Shuwak, about two hundred and fifty miles southwest from the Jauf near the Red Sea, nor with the land of the Tsukhi of the Assyrian inscriptions, lying on the Chaldean frontier. It was probably a city, now forgotten, in the Idumæan region. Maan, also near Petra, may be the Naamah of Zophar. It is at least tempting to regard all the three as neighbours who might without great difficulty communicate with each other and arrange a visit to their common friend. From their meeting-place at Teman or at Maan they would, in that case, have to make a journey of some two hundred miles across one of the most barren and dangerous deserts of Arabia,—clear enough proof of their esteem for Job and their deep sympathy.

The fine idealism of the poem is maintained in this new act. Men of knowledge and standing are these. They may fail; they may take a false view of their friend and his state; but their sincerity must not be doubted nor their rank as thinkers. Whether the three represent ancient culture, or rather the conceptions of the writer's own time, is a question that may be variously answered. The book, however, is so full of life, the life of earnest thought and keen thirst for truth, that the type of religious belief found in all the three must have been familiar to the author. These men are not, any more than Job himself, contemporaries of Ephron the Hittite or the Balaam of Numbers. They stand out as

religious thinkers of a far later age, and represent the current Rabbinitism of the post-Solomonic era. The characters are filled in from a profound knowledge of man and man's life. Yet each of them, Temanite, Shuchite, Naamathite, is at bottom a Hebrew believer striving to make his creed apply to a case not yet brought into his system, and finally, when every suggestion is repelled, taking refuge in that hardness of temper which is peculiarly Jewish. They are not men of straw, as some imagine, but types of the culture and thought which led to Pharisaism. The writer argues not so much with Edom as with his own people.

Approaching Job's dwelling the three friends look eagerly from their camels, and at length perceive one prostrate, disfigured, lying on the *mezbele*, a miserable wreck of manhood. "That is not our friend," they say to each other. Again and yet again, "This is not he; this surely cannot be he." Yet nowhere else than in the place of the forsaken do they find their noble friend. The brave, bright chief they knew, so stately in his bearing, so abundant and honourable, how has he fallen! They lift up their voices and weep; then, struck into amazed silence, each with torn mantle and dust-sprinkled head, for seven days and nights they sit beside him in grief unspeakable.

Real is their sympathy; deep too, as deep as their character and sentiments admit. As comforters they are proverbial in a bad sense. Yet one says truly, perhaps out of bitter experience, "Who that knows what most modern consolation is can prevent a prayer that Job's comforters may be his? They do not call upon him for an hour and invent excuses for the departure which they so anxiously await; they do not write notes to him, and go about their business as if nothing had happened; they do not inflict upon him meaningless commonplaces."* It was their misfortune, not altogether their fault, that they had mistaken notions which they deemed it their duty to urge upon him. Job, disappointed by and by, did not spare them, and we feel so much for him that we are apt to deny them their due. Yet are we not bound to ask, What friend has had equal proof of our sympathy? Depth of nature; sincerity of friendship; the will to console: let those mock at Job's comforters as wanting here who have travelled two hundred miles over the burning sand to visit a man sunk in disaster, brought to poverty and the gate of death, and sat with him seven days and nights in generous silence.

THE FIRST COLLOQUY.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRY FROM THE DEPTH.

JOB iii. JOB SPEAKS.

WHILE the friends of Job sat beside him that dreary week of silence, each of them was meditating in his own way the sudden calamities which had brought the prosperous emeer to poverty, the strong man to this extremity of miserable disease. Many thoughts came and were dis-

* "Mark Rutherford."

missed; but always the question returned, Why these disasters, this shadow of dreadful death? And for very compassion and sorrow each kept secret the answer that came and came again and would not be rejected. Meanwhile the silence has weighed upon the sufferer, and the burden of it becomes at length insupportable. He has tried to read their thoughts, to assure himself that grief alone kept them dumb, that when they spoke it would be to cheer him with kindly words, to praise and reinvigorate his faith, to tell him of Divine help that would not fail him in life or death. But as he sees their faces darken into inquiry first and then into suspicion, and reads at length in averted looks the thought they cannot conceal, when he comprehends that the men he loved and trusted hold him to be a transgressor and under the ban of God, this final disaster of false judgment is overwhelming. The man whom all circumstances appear to condemn, who is bankrupt, solitary, outworn with anxiety and futile efforts to prove his honour, if he have but one to believe in him, is helped to endure and hope. But Job finds human friendship yield like a reed. All the past is swallowed up in one tragical thought that, be a man what he may, there is no refuge for him in the justice of man. Everything is gone that made human society and existence in the world worth caring for. His wife, indeed, believes in his integrity, but values it so little that she would have him cast it away with a taunt against God. His friends, it is plain to see, deny it. He is suffering at God's hand, and they are hardened against him. The iron enters into his soul.

True, it is the shame and torment of his disease that move him to utter his bitter lamentation. Yet the underlying cause of his loss of self-command and of patient confidence in God must not be missed. The disease has made life a physical agony; but he could bear that if still no cloud came between him and the face of God. Now these dark, suspicious looks which meet him every time he lifts his eyes, which he feels resting upon him even when he bows his head in the attempt to pray, make religion seem a mockery. And in pitiful anticipation of the doom to which they are silently driving him, he cries aloud against the life that remains. He has lived in vain. Would he had never been born!

In this first lyrical speech put into the mouth of Job there is an Oriental, hyperbolic strain, suited to the speaker and his circumstances. But we are also made to feel that calamity and dejection have gone near to unhinging his mind. He is not mad, but his language is vehement, almost that of insanity. It would be wrong, therefore, to criticise the words in a matter-of-fact way, and against the spirit of the book to try by the rules of Christian resignation one so tossed and racked, in the very throat of the furnace. This is a pious man, a patient man, who lately said, "Shall we receive joy at the hand of God, and shall we not receive affliction?" He seems to have lost all control of himself and plunges into wild untamed speech filled with anathemas, as one who had never feared God. But he is driven from self-possession. Phantasmal now is all that brave life of his as prince and as father, as a man in honour beloved of the Highest. Did he ever enjoy it? If he did, was it not as in a dream? Was he not rather a deceiver, a vile transgressor? His state befits that. Light and love and life are turned into

bitter gall. "I lived," says one distressed like Job, "in a continual, indefinite, pining fear; tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what; it seemed as if the heavens and the earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured. . . . Man is, properly speaking, based upon hope, he has no other possession but hope; this world of his is emphatically the Place of Hope." We see Job, "for the present, quite shut out from hope; looking not into the golden orient, but vaguely all round into a dim firmament pregnant with earthquake and tornado."

The poem may be read calmly. Let us remember that it came not calmly from the pen of the writer, but as the outburst of volcanic feeling from the deep centres of life. It is Job we hear; the language befits his despondency, his position in the drama. But surely it presents to us a real experience of one who, in the hour of Israel's defeat and captivity, had seen his home swept bare, wife and children seized and tortured or borne down in the rush of savage soldiery, while he himself lived on, reduced in one day to awful memories and doubts as the sole consciousness of life. Is not some crisis like this with its irretrievable woes translated for us here into the language of Job's bitter cry? Are we not made witnesses of a tragedy greater even than his?

"What is to become of us," asks Amiel, "when everything leaves us, health, joy, affections, when the sun seems to have lost its warmth, and life is stripped of all charm? Must we either harden or forget? There is but one answer, Keep close to duty, do what you ought, come what may." The mood of these words is not so devout as other passages of the same writer. The advice, however, is often tendered in the name of religion to the life-weary and desolate; and there are circumstances to which it well applies. But a distracting sense of impotence weighed down the life of Job. Duty? He could do nothing. It was impossible to find relief in work; hence the fierceness of his words. Nor can we fail to hear in them a strain of impatience, almost of anger: "To the unregenerate Prometheus Vinculus of a man, it is ever the bitterest aggravation of his wretchedness that he is conscious of suffering, that he feels himself the victim not of suffering only, but of injustice. What then? Is the heroic inspiration we name Virtue but some passion, some bubble of the blood? . . . Thus has the bewildered wanderer to stand, as so many have done, shouting question after question into the sibyl cave of Destiny, and receiving no answer but an echo. It is all a grim desert, this once fair world of his."

Job is already asserting to himself the reality of his own virtue, for he resents the suspicion of it. Indeed, with all the mystery of his affliction yet to solve, he can but think that Providence is also casting doubt on him. A keen sense of the favour of God had been his. Now he becomes aware that while he is still the same man who moved about in gladness and power, his life has a different look to others; men and nature conspire against him. His once brave faith—the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away—is almost overborne. He does not renounce, but he has a struggle to save it. The subtle Divine grace at his heart alone keeps him from bidding farewell to God.

The outburst of Job's speech falls into three lyrical strophes, the first ending at the tenth verse, the second at the nineteenth, the third closing with the chapter.

I. "Job opened his mouth and cursed his day." In a kind of wild impossible revision of providence and reopening of questions long settled, he assumes the right of heaping denunciations on the day of his birth. He is so fallen, so distraught, and the end of his existence appears to have come in such profound disaster, the face of God as well as of man frowning on him, that he turns savagely on the only fact left to strike at,—his birth into the world. But the whole strain is imaginative. His revolt is unreason, not impiety either against God or his parents. He does not lose the instinct of a good man, one who keeps in mind the love of father and mother and the intention of the Almighty whom he still reveres. Life is an act of God: he would not have it marred again by infelicity like his own. So the day as an ideal factor in history or cause of existence is given up to chaos.

"That day, there! Darkness be it.
See it not the High God from above;
And no light stream on it.
Darkness and the nether gloom reclaim it,
Encamp over it the clouds;
Scare it blacknesses of the day."

The idea is, Let the day of my birth be got rid of, so that no other come into being on such a day; let God pass from it—then He will not give life on that day. Mingled in this is the old-world notion of days having meanings and powers of their own. This day had proved malign, terribly bad. It was already a chaotic day, not fit for a man's birth. Let every natural power of storm and eclipse draw it back to the void. The night too, as part of the day, comes under imprecation.

"That night, there! Darkness seize it,
Joy have it none among the days of the year,
Nor come into the numbering of months.
See! That night, be it barren;
No song-voice come to it:
Ban it, the cursers of day
Skilful to stir up leviathan.
Dark be the stars of its twilight,
May it long for the light—and none,
Nor see the eyelids of dawn."

The vividness here is from superstition, fancies of past generations, old dreams of a child race. Foreign they would be to the mind of Job in his strength; but in great disaster the thoughts are apt to fall back on these levels of ignorance and dim efforts to explain, omens and powers intangible. It is quite easy to follow Job in this relapse, half wilful, half for easing of his bosom. Throughout Arabia, Chaldaea, and India went a belief in evil powers that might be invoked to make a particular day one of misfortune. The leviathan is the dragon which was thought to cause eclipses by twining its black coils about the sun and moon. These vague undertones of belief ran back probably to myths of the sky and the storm, and Job ordinarily must have scorned them. Now, for the time, he chooses to make them serve his need of stormy utterance. If any who hear him really believe in magicians and their spells, they are welcome to gather through that belief a sense of his condition; or if they choose to feel pious horror, they may be shocked. He flings out maledictions, knowing in his heart that they are vain words.

Is it not something strange that the happy past is here entirely forgotten? Why has Job nothing to say of the days that shone brightly upon him? Have they no weight in the balance against pain and grief?

"The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there."

His mind is certainly clouded; for it is not vain to say that piety preserves the thought of what God once gave, and Job had himself spoken of it when his disease was young. At this point he is an example of what man is when he allows the water-floods to overflow him and the sad present to extinguish a brighter past. The sense of a wasted life is upon him, because he does not yet understand what the saving of life is. To be kind to others and to be happy in one's own kindness is not for man so great a benefit, so high a use of life, as to suffer with others and for them. What were the life of our Lord on earth and His death but a revelation to man of the secret he had never grasped and still but half approves? The Book of Job, a long, yearning cry out of the night, shows how the world needed Christ to shed His Divine light upon all our experiences and unite them in a religion of sacrifice and triumph. The book moves toward that reconciliation which only the Christ can achieve. As yet, looking at the sufferer here, we see that the light of the future has not dawned upon him. Only when he is brought to bay by the falsehoods of man, in the absolute need of his soul, will he boldly anticipate the redemption and fling himself for refuge on a justifying God.

II. In the second strophe cursing is exchanged for wailing, fruitless reproach of a long past day for a touching chant in praise of the grave. If his birth had to be, why could he not have passed at once into the shades? The lament, though not so passionate, is full of tragic emotion. The phrases of it have been woven into a modern hymn and used to express what Christians may feel; but they are pagan in tone, and meant by the writer to embody the unhelpful thought of the race. Here is no outlook beyond the manition of death, the oblivion and silence of the tomb. It is not the extreme of unfaith, but rather of weakness and misery.

"Wherefore hastened the knees to meet me,
And why the breasts that I should suck?
For then, having sunk down, would I repose,
Fallen asleep there would be rest for me.
With kings and councillors of the earth
Who built them solitary piles;
Or with princes who had gold,
Who filled their houses with silver;
Or as a hidden abortion I had not been,
As infants who never saw light.
There the wicked cease from raging,
And there the outworn rest.
Together the prisoners are at ease,
Not hearing the call of the task-master.
Small and great are there the same,
The slave set free from his lord."

It is beautiful poetry, and the images have a singular charm for the dejected mind. The chief point, however, for us to notice is the absence of any thought of judgment. In the dim underworld, hid as beneath heavy clouds, power and energy are not. Existence has fallen to so low an ebb that it scarcely matters whether men were good or bad in this life, nor is it needful to separate them. For the tyrant can do no more harm to the captive, nor the robber to his victim.

The astute councillor is no better than the slave. It is a kind of existence below the level of moral judgment, below the level either of fear or joy. From the peacefulness of this region none are excluded; as there will be no strength to do good there will be none to do evil. "The small and great are there the same." The stillness and calm of the dead body deceive the mind, willing in its wretchedness to be deceived.

When the writer put this chant into the mouth of Job, he had in memory the pyramids of Egypt and tombs, like those of Petra, carved in the lonely hills. The contrast is thus made picturesque between the state of Job lying in loathsome disease and the lot of those who are gathered to the mighty dead. For whether the rich are buried in their stately sepulchres, or the body of a slave is hastily covered with desert sand, all enter into one painless repose. The whole purpose of the passage is to mark the extremity of hopelessness, the mind revelling in images of its own decay. We are not meant to rest in that love of death from which Job vainly seeks comfort. On the contrary, we are to see him by-and-by roused to interest in life and its issues. This is no halting-place in the poem, as it often is in human thought. A great problem of Divine righteousness hangs unsolved. With the death of the prisoner and the down-trodden slave whose worn-out body is left a prey to the vulture—with the death of the tyrant whose evil pride has built a stately tomb for his remains—all is not ended. Peace has not come. Rather has the unravelling of the tangle to begin. The All-righteous has to make His inquisition and deal out the justice of eternity. Modern poetry, however, often repeats in its own way the old-world dream, mistaking the silence and composure of the dead face for a spiritual deliverance:—

"The aching craze to live ends, and life glides
Lifeless—to nameless quiet, nameless joy.
Blessed Nirvana, sinless, stirless rest,
That change which never changes."

To Christianity this idea is utterly foreign, yet it mingles with some religious teaching, and is often to be found in the weaker sorts of religious fiction and verse.

III. The last portion of Job's address begins with a note of inquiry. He strikes into eager questioning of heaven and earth regarding his state. What is he kept alive for? He pursues death with his longing as one goes into the mountains to seek treasure. And again, his way is hid; he has no future. God hath hedged him in on this side by losses, on that by grief; behind a past mocks him, before is a shape which he follows and yet dreads.

"Wherefore gives He light to wretched men,
Life to the bitter in soul?
Who long for death; but no!
Search for it more than for treasures."

It is indeed a horrible condition, this of the baffled mind to which nothing remains but its own gnawing thought that finds neither reason of being nor end of turmoil, that can neither cease to question nor find answer to inquiries that rack the spirit. There is energy enough, life enough to feel life a terror, and no more; not enough for any mastery even of stoical resolve. The power of self-consciousness seems to be the last injury, a Nessus-shirt, the gift of a strange hate. "The real agony is the silence, the ignorance of the why and the wherefore, the

Sphinx-like imperturbability which meets his prayers." This struggle for a light that will not come has been expressed by Matthew Arnold in his "Empedocles on Etna," a poem which may in some respects be named a modern version of Job:—

"This heart will glow no more; y thou art
A living man no more, Empedocles!
Nothing but a devouring flame of thought—
But a naked eternally restless mind. . . .
To the elements it came from
Everything will return—
Our bodies to earth,
Our blood to water,
Heat to fire,
Breath to air.
They were well born,
They will be well entombed—
But mind, but thought—
Where will they find their parent element?
What will receive them, who will call them home?
But we shall still be in them and they in us. . . .
And we shall be unsatisfied as now;
And we shall feel the agony of thirst,
The ineffable longing for the life of life,
Baffled for ever."

Thought yields no result; the outer universe is dumb and impenetrable. Still Job would revive if a battle for righteousness offered itself to him. He has never had to fight for God or for his own faith. When the trumpet call is heard he will respond; but he is not yet aware of hearing it.

The closing verses have presented considerable difficulty to interpreters, who on the one hand shrink from the supposition that Job is going back on his past life of prosperity and finding there the origin of his fear, and on the other hand see the danger of leaving so significant a passage without definite meaning. The Revised Version puts all the verbs of the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth verses into the present tense, and Dr. A. B. Davidson thinks translation into the past tense would give a meaning "contrary to the idea of the poem." Now, a considerable interval had already elapsed from the time of Job's calamities, even from the beginning of his illness, quite long enough to allow the growth of anxiety and fear as to the judgment of the world. Job was not ignorant of the caprice and hardness of men. He knew how calamity was interpreted; he knew that many who once bowed to his greatness already heaped scorn upon his fall. May not his fear have been that his friends from beyond the desert would furnish the last and in some respects most cutting of his sorrows?

"I have feared a fear; it has come upon me,
And that which I dread has come to me.
I have not been at ease, nor quiet, nor have I had rest;
Yet trouble has come."

In his brooding soul, those seven days and nights, fear has deepened into certainty. He is a man despised. Even for those three his circumstances have proved too much. Did he imagine for a moment that their coming might relieve the pressure of his lot and open a way to the recovery of his place among men? The trouble is deeper than ever; they have stirred a tempest in his breast.

Note that in his whole agony Job makes no motion towards suicide. Arnold's Empedocles cries against life, flings out his questions to a dumb universe, and then plunges into the crater of Etna. Here, as at other points, the inspiration of the author of our book strikes clear between stoicism and pessimism, defiance of the world to do its worst and confession that the struggle

is too terrible. The deep sense of all that is tragic in life, and, with this, the firm persuasion that nothing is appointed to man but what he is able to bear, together make the clear Bible note. It may seem that Job's ejaculations differ little from the cry out of the "City of Dreadful Night,"

"Weary of erring in this desert, Life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath
And pray to thee, O ever quiet Death,
To come and soothe away my bitter pain."

But the writer of the book knows what is in hand. He has to show how far faith may be pressed down and bent by the sore burdens of life without breaking. He has to give us the sense of a soul in the uttermost depth, that we may understand the sublime argument which follows, know its importance, and find our own tragedy exhibited, our own need met, the personal and the universal marching together to an issue. Suicide is no issue for a life, any more than universal cataclysm for the evolution of a world. Despair is no refuge. The inspired writer here sees so far, so clearly, that to mention suicide would be absurd. The struggle of life cannot be renounced. So much he knows by a spiritual instinct which anticipates the wisdom of later times. Were this book a simple record of fact, we have Job in a position far more trying than that of Saul after his defeat on Gilboa; but it is an ideal prophetic writing, a Divine poem, and the faith it is designed to commend saves the man from interfering by any deed of his with the will of God.

We are prepared for the vehement controversy that follows and the sustained appeal of the sufferer to that Power which has laid upon him such a weight of agony. When he breaks into passionate cries and seems to be falling away from all trust, we do not despair of him nor of the cause he represents. The intensity with which he longs for death is actually a sign and measure of the strong life that throbs within him, which yet will be led out into light and freedom and come to peace as it were in the very clash of revolt.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THINGS ELIPHAZ HAD SEEN.

JOB IV., V. ELIPHAZ SPEAKS.

The ideas of sin and suffering against which the poem of Job was written come now dramatically into view. The belief of the three friends had always been that God, as righteous Governor of human life, gives felicity in proportion to obedience and appoints trouble in exact measure of disobedience. Job himself, indeed, must have held the same creed. We may imagine that while he was prosperous his friends had often spoken with him on this very point. They had congratulated him often on the wealth and happiness he enjoyed as an evidence of the great favour of the Almighty. In conversation they had remarked on case after case which seemed to prove, beyond the shadow of doubt, that if men reject God affliction and disaster invariably follow. Their idea of the scheme of things was

very simple, and, on the whole, it had never come into serious questioning. Of course human justice, even when rudely administered, and the practice of private revenge helped to fulfil their theory of Divine government. If any serious crime was committed, those friendly to the injured person took up his cause and pursued the wrong-doer to inflict retribution upon him. His dwelling was perhaps burned and his flocks dispersed, he himself driven into a kind of exile. The administration of law was rude, yet the unwritten code of the desert made the evil-doer suffer and allowed the man of good character to enjoy life if he could. These facts went to sustain the belief that God was always regulating a man's happiness by his deserts. And beyond this, apart altogether from what was done by men, not a few accidents and calamities appeared to show Divine judgment against wrong. Then, as now, it might be said that avenging forces lurk in the lightning, the storm, the pestilence, forces which are directed against transgressors and cannot be evaded. Men would say, Yes, though one hide his crimes, though he escape for long the condemnation and punishment of his fellows, yet the hand of God will find him; and the prediction seemed always to be verified. Perhaps the stroke did not fall at once. Months might pass; years might pass; but the time came when they could affirm, Now righteousness has overtaken the offender; his crime is rewarded; his pride is brought low. And if, as happened occasionally, the flocks of a man who was in good reputation died of murrain, and his crops were blighted by the terrible hot wind of the desert, they could always say, Ah! we did not know all about him. No doubt if we could look into his private life we should see why this has befallen. So the barbarians of the island of Melita, when Paul had been shipwrecked there, seeing a viper fasten on his hand, said, "No doubt this is a murderer whom, though he hath escaped from the sea, yet justice suffereth not to live."

Thoughts like these were in the minds of the three friends of Job, very confounding indeed, for they had never expected to shake their heads over him. They accordingly deserve credit for true sympathy, inasmuch as they refrained from saying anything that might hurt him. His grief was great, and it might be due to remorse. His unparalleled afflictions put him, as it were, in sanctuary from taunts or even questionings. He has done wrong, he has not been what we thought him, they said to themselves, but he is drinking to the bitter dregs a cup of retribution.

But when Job opened his mouth and spoke, their sympathy was dashed with pious horror. They had never in all their lives heard such words. He seemed to prove himself far worse than they could have imagined. He ought to have been meek and submissive. Some flaw there must have been: what was it? He should have confessed his sin instead of cursing life and reflecting on God. Their own silent suspicion, indeed, is the chief cause of his despair; but this they do not understand. Amazed they hear him; outraged, they take up the challenge he offers. One after another the three men reason with Job, from almost the same point of view, suggesting first and then insisting that he should acknowledge his fault and humble himself under the hand of a just and holy God.

Now, here is the motive of the long contro-

versy which is the main subject of the poem. And, in tracing it, we are to see Job, although racked by pain and distraught by grief—sadly at disadvantage because he seems to be a living example of the truth of their ideas—rousing himself to the defence of his integrity and contending for that as the only grip he has of God. Advance after advance is made by the three, who gradually become more dogmatic as the controversy proceeds. Defence after defence is made by Job, who is driven to think himself challenged not only by his friends, but sometimes also by God Himself through them.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar agree in the opinion that Job has done evil and is suffering for it. The language they use and the arguments they bring forward are much alike. Yet a difference will be found in their way of speaking, and a vaguely suggested difference of character. Eliphaz gives us an impression of age and authority. When Job has ended his complaint, Eliphaz regards him with a disturbed and offended look. "How pitiful!" he seems to say; but also, "How dreadful, how unaccountable!" He desires to win Job to a right view of things by kindly counsel; but he talks pompously, and preaches too much from the high moral bench. Bildad, again, is a dry and composed person. He is less the man of experience than of tradition. He does not speak of discoveries made in the course of his own observation; but he has stored the sayings of the wise and reflected upon them. When a thing is cleverly said he is satisfied, and he cannot understand why his impressive statements should fail to convince and convert. He is a gentleman, like Eliphaz, and uses courtesy. At first he refrains from wounding Job's feelings. Yet behind his politeness is the sense of superior wisdom—the wisdom of ages, and his own. He is certainly a harder man than Eliphaz. Lastly, Zophar is a blunt man with a decidedly rough, dictatorial style. He is impatient of the waste of words on a matter so plain, and prides himself on coming to the point. It is he who ventures to say definitely: "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth,"—a cruel speech from any point of view. He is not so eloquent as Eliphaz, he has no air of a prophet. Compared with Bildad he is less argumentative. With all his sympathy—and he, too, is a friend—he shows an exasperation which he justifies by his zeal for the honour of God. The differences are delicate, but real, and evident even to our late criticism. In the author's day the characters would probably seem more distinctly contrasted than they appear to us. Still, it must be owned, each holds virtually the same position. One prevailing school of thought is represented and in each figure attacked.

It is not difficult to imagine three speakers differing far more from each other. For example, instead of Bildad we might have had a Persian full of the Zoroastrian ideas of two great powers, the Good Spirit, Ahuramazda, and the Evil Spirit, Ahriman. Such a one might have maintained that Job had given himself to the Evil Spirit, or that his revolt against providence would bring him under that destructive power and work his ruin. And then, instead of Zophar, one might have been set forward who maintained that good and evil make no difference, that all things come alike to all, that there is no God who cares for righteousness among men;

assailing Job's faith in a more dangerous way. But the writer has no such view of making a striking drama. His circle of vision is deliberately chosen. It is only what might appear to be true he allows his characters to advance. One hears the breathings of the same dogmatism in the three voices. All is said for the ordinary belief that can be said. And three different men reason with Job that it may be understood how popular, how deeply rooted is the notion which the whole book is meant to criticise and disprove. The dramatising is vague, not at all of our sharp, modern kind like that of Ibsen, throwing each figure into vivid contrast with every other. All the author's concern is to give full play to the theory which holds the ground and to show its incompatibility with the facts of human life, so that it may perish of its own hollowness.

Nevertheless the first address to Job is eloquent and poetically beautiful. No rude arguer is Eliphaz, but one of the golden-mouthed, mistaken in creed but not in heart, a man whom Job might well cherish as a friend.

I. The first part of his speech extends to the eleventh verse. With the respect due to sorrow, putting aside the dismay caused by Job's wild language, he asks, "If one essay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved?" It seems unpardonable to add to the sufferer's misery by saying what he has in his mind; and yet—he cannot refrain. "Who can withhold himself from speaking?" The state of Job is such that there must be thorough and very serious communication. Eliphaz reminds him of what he had been—an instructor of the ignorant, one who strengthened the weak, upheld the falling, confirmed the feeble. Was he not once so confident of himself, so resolute and helpful that fainting men found him a bulwark against despair? Should he have changed so completely? Should one like him take to fruitless wailings and complaints? "Now it cometh upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art confounded." Eliphaz does not mean to taunt. It is in sorrow that he speaks, pointing out the contrast between what was and is. Where is the strong faith of former days? There is need for it, and Job ought to have it as his stay. "Is not thy piety thy confidence? Thy hope, is it not the integrity of thy ways?" Why does he not look back and take courage? Pious fear of God, if he allows himself to be guided by it, will not fail to lead him again into the light.

It is a friendly and sincere effort to make the champion of God serve himself of his own faith. The undercurrent of doubt is not allowed to appear. Eliphaz makes it a wonder that Job had dropped his claim on the Most High; and he proceeds in a tone of expostulation, amazed that a man who knew the way of the Almighty should fall into the miserable weakness of the worst evil-doer. Poetically, yet firmly, the idea is introduced:—

"Bethink thee now, who ever, being innocent, perished,
And where have the upright been destroyed?
As I have seen, they who plough iniquity
And sow disaster reap the same.
By the wrath of God they perish,
By the storm of His wrath they are undone.
Roaring of the lion, voice of the growling lion,
Teeth of the young lions are broken;
The old lion perisheth for lack of prey,
The whelps of the lioness are scattered."

First among the things Eliphaz has seen is the fate of those violent evil-doers who plough iniquity.

nity and sow disaster. But Job has not been like them and therefore has no need to fear the harvest of perdition. He is among those who are not finally cut off. In the tenth and eleventh verses the dispersion of a den of lions is the symbol of the fate of those who are hot in wickedness. As in some cave of the mountains an old lion and lioness with their whelps dwell securely, issuing forth at their will to seize the prey and make night dreadful with their growling, so those evil-doers flourish for a time in hateful and malignant strength. But as on a sudden the hunters, finding the lions' retreat, kill and scatter them, young and old, so the coalition of wicked men is broken up. The rapacity of wild desert tribes appears to be reflected in the figure here used. Eliphaz may be referring to some incident which had actually occurred.

II. In the second division of his address he endeavours to bring home to Job a needed moral lesson by detailing a vision he once had and the oracle which came with it. The account of the apparition is couched in stately and impressive language. That chilling sense of fear which sometimes mingles with our dreams in the dead of night, the sensation of a presence that cannot be realised, something awful breathing over the face and making the flesh creep, an imagined voice falling solemnly on the ear—all are vividly described. In the recollection of Eliphaz the circumstances of the vision are very clear, and the finest poetic skill is used in giving the whole solemn dream full justice and effect.

"Now a word was secretly brought me,
Mine ear caught the whisper thereof;
In thoughts from visions of the night,
When deep sleep falls upon men,
A terror came on me, and trembling
Which thrilled my bones to the marrow.
Then a breath passed before my face,
The hairs of my body rose erect.
It stood still—its appearance I trace not.
An image is before mine eyes.
There was silence, and I heard a voice—
Shall man beside Eloah be righteous?
Or beside his Maker shall man be clean?"

We are made to feel here how extraordinary the vision appeared to Eliphaz, and, at the same time, how far short he comes of the seer's gift. For what is this apparition? Nothing but a vague creation of the dreaming mind. And what is the message? No new revelation, no discovery of an inspired soul. After all, only a fact quite familiar to pious thought. The dream oracle has been generally supposed to continue to the end of the chapter. But the question as to the righteousness of man and his cleanness beside God seems to be the whole of it, and the rest is Eliphaz's comment or meditation upon it, his "thoughts from visions of the night."

As to the oracle itself: while the words may certainly bear translating so as to imply a direct comparison between the righteousness of man and the righteousness of God, this is not required by the purpose of the writer, as Dr. A. B. Davidson has shown. In the form of a question it is impressively announced that with or beside the High God no weak man is righteous, no strong man pure; and this is sufficient, for the aim of Eliphaz is to show that troubles may justly come on Job, as on others, because all are by nature imperfect. No doubt the oracle might transcend the scope of the argument. Still the question has not been raised by Job's criticism of providence, whether he reckons himself more just than God; and apart from that any comparison seems

unnecessary, meeting no mood of human revolt of which Eliphaz has ever heard. The oracle, then, is practically of the nature of a truism, and, as such, agrees with the dream vision and the impalpable ghost, a dim presentation by the mind to itself of what a visitor from the higher world might be.

Shall any created being, inheritor of human defects, stand beside Eloah, clean in His sight? Impossible. For, however sincere and earnest any one may be toward God and in the service of men, he cannot pass the fallibility and imperfection of the creature. The thought thus solemnly announced, Eliphaz proceeds to amplify in a prophetic strain, which, however, does not rise above the level of good poetry.

"Behold, He putteth no trust in His servants." Nothing that the best of them have to do is committed entirely to them; the supervision of Eloah is always maintained that their defects may not mar His purpose. "His angels He chargeth with error." Even the heavenly spirits, if we are to trust Eliphaz, go astray; they are under a law of discipline and holy correction. In the Supreme Light they are judged and often found wanting. To credit this to a Divine oracle would be somewhat disconcerting to ordinary theological ideas. But the argument is clear enough.—If even the angelic servants of God require the constant supervision of His wisdom and their faults need His correction, much more do men whose bodies are "houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth"—that is, the moth which breeds corrupting worms. "From morning to evening they are destroyed"—in a single day their vigour and beauty pass into decay.

"Without observance they perish for ever," says Eliphaz. Clearly this is not a word of Divine prophecy. It would place man beneath the level of moral judgment, as a mere earth-creature whose life and death are of no account even to God. Men go their way when a comrade falls, and soon forget. True enough. But "One higher than the highest regardeth." The stupidity or insensibility of most men to spiritual things is in contrast to the attention and judgment of God.

The description of man's life on earth, its brevity and dissolution, on account of which he can never exalt himself as just and clean beside God, ends with words that may be translated thus:—

"Is not their cord torn asunder in them?
They shall die, and not in wisdom."

Here the tearing up of the tent cord or the breaking of the bow-string is an image of the snapping of that chain of vital functions, the "silver cord," on which the bodily life depends.

The argument of Eliphaz, so far, has been, first, that Job, as a pious man, should have kept his confidence in God, because he was not like those who plough iniquity and sow disaster and have no hope in Divine mercy; next, that before the Most High all are more or less unrighteous and impure, so that if Job suffers for defect, he is no exception, his afflictions are not to be wondered at. And this carries the further thought that he ought to be conscious of fault and humble himself under the Divine hand. Just at this point Eliphaz comes at last within sight of the right way to find Job's heart and conscience. The corrective discipline which all need was safe ground to take with one who could

not have denied in the last resort that he, too, had

"Sins of will,
Defects of doubt and taints of blood."

This strain of argument, however, closes, Eliphaz having much in his mind which has not found expression and is of serious import.

III. The speaker sees that Job is impatient of the sufferings which make life appear useless to him. But suppose he appealed to the saints—holy ones, or angels—to take his part, would that be of any use? In his cry from the depth he had shown resentment and hasty passion. These do not insure, they do not deserve help. The "holy ones" would not respond to a man so unreasonable and indignant. On the contrary, "resentment slayeth the foolish man, passion killeth the silly." What Job had said in his outcry only tended to bring on him the fatal stroke of God. Having caught at this idea, Eliphaz proceeds in a manner rather surprising. He has been shocked by Job's bitter words. The horror he felt returns upon him, and he falls into a very singular and inconsiderate strain of remark. He does not, indeed, identify his old friend with the foolish man whose destruction he proceeds to paint. But an instance has occurred to him—a bit of his large experience—of one who behaved in a godless, irrational way and suffered for it; and for Job's warning, because he needs to take home the lesson of the catastrophe, Eliphaz details the story. Forgetting the circumstances of his friend, utterly forgetting that the man lying before him has lost all his children and that robbers have swallowed his substance, absorbed in his own reminiscence to the exclusion of every other thought, Eliphaz goes deliberately through a whole roll of disasters so like Job's that every word is a poisoned arrow:—

"Plead then: will any one answer thee;
And to which of the holy ones wilt thou turn?
Nay, resentment killeth the fool,
And hasty indignation slayeth the silly,
I myself have seen a godless fool take root;
Yet straightway I cursed his habitation:—
His children are far from succour,
They are crushed in the gate without deliverer
While the hungry eats up his harvest
And snatches it even out of the thorns,
And the snare gapes for their substance."

The desolation he saw come suddenly, even when the impious man had just taken root as founder of a family, Eliphaz declares to be a curse from the Most High; and he describes it with much force. Upon the children of the household disaster falls at the gate or place of judgment; there is no one to plead for them, because the father is marked for the vengeance of God. Predatory tribes from the desert devour first the crops in the remoter fields, and then those protected by the thorn hedge near the homestead. The man had been an oppressor; now those he had oppressed are under no restraint, and all he has is swallowed up without redress.

So much for the third attempt to convict Job and bring him to confession. It is a bolt shot apparently at a venture, yet it strikes where it must wound to the quick. Here, however, made aware, perhaps by a look of anguish or a sudden gesture, that he has gone too far, Eliphaz draws back. To the general dogma that affliction is the lot of every human being he returns, that the sting may be taken out of his words:—

"For disaster cometh not forth from the dust,
And out of the ground trouble springeth not;
But man is born unto trouble
As the sparks fly upward."

By this vague piece of moralising, which sheds no light on anything, Eliphaz betrays himself. He shows that he is not anxious to get at the root of the matter. The whole subject of pain and calamity is external to him, not a part of his own experience. He would speak very differently if he were himself deprived of all his possessions and laid low in trouble. As it is he can turn glibly from one thought to another, as if it mattered not which fits the case. In fact, as he advances and retreats we discover that he is feeling his way, aiming first at one thing, then at another, in the hope that this or that random arrow may hit the mark. No man is just beside God. Job is like the rest, crushed before the moth. Job has spoken passionately, in wild resentment. Is he then among the foolish whose habitation is cursed? But again, lest that should not be true, the speaker falls back on the common lot of men born to trouble—why, God alone can tell. Afterwards he makes another suggestion. Is not God He who frustrates the devices of the crafty and confounds the cunning, so that they grope in the blaze of noon as if it were night? If the other explanations did not apply to Job's condition, perhaps this would. At all events something might be said by way of answer that would give an inkling of the truth. At last the comparatively kind and vague explanation is offered, that Job suffers from the chastening of the Lord, who, though He afflicts, is also ready to heal. Glancing at all possibilities which occur to him, Eliphaz leaves the afflicted man to accept that which happens to come home.

IV. Eloquence, literary skill, sincerity, mark the close of this address. It is the argument of a man who is anxious to bring his friend to a right frame of mind so that his latter days may be peace. "As for me," he says, hinting what Job should do, "I would turn to God, and set my expectation upon the Highest." Then he proceeds to give his thoughts on Divine providence. Unsearchable, wonderful are the doings of God. He is the Rain-giver for the thirsty fields and desert pastures. Among men, too, He makes manifest His power, exalting those who are lowly, and restoring the joy of the mourners. Crafty men, who plot to make their own way, oppose His sovereign power in vain. They are stricken as if with blindness. Out of their hand the helpless are delivered, and hope is restored to the feeble. Has Job been crafty? Has he been in secret a plotter against the peace of men? Is it for this reason God has cast him down? Let him repent, and he shall yet be saved. For

"Happy is the man whom Eloah correcteth,
Therefore spurn not thou the chastening of Shaddai.
For He maketh sore and bindeth up;
He smiteth, but His hands make whole.
In six straits He will deliver thee;
In seven also shall not evil touch thee.
In famine He will rescue thee from death,
And in war from the power of the sword.
When the tongue smiteth thou shalt be hid;
Nor shalt thou fear when desolation cometh.
At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh;
And of the beasts of the earth shalt not be afraid.
For with the stones of the field shall be thy covenant,
With thee shall the beasts of the field be at peace.
So shalt thou find that thy tent is secure,
And surveying thy homestead thou shalt miss nothing
Thou shalt find that thy seed are many,
And thy offspring like the grass of the earth;
Thou shalt come to thy grave with white hair,
As a ripe shock of corn is carried home in its season.
Behold! This we have searched out: thus it is.
Hear it, and, thou, consider it for thyself!"

Fine, indeed, as dramatic poetry; but is it not, as reasoning, incoherent? The author does not mean it to be convincing. He who is chastened and receives the chastening may not be saved in those six troubles, yea seven. There is more of dream than fact. Eliphaz is apparently right in everything, as Dillmann says; but right only on the surface. *He has seen*—that they who plough iniquity and sow disaster reap the same. *He has seen*—a vision of the night, and received a message; a sign of God's favour that almost made him a prophet. *He has seen*—a fool or impious man taking root, but was not deceived; he knew what would be the end, and took upon him to curse judicially the doomed homestead. *He has seen*—the crafty confounded. *He has seen*—the man whom God corrected, who received his chastisement with submission, rescued and restored to honour. "Lo, this we have searched out," he says; "it is even thus." But the piety and orthodoxy of the good Eliphaz do not save him from blunders at every turn. And to the clearing of Job's position he offers no suggestion of value. What does he say to throw light on the condition of a believing, earnest servant of the Almighty who is *always* poor, *always* afflicted, who meets disappointment after disappointment, and is pursued by sorrow and disaster even to the grave? The religion of Eliphaz is made for well-to-do people like himself, and such only. It it were true that, because all are sinful before God, affliction and pain are punishments of sin, and a man is happy in receiving this Divine correction, why is Eliphaz himself not lying like Job upon a heap of ashes, racked with the torment of disease? Good orthodox prosperous man, he thinks himself a prophet, but he is none. Were he tried like Job he would be as unreasonable and passionate, as wild in his declamation against life, as eager for death.

Useless in religion is all mere talk that only skims the surface, however often the terms of it may be repeated, however widely they find acceptance. The creed that breaks down at any point is no creed for a rational being. Infidelity in our day is very much the consequence of crude notions about God that contradict each other, notions of the atonement, of the meaning of suffering, of the future life, that are incoherent, childish, of no practical weight. People think they have a firm grasp of the truth; but when circumstances occur which are at variance with their preconceived ideas, they turn away from religion, or their religion makes the facts of life appear worse for them. It is the result of insufficient thought. Research must go deeper, must return with new zeal to the study of Scripture and the life of Christ. God's revelation in providence and Christianity is one. It has a profound coherency, the stamp and evidence of its truth. The rigidity of natural law has its meaning for us in our study of the spiritual life.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEN FALSE: GOD OVERBEARING.

JOB vi., vii. JOB SPEAKS.

WORST to endure of all things is the grief that preys on a man's own heart because no channel outside self is provided for the hot stream of thought. Now that Eliphaz has spoken, Job has

something to arouse him, at least to resentment. The strength of his mind revives as he finds himself called to a battle of words. And how energetic he is! The long address of Eliphaz we saw to be incoherent, without the backbone of any clear conviction, turning hither and thither in the hope of making some way or other a happy hit. But as soon as Job begins to speak there is coherency, strong thought running through the variety of expression, the anxiety for instruction, the sense of bewilderment and trouble. We feel at once that we are in contact with a mind no half-truths can satisfy, that will go with whatever difficulty to the very bottom of the matter.

Supreme mark of a healthy nature, this. People are apt to praise a mind at peace, moving composedly from thought to thought, content "to enjoy the things which others understand," not distressed by moral questions. But minds enjoying such peace are only to be praised if the philosophy of life has been searched out and tried, and the great trust in God which resolves all doubt has been found. While life and providence, one's own history and the history of the world present what appear to be contradictions, problems that baffle and disturb the soul, how can a healthy mind be at rest? Our intellectual powers are not given simply that we may enjoy; they are given that we may understand. A mind hungers for knowledge, as a body for food, and cannot be satisfied unless the reason and the truth of things are seen. You may object that some are not capable of understanding, that indeed Divine providence, the great purposes of God, lie so far and so high beyond the ordinary human range as to be incomprehensible to most of us. Of what use, then, is revelation? Is it given merely to bewilder us, to lead us on in a quest which at the last must leave many of the searchers unsatisfied, without light or hope? If so, the Bible mocks us, the prophets were deceivers, even Christ Himself is found no Light of the world, but a dreamer who spoke of that which can never be realised. Not thus do I begin in doubt, and end in doubt. There are things beyond me; but exact or final knowledge of these is not necessary. Within my range and reach through nature and religion, through the Bible and the Son of God, are the principles I need to satisfy my soul's hunger. And in every healthy mind there will be desire for truth which, often baffled, will continue till understanding comes.

And here we join issue with the agnostic, who denies this vital demand of the soul. Our thought dwelling on life and all its varied experience—sorrow and fear, misery and hope, love threatened by death yet unquenchable, the exaltation of duty, the baffling of ambition, unforeseen peril and unexpected deliverance—our thought, I say, dealing with these elements of life, will not rest in the notion that all is due to chance or to blind forces, that evolution can never be intelligently followed. The modern atheist or agnostic falls into the very error for which he used to reprove faith when he contemptuously bids us get rid of the hope of understanding the world and the Power directing it, when he invites us to remember our limitations and occupy ourselves with things within our range. Religion used to be taunted with crippling man's faculties and denying full play to his mental activity. Scientific unbelief does so now. It restricts us to the seen and temporal, and, if consistent,

ought to refuse all ideals and all desires for a "perfect" state. The modern sage, intent on the study of material things and their changes, confining himself to what can be seen, heard, touched, or by instruments analysed, may have nothing but scorn or, say, pity for one who cries out of trouble—

"Have I sinned? Yet, what have I done unto Thee,
O Thou Watcher of men?
Why hast Thou set me as Thy stumbling-block,
So that I am a burden to myself?
And why wilt Thou not pardon my transgression,
And cause my sin to pass away?"

But the man whose soul is eager in the search for reality must endeavour to wrest from Heaven itself the secret of his dissatisfaction with the real, his conflict with the real, and why he must so often suffer from the very forces that sustain his life. Yes, the passion of the soul continues. It protests against darkness, and therefore against materialism. Conscious mind presses toward an origin of thought. Soul must find a Divine Eternal Soul. Where nature opens ascending ways to the reason in its quest; where prophets and sages have cut paths here and there through the forest of mystery; where the brave and true testify of a light they have seen and invite us to follow; where One stands high and radiant above the cross on which He suffered and declares Himself the Resurrection and the Life,—there men will advance, feeling themselves inspired to maintain the search for that Eternal Truth without the hope of which all our life here is a wearisome pageant, a troubled dream, a bitter slavery.

In his reply to Eliphaz, Job first takes hold of the charge of impatience and hasty indignation made in the opening of the fifth chapter. He is quite aware that his words were rash when he cursed his day and cried impatiently for death. In accusing him of rebellious passion, Eliphaz had shot the only arrow that went home; and now Job, conscientious here, pulls out the arrow to show it and the wound. "Oh," he cries, "that my hasty passion were duly weighed, and my misery were laid in the balance against it! For then would it, my misery, be found heavier than the sand of the seas; therefore have my words been rash." He is almost deprecatory. Yes: he will admit the impatience and vehemence with which he spoke. But then, had Eliphaz duly considered his state, the weight of his trouble causing a physical sense of indescribable oppression? Let his friends look at him again, a man prostrated with sore disease and grief, dying slowly in the leper's exile.

"The arrows of the Almighty are within me,
The poison whereof my spirit drinketh up.
The terrors of God beleaguer me."

We need not fall into the mistake of supposing that it is only the pain of his disease which makes Job's misery so heavy. Rather is it that his troubles have come from God; they are "the arrows of the Almighty." Mere suffering and loss, even to the extremity of death, he could have borne without a murmur. But he had thought God to be his friend. Why on a sudden have those darts been launched against him by the hand he trusted? What does the Almighty mean? The evil-doer who suffers knows why he is afflicted. The martyr enduring for conscience' sake has his support in the truth to which he

bears witness, the holy cause for which he dies. Job has no explanation, no support. He cannot understand providence. The God with whom he supposed himself to be at peace suddenly becomes an angry incomprehensible Power, blighting and destroying His servant's life. Existence poisoned, the couch of ashes encompassed with terrors, is it any wonder that passionate words break from his lips? A cry is the last power left to him.

So it is with many. The seeming needlessness of their sufferings, the impossibility of tracing these to any cause in their past history, in a word, the mystery of the pain confounds the mind, and adds to anguish and desolation an unspeakable horror of darkness. Sometimes the very thing guarded against is that which happens; a man's best intelligence appears confuted by destiny or chance. Why has he amongst the many been chosen for this? Do all things come alike to all, righteous and wicked? The problem becomes terribly acute in the case of earnest God-fearing men, and women who have not yet found the real theory of suffering. Endurance for others does not always explain. All cannot be rested on that. Nor unless we speak falsely for God will it avail to say, These afflictions have fallen on us for our sins. For even if the conscience does not give the lie to that assertion, as Job's conscience did, the question demands a clear answer why the penitent should suffer, those who believe, to whom God imputes no iniquity. If it is for our transgressions we suffer, either our own faith and religion are vain, or God does not forgive excepting in form, and the law of punishment retains its force. We have here the serious difficulty that legal fictions seem to hold their ground even in the dealings of the Most High with those who trust Him. Many are in the direst trouble still for the same reason as Job, and might use his very words. Taught to believe that suffering is invariably connected with wrong-doing and is always in proportion to it, they cannot find in their past life any great transgressions for which they should be racked with constant pain or kept in grinding penury and disappointment. Moreover, they had imagined that through the mediation of Christ their sins were expiated and their guilt blotted out. What strange error is there in the creed or in the world? Have they never believed? Has God turned against them? So they inquire in the darkness.

The truth, however, as shown in a previous chapter, is that suffering has no proportion to the guilt of sin, but is related in the scheme of Divine providence to life in this world, its movement, discipline, and perfecting in the individual and the race. Afflictions, pains, and griefs are appointed to the best as well as the worst, because all need to be tried and urged on from imperfect faith and spirituality to vigour, constancy, and courage of soul. The principle is not clearly stated in the Book of Job, but underlies it, as truth must underlie all genuine criticism and every faithful picture of human life. The inspiration of the poem is so to present the facts of human experience that the real answer alone can satisfy. And in the speech we are now considering some imperfect and mistaken views are swept so completely aside that their survival is almost unaccountable.

Beginning with the fifth verse we have a series of questions somewhat difficult to interpret:—

"Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass?
Or loweth the ox over his fodder?
Can that be eaten which is unsavoury, without salt?
Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?
My soul refuseth to touch them;
They are to me as mouldy bread."

By some these questions are supposed to describe sarcastically the savourless words of Eliphaz, his "solemn and impertinent prosing." This, however, would break the continuity of the thought. Another view makes the reference to be to Job's afflictions, which he is supposed to compare to insipid and loathsome food. But it seems quite unnatural to take this as the meaning. Such pain and grief and loss as he had undergone were certainly not like the white of an egg. But he has already spoken wildly, unreasonably, and he now feels himself to be on the point of breaking out afresh in similar impatient language. Now, the wild ass does not complain when it has grass, nor the ox when it has fodder; so, if his mind were supplied with necessary explanations of the sore troubles he is enduring, he would not be impatient, he would not complain. His soul hungers to know the reason of the calamities that darken his life. Nothing that has been said helps him. Every suggestion presented to his mind is either trifling and vain, without the salt of wisdom, like the white of an egg, or offensive, disagreeable. Ruthlessly sincere, he will not pretend to be satisfied when he is not. His soul refuses to touch the offered explanations and reasons. Verily, they are like mouldy bread to him. It is his own impatience, his loud cries and inquiries, he desires to account for; he does not attack Eliphaz with sarcasm, but defends himself.

At this point there is a brief halt in the speech. As if after a pause, due to a sharp sting of pain, Job exclaims: "Oh that God would please to destroy me!" He had felt the paroxysm approaching; he had endeavoured to restrain himself, but the torture drives him, as before, to cry for death. Again and again in the course of his speeches sudden turns of this kind occur, points at which the dramatic feeling of the writer comes out. He will have us remember the terrible disease and keep continually in mind the setting of the thoughts. Job had roused himself in beginning his reply, and, for a little, eagerness had overcome pain. But now he falls back, mastered by cruel sickness which appears to be unto death. Then he speaks:—

"Oh that I might have my request,
That God would give me the thing I long for,
Even that God would be pleased to crush me,
That He would loose His hand and tear me off;
And I should yet have comfort,
I should even exult amidst unsparing pain,
For I have not denied the words of the Holy One."

The longing for death which now returns on Job is not so passionate as before; but his cry is quite as urgent and unqualified. As we have already seen, no motion towards suicide is at any point of the drama attributed to him. He does not, like Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose position is in some respects very similar, question with himself,

"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?"

Nor may we say that Job is deterred from the act of self-destruction by Hamlet's thought, "The dread of something after death" that

"makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of."

Job has the fear and faith of God still, and not even the pressure of "unsparing pain" can move him to take into his own hands the ending of that torment God bids him bear. He is too pious even to dream of it. A true Oriental, with strong belief that the will of God must be done, he could die without a murmur, in more than stoical courage; but a suicide he cannot be. And indeed the Bible, telling us for the most part of men of healthy mind, has few suicides to record. Saul, Zimri, Abithophel, Judas, break away thus from dishonour and doom; but these are all who, in impatience and cowardice, turn against God's decree of life.

Here, then, the strong religious feeling of the writer obliges him to reject that which the poets of the world have used to give the strongest effect to their work. From the Greek dramatists, through Shakespeare to Browning, the drama is full of that quarrel with life which flies to suicide. In this great play, as we may well call it, of Semitic faith and genius, the ideas are masterly, the hold of universal truth is sublime. Perhaps the author was not fully aware of all he suggests, but he feels that suicide serves no end: it settles nothing; and his problem must be settled. Suicide is an attempt at evasion in a sphere where evasion is impossible. God and the soul have a controversy together, and the controversy must be worked out to an issue.

Job has not cursed God nor denied his words. With this clear conscience he is not afraid to die; yet, to keep it, he must wait on the decision of the Almighty—that it would please God to crush him, or tear him off like a branch from the tree of life. The prospect of death, if it were granted by God, would revive him for the last moment of endurance. He would leap up to meet the stroke, God's stroke, the pledge that God was kind to him after all.

"Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all. . . .
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past."

According to Eliphaz there was but one way for a sufferer. If Job would bow humbly in acknowledgment of guilt, and seek God in penitence, then recovery would come; the hand that smote would heal and set him on high; all the joy and vigour of life would be renewed, and after another long course of prosperity, he should come to his grave at last as a shock of corn is carried home in its season. Recalling this glib promise, Job puts it from him as altogether incongruous with his state. He is a leper; he is *dying*.

"What is my strength that I should wait,
And what my term that I should be patient?
Is my strength the strength of stones?
Is my flesh brass?
Is not my help within me gone,
And energy quite driven from me?"

Why, his condition is hopeless. What can he look for but death? Speak to him of a new

term; it was adding mockery to de-pair. But he would die still true to God, and therefore he seeks the end of conflict. If he were to live on he could not be sure of himself, especially when, with failing strength, he had to endure the nausea and stings of disease. As yet he can face death as a chief should.

The second part of the address begins at the fourteenth verse of chap. vi. Here Job rouses himself anew, and this time to assail his friends. The language of their spokesman had been addressed to him from a height of assumed moral superiority, and this had stirred in Job a resentment quite natural. No doubt the three friends showed friendliness. He could not forget the long journey they had made to bring him comfort. But when he bethought him how in his prosperity he had often entertained these men, held high discourse with them on the ways of God, opened his heart and showed them all his life, he marvelled that now they could fail of the thing he most wanted—understanding. The knowledge they had of him should have made suspicion impossible, for they had the testimony of his whole life. The author is not unfair to his champions of orthodoxy. They fail where all such have a way of failing. If their victim in the poem presses on to stinging sarcasm and at last oversteps the bounds of fair criticism, one need not wonder. He is not intended as a type of the meek, self-depreciating person who lets slander pass without a protest. If they have treated him badly, he will tell them to their faces what he thinks. Their want of justice might cause a weak man to slip and lose himself.

"Pity from his friend is due to the despairing,
Lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty ;
But my brethren have deceived as a torrent,
Like the streams of the ravine, that pass away,
That become blackish with ice,
In which the snow is dissolved.
What time they wax warm they vanish,
When it is hot they are dried up out of their place.
The caravans turn aside,
They go up into the desert and are perishing.
The caravans of Tema look out,
The merchants of Sheba hope for them.
They were ashamed because they had trusted,
They came up to them and blushed.
Even so, now are ye nought."

The poetical genius of the writer overflows here. The allegory is beautiful, the wit keen, the knowledge abundant; yet, in a sense, we have to pardon the interposition. Job is not quite in the mood to represent his disappointment by such an elaborate picture. He would naturally seek a sharper mode of expression. Still, the passage must not be judged by our modern dramatic rules. This is the earliest example of the philosophic story, and elaborate word-pictures are part of the literature of the piece. We accept the pleasure of following a description which Job must be supposed to have painted in melancholy humour.

The scene is in the desert, several days' journey from the Jauf, that valley already identified as the region in which Job lived. Beyond the Ne-food to the west towers the Jebel Tobeck, a high ridge covered in winter with deep snow, the melting of which fills the ravines with roaring streams. Caravans are coming across the desert from Tema, which lies seven days' journey to the south of the Jauf, and from Sheba still farther in the same direction. They are on the march in early summer and, falling short of water, turn

aside westward to one of the ravines where a stream is expected to be still flowing. But, alas for the vain hope! In the wadi is nothing but stones and dry sand, mocking the thirst of man and beast. Even so, says Job to his friends, ye are treacherous; ye are nothing. I looked for the refreshing waters of sympathy, but ye are empty ravines, dry sand. In my days of prosperity you gushed with friendliness. Now, when I thirst, ye have not even pity. "Ye see a terror, and are afraid." I am terribly stricken. You fear that if you sympathised with me, you might provoke the anger of God.

From this point he turns upon them with reproach. Had he asked them for anything, gifts out of their herds or treasure, aid in recovering his property? They knew he had requested no such service. But again and again Eliphaz had made the suggestion that he was suffering as a wrong-doer. Would they tell him then, straightforwardly, how and when he had transgressed? "How forcible are words of uprightness," words that go right to a point; but as for their reproofing, what did it come to? They had caught at his complaint. Men of experience should know that the talk of a desperate man is for the wind, to be blown away and forgotten, not to be laid hold of captiously. And here from sarcasm he passes to invective. Their temper, he tells them, is so hard and unfeeling that they are fit to cast lots over the orphan and bargain over a friend. They would be guilty even of selling for a slave a poor fatherless child cast on their charity. "Be pleased to look on me," he cries; "I surely will not lie to your face. Return, let not wrong be done. Go back over my life. Let there be no unfairness. Still is my cause just." They were bound to admit that he was as able to distinguish right from wrong as they were. If that were not granted, then his whole life went for nothing, and their friendship also.

In this vivid eager expostulation there is at least much of human nature. It abounds in natural touches common to all time and in shrewd ironic perception. The sarcasms of Job bear not only upon his friends, but also upon our lives. The words of men who are sorely tossed with trouble, aye even their deeds, are to be judged with full allowance for circumstances. A man driven back inch by inch in a fight with the world, irritated by defeat, thwarted in his plans, missing his calculations, how easy is it to criticise him from the standpoint of a successful career, high repute, a good balance at the banker's! The hasty words of one who is in sore distress, due possibly to his own ignorance and carelessness, how easy to reckon them against him, find in them abundant proof that he is an unbeliever and a knave, and so pass on to offer in the temple the Pharisee's prayer! But, easy and natural, it is base. The author of our poem does well to lay the lash of his inspired scorn upon such a temper. He who stores in memory the quick words of a sufferer and brings them up by and by to prove him deserving of all his troubles, such a man would cast lots over the orphan. It is no unfair charge. Oh for humane feeling, gentle truth, self-searching fear of falsehood! It is so easy to be hard and pious.

Beginning another strophe Job turns from his friends, from would-be wise assertions and innuendoes, to find, if he can, a philosophy of human life, then to reflect once more in sorrow on

his state, and finally to wrestle in urgent entreaty with the Most High. The seventh chapter, in which we trace this line of thought, increases in pathos as it proceeds and rises to the climax of a most daring demand which is not blasphemous because it is entirely frank, profoundly earnest.

The friends of Job have wondered at his sufferings. He himself has tried to find the reason of them. Now he seeks it again in a survey of man's life:—

"Hath not man war service on earth?
And as the days of an hireling are not his?"

The thought of necessity is coming over Job, that man is not his own master; that a Power he cannot resist appoints his task, whether of action or endurance, to fight in the hot battle or to suffer wearily. And there is truth in the conception; only it is a truth which is inspiring or depressing as the ultimate Power is found in noble character or mindless force. In the time of prosperity this thought of an inexorable decree would have caused no perplexity to Job, and his judgment would have been that the Irresistible is wise and kind. But now, because the shadow has fallen, all appears in gloomy colour, and man's life a bitter servitude. As a slave, panting for the shade, longing to have his work over, Job considers man. During months of vanity and nights of weariness he waits, long nights made dreary with pain, through the slow hours of which he tosses to and fro in misery. His flesh is clothed with worms and an earthy crust, his skin hardens and breaks out. His days are flimsier than a web (ver. 6), and draw to a close without hope. The wretchedness masters him, and he cries to God.

"O remember, a breath is my life;
Never again will mine eye see good."

Does the Almighty consider how little time is left to him? Surely a gleam might break before all grows dark! Out of sight he will be soon, yea, out of the sight of God Himself, like a cloud that melts away. His place will be down in Sheol, the region of mere existence, not of life, where a man's being dissolves in shadows and dreams. God must know this is coming to Job. Yet in anguish, ere he die, he will remonstrate with his Maker: "I will not curb my mouth, I will make my complaint in the bitterness of my soul."

Striking indeed is the remonstrance that follows. A struggle against that belief in grim fate which has so injured Oriental character gives vehemence to his appeal; for God must not be lost. His mind is represented as going abroad to find in nature what is most ungovernable and may be supposed to require most surveillance and restraint. By change after change, stroke after stroke, his power has been curbed; till at last, in abject impotence, he lies, a wreck upon the wayside. Nor is he allowed the last solace of nature *in extremis*; he is not unconscious; he cannot sleep away his misery. By night tormenting dreams haunt him, and visions make as it were a terrible wall against him. He exists on sufferance, perpetually chafed. With all this in his consciousness, he asks,—

"Am I a sea, or a sea-monster,
That thou keepest watch over me?"

In a daring figure he imagines the Most High who sets a bound to the sea exercising the same

restraint over him, or barring his way as if he were some huge monster of the deep. A certain grim humour characterises the picture. His friends have denounced his impetuosity. Is it as fierce in God's sight? Can his rage be so wild? Strange indeed is the restraint put on one conscious of having sought to serve God and his age. In self-pity, with an inward sense of the absurdity of the notion, he fancies the Almighty fencing his squalid couch with the horrible dreams and spectres of delirium, barring his way as if he were a raging flood. "I loathe life," he cries; "I would not live always. Let me alone, for my days are a vapour." Do not pain me and hem me in with Thy terrors that allow no freedom, no hope, nothing but a weary sense of impotence. And then his expostulation becomes even bolder.

"What is man," asks a psalmist, "that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" With amazement God's thought of so puny and insignificant a being is observed. But Job, marking in like manner the littleness of man, turns the question in another way:—

"What is man that Thou magnifiest him,
And settest Thine heart upon him?
That Thou visitest him every morning,
And triest him every moment?"

Has the Almighty no greater thing to engage Him that He presses hard on the slight personality of man? Might he not be let alone for a little? Might the watchful eye not be turned away from him even for a moment?

And finally, coming to the supposition that he may have transgressed and brought himself under the judgment of the Most High, he even dares to ask why that should be:—

"Have I sinned? Yet what have I done unto Thee,
O Thou Watcher of men?
Why hast Thou set me as Thy butt,
So that I am a burden to myself?
And why will Thou not pardon my transgression,
And cause my sin to pass away?"

How can his sin have injured God? Far above man the Almighty dwells and reigns. No shock of human revolt can affect His throne. Strange is it that a man, even if he has committed some fault or neglected some duty, should be like a block of wood or stone before the feet of the Most High, till bruised and broken he cares no more for existence. If iniquity has been done, cannot the Great God forgive it, pass it by? That would be more like the Great God. Yes; soon Job would be down in the dust of death. The Almighty would find then that he had gone too far. "Thou shalt seek me, but I shall not be."

More daring words were never put by a pious man into the mouth of one represented as pious; and the whole passage shows how daring piety may be. The inspired writer of this book knows God too well, honours Him too profoundly to be afraid. The Eternal Father does not watch keenly for the offences of the creatures He has made. May a man not be frank with God and say out what is in his heart? Surely he may. But he must be entirely earnest. No one playing with life, with duty, with truth, or with doubt may expostulate thus with his Maker.

There is indeed an aspect of our little life in which sin may appear too pitiful, too impotent for God to search out. "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he

flourisheth." Only when we see that infinite Justice is involved in the minute infractions of justice, that it must redress the iniquity done by feeble hands and vindicate the ideal we crave for yet so often infringe; only when we see this and realise therewith the greatness of our being, made for justice and the ideal, for moral conflict and victory; only, in short, when we know responsibility, do we stand aghast at sin and comprehend the meaning of judgment. Job is learning here the wisdom and holiness of God which stand correlative to His grace and our responsibility. By way of trial and pain and these sore battles with doubt he is entering into the fulness of the heritage of spiritual knowledge and power.

CHAPTER IX.

VENTURESOME THEOLOGY.

JOB viii. BILDAD SPEAKS.

THE first attempt to meet Job has been made by one who relies on his own experience and takes pleasure in recounting the things which he has seen. Bildad of Shuach, on the other hand, is a man who holds to the wisdom of the fathers and supports himself at all times with their answers to the questions of life. Vain to him is the reasoning of one who sees all as through coloured glass, everything of this tint or that, according to his state or notions for the time being. The personal impression counts for nothing with Bildad. He finds no authority there. In him we have the Catholic theologian opposing individualism. Unfortunately he fails in the power most needed, of distinguishing chaff from grain. Back to antiquity, back to the fathers, say some; but, although they profess the excellent temper of reverence, there is no guarantee that they will not select the follies of the past instead of its wisdom to admire. Everything depends upon the man, the individual, after all, whether he has an open mind, a preference if not a passion for great ideas. There are those who go back to the apostles and find only dogmatism, instead of the glorious breadth of Divine poetry and hope. Yea, some go to the Light of the World, and report as their discovery some pragmatism scheme, some weak arrangement of details, a bondage or a futility. Bildad is not one of these. He is intelligent and well-informed, an able man, as we say; but he has no sympathy with new ideas that burst the old wine-skins of tradition, no sympathy with daring words that throw doubt on old orthodoxies. You can fancy his pious horror when the rude hand of Job seemed to rend the sacred garments of established truth. It would have been like him to turn away and leave to fate and judgment a man so venturesome.

With the instinct of the highest and noblest thought, utterly removed from all impiety, the writer has shown his inspiration in leading Job to a climax of impassioned inquiry as one who wrestles in the swellings of Jordan with the angel of Jehovah. Now he brings forward Bildad speaking cold words from a mind quite unable to understand the crisis. This is a man who firmly believed himself possessed of authority and insight. When Job added entreaty to entreaty, demand to demand, Bildad would feel as

if his ears were deceiving him, for what he heard seemed to be an impious assault on the justice of the Most High, an attempt to convict the infinitely Righteous of unrighteousness. He burns to speak; and Job has no sooner sunk down exhausted than he begins:—

"How long wilt thou speak these things?
A mighty wind, forsooth, are the words of thy mouth.
God:—will He pervert judgment?
Almighty God:—will He pervert righteousness?
If thy children sinned against Him,
And He cast them away into the hand of their rebellion;
If thou wilt seek unto God,
And unto the Almighty wilt make entreaty;
If spotless and upright thou art,
Surely now He would awake for thee
And make prosperous thy righteous habitation.
So that thy beginning shall prove small
And thy latter end exceedingly great."

How far wrong Bildad is may be seen in this, that he dangles before Job the hope of greater worldly prosperity. The children must have sinned, for they have perished. Yet Job himself may possibly be innocent. If he is, then a simple entreaty to God will insure His renewed favour and help. Job is required to seek wealth and greatness again as a pledge of his own uprightness. But the whole difficulty lies in the fact that, being upright, he has been plunged into poverty, desolation, and a living death. He desires to know the reason of what has occurred. Apart altogether from the restoration of his prosperity and health, he would know what God means. Bildad does not see this in the least. Himself a prosperous man, devoted to the doctrine that opulence is the proof of religious acceptance and security, he has nothing for Job but the advice to get God to prove him righteous by giving him back his goods. There is a taunt in Bildad's speech. He privately believes that there has been sin, and that only by way of repentance good can come again. Since his friend is so obstinate let him try to regain his prosperity and fail. Bildad is lavish in promises, extravagant indeed. He can only be acquitted of a sinister meaning in his large prediction if we judge that he reckons God to be under a debt to a faithful servant whom He had unwittingly, while He was not observing, allowed to be overtaken by disaster.

Next the speaker parades his learning, the wisdom he had gathered from the past:—

"Inquire, I pray thee, of the bygone age,
And attend to the research of their fathers.
(For we are but of yesterday and know nothing;
A shadow, indeed, are our days upon the earth)—
Shall not they teach thee and tell thee,
Bring forth words from their heart?"

The man of to-day is nothing, a poor creature. Only by the proved wisdom of the long ages can end come to controversy. Let Job listen, then, and be convinced.

Now it must be owned there is not simply an air of truth but truth itself in what Bildad proceeds to say in the very picturesque passage that follows. Truths, however, may be taken hold of in a wrong way to establish false conclusions; and in this way Job's interlocutor errs with not a few of his painstaking successors. The rush or papyrus of the river-side cannot grow without mire; the reed-grass needs moisture. If the water fails they wither. So are the paths of all that forget God. Yes: if you take it aright, what can be more impressively certain? The hope of a godless man perishes. His confidence is cut

off; it is as if he trusted in a spider's web. Even his house, however strongly built, shall not support him. The man who has abandoned God must come to this—that every earthly stay shall snap asunder, every expectation fade. There shall be nothing between him and despair. His strength, his wisdom, his inheritance, his possessions piled together in abundance, how can they avail when the demand is urged by Divine justice—What hast thou done with thy life? This, however, is not at all in Bildad's mind. He is not thinking of the prosperity of the soul and exultation in God, but of outward success, that a man should spread his visible existence like a green bay tree. Beyond that visible existence he cannot stretch thought or reasoning. His school, generally, believed in God much after the manner of English eighteenth-century deists, standing on the earth, looking over the life of man here, and demanding in the present world the vindication of providence. The position is realistic, the good of life solely mundane. If one is brought low who flourished in luxuriance and sent forth his shoots over the garden and was rooted near the spring, his poverty is his destruction; he is destroyed because somehow the law of life, that is of prosperity, has been transgressed, and the God of success punishes the fault. We are made to feel that beneath the promise of returning honour and joy with which Bildad closes there is an *if*. "God will not cast away a perfect man." Is Job perfect? Then his mouth will be filled with laughter, and his haters shall be clothed with shame. That issue is problematical. And yet, on the whole, doubt is kept well in the background, and the final word of cheer is made as generous and hopeful as circumstances will allow. Bildad means to leave the impression on Job's mind that the wisdom of the ancients as applied to his case is reassuring.

But one sentence of his speech, that in which (ver. 4) he implies the belief that Job's children had sinned and been "cast away into the hand of their rebellion," shows the cold, relentless side of his orthodoxy, the logic, not unknown still, which presses to its point over the whole human race. Bildad meant, it appears, to shift from Job the burden of his children's fate. The catastrophe which overtook them might have seemed to be one of the arrows of judgment aimed at the father. Job himself may have had great perplexity as well as keen distress whenever he thought of his sons and daughters. Now Bildad is throwing on them the guilt which he believes to have been so terribly punished, even to the extremity of irremediable death. But there is no enlightenment in the suggestion. Rather does it add to the difficulties of the case. The sons and daughters whom Job loved, over whom he watched with such religious care lest they should renounce God in their hearts—were they condemned by the Most High? A man of the old world, accustomed to think of himself as standing in God's stead to his household, Job cannot receive this. Thought having been once stirred to its depths, he is resentful now against a doctrine that may never before have been questioned. Is there, then, no fatherhood in the Almighty, no magnanimity such as Job himself would have shown? If so, then the spirit would fail before Him, and the souls which He has made (Isaiah lvii. 16). The dogmatist with his wisdom of the ages drops in the by-going one of

his commonplaces of theological thought. It is a coal of fire in the heart of the sufferer.

Those who attempt to explain God's ways for edification and comfort need to be very simple and genuine in their feeling with men, their effort on behalf of God. Every one who believes and thinks has something in his spiritual experience worth recounting, and may help an afflicted brother by retracing his own history. But to make a creed learned by rote the basis of consolation is perilous. The aspect it takes to those under trial will often surprise the best-meaning consoler. A point is emphasised by the keen mind of sorrow, and, like Elijah's cloud, it soon sweeps over the whole sky, a storm of doubt and dismay.

CHAPTER X.

THE THOUGHT OF A DAYSMAN.

JOB ix., x. JOB SPEAKS.

It is with an infinitely sad restatement of what God has been made to appear to him by Bildad's speech that Job begins his reply. Yes, yes; it is so. How can man be just before such a God? You tell me my children are overwhelmed with destruction for their sins. You tell me that I, who am not quite dead as yet, may have new prosperity if I put myself into right relations with God. But how can that be? There is no uprightness, no dutifulness, no pious obedience, no sacrifice that will satisfy Him. I did my utmost; yet God has condemned me. And if He is what you say, His condemnation is unanswerable. He has such wisdom in devising accusations and in maintaining them against feeble man, that hope there can be none for any human being. To answer one of the thousand charges God can bring, if He will contend with man, is impossible. The earthquakes are signs of His indignation, removing mountains, shaking the earth out of her place. He is able to quench the light of the sun and moon, and to seal up the stars. What is man beside the omnipotence of Him who alone stretched out the heavens, whose march is on the huge waves of the ocean, who is the Creator of the constellations, the Bear, the Giant, the Pleiades, and the chambers or spaces of the southern sky? It is the play of irresistible power Job traces around him, and the Divine mind or will is inscrutable.

"Lo, He goeth by me and I see Him not:
He passeth on, and I perceive Him not.
Behold, He seizeth. Who will stay Him?
Who will say to Him, What doest Thou?"

Step by step the thought here advances into that dreadful imagination of God's unrighteousness which must issue in revolt or in despair. Job, turning against the bitter logic of tradition, appears for the time to plunge into impiety. Sincere earnest thinker as he is, he falls into a strain we are almost compelled to call false and blasphemous. Bildad and Eliphaz seem to be saints, Job a rebel against God. The Almighty, he says, is like a lion that seizes the prey and cannot be hindered from devouring. He is a wrathful tyrant under whom the helpers of Rahab, those powers that according to some nature myth sustain the dragon of the sea in its conflict with heaven, stoop and give way. Shall Job essay to answer Him? It is vain. He cannot.

To choose words in such a controversy would be of no avail. Even one right in his cause would be overborne by tyrannical omnipotence. He would have no resource but to supplicate for mercy like a detected malefactor. Once Job may have thought that an appeal to justice would be heard, that his trust in righteousness was well founded. He is falling away from that belief now. This Being whose despotic power has been set in his view has no sense of man's right. He cares nothing for man.

What is God? How does He appear in the light of the sufferings of Job?

"He breaketh me with a tempest,
Increaseeth my wounds without cause.
If you speak of the strength of the mighty,
Behold Me," saith He;
If of judgment—"Who will appoint Me a time?"

No one, that is, can call God to account. The temper of the Almighty appears to Job to be such that man must needs give up all controversy. In his heart Job is convinced still that he has wrought no evil. But he will not say so. He will anticipate the wilful condemnation of the Almighty. God would assail his life. Job replies in fierce revolt, "Assail it, take it away, I care not, for I despise it. Whether one is righteous or evil, it is all the same. God destroys the perfect and the wicked" (ver. 22).

Now, are we to explain away this language? If not, how shall we defend the writer who has put it into the mouth of one still the hero of the book, still appearing as a friend of God? To many in our day, as of old, religion is so dull and lifeless, their desire for the friendship of God so lukewarm, that the passion of the words of Job is incomprehensible to them. His courage of despair belongs to a range of feeling they never entered, never dreamt of entering. The calculating world is their home, and in its frigid atmosphere there is no possibility of that keen striving for spiritual life which fills the soul as with fire. To those who deny sin and pooh-poo anxiety about the soul, the book may well appear an old-world dream, a Hebrew allegory rather than the history of a man. But the language of Job is no outburst of lawlessness; it springs out of deep and serious thought.

It is difficult to find an exact modern parallel here; but we have not to go far back for one who was driven like Job by false theology into bewilderment, something like unreason. In his "Grace Abounding," John Bunyan reveals the depths of fear into which hard arguments and misinterpretations of Scripture often plunged him, when he should have been rejoicing in the liberty of a child of God. The case of Bunyan is, in a sense, very different from that of Job. Yet both are urged almost to despair of God; and Bunyan, realising this point of likeness, again and again uses words put into Job's mouth. Doubts and suspicions are suggested by his reading, or by sermons which he hears, and he regards their occurrence to his mind as a proof of his wickedness. In one place he says: "Now I thought surely I am possessed of the devil: at other times again I thought I should be bereft of my wits; for, instead of lauding and magnifying God with others, if I have but heard Him spoken of, presently some most horrible blasphemous thought or other would bolt out of my heart against Him, so that whether I did think that God was, or again did think there was no such thing, no love, nor peace, nor gracious dis-

position could I feel within me." Bunyan had a vivid imagination. He was haunted by strange cravings for the spiritually adventurous. What would it be to sin the sin that is unto death? "In so strong a measure," he says, "was this temptation upon me, that often I have been ready to clap my hands under my chin to keep my mouth from opening." The idea that he should "sell and part with Christ" was one that terribly afflicted him; and, "at last," he says, "after much striving, I felt this thought pass through my heart. Let Him go if He will. . . . After this, nothing for two years together would abide with me but damnation and the expectation of damnation. This thought had passed my heart—God hath let me go, and I am fallen. Oh, thought I, that it was with me as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me."

The Book of Job helps us to understand Bunyan and those terrors of his that amaze our composed generation. Given a man like Job or like Bunyan, to whom religion is everything, who must feel sure of Divine justice, truth, and mercy, he will pass far beyond the measured emotions and phrases of those who are more than half content with the world and themselves. The writer here, whose own stages of thought are recorded, and Bunyan, who with rare force and sincerity retraces the way of his life, are men of splendid character and virtue. Titans of the religious life, they are stricken with anguish and bound with iron fetters to the rock of pain for the sake of universal humanity. They are a wonder to the worldling, they speak in terms the smooth professor of religion shudders at. But their endurance, their vehement resolution, break the falsehoods of the time and enter into the redemption of the race.

The strain of Job's complaint increases in bitterness. He seems to see omnipotent injustice everywhere. If a scourge (ver. 23) such as lightning, accident, or disease slayeth suddenly, there seems to be nothing but mockery of the innocent. God looks down on the wreck of human hope from the calm sky after the thunderstorm, in the evening sunlight that gilds the desert grave. And in the world of men the wicked have their way. God veils the face of the judge so that he is blinded to the equity of the cause. Thus, after the arguments of his friends, Job is compelled to see wrong everywhere, and to say that it is the doing of God. The strophe ends with the abrupt fierce demand,—If not, who then is it?

The short passage from the twenty-fifth verse to the end of chap. ix. returns sadly to the strain of personal weakness and entreaty. Swiftly Job's days go by, more swiftly than a runner, in so far as he sees no good. Or they are like the reed-skiffs on the river, or the darting eagle. To forget his pain is impossible. He cannot put on an appearance of serenity or hope. God is keeping him bound as a transgressor. "I shall be condemned whatever I do. Why then do I weary myself in vain?" Looking at his discoloured body, covered with the grime of disease, he finds it a sign of God's detestation. But if he could wash it with snow, that is, to snowy whiteness, if he could purify those blackened limbs with lye, the renewal would go no further. God would plunge him again into the mire; his own clothes would abhor him.

And now there is a change of tone. His mind, revolting from its own conclusion, turns

towards the thought of reconciliation. While as yet he speaks of it as an impossibility there comes to him a sorrowful regret, a vague dream or reflection in place of that fierce rebellion which discoloured the whole world and made it appear an arena of injustice. With that he cannot pretend to satisfy himself. Again his humanity stirs in him:—

“For He is not a man, as I, that I should answer Him,
That we should come together in judgment.
There is no daysman between us
That might lay his hand upon us both.
Let Him take away His rod from me,
And let not His terror overawe me;
Then would I speak and not fear Him:
For I am not in such case in myself.”

If he could only speak with God as a man speaks with his friend the shadows might be cleared away. The real God, not unreasonable, not unrighteous nor despotic, here begins to appear; and in default of personal converse, and of a daysman, or arbiter, who might lay reconciling hands upon both and bring them together, Job cries for an interval of strength and freedom, that without fear and anguish he may himself express the matter at stake. The idea of a daysman, although the possibility of such a friendly helper is denied, is a new mark of boldness in the thought of the drama. In that one word the inspired writer strikes the note of a Divine purpose which he does not yet foresee. We must not say that here we have the prediction of a Redeemer at once God and man. The author has no such affirmation to make. But very remarkably the desires of Job are led forth in that direction in which the advent and work of Christ have fulfilled the decree of grace. There can be no doubt of the inspiration of a writer who thus strikes into the current of the Divine will and revelation. Not obscurely is it implied in this Book of Job that, however earnest man may be in religion, however upright and faithful (for all this Job was), there are mysteries of fear and sorrow connected with his life in this world which can be solved only by One who brings the light of eternity into the range of time, who is at once “very God and very man,” whose overcoming demands and encourages our faith.

Now, the wistful cry of Job—“There is no daysman between us”—breaking from the depths of an experience to which the best as well as the worst are exposed in this life, an experience which cannot in either case be justified or accounted for unless by the fact of immortality, is, let us say, as presented here, a purely human cry. Man who “cannot be God’s exile,” bound always to seek understanding of the will and character of God, finds himself in the midst of sudden calamity and extreme pain, face to face with death. The darkness that shrouds his whole existence he longs to see dispelled or shot through with beams of clear revealing light. What shall we say of it? If such a desire, arising in the inmost mind, had no correspondence whatever to fact, there would be falsehood at the heart of things. The very shape the desire takes—for a Mediator who should be acquainted equally with God and man, sympathetic toward the creature, knowing the mind of the Creator—cannot be a chance thing. It is the fruit of a Divine necessity inwrought with the constitution and life of the human soul. We are pointed to an irrefragable argument; but the thought mean-

while does not follow it. Immortality waits for a revelation.

Job has prayed for rest. It does not come. Another attack of pain makes a pause in his speech, and with the tenth chapter begins a long address to the Most High, not fierce as before, but sorrowful, subdued.

“My soul is weary of my life.
I will give free course to my complaint;
I will speak in bitterness of my soul.”

It is scarcely possible to touch the threnody that follows without marring its pathetic and profound beauty. There is an exquisite dignity of restraint and frankness in this appeal to the Creator. He is an Artist whose fine work is in peril, and that from His own seeming carelessness of it, or more dreadful to conceive, His resolution to destroy it.

First the cry is, “Do not condemn me. Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldst despise the work of Thine hands?” It is marvellous to Job that he should be scorned as worthless, while at the same time God seems to shine on the counsel of the wicked. How can that, O Thou Most High, be in harmony with Thy nature? He puts a supposition, which even in stating it he must refuse, “Hast Thou eyes of flesh? or seest Thou as man seeth?” A jealous man, clothed with a little brief authority, might probe into the misdeeds of a fellow-creature. But God cannot do so. His majesty forbids; and especially since He knows, for one thing, that Job is not guilty, and, for another thing, that no one can escape His hands. Men often lay hold of the innocent, and torture them to discover imputed crimes. The supposition that God acts like a despot or the servant of a despot is made only to be cast aside. But he goes back on his appeal to God as Creator, and bethinks him of that tender fashioning of the body which seems an argument for as tender a care of the soul and the spirit-life. Much of power and lovingkindness goes to the perfecting of the body and the development of the physical life out of weakness and embryonic form. Can He who has so wrought, who has added favour and apparent love, have been concealing all the time a design of mockery? Even in creating, had God the purpose of making His creature a mere plaything for the self-will of Omnipotence?

“Yet these things Thou didst hide in Thine heart.”

These things—the desolate home, the outcast life, the leprosy. Job uses a strange word: “I *know* that this was with Thee.” His conclusion is stated roughly, that nothing can matter in dealing with such a Creator. The insistence of the friends on the hope of forgiveness, Job’s own consciousness of integrity go for nothing.

“Were I to sin Thou wouldst mark me,
And Thou wouldst not acquit me of iniquity.
Were I wicked, woe unto me;
Were I righteous, yet should I not lift up my head.”

The supreme Power of the world has taken an aspect not of unreasoning force, but of determined ill-will to man. The only safety seems to be in lying quiet so as not to excite against him the activity of this awful God who hunts like a lion and delights in marvels of wasteful strength. It appears that, having been once roused, the Divine Enemy will not cease to persecute. New

witnesses, new causes of indignation would be found; a changing host of troubles would follow up the attack.

I have ventured to interpret the whole address in terms of supposition, as a theory Job flings out in the utter darkness that surrounds him. He does not adopt it. To imagine that he really believes this, or that the writer of the book intended to put forward such a theory as even approximately true, is quite impossible. And yet, when one thinks of it, perhaps impossible is too strong a word. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a fundamental truth; but it has been so conceived and wrought with as to lead many reasoners into a dream of cruelty and irresponsible force not unlike that which haunts the mind of Job. Something of the kind has been argued for with no little earnestness by men who were religiously endeavouring to explain the Bible and professed to believe in the love of God to the world. For example: the annihilation of the wicked is denied by one for the good reason that God has a profound reverence for being or existence, so that he who is once possessed of will must exist for ever; but from this the writer goes on to maintain that the wicked are useful to God as the material on which His justice operates, that indeed they have been created solely for everlasting punishment in order that through them the justice of the Almighty may be clearly seen. Against this very kind of theology Job is in revolt. In the light even of his world it was a creed of darkness. That God hates wrongdoing, that everything selfish, vindictive, cruel, unclean, false, shall be driven before Him—who can doubt? That according to His decree sin brings its punishment yielding the wages of death—who can doubt? But to represent Him who has made us all, and must have foreseen our sin, as without any kind of responsibility for us, dashing in pieces the machines He has made because they do not serve His purpose, though He knew even in making them that they would not—what a hideous falsehood is this; it can justify God only at the expense of undefining Him.

One thing this Book of Job teaches, that we are not to go against our own sincere reason nor our sense of justice and truth in order to square facts with any scheme or any theory. Religious teaching and thought must affirm nothing that is not entirely frank, purely just, and such as we could, in the last resort, apply out and out to ourselves. Shall man be more just than God, more generous than God, more faithful than God? Perish the thought, and every system that maintains so false a theory and tries to force it on the human mind! Nevertheless, let there be no falling into the opposite error; from that, too, frankness will preserve us. No sincere man, attentive to the realities of the world and the awful ordinances of nature, can suspect the Universal Power of indifference to evil, of any design to leave law without sanction. We do not escape at one point; God is our Father; righteousness is vindicated, and so is faith.

As the colloquies proceed, the impression is gradually made that the writer of this book is wrestling with that study which more and more engages the intellect of man—What is the real? How does it stand related to the ideal, thought of as righteousness, as beauty, as truth? How does it stand related to God, sovereign and holy? The opening of the book might have led straight to the theory that the real, the present world

charged with sin, disaster, and death, is not of the Divine order, therefore is of a Devil. But the disappearance of Satan throws aside any such idea of dualism, and pledges the writer to find solution, if he find it at all, in one will, one purpose, one Divine event. On Job himself the burden and the effort descend in his conflict with the real as disaster, enigma, impending death, false judgment, established theology and schemes of explanation. The ideal evades him, is lost between the rising wave and the lowering sky. In the whole horizon he sees no clear open space where it can unfold the day. But it remains in his heart; and in the night-sky it waits where the great constellations shine in their dazzling purity and eternal calm, brooding silent over the world as from immeasurable distance far withdrawn. Even from that distance God sends forth and will accomplish a design. Meanwhile the man stretches his hands in vain from the shadowed earth to those keen lights, ever so remote and cold.

“Show me wherefore Thou strivest with me.
Is it pleasant to Thee that Thou should'st oppress,
That Thou should'st despise the work of Thy hands
And shine upon the counsel of the wicked?
Hast Thou eyes of flesh?
Or seest Thou as man seeth?
Thy days—are they as the days of man?
Thy years—are they as man's days,
That Thou inquirest after fault of mine,
And searchest after my sin,
Though Thou knowest that I am not wicked,
And none can deliver from Thy hand?
Thine hands have made and fashioned me
Together round about; and Thou dost destroy me”
(chap. x. 2-8).

CHAPTER XI.

A FRESH ATTEMPT TO CONVICT.

JOB xi. ZOPHAR SPEAKS.

THE third and presumably youngest of the three friends of Job now takes up the argument somewhat in the same strain as the others. With no wish to be unfair to Zophar we are somewhat prepossessed against him from the outset; and the writer must mean us to be so, since he makes him attack Job as an empty babbling:—

“Shall not the multitude of words be answered?
And shall a man of lips be justified?
Shall thy boastings make people silent,
So that thou mayest mock on, none putting thee to shame?”

True it was, Job had used vehement speech. Yet it is a most insulting suggestion that he meant little, but irreligious bluster. The special note of Zophar comes out in his rebuke of Job for the mockery, that is, sceptical talk, in which he had indulged. Persons who merely rehearse opinions are usually the most dogmatic and take most upon them. Nobody reckons himself more able to detect error in doctrine, nobody denounces rationalism and infidelity with greater confidence, than the man whose creed is formal, who never applied his mind directly to the problems of faith, and has but a moderate amount of mind to apply. Zophar, indeed, is a man of considerable intelligence; but he betrays himself. To him Job's words have been wearisome. He may have tried to understand the matter, but he has caught only a general impression that, in the face of what appears to him clearest evidence,

Job denies being any way amenable to justice. He had dared to say to God, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." What? God can afflict a man whom He knows to be righteous! It is a doctrine as profane as it is novel. Eliphaz and Bildad supposed that they had to deal with a man unwilling to humble himself in the way of acknowledging sins hitherto concealed. By pressure of one kind or another they hoped to get Job to realise his secret transgression. But Zophar has noted the whole tendency of his argument to be heretical. "Thou sayest, My doctrine is pure." And what is that doctrine? Why, that thou wast clean in the eyes of God, that God has smitten thee without cause. Dost thou mean, O Job! to accuse the Most High of acting in that manner? Oh that God would speak and open His lips against thee! Thou hast expressed a desire to state thy case to Him. The result would be very different from thy expectation.

Now, beneath any mistaken view held by sincere persons there is almost always a sort of foundation of truth; and they have at least as much logic as satisfies themselves. Job's friends are religious men; they do not consciously build on lies. One and all they are convinced that God is invariable in His treatment of men, never afflicting the innocent, always dealing out judgment in the precise measure of a man's sin. That belief is the basis of their creed. They could not worship a God less than absolutely just. Beginning the religious life with this faith they have clung to it all along. After thirty or forty years' experience they are still confident that their principle explains the prosperity and affliction, the circumstances of all human beings. But have they never seen anything that did not harmonise with this view of providence? Have they not seen the good die in youth, and those whose hearts are dry as summer dust burn to their sockets? Have they not seen vile schemes prosper, and the schemers enjoy their ill-gotten power for years? It is strange the old faith has not been shaken at least. But no! They come to the case of Job as firmly convinced as ever that the Ruler of the world shows His justice by dispensing joy and suffering in proportion to men's good and evil deeds, that whenever trouble falls on any one some sin must have been committed which deserved precisely this kind and quantity of suffering.

Trying to get at the source of the belief we must confess ourselves partly at a loss. One writer suggests that there may have been in the earlier and simpler conditions of society a closer correspondence between wrong-doing and suffering than is to be seen nowadays. There may be something in this. But life is not governed differently at different epochs, and the theory is hardly proved by what we know of the ancient world. No doubt in the history of the Hebrews, which lies behind the faith attributed to the friends of Job, a connection may be traced between their wrong-doing *as a nation* and their suffering *as a nation*. When they fell away from faith in God their obedience languished, their vigour failed, the end of their existence being lost sight of, and so they became the prey of enemies. But this did not apply to individuals. The good suffered along with the careless and wicked in seasons of national calamity. And the history of the people of Israel would support such a view of the Divine government

so long only as national transgression and its punishment were alone taken into account. Now, however, the distinction between the nation and the individual has clearly emerged. The sin of a community can no longer explain satisfactorily the sufferings of a member of the community, faithful among the unbelieving.

But the theory seems to have been made out rather by the following course of argument. Always in the administration of law and the exercise of paternal authority, transgression has been visited with pain and deprivation of privilege. The father whose son has disobeyed him inflicts pain, and, if he is a judicious father, makes the pain proportionate to the offence. The ruler, through his judges and officers, punishes transgression according to some orderly code. Malefactors are deprived of liberty; they are fined or scourged, or, in the last resort, executed. Now, having in this way built up a system of law which inflicts punishment with more or less justice in proportion to the offence imputed, men take for granted that what they do imperfectly is done perfectly by God. They take for granted that the calamities and troubles He appoints are ordained according to the same principle, with precisely the same design, as penalty is inflicted by a father, a chief, or a king. The reasoning is contradicted in many ways, but they disregard the difficulties. If this is not the truth, what other explanation is to be found? The desire for happiness is keen; pain seems the worst of evils: and they fail to see that endurance can be the means of good. Feeling themselves bound to maintain the perfect righteousness of God they affirm the only theory of suffering that seems to agree with it.

Now, Zophar, like the others full of this theory, admits that Job may have failed to see his transgression. But in that case the sufferer is unable to distinguish right from wrong. Indeed, his whole contention seems to Zophar to show ignorance. If God were to speak and reveal the secrets of His holy wisdom, twice as deep, twice as penetrating as Job supposes, the sins he has denied would be brought home to him. He would know that God requires less of him than his iniquity deserves. Zophar hints, what is very true, that our judgment of our own conduct is imperfect. How can we trace the real nature of our actions, or know how they look to the sublime wisdom of the Most High? Job appears to have forgotten all this. He refuses to allow fault in himself. But God knows better.

Here is a cunning argument to fortify the general position. It could always be said of a case which presented difficulties that, while the sufferer seemed innocent, yet the wisdom of God, "twofold in understanding" (ver. 6) as compared with that of man, perceived guilt and ordained the punishment. But the argument proved too much, for Zophar's own health and comfort contradicted his dogma. He took for granted that the twofold wisdom of the Almighty found nothing wrong in him. It was a naive piece of forgetfulness. Could he assert that his life had no flaw? Hardly. But then, why is he in honour? How had he been able to come riding on his camel, attended by his servants, to sit in judgment on Job? Plainly, on an argument like his, no man could ever be in comfort or pleasure, for human nature is always defective, always in more or less of sin. Repentance never

overtakes the future. Therefore God who deals with man on a broad basis could never treat him save as a sinner, to be kept in pain and deprivation. If suffering is the penalty of sin we ought all, notwithstanding the atonement of Christ, to be suffering the pain of the hour for the defect of the hour, since "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." At this rate man's life—again despite the atonement—would be continued trial and sentence. From all which it is evident that the world is governed on another plan than that which satisfied Job's friends.

Zophar rises to eloquence in declaring the unsearchableness of Divine wisdom.

"Canst thou find the depths of Eloah?
Canst thou reach to the end of Shaddai?
Heights of heaven! What canst thou do?
Deeper than Sheol! What canst thou know?
The measure thereof is longer than the earth,
Broader is it than the sea."

Here is fine poetry; but with an attempt at theology the speaker goes astray, for he conceives God as doing what he himself wishes to do, namely, prove Job a sinner. The Divine greatness is invoked that a narrow scheme of thought may be justified. If God pass by, if He arrest, if He hold assize, who can hinder Him? Supreme wisdom and infinite power admit no questioning, no resistance. God knoweth vain or wicked men at a glance. One look and all is plain to him. Empty man will be wise in these matters "when a wild ass's colt is born a man."

Turning from this, as if in recollection that he has to treat Job with friendliness, Zophar closes like the other two with a promise. If Job will put away sin, his life shall be established again, his misery forgotten or remembered as a torrent of spring when the heat of summer comes.

"Thou shalt forget thy misery;
Remember it as waters that have passed by;
And thy life shall rise brighter than noonday;
And if darkness fall, it shall be as the morning;
Thou shalt then have confidence because there is hope;
Yea, look around and take rest in safety,
Also lie down and none shall affray thee,
And many shall make suit unto thee.
But the eyes of the wicked fail;
For them no way of escape.
And their hope is to breathe out the spirit."

Rhetoric and logic are used in promises given freely by all the speakers. But not one of them has any comfort for his friend while the affliction lasts. The author does not allow one of them to say, God is thy friend, God is thy portion—now; He still cares for thee. In some of the psalms a higher note is heard: "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." The friends of Job are full of pious intentions, yet they state a most unspiritual creed, the foundation of it laid in corn and wine. Peace of conscience and quiet confidence in God are not what they go by. Hence the sufferer finds no support in them or their promises. They will not help him to live one day, nor sustain him in dying. For it is the light of God's countenance he desires to see. He is only mocked and exasperated by their arguments; and in the course of his own eager thought the revelation comes like a star of hope rising on the midnight of his soul.

Though Zophar fails like the other two, he is

not to be called a mere echo. It is incorrect to say that, while Eliphaz is a kind of prophet and Bildad a sage, Zophar is a commonplace man without ideas. On the contrary, he is a thinker, something of a philosopher, although, of course, greatly restricted by his narrow creed. He is stringent, bitter indeed. But he has the merit of seeing a certain force in Job's contention which he does not fairly meet. It is a fresh suggestion that the answer must lie in the depth of that penetrating wisdom of the Most High, compared to which man's wisdom is vain. Then, his description of the return of blessedness and prosperity, when one examines it, is found distinctly in advance of Eliphaz's picture in moral colouring and gravity of treatment. We must not fail to notice, moreover, that Zophar speaks of the omniscience of God more than of His omnipotence; and the closing verse describes the end of the wicked not as the result of a supernatural stroke or a sudden calamity, but as a process of natural and spiritual decay.

The closing words of Zophar's speech point to the finality of death, and bear the meaning that if Job were to die now of his disease the whole question of his character would be closed. It is important to note this, because it enters into Job's mind and affects his expressions of desire. Never again does he cry for release as before. If he names death it is as a sorrowful fate he must meet or a power he will defy. He advances to one point after another of reasserted energy, to the resolution that, whatever death may do, either in the underworld or beyond it, he will wait for vindication or assert his right.

CHAPTER XII.

BEYOND FACT AND FEAR TO GOD.

JOB xii.-xiv. JOB SPEAKS.

ZOPHAR excites in Job's mind great irritation, which must not be set down altogether to the fact that he is the third to speak. In some respects he has made the best attack from the old position, pressing most upon the conscience of Job. He has also used a curt positive tone in setting out the method and principle of Divine government and the judgment he has formed of his friend's state. Job is accordingly the more impatient, if not disconcerted. Zophar had spoken of the want of understanding Job had shown, and the penetrating wisdom of God which at a glance convicts men of iniquity. His tone provoked resentment. Who is this that claims to have solved the enigmas of providence, to have gone into the depths of wisdom? Does he know any more, he himself, than the wild ass's colt?

And Job begins with stringent irony—

"No doubt but ye are the people,
And wisdom shall die with you."

The secrets of thought, of revelation itself are yours. No doubt the world waited to be taught till you were born. Do you not think so? But, after all, I also have a share of understanding, I am not quite so void of intellect as you seem to fancy. Besides, who knoweth not such things as ye speak? Are they new? I had supposed them to be commonplaces. Yea, if you recall what I

said, you will find that with a little more vigour than yours I made the same declarations.

"A laughing-stock to his neighbours am I,
I who called upon Eloah and He answered me,—
A laughing-stock, the righteous and perfect man."

Job sees or thinks he sees that his misery makes him an object of contempt to men who once gave him the credit of far greater wisdom and goodness than their own. They are bringing out old notions, which are utterly useless, to explain the ways of God; they assume the place of teachers; they are far better, far wiser now than he. It is more than flesh can bear.

As he looks at his own diseased body and feels again his weakness, the cruelty of the conventional judgment stings him. "In the thought of him that is at ease there is for misfortune scorn; it awaiteth them that slip with the foot." Perhaps Job was mistaken, but it is too often true that the man who fails in a social sense is the man suspected. Evil things are found in him when he is covered with the dust of misfortune, things which no one dreamed of before. Flatterers become critics and judges. They find that he has a bad heart or that he is a fool.

But if those very good and wise friends of Job are astonished at anything previously said, they shall be more astonished. The facts which their account of Divine providence very carefully avoided as inconvenient Job will blurt out. They have stated and restated, with utmost complacency, their threadbare theory of the government of God. Let them look now abroad in the world and see what actually goes on, blinking no facts.

The tents of robbers prosper. Out in the desert there are troops of bandits who are never overtaken by justice; and they that provoke God are secure, who carry a god in their hand, whose sword and the reckless daring with which they use it make them to all appearance safe in villainy. These are the things to be accounted for; and, accounting for them, Job launches into a most emphatic argument to prove all that is done in the world strangely and inexplicably to be the doing of God. As to that he will allow no question. His friends shall know that he is sound on this head. And let them provide the defence of Divine righteousness after he has spoken.

Here, however, it is necessary to consider in what way the limitations of Hebrew thought must have been felt by one who, turning from the popular creed, sought a view more in harmony with fact. Now-a-days the word *nature* is often made to stand for a force or combination of forces conceived of as either entirely or partially independent of God. Tennyson makes the distinction when he speaks of man

"Who trusted God was love indeed
And love creation's final law,
Though nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravin, shrieked against the creed,"

and again when he asks—

"Are God and nature then at strife
That nature lends such evil dreams,
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life?"

Now to this question, perplexing enough on the face of it when we consider what suffering there is in the creation, how the waves of life seem to beat and break themselves age after age on the rocks of death, the answer in its first stage is that

God and nature cannot be at strife. They are not apart; there is but one universe, therefore one Cause. One Omnipotent there is whose will is done, whose character is shown in all we see and all we cannot see, the issues of endless strife, the long results of perennial evolution. But then comes the question, What is His character, of what spirit is He who alone rules, who sends after the calm the fierce storm, after the beauty of life the corruption of death? And one may say the struggle between Bible religion and modern science is on this very field.

Cold heartless power, say some; no Father, but an impersonal Will to which men are nothing, human joy and love nothing, to which the fair blossom is no more than the clod, and the holy prayer no better than the vile sneer. On this, faith arises to the struggle. Faith warm and hopeful takes reason into counsel, searches the springs of existence, goes forth into the future and forecasts the end, that it may affirm and reaffirm against all denial that One Omnipotent reigns who is all-loving, the Father of infinite mercy. Here is the arena; here the conflict rages and will rage for many a day. And to him will belong the laurels of the age who, with the Bible in one hand and the instruments of science in the other, effects the reconciliation of faith with fact. Tennyson came with the questions of our day. He passes and has not given a satisfactory answer. Carlyle has gone with the "Everlasting Yea and No" beating through his oracles. Even Browning, a later athlete, did not find complete reason for faith.

"From Thy will stream the worlds, life, and nature, Thy dread sabaoth."

Now return to Job. He considers nature; he believes in God; he stands firmly on the conviction that all is of God. Hebrew faith held this, and was not limited in holding it, for it is the fact. But we cannot wonder that providence disconcerted him, since the reconciliation of "merciless" nature and the merciful God is not even yet wrought out. Notwithstanding the revelation of Christ, many still find themselves in darkness just when light is most urgently craved. Willing to believe, they yet lean to a dualism which makes God Himself appear in conflict with the scheme of things, thwarted now and now repentant, gracious in design but not always in effect. Now the limitation of the Hebrew was this, that to his idea the infinite power of God was not balanced by infinite mercy, that is, by regard to the whole work of His hands. In one stormy dash after another Job is made to attempt this barrier. At moments he is lifted beyond it, and sees the great universe filled with Divine care that equals power; for the present, however, he distinguishes between merciful intent and merciless, and ascribes both to God.

What does he say? God is in the deceived and in the deceiver; they are both products of nature, that is, creatures of God. He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them. Cities arise and become populous. The great metropolis is filled with its myriads, "among whom are six-score thousand that cannot discern between their right hand and their left." The city shall fulfil its cycle and perish. It is God. Searching for reconciliation Job looks the facts of human existence right in the face, and he sees a confusion, the whole enigma which lies in the constitution of the world and of the soul. Observe how his

thought moves. The beasts, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, all living beings everywhere, not self-created, with no power to shape or resist their destiny, bear witness to the almightiness of God. In His hand is the lower creation; in His hand also, rising higher, is the breath of all mankind. Absolute, universal is that power, dispensing life and death as it broods over the ages. Men have sought to understand the ways of the Great Being. The ear trieth words as the mouth tasteth meat. Is there wisdom with the ancient, those who live long, as Bildad says? Yes: but with God are wisdom *and strength*; not penetration only, but power. He discerns and does. He demolishes, and there is no rebuilding. Man is imprisoned, shut up by misfortune, by disease. It is God's decree, and there is no opening till He allows. At His will the waters are dried up; at His will they pour in torrents over the earth. And so amongst men there are currents of evil and good flowing through lives, here in the liar and cheat, there in the victim of knavery; here in the counsellors whose plans come to nothing; there in the judges who sagacity is changed to folly; and all these currents, and cross-currents, making life a bewildering maze, have their beginning in the will of God, who seems to take pleasure in doing what is strange and baffling. Kings take men captive; the bonds of the captives are loosed, and the kings themselves are bound. What are princes and priests, what are the mighty to Him? What is the speech of the eloquent? Where is the understanding of the aged when He spreads confusion? Deep as in the very gloom of the grave the ambitious may hide their schemes; the flux of events brings them out to judgment, one cannot foresee how. Nations are raised up and destroyed; the chiefs of the people are made to fear like children. Trusted leaders wander in a wilderness; they grope in midnight gloom; they stagger like the drunken. Behold, says Job, all this I have seen. This is God's doing. And with this great God he would speak; he, a man, would have things out with the Lord of all (chap. xiii. 3).

This impetuous passage, full of revolution, disaster, vast mutations, a phantasmagoria of human struggle and defeat, while it supplies a note of time and gives a distinct clue to the writer's position as an Israelite, is remarkable for the faith that survives its apparent pessimism. Others have surveyed the world and the history of change, and have protested with their last voice against the cruelty that seemed to rule. As for any God, they could never trust one whose will and power were to be found alike in the craft of the deceiver and the misery of the victim, in the baffling of sincere thought and the overthrow of the honest with the vile. But Job trusts on. Beneath every enigma, he looks for reason; beyond every disaster, to a Divine end. The voices of men have come between him and the voice of the Supreme. Personal disaster has come between him and his sense of God. His thought is not free. If it were, he would catch the reconciling word, his soul would hear the music of eternity. "I would reason with God." He clings to God-given reason as his instrument of discovery.

Very bold is this whole position, and very reverent also, if you will think of it; far more honouring to God than any attempt of the

friends who, as Job says, appear to hold the Almighty no better than a petty chief, so insecure in His position that He must be grateful to any one who will justify His deeds. "Poor God, with nobody to help Him." Job uses all his irony in exposing the folly of such a religion, the impertinence of presenting it to him as a solution and a help. In short, he tells them, they are pious quacks, and, as he will have none of them for his part, he thinks God will not either. The author is at the very heart of religion here. The word of reproof and correction, the plea for providence must go straight to the reason of man, or it is of no use. The word of the Lord must be a two-edged sword of truth, piercing to the dividing asunder even of soul and spirit. That is to say, into the centre of energy the truth must be driven which kills the spirit of rebellion, so that the will of man, set free, may come into conscious and passionate accord with the will of God. But reconciliation is impossible unless each will deal in the utmost sincerity with truth, realising the facts of existence, the nature of the soul and the great necessities of its discipline. To be true in theology we must not accept what seems to be true, nor speak forensically, but affirm what we have proved in our own life and gathered in utmost effort from Scripture and from nature. Men inherit opinions as they used to inherit garments, or devise them, like clothes of a new fashion, and from within the folds they speak, not as men but as priests, what is the right thing according to a received theory. It will not do. Even of old time a man like the author of Job turned contemptuously from school-made explanations and sought a living word. In our age the number of those whose fever can be lulled with a working theory of religion and a judicious arrangement of the universe is rapidly becoming small. Theology is being driven to look the facts of life full in the face. If the world has learned anything from modern science, it is the habit of rigorous research and the justification of free inquiry, and the lesson will never be unlearned.

To take one error of theology. All men are concluded equally under God's wrath and curse; then the proofs of the malediction are found in trouble, fear, and pain. But what comes of this teaching? Out in the world, with facts forcing themselves on consciousness, the scheme is found hollow. All are not in trouble and pain. Those who are afflicted and disappointed are often sincere Christians. A theory of deferred judgment and happiness is made for escape; it does not, however, in the least enable one to comprehend how, if pain and trouble be the consequences of sin, they should not be distributed rightly from the first. A universal moral order cannot begin in a manner so doubtful, so very difficult for the wayfaring man to read as he goes. To hold that it can is to turn religion into an occultism which at every point bewilders the simple mind. The theory is one which tends to blunt the sense of sin in those who are prosperous, and to beget that confident Pharisaism which is the curse of church-life. On the other hand, the "sacrificed classes," contrasting their own moral character with that of the frivolous and fleshly rich, are forced to throw over a theology which binds together sin and suffering, and to deny a God whose equity is so far to seek. And yet, again, in the recoil from all this men invent wersh schemes of bland good-will and comfort, which

have simply nothing to do with the facts of life, no basis in the world as we know it, no sense of the rigour of Divine love. So Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar remain with us and confuse theology until some think it lost in unreason.

"But ye are patchers of lies,
Physicians of nought are ye all.
Oh that ye would only keep silence,
And it should be your wisdom:" (chap. xiii. 4, 5).

Job sets them down with a current proverb—"Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise." He begs them to be silent. They shall now hear his rebuke.

"On behalf of God will ye speak wrong?
And for Him will ye speak deceit?
Will ye be partisans for Him?
Or for God will ye contend?"

Job finds them guilty of speaking falsely as special pleaders for God in two respects. They insist that he has offended God, but they cannot point to one sin which he has committed. On the other hand, they affirm positively that God will restore prosperity if confession is made. But in this too they play the part of advocates without warrant. They show great presumption in daring to pledge the Almighty to a course in accordance with their idea of justice. The issue might be what they predict; it might not. They are venturing on ground to which their knowledge does not extend. They think their presumption justified because it is for religion's sake. Job administers a sound rebuke, and it extends to our own time. Special pleaders for God's sovereign and unconditional right and for His illimitable good-nature, alike have warning here. What justification have men in affirming that God will work out His problems in detail according to their views? He has given to us the power to apprehend the great principles of His working. He has revealed much in nature, providence, and Scripture, and in Christ; but there is the "hiding of His power," "His path is in the mighty waters, and His judgments are not known." Christ has said, "It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority." There are certainties of our consciousness, facts of the world and of revelation from which we can argue. Where these confirm, we may dogmatise, and the dogma will strike home. But no piety, no desire to vindicate the Almighty or to convict and convert the sinner, can justify any man in passing beyond the certainty which God has given him to that unknown which lies far above human ken.

"He will surely correct you
If in secret ye are partial.
Shall not His majesty terrify you,
And His dread fall upon you?" (chap. xiii. 10, 11.)

The Book of Job, while it brands insincerity and loose reasoning, justifies all honest and reverent research. Here, as in the teaching of our Lord, the real heretic is he who is false to his own reason and conscience, to the truth of things as God gives him to apprehend it, who, in short, makes believe to any extent in the sphere of religion. And it is upon this man the terror of the Divine majesty is to fall.

We saw how Bildad established himself on the wisdom of the ancients. Recalling this, Job flings contempt on his traditional sayings.

"Your remembrances are proverbs of ashes,
Your defences, defences of dust."

Did they mean to smite him with those proverbs as with stones? They were ashes. Did they intrench themselves from the assaults of reason behind old suppositions? Their ramparts were mere dust. Once more he bids them hold their peace, and let him alone that he may speak out all that is in his mind. It is, he knows, at the hazard of his life he goes forward; but he will. The case in which he is can have no remedy excepting by an appeal to God, and that final appeal he will make.

Now the proper beginning of this appeal is in the twenty-third verse, with the words: "How many are mine iniquities and my sins?" But before Job reaches it he expresses his sense of the danger and difficulty under which he lies, interweaving with the statement of these a marvellous confidence in the result of what he is about to do. Referring to the declarations of his friends as to the danger that yet threatens if he will not confess sin, he uses a proverbial expression for hazard of life.

"Why do I take my flesh in my teeth,
And put my life in my hand?"

Why do I incur this danger, do you say? Never mind. It is not your affair. For bare existence I care nothing. To escape with mere consciousness for a while is no object to me, as I now am. With my life in my hand I hasten to God.

"Lo! He will slay me: I will not delay—
Yet my ways will I maintain before Him" (chap. xiii. 15).

The old Version here, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is inaccurate. Still it is not far from expressing the brave purpose of the man—prostrate before God, yet resolved to cling to the justice of the case as he apprehends it, assured that this will not only be excused by God, but will bring about his acquittal or salvation. To grovel in the dust, confessing himself a miserable sinner more than worthy of all the sufferings he has undergone, while in his heart he has the consciousness of being upright and faithful—this would not commend him to the Judge of all the earth. It would be a mockery of truth and righteousness, therefore of God Himself. On the other hand, to maintain his integrity which God gave him, to go on maintaining it at the hazard of all, is his only course, his only safety.

"This also shall be my salvation,
For a godless man shall not live before Him."

The fine moral instinct of Job, giving courage to his theology, declares that God demands "truth in the inward parts" and truth in speech—that man "consists in truth"—that "if he betrays truth he betrays himself," which is a crime against his Maker. No man is so much in danger of separating himself from God and losing everything as he who acts or speaks against conviction.

Job has declared his hazard, that he is lying helpless before Almighty Power which may in a moment crush him. He has also expressed his faith, that approaching God in the courage of truth he will not be rejected, that absolute sincerity will alone give him a claim on the infinitely True. Now turning to his friends as if in new defiance, he says:—

"Hear diligently my speech,
And my explanation with your ears.
Behold now, I have ordered my cause;
I know that I shall be justified.
Who is he that will contend with me?
For then would I hold my peace and expire."

That is to say, he has reviewed his life once more, he has considered all possibilities of transgression, and yet his contention remains. So much does he build upon his claim on God that, if any one could now convict him, his heart would fail, life would no more be worth living; the foundation of hope destroyed, conflict would be at an end.

But with his plea to God still in view he expresses once more his sense of the disadvantage under which he lies. The pressure of the Divine hand is upon him still, a sore enervating terror which bears upon his soul. Would God but give him respite for a little from the pain and the fear, then he would be ready either to answer the summons of the Judge or make his own demand for vindication.

We may suppose an interval of release from pain or at least a pause of expectancy, and then, in verse twenty-third, Job begins his cry. The language is less vehement than we have heard. It has more of the pathos of weak human life. He is one with that race of thinking, feeling, suffering creatures who are tossed about on the waves of existence, driven before the winds of change like autumn leaves. It is the plea of human feebleness and mortality we hear, and then, as the "still sad music" touches the lowest note of wailing, there mingles with it the strain of hope.

"How many are mine iniquities and sins?
Make me to know my transgression and my sin."

We are not to understand here that Job confesses great transgressions, nor, contrariwise, that he denies infirmity and error in himself. There are no doubt failures of his youth which remain in memory, sins of desire, errors of ignorance, mistakes in conduct such as the best men fall into. These he does not deny. But righteousness and happiness have been represented as a profit and loss account, and therefore Job wishes to hear from God a statement in exact form of all he has done amiss or failed to do, so that he may be able to see the relation between fault and suffering, his faults and his sufferings, if such relation there be. It appears that God is counting him an enemy (ver. 24). He would like to have the reason for that. So far as he knows himself he has sought to obey and honour the Almighty. Certainly there has never been in his heart any conscious desire to resist the will of Eloah. Is it then for transgressions unwittingly committed that he now suffers—for sins he did not intend or know of? God is just. It is surely a part of His justice to make a sufferer aware why such terrible afflictions befall him.

And then—is it worth while for the Almighty to be so hard on a poor weak mortal?

"Wilt thou scare a driven leaf—
Wilt thou pursue the dry stubble—
That thou writest bitter judgments against me,
And makest me to possess the faults of my youth,
And puttest my feet in the stocks,
And watchest all my paths,
And drawest a line about the soles of my feet—
One who as a rotten thing is consuming,
As a garment that is moth-eaten?"

The sense of rigid restraint and pitiable decay was perhaps never expressed with so fit and vivid imagery. So far it is personal. Then begins a general lamentation regarding the sad fleeting life of man. His own prosperity, which passed as a dream, has become to Job a type of the brief vain existence of the race tried at every moment by inexorable Divine judgment; and the low mournful words of the Arabian chief have echoed ever since in the language of sorrow and loss.

"Man that is born of woman,
Of few days is he and full of trouble,
Like the flower he springs up and withers;
Like a shadow he flees and stays not.
Is it on such a one Thon hast fixed Thine eye?
Bringest Thon me into Thy judgment?
Oh that the clean might come out of the unclean!
But there is not one."

Human frailty is both of the body and of the soul; and it is universal. The nativity of men forbids their purity. Well does God know the weakness of His creatures; and why then does He expect of them, if indeed He expects, a pureness that can stand the test of His searching? Job cannot be free from the common infirmity of mortals. He is born of woman. But why then is he chased with inquiry, haunted and scared by a righteousness he cannot satisfy? Should not the Great God be forbearing with a man?

"Since his days are determined,
The number of his moons with Thee,
And Thon hast set him bounds not to be passed;
Look Thon away from him, that he may rest,
At least fulfil as a hireling his day."

Men's life being so short, his death so sure and soon, seeing he is like a hireling in the world, might he not be allowed a little rest? might he not, as one who has fulfilled his day's work, be let go for a little repose ere he die? That certain death, it weighs upon him now, pressing down his thought.

"For even a tree hath hope;
If it be hewn down it will sprout anew,
The young shoot thereof will not fail.
If in the earth its root wax old,
Or in the ground its stock should die,
Yet at the scent of water it will spring,
And shoot forth boughs like a new plant.
But a man: he dies and is cut off;
Yea, when men die, they are gone.
Ebbs away the water from the sea,
And the stream decays and dries:
So when men have lain down they rise not;
Till the heavens vanish they never awake,
Nor are they roused from their sleep."

No arguments, no promises can break this deep gloom and silence into which the life of man passes. Once Job had sought death; now a desire has grown within him, and with it recoil from Sheol. To meet God, to obtain his own justification and the clearing of Divine righteousness, to have the problem of life explained—the hope of this makes life precious. Is he to lie down and rise no more while the skies endure? Is no voice to reach him from the heavenly justice he has always confided in? The very thought is confounding. If he were now to desire death it would mean that he had given up all faith, that justice, truth, and even the Divine name of Eloah had ceased to have any value for him.

We are to behold the rise of a new hope, like a star in the firmament of his thought. Whence does it spring?

The religion of the Book of Job, as already shown, is, in respect of form, a natural religion; that is to say, the ideas are not derived from the Hebrew Scriptures. The writer does not refer to the legislation of Moses and the great words of prophets. The expression "As the Lord said unto Moses" does not occur in this book, nor any equivalent. It is through nature and the human consciousness that the religious beliefs of the poem appear to have come into shape. Yet two facts are to be kept fully in view.

The first is that even a natural religion must not be supposed to be a thing of man's invention, with no origin further than his dreams. We must not declare all religious ideas outside those of Israel to be mere fictions of the human fancy or happy guesses at truth. The religion of Teman may have owed some of its great thoughts to Israel. But, apart from that, a basis of Divine revelation is always laid wherever men think and live. In every land the heart of man has borne witness to God. Reverent thought, dwelling on justice, truth, mercy, and all virtues found in the range of experience and consciousness, came through them to the idea of God. Every one who made an induction as to the Great Unseen Being, his mind open to the facts of nature and his own moral constitution, was in a sense a prophet. As far as they went, the reality and value of religious ideas, so reached, are acknowledged by Bible writers themselves. "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." God has always been revealing Himself to men.

"Natural religion" we say; and yet, since God is always revealing Himself and has made all men more or less capable of apprehending the revelation, even the natural is supernatural. Take the religion of Egypt, or of Chaldæa, or of Persia. You may contrast any one of these with the religion of Israel; you may call the one natural, the other revealed. But the Persian speaking of the Great Good Spirit or the Chaldean worshipping a supreme Lord must have had some kind of revelation; and his sense of it, not clear indeed, far enough below that of Moses or Isaiah, was yet a forth-reaching towards the same light as now shines for us.

Next we must keep it in view that Job does not appear as a thinker building on himself alone, depending on his own religious experience. Centuries and ages of thought are behind these beliefs which are ascribed to him, even the ideas which seem to start up freshly as the result of original discovery. Imagine a man thinking for himself about Divine things in that far-away Arabian past. His mind, to begin with, is not a blank. His father has instructed him. There is a faith that has come down from many generations. He has found words in use which hold in them religious ideas, discoveries, perceptions of Divine reality, caught and fixed ages before. When he learned language the products of evolution, not only psychical, but intellectual and spiritual, became his. Eloah, the lofty one, the righteousness of Eloah, the word of Eloah, Eloah as Creator, as Watcher of men, Eloah as wise, unsearchable in wisdom, as strong, infinitely mighty,—these are ideas he has not struck out for himself, but inherited. Clearly then a new thought, springing from these, comes

as a supernatural communication and has behind it ages of spiritual evolution. It is new, but has its root in the old; it is natural, but originates in the over-nature.

Now the primitive religion of the Semites, the race to which Job belonged, to which also the Hebrews belonged, has been of late carefully studied; and with regard to it certain things have been established that bear on the new hope we are to find struck out by the Man of Uz.

In the early morning of religious thought among those Semites it was universally believed that the members of a family or tribe, united by blood-relationship to each other, were also related in the same way to their God. He was their father, the invisible head and source of their community, on whom they had a claim so long as they pleased him. His interest in them was secured by the sacrificial meal which he was invited and believed to share with them. If he had been offended, the sacrificial offering was the means of recovering his favour; and communion with him in those meals and sacrifices was the inheritance of all who claimed the kinship of that clan or tribe. With the clearing of spiritual vision this belief took a new form in the minds of the more thoughtful. The idea of communion remained and the necessity of it to the life of the worshipper was felt even more strongly when the kinship of the God with his subject family was, for the few at least, no longer an affair of physical descent and blood-relationship, but of spiritual origin and attachment. And when faith rose from the tribal god to the idea of the Heaven-Father, the one Creator and King, communion with Him was felt to be in the highest sense a vital necessity. Here is found the religion of Job. A main element of it was communion with Eloah, an ethical kinship with Him, no arbitrary or merely physical relation, but of the spirit. That is to say, Job has at the heart of his creed the truth as to man's origin and nature. The author of the book is a Hebrew; his own faith is that of the people from whom we have the Book of Genesis; but he treats here of man's relation to God from the ethnic side, such as may be taken now by a reasoner treating of spiritual evolution.

Communion with Eloah had been Job's life, and with it had been associated his many years of wealth, dignity, and influence. Lest his children should fall from it and lose their most precious inheritance, he used to bring the periodical offerings. But at length his own communion was interrupted. The sense of being at one with Eloah, if not lost, became dull and faint. It is for the restoration of his very life—not as we might think of religious feeling, but of actual spirit energy—he is now concerned. It is this that underlies his desire for God to speak with him, his demand for an opportunity of pleading his cause. Some might expect that he would ask his friends to offer sacrifice on his behalf. But he makes no such request. The crisis has come in a region higher than sacrifice, where observances are of no use. Thought only can reach it; the discovery of reconciling truth alone can satisfy. Sacrifices which for the old world alone sustained the relation with God could no more for Job restore the intimacy of the spiritual Lord. With a passion for this fellowship keener than ever, since he now more distinctly realises what it is, a fear blends in the heart of the man. Death will be upon him soon. Severed from

God he will fall away into the privation of that world where is neither praise nor service, knowledge nor device. Yet the truth which lies at the heart of his religion does not yield. Leaning all upon it, he finds it strong, elastic. He sees at least a possibility of reconciliation; for how can the way back to God ever be quite closed?

What difficulty there was in his effort we know. To the common thought of the time when this book was written, say that of Hezekiah, the state of the dead was not extinction indeed, but an existence of extreme tenuity and feebleness. In Sheol there was nothing active. The hollow ghost of the man was conceived of as neither hoping nor fearing, neither originating nor receiving impressions. Yet Job dares to anticipate that even in Sheol a set time of remembrance will be ordained for him and he shall hear the thrilling call of God. As it approaches this climax the poem flashes and glows with prophetic fire.

“Oh that Thou would'st hide me in Sheol,
That Thou would'st keep me secret until Thy wrath be
past,
That Thou would'st appoint a set time, and remember
me!
If a (strong) man die, shall he live?
All the days of my appointed time would I wait
Till my release came.
Thou would'st call, I would answer Thee;
Thou would'st have a desire to the work of Thy hands.”

Not easily can we now realise the extraordinary step forward made in thought when the anticipation was thrown out of spiritual life going on beyond death (“would I wait”), retaining intellectual potency in that region otherwise dark and void to the human imagination (“I would answer Thee”). From both the human side and the Divine the poet has advanced a magnificent intuition, a springing arch into which he is unable to fit the keystone—the spiritual body; for He only could do this who long afterwards came to be Himself the Resurrection and the Life. But when this poem of Job had been given to the world a new thought was implanted in the soul of the race, a new hope that should fight against the darkness of Sheol till that morning when the sunrise fell upon an empty sepulchre, and one standing in the light asked of sorrowful men, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

“Thou would'st have a desire to the work of Thy hands.” What a philosophy of Divine care underlies the words! They come with a force Job seems hardly to realise. Is there a High One who makes men in His own image, capable of fine achievement, and then casts them away in discontent or loathing? The voice of the poet rings in a passionate key because he rises to a thought practically new to the human mind. He has broken through barriers both of faith and doubt into the light of his hope and stands trembling on the verge of another world. “One must have had a keen perception of the profound relation between the creature and his Maker in the past to be able to give utterance to such an imaginative expectation respecting the future.”

But the wrath of God still appears to rest upon Job's life; still He seems to keep in reserve, sealed up, unrevealed, some record of transgressions for which He has condemned His servant. From the height of hope Job falls away into an abject sense of the decay and misery to which man is brought by the continued rigour of Eloah's examination. As with shocks of earth-

quake mountains are broken, and waters by constant flowing wash down the soil and the plants rooted in it, so human life is wasted by the Divine severity. In the world the children whom a man loved are exalted or brought low, but he knows nothing of it. His flesh corrupts in the grave and his soul in Sheol languishes.

“Thou destroyest the hope of man.
Thou ever prevailest against him, and he passeth;
Thou changest his countenance and sendest him away.”

The real is at this point so grim and insistent as to shut off the ideal and confine thought again to its own range. The energy of the prophetic mind is overborne, and unintelligible fact surrounds and presses hard the struggling personality.

THE SECOND COLLOQUY.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRADITION OF A PURE RACE.

JOB XV. ELIPHAZ SPEAKS.

THE first colloquy has made clear severance between the old Theology and the facts of human life. No positive reconciliation is effected as yet between reality and faith, no new reading of Divine providence has been offered. The author allows the friends on the one hand, Job on the other, to seek the end of controversy just as men in their circumstances would in real life have sought it. Unable to penetrate behind the veil the one side clings obstinately to the ancestral faith, on the other side the persecuted sufferer strains after a hope of vindication apart from any return of health and prosperity, which he dares not expect. One of the conditions of the problem is the certainty of death. Before death, repentance and restoration,—say the friends. Death immediate, therefore should God hear me, vindicate me,—says Job. In desperation he breaks through to the hope that God's wrath will pass even though his scared and harrowed life be driven into Sheol. For a moment he sees the light; then it seems to expire. To the orthodox friends any such thought is a kind of blasphemy. They believe in the nullity of the state beyond death. There is no wisdom nor hope in the grave. “The dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten”—even by God. “As well their love, as their hatred and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun” (Eccles. ix. 5, 6). On the mind of Job this dark shadow falls and hides the star of his hope. To pass away under the reprobation of men and of God, to suffer the final stroke and be lost for ever in the deep darkness;—anticipating this, how can he do otherwise than make a desperate fight for his own consciousness of right and for God's intervention while yet any breath is left in him? He persists in this. The friends do not approach him one step in thought; instead of being moved by his pathetic entreaties they draw back into more bigoted judgment.

In opening the new circle of debate Eliphaz might be expected to yield a little, to admit

something in the claim of the sufferer, granting at least for the sake of argument that his case is hard. But the writer wishes to show the rigour and determination of the old creed, or rather of the men who preach it. He will not allow them one sign of *rapprochement*. In the same order as before the three advance their theory, making no attempt to explain the facts of human existence to which their attention has been called. Between the first and the second round there is, indeed, a change of position, but in the line of greater hardness. The change is thus marked. Each of the three, differing *totocalo* from Job's view of his case, had introduced an encouraging promise. Eliphaz had spoken of six troubles, yea seven, from which one should be delivered if he accepted the chastening of the Lord. Bildad affirmed

"Behold, God will not cast away the perfect:
He will yet fill thy mouth with laughter
And thy lips with shouting."

Zophar had said that if Job would put away iniquity he should be led into fearless calm.

"Thou shalt be steadfast and not fear,
For thou shalt forget thy misery;
Remember it as waters that are passed by."

That is a note of the first series of arguments; we hear nothing of it in the second. One after another drives home a stern, uncompromising judgment.

The dramatic art of the author has introduced several touches into the second speech of Eliphaz which maintain the personality. For example, the formula "I have seen" is carried on from the former address where it repeatedly occurs, and is now used quite incidentally, therefore with all the more effect. Again the "crafty" are spoken of in both addresses with contempt and aversion, neither of the other interlocutors of Job nor Job himself using the word. The thought of chap. xv. 15 is also the same as that ventured upon in chap. iv. 18, a return to the oracle which gave Eliphaz his claim to be a prophet. Meanwhile he adopts from Bildad the appeal to ancient belief in support of his position; but he has an original way of enforcing this appeal. As a pure Temanite he is animated by the pride of race and claims more for his progenitors than could be allowed to a Shuchite or Naamathite, more, certainly, than could be allowed to one who dwelt among worshippers of the sun and moon. As a whole the thought of Eliphaz remains what it was, but more closely brought to a point. He does not wander now in search of possible explanations. He fancies that Job has convicted himself and that little remains but to show most definitely the fate he seems bent on provoking. It will be a kindness to impress this on his mind.

The first part of the address, extending to verse 13, is an expostulation with Job, whom in irony he calls "wise." Should a wise man use empty unprofitable talk, filling his bosom, as it were, with the east wind, peculiarly blustering and arid? Yet what Job says is not only unprofitable, it is profane.

"Thou doest away with piety
And hinderest devotion before God.
For thine iniquity instructs thy mouth,
And thou choosest the tongue of the crafty.
Thine own mouth condemneth thee: not I;
Thine own lips testify against thee."

Eliphaz is thoroughly sincere. Some of the expressions used by his friend must have seemed to him to strike at the root of reverence. Which were they? One was the affirmation that tents of robbers prosper and they that provoke God are secure; another the daring statement that the deceived and the deceiver are both God's; again the confident defence of his own life: "Behold now I have ordered my cause, I know that I am righteous; who is he that will contend with me?" and once more his demand why God harassed him, a driven leaf, treating him with oppressive cruelty. Things like these were very offensive to a mind surcharged with veneration and occupied with a single idea of Divine government. From the first convinced that gross fault or arrogant self-will had brought down the malediction of God, Eliphaz could not but think that Job's iniquity was "teaching his mouth" (coming out in his speech, forcing him to profane expressions), and that he was choosing the tongue of the crafty. It seemed that he was trying to throw dust in their eyes. With the cunning and shiftiness of a man who hoped to carry off his evil-doing, he had talked of maintaining his ways before God and being vindicated in that region where, as every one knew, recovery was impossible. The ground of all certainty and belief was shaken by those vehement words. Eliphaz felt that piety was done away and devotion hindered, he could scarcely breathe a prayer in this atmosphere foul with scepticism and blasphemy.

The writer means us to enter into the feelings of this man, to think with him, for the time, sympathetically. It is no moral fault to be over-jealous for the Almighty, although it is a misconception of man's place and duty, as Elijah learned in the wilderness, when, having claimed to be the only believer left, he was told there were seven thousand that never bowed the knee to Baal. The speaker has this justification, that he does not assume office as advocate for God. His religion is part of him, his feeling of shock and disturbance quite natural. Blind to the unfairness of the situation, he does not consider the incivility of joining with two others to break down one sick bereaved man, to scare a driven leaf. This is accidental. Controversy begun, a pious man is bound to carry on, as long as may be necessary, the argument which is to save a soul.

Nevertheless, being human, he mingles a tone of sarcasm as he proceeds.

"The first man wast thou born?
Or wast thou made before the hills?
Did'st thou hearken in the conclave of God?
And dost thou keep the wisdom to thyself?"

Job had accused his friends of speaking unrighteously for God and respecting His person. This pricked. Instead of replying in soft words as he claims to have been doing hitherto ("Are the consolations of God too small for thee and a word that dealt tenderly with thee?"), Eliphaz takes to the sarcastic proverb. The author reserves dramatic gravity and passion for Job, as a rule, and marks the others by varying tones of intellectual hardness, of current raillery. Eliphaz now is permitted to show more of the self-defender than the defender of faith. The result is a loss of dignity.

"What knowest thou that we know not?
What understandest thou that is not in us?"

After all it is man's reason against man's reason. The answer will only come in the judgment of the Highest.

"With us is he who is both grey-haired and very old,
Older in days than thy father."

Not Eliphaz himself surely. That would be to claim too great antiquity. Besides, it seems a little wanting in sense. More probably there is reference to some aged rabbi, such as every community loved to boast of, the Nestor of the clan, full of ancient wisdom. Eliphaz really believes that to be old is to be near the fountain of truth. There was an origin of faith and pure life. The fathers were nearer that holy source; and wisdom meant going back as far as possible up the stream. To insist on this was to place a real barrier in the way of Job's self-defence. He would scarcely deny it as the theory of religion. What then of his individual protest, his philosophy of the hour and of his own wishes? The conflict is presented here with much subtlety, a standing controversy in human thought. Fixed principles there must be; personal research, experience and passion there are, new with every new age. How settle the antithesis? The Catholic doctrine has not yet been struck out that will fuse in one commanding law the immemorial convictions of the race and the widening visions of the living soul. The agitation of the church to-day is caused by the presence within her of Eliphaz and Job—Eliphaz standing for the fathers and their faith, Job passing through a fever-crisis of experience and finding no remedy in the old interpretations. The church is apt to say, Here is moral disease, sin; we have nothing for that but rebuke and aversion. Is it wonderful that the tried life, conscious of integrity, rises in indignant revolt? The taunt of sin, scepticism, rationalism or self-will is too ready a weapon, a sword worn always by the side or carried in the hand. Within the House of God men should not go armed, as if brethren in Christ might be expected to prove traitors.

The question of the eleventh verse—"Are the consolations of God too small for thee?"—is intended to cover the whole of the arguments already used by the friends and is arrogant enough as implying a Divine commission exercised by them. "The word that dealt tenderly with thee," says Eliphaz; but Job has his own idea of the tenderness and seems to convey it by an expressive gesture or glance which provokes a retort almost angry from the speaker,—

"Why doth thine heart carry thee away,
And why do thine eyes wink,
That thou turnest thy breathing against God,
And sendest words out of thy mouth?"

We may understand a brief emphatic word of repudiation not unmingled with contempt and, at the same time, not easy to lay hold of. Eliphaz now feels that he may properly insist on the wickedness of man—painfully illustrated in Job himself—and depict the certain fate of him who defies the Almighty and trusts in his own "vanity." The passage is from first to last repetition, but has new colour of the quasi-prophetic kind and a certain force and eloquence that give it fresh interest.

Formerly Eliphaz had said, "Shall man be just beside God? Behold He putteth no trust in His servants, and His angels He chargeth with folly."

Now, with a keener emphasis, and adopting Job's own confession that man born of woman is impure, he asserts the doctrine of creaturely imperfection and human corruption.

"Eloah trusteth not in His holy ones,
And the heavens are not pure in His sight;
How much less the abominable and corrupt,
Man, who drinketh iniquity as water?"

First is set forth the refusal of God to put confidence in the holiest creature,—a touch, as it were, of suspicion in the Divine rule. A statement of the holiness of God otherwise very impressive is marred by this too anthropomorphic suggestion. Why, is not the opposite true, that the Creator puts wonderful trust not only in saints but in sinners? He trusts men with life, with the care of the little children whom He loves, with the use in no small degree of His creation, the powers and resources of a world. True, there is a reservation. At no point is the creature allowed to rule. Saint and sinner, man and angel are alike under law and observation. None of them can be other than servants, none of them can ever speak the final word or do the last thing in any cause. Eliphaz therefore is dealing with a large truth, one never to be forgotten or disallowed. Yet he fails to make right use of it, for his second point, that of the total corruption of human nature, ought to imply that God does not trust man at all. The logic is bad and the doctrine will hardly square with the reference to human wisdom and to wise persons holding the secret of God of whom Eliphaz goes on to speak. Against him two lines of reasoning are evident. Abominable, gone sour or putrid, to whom evil is a necessary of existence like water—if man be that, his Creator ought surely to sweep him away and be done with him. But since, on the other hand, God maintains the life of human beings and honours them with no small confidence, it would seem that man, sinful as he is, bad as he often is, does not lie under the contempt of his Maker, is not set beyond a service of hope. In short, Eliphaz sees only what he chooses to see. His statements are devout and striking, but too rigid for the manifoldness of life. He makes it felt, even while he speaks, that he himself in some way stands apart from the race he judges so hardly. So far as the inspiration of this book goes, it is against the doctrine of total corruption as put into the mouth of Eliphaz. He intends a final and crushing assault on the position taken up by Job; but his mind is prejudiced, and the man he condemns is God's approved servant, who, in the end, will have to pray for Eliphaz that he may not be dealt with after his folly. Quotation of the words of Eliphaz in proof of total depravity is a grave error. The race is sinful; all men sin, inherit sinful tendencies and yield to them: who does not confess it? But,—all men abominable and corrupt, drinking iniquity as water,—that is untrue at any rate of the very person Eliphaz engages to convict.

It is remarkable that there is not a single word of personal confession in any speech made by the friends. They are concerned merely to state a creed supposed to be honouring to God, a full justification from their point of view of His dealings with men. The sovereignty of God must be vindicated by attributing this entire vileness to man, stripping the creature of every claim on the consideration of his Maker. The great evan-

gical teachers have not so driven home their reasoning. Augustine began with the evil in his own heart and reasoned to the world, and Jonathan Edwards in the same way began with himself. "My wickedness," he says, "has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable and, swallowing up all thought and imagination, like an infinite deluge or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be than by heaping infinite on infinite and multiplying infinite by infinite." Here is no Eliphaz arguing from misfortune to sinfulness; and indeed by that line it is impossible ever to arrive at evangelical poverty of spirit.

Passing to his final contention here the speaker introduces it with a special claim to attention. Again it is what "he has seen" he will declare, what indeed all wise men have seen from time immemorial.

"I will inform thee: hear me;
And what I have seen I will declare:
Things which wise men have told,
From their fathers, and have not hid,
To whom alone the land was given,
And no stranger passed in their midst."

There is the pride. He has a peculiar inheritance of unsophisticated wisdom. The pure Temanite race has dwelt always in the same land, and foreigners have not mixed with it. With it, therefore, is a religion not perverted by alien elements or the adoption of sceptical ideas from passing strangers. The plea is distinctively Arabic and may be illustrated by the self-complacent dogmatism of the Wahnābees of Ri'ad, whom Mr. Palgrave found enjoying their own uncorrupted orthodoxy. "In central Nejed society presents an element pervading it from its highest to its lowest grades. Not only as a Wahnābee but equally as a Nejdean the native of 'Aared and Yemāmah differs, and that widely, from his fellow-Arab of Shomer and Kaseem, nay, of Woshem and Sedeyr. The cause of this difference is much more ancient than the epoch of the great Wahnābee, and must be sought first and foremost in the pedigree itself. The descent claimed by the indigenous Arabs of this region is from the family of Tameen, a name peculiar to these lands. . . . Now Benoo-Tameen have been in all ages distinguished from other Arabs by strongly drawn lines of character, the object of the exaggerated praise and of the biting satire of native poets. Good or bad, these characteristics, described some thousand years ago, are identical with the portrait of their real or pretended descendants. . . . Simplicity is natural to the men of 'Aared and Yemāmah, independent of Wahnābee puritanism and the vigour of its code" ("Central Arabia," pp. 272, 273). To this people Nejed is holy, Damascus through which Christians and other infidels go is a lax disreputable place. They maintain a strict Mohammedanism from age to age. In their view, as in that of Eliphaz, the land belongs to the wise people who have the heavenly treasure and do not entertain strangers as guides of thought. Infallibility is a very old and very abiding cult.

Eliphaz drags back his hearers to the penal visitation of the wicked, his favourite dogma. Once more it is affirmed that for one who transgresses the law of God there is nothing but misery, fear, and pain. Though he has a great following he lives in terror of the destroyer; he knows that calamity will one day overtake him, and from it there will be no deliverance. Then

he will have to wander in search of bread, his eyes perhaps put out by his enemy. So trouble and anguish make him afraid even in his great day. There is here not a suggestion that conscience troubles him. His whole agitation is from fear of pain and loss. No single touch in the picture gives the idea that this man has any sense of sin.

How does Eliphaz distinguish or imagine the Almighty distinguishing between men in general, who are all bad and offensive in their badness, and this particular "wicked man"? Distinction there must be. What is it? One must assume, for the reasoner is no fool, that the settled temper and habit of a life are meant. Revolt against God, proud opposition to His will and law, these are the wickedness. It is no mere stagnant pool of corruption, but a force running against the Almighty. Very well: Eliphaz has not only made a true distinction, but apparently stated for once a true conclusion. Such a man will indeed be likely to suffer for his arrogance in this life, although it does not hold that he will be haunted by fears of coming doom. But analysing the details of the wicked life in vers. 25-28, we find incoherency. The question is why he suffers and is afraid.

"Because he stretched out his hand against God
And bade defiance to the Almighty;
He ran upon Him with a neck
Upon the thick bosses of His bucklers;
Because he covered his face with his fatness
And made collops of fat on his flanks;
And he dwelt in tabooed cities,
In houses which no man ought to inhabit,
Destined to become heaps."

Eliphaz has narrowed down the whole contention, so that he may carry it triumphantly and bring Job to admit, at least in this case, the law of sin and retribution. It is fair to suppose that he is not presenting Job's case, but an argument, rather, in abstract theology, designed to strengthen his own general position. The author, however, by side lights on the reasoning shows where it fails. The account of calamity and judgment, true as it might be in the main of God-defiant lives running headlong against the laws of heaven and earth, is confused by the other element of wickedness—"Because he hath covered his face with his fatness," etc. The recoil of a refined man of pure race from one of gross sensual appetite is scarcely a fit parallel to the aversion of God from man stubbornly and insolently rebellious. Further, the superstitious belief that one was unpardonable who made his dwelling in cities under the curse of God (literally, cities *cut off* or *tabooed*), while it might be sincerely put forward by Eliphaz, made another flaw in his reasoning. Any one in constant terror of judgment would have been the last to take up his abode in such accursed habitations. The argument is strong only in picturesque assertion.

The latter end of the wicked man and his futile attempts to found a family or clan are presented at the close of the address. He shall not become rich; that felicity is reserved for the servants of God. No plentiful produce shall weigh down the branches of his olives and vines, nor shall he ever rid himself of misfortune. As by a flame or hot breath from the mouth of God his harvest and himself shall be carried away. The vanity or mischief he sows shall return to him in vanity or trouble; and before his time,

while life should be still fresh, the full measure of his reward shall be paid to him. The branch withered and dry, unripe grapes and the infertile flowers of the olive falling to the ground point to the want of children or their early death; for "the company of the godless shall be barren." The tents of injustice or bribery, left desolate, shall be burned. The only fruit of the doomed life shall be iniquity.

One hesitates to accuse Eliphaz of inaccuracy. Yet the shedding of the petals of the olive is not in itself a sign of infertility; and although this tree, like others, often blossoms without producing fruit, yet it is the constant emblem of productiveness. The vine, again, may have shed its unripe grapes in Teman; but usually they wither. It may be feared that Eliphaz has fallen into the popular speaker's trick of snatching at illustrations from "something supposed to be science." His contention is partly sound in its foundation, but fails like his analogies; and the controversy, when he leaves off, is advanced not a single step.

CHAPTER XIV.

"MY WITNESS IN HEAVEN."

JOB XVI., XVII. JOB SPEAKS.

IF it were comforting to be told of misery and misfortune, to hear the doom of insolent evildoers described again and again in varying terms, then Job should have been comforted. But his friends had lost sight of their errand, and he had to recall them to it.

"I have heard many such things :
Afflictive comforters are ye all.
Shall vain words have an end ?"

He would have them consider that perpetual harping on one string is but a sober accomplishment! Returning one after another to the wicked man, the godless sinner, crafty, froward, sensual, overbearing, and his certain fate of disaster and extinction, they are at once obstinately ungracious and to Job's mind pitifully inept. He is indisposed to argue afresh with them, but he cannot refrain from expressing his sorrow and indeed his indignation that they have offered him a stone for bread. Excusing themselves, they had blamed him for his indifference to the "consolations of God." All he had been aware of was their "joining words together" against him with much shaking of the head. Was that Divine consolation? Anything, it seemed, was good enough for him, a man under the stroke of God. Perhaps he is a little unfair to his comforters. They cannot drop their creed in order to assuage his grief. In a sense it would have been easy to murmur soothing inanities.

"One writes that 'Other friends remain,'
That 'Loss is common to the race'—
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

"That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more :
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break."

Even so, the courteous superficial talk of men who said, Friend, you are only accidentally afflicted; there is no stroke of God in this; wait a little till the shadows pass, and meanwhile let us cheer you by stories of old times:—such talk

would have served Job even less than the serious attempt of the friends to settle the problem. It is therefore with somewhat inconsiderate irony he blames them for not giving what, if they had offered it, he would have rejected with scorn.

"I also could speak like you ;
If your soul were in my soul's stead,
I could join words together against you,
And shake my head at you ;
I could strengthen you with my mouth,
And the solace of my lips should assuage your grief."

The passage is throughout ironical. No change of tone occurs in verse 5, as the opening word *But* in the English version is intended to imply. Job means, of course, that such consolation as they were offering he never would have offered them. It would be easy, but abhorrent.

So far in sad sarcasm; and then, the sense of desolation falling too heavily on his mind for banter or remonstrance, he returns to his complaint. What is he among men? What is he in himself? What is he before God? Alone, stricken, the object of fierce assault and galling reproach. After a pause of sorrowful thought he resumes the attempt to express his woes, a final protest before his lips are silent in death. He cannot hope that speaking will relieve his sorrow or mitigate his pain. He would prefer to bear on

"In all the silent manliness of grief."

But as yet the appeal he has made to God remains unanswered, for aught he knows unheard. It appears therefore his duty to his own reputation and his faith that he endeavour yet again to break the obstinate doubts of his integrity which still estrange from him those who were his friends. He uses indeed language that will not commend his case but tend to confirm every suspicion. Were he wise in the world's way he would refrain from repeating his complaint against God. Rather would he speak of his misery as a simple fact of experience and strive to argue himself into submission. This line he has not taken and never takes. It is present to his own mind that the hand of God is against him. Whether men will join him by-and-by in an appeal from God to God he cannot tell. But once more all that he sees or seems to see he will declare. Every step may bring him into more painful isolation, yet he will proclaim his wrong.

"Certainly, now, He hath wearied me out.
Thou hast made desolate my company ;
Thou hast taken hold of me,
And it is a witness against me ;
And my leanness riseth up against me
Bearing witness to my face."

He is exhausted; he has come to the last stage. The circle of his family and friends in which he once stood enjoying the love and esteem of all—where is it now? That hold of life is gone. Then, as if in sheer malice, God has plucked health from him, and doing so, left a charge of unworthiness. By the sore disease the Divine hand grasps him, keeps him down. The emaciation of his body bears witness against him as an object of wrath. Yes; God is his enemy, and how terrible an enemy! He is like a savage lion that tears with his teeth and glares as if in act to devour. With God, men also, in their degree, persecute and assail him. People from the city have come out to gaze upon him. Word has gone round that he is being crushed by the Almighty for proud defiance and blasphemy.

Men who once trembled before him have smitten him upon the cheek reproachfully. They gather in groups to jeer at him. He is delivered into their hands.

But it is God, not men, of whose strange work he has most bitterly to speak. Words almost fail him to express what his Almighty Foe has done.

"I was at ease, and He brake me asunder;
Yea he hath taken me by the neck
And dashed me to pieces;
He hath also set me as His butt,
His arrows compass me round about,
He cleaveth my reins asunder and spareth not,
He poureth my gall on the ground;
He breaketh me with breach upon breach,
He runneth upon me like a giant."

Figure after figure expresses the sense of persecution by one full of resource who cannot be resisted. Job declares himself to be physically bruised and broken. The stings and sores of his disease are like arrows shot from every side that rankle in his flesh. He is like a fortress beleaguered and stormed by some irresistible enemy. His strength humbled to the dust, his eyes fowl with weeping, the eyelids swollen so that he cannot see, he lies abased and helpless, stricken to the very heart. But not in the chastened mood of one who has done evil and is now brought to contrite submission. That is as far from him as ever. The whole account is of persecution, undeserved. He suffers, but protests still that there is no violence in his hands, also his prayer is pure. Let neither God nor man think he is concealing sin and making appeal craftily. Sincere he is in every word.

At this point, where Job's impassioned language might be expected to lead to a fresh outburst against heaven and earth, one of the most dramatic turns in the thought of the sufferer brings it suddenly to a minor harmony with the creation and the Creator. His excitement is intense. Spiritual eagerness approaches the highest point. He invokes the earth to help him and the mountain echoes. He protests that his claim of integrity has its witness and must be acknowledged.

For this new and most pathetic effort to reach a benignant fidelity in God which all his cries have not yet stirred, the former speeches have made preparation. Rising from the thought that it was all one to God whether he lived or died since the perfect and the wicked are alike destroyed, bewailing the want of a daysman between him and the Most High, Job in the tenth chapter touched the thought that his Maker could not despise the work of His own hands. Again, in chapter xiv., the possibility of redemption from Sheol gladdened him for a little. Now, under the shadow of imminent death, he abandons the hope of deliverance from the underworld. Immediately, if at all, his vindication must come. And it exists, written on the breast of earth, open to the heavens, somewhere in clear words before the Highest. Not vainly did the speaker in his days of past felicity serve God with all his heart. The God he then worshipped heard his prayers, accepted his offerings, made him glad with a friendship that was no empty dream. Somewhere his Divine Friend lives still, observes still his tears and agonies and cries. Those enemies about him taunting him with sins he never committed, this horrible malady bearing him down into death;—God knows of these,

knows them to be cruel and undeserved. He cries to that God, Eloah of the Elohim, Higher than the highest.

"O Earth, cover not my blood,
And let my cry have no resting-place!
Even now, lo! my witness is in heaven,
And He that voucheth for me is on high.
My friends scorn me:
Mine eye sheds tears unto God—
That he would right a man against God,
And a son of man against his friend."

Now, in the present stage of being, before those years expire that lead him to the grave, Job entreats the vindication which exists in the records of heaven. As a son of man he pleads, not as one who has any peculiar claim, but simply as a creature of the Almighty; and he pleads for the first time with tears. The fact that earth, too, is besought to help him must not be overlooked. There is a touch of wide and wistful emotion, a sense that Eloah must regard the witness of His world. The thought has its colour from a very old feeling; it takes us back to primeval faith, and the dumb longing before faith.

Is there in any sense a deeper depth in the faithfulness of God, a higher heaven, more difficult to penetrate, of Divine benignity? Job is making a bold effort to break that barrier we have already found to exist in Hebrew thought between God as revealed by nature and providence and God as vindicator of the individual life. The man has that in his own heart which vouches for his life, though calamity and disease impeach him. And in the heart of God also there must be a witness to His faithful servant, although, meanwhile, something interferes with the testimony God could bear. Job's appeal is to the sun beyond the rolling clouds to shine. It is there; God is faithful and true. It will shine. But let it shine *now!* Human life is brief and delay will be disastrous. Pathetic cry—a struggle against what in ordinary life is the inexorable. How many have gone the way whence they shall not return, unheard apparently, unvindicated, hidden in calumny and shame! And yet Job was right. The Maker has regard to the work of His hands.

The philosophy of Job's appeal is this, that beneath all seeming discord there is one clear note. The universe is one and belongs to One, from the highest heaven to the deepest pit. Nature, providence,—what are they but the veil behind which the One Supreme is hidden, the veil God's own hands have wrought? We see the Divine in the folds of the veil, the marvellous pictures of the arras. Yet behind is He who weaves the changing forms, iridescent with colours of heaven, dark with unutterable mystery. Man is now in the shadow of the veil, now in the light of it, self-pitying, exultant, in despair, in ecstasy. He would pass the barrier. It will not yield at his will. It is no veil now, but a wall of adamant. Yet faith on this side answers to truth beyond; of this the soul is assured. The cry is for God to unravel the enigmas of His own providence, to unfold the principle of His discipline, to make clear what is perplexing to the mind and conscience of His thinking, suffering creature. None but He who weaves the web can withdraw it, and let the light of eternity shine on the tangles of time. From God the Concealer to God the Revealer, from God who hides Himself to God who is

Light, in whom is no darkness at all, we appeal. To pray on—that is man's high privilege, man's spiritual life.

So the passage we have read is a splendid utterance of the wayworn travelling soul conscious of sublime possibilities,—shall we not say, certainties? Job is God-inspired in his cry, not profane, not mad, but prophetic. For God is a bold dealer with men, and He likes bold sons. The impeachment we almost shuddered to hear is not abominable to Him because it is the truth of a soul. The claim that God is man's witness is the true courage of faith: it is sincere, and it is justified.

The demand for immediate vindication still urged is inseparable from the circumstances.

"For when a few years are come
I shall go the way whence I shall not return.
My spirit is consumed, my days extinct;
The grave is ready for me.
Surely there are mockeries with me
And mine eye lodgeth in their provocation.
Provide a pledge now; be surety for me with Thysel.
Who is there that will strike hands with me?"

Moving towards the under-world, the fire of his spirit burning low because of his disease, his body preparing its own grave, the bystanders flouting him with mockeries under a sense of which his eyes remain closed in weary endurance, he has need for one to undertake for him, to give him a pledge of redemption. But who is there excepting God to whom he can appeal? What other friend is left? Who else would be surety for one so forlorn? Against disease and fate, against the seeming wreck of hope and life, will not God Himself stand up for His servant? As for the men his friends, his enemies, the Divine suretyship for Job will recoil upon them and their cruel taunts. Their hearts are "hid from understanding," unable to grasp the truth of the case; "Therefore Thou shalt not exalt them"—that is, Thou shalt bring them low. Yes, when God redeems His pledge, declares openly that He has undertaken for His servant, the proverb shall be fulfilled—"He that giveth his fellows for a prey, even the eyes of his children shall fail." It is a proverb of the old way of thinking and carries a kind of imprecation. Job forgets himself in using it. Yet how, otherwise, is the justice of God to be invoked against those who pervert judgment and will not receive the sincere defence of a dying man?

"I am even made a byword of the populace;
I am become one in whose face they spit;
Mine eye also fails by reason of sorrow."

This is apparently parenthetical—and then Job returns to the result of the intervention of his Divine Friend. One reason why God should become his surety is the pitiable state he is in. But another reason is the new impetus that will be given to religion, the awakening of good men out of their despondency, the reassurance of those who are pure in heart, the growth of spiritual strength in the faithful and true. A fresh light thrown on providence shall indeed startle and revive the world.

"Upright men shall be amazed at this,
And the innocent shall rouse himself against the godless,
And the righteous shall keep his way,
And he that hath clean hands wax stronger and stronger."

With this hope, that his life is to be rescued from darkness and the faith of the good re-estab-

lished by the fulfilment of God's suretyship, Job comforts him-self for a little—but only for a little, a moment of strength, during which he has courage to dismiss his friends:—

"But as for you all, turn ye, and go:
For I shall not find a wise man among you."

They have forfeited all claim to his attention. Their continued discussion of the ways of God will only aggravate his pain. Let them take their departure then and leave him in peace.

The final passage of the speech referring to a hope present to Job's mind has been variously interpreted. It is generally supposed that the reference is to the promise held out by the friends that repentance will bring him relief from trouble and new prosperity. But this is long ago dismissed. It seems clear that *my hope*, an expression twice used, cannot refer to one pressed upon Job but never accepted. It must denote either the hope that God would after Job's death lay aside His anger and forgive, or the hope that God would strike hands with him and undertake his case against all adverse forces and circumstances. If this be the meaning, the course of thought in the last strophe, from verse 11 onward, is the following.—Life is running to a low ebb with me, all I had once in my heart to do is arrested, brought to an end; so gloomy are my thoughts that they set night for day, the light is near unto darkness. If I wait till death come and Sheol be my habitation and my body is given to corruption, where then shall my hope of vindication be? As for the fulfilment of my trust in God, who shall see it? The effort once made to maintain hope even in the face of death is not forgotten. But he questions now whether it has the least ground in fact. The sense of bodily decay masters his brave prevision of a deliverance from Sheol. His mind needs yet another strain put upon it before it shall rise to the magnificent assertion—Without my flesh I shall see God. The tides of trust ebb and flow. There is here a low ebb. The next advance will mark the springtide of resolute belief.

"If I wait till Sheol is my house;
Till I have spread my couch in darkness;
If I shall have said to corruption, My father art thou,
To the worm, My mother and my sister—
Where then were my hope?
As for my hope, who shall see it?
It shall go down to the bars of Sheol,
When once there is rest in the dust."

How strenuous is the thought that has to fight with the grave and corruption! The body in its emaciation and decay, doomed to be the prey of worms, appears to drag with it into the nether darkness the eager life of the spirit. Those who have the Christian outlook to another life may measure by the oppression Job has to endure the value of that revelation of immortality which is the gift of Christ.

Not in error, not in unbelief, did a man like Job fight with grim death, strive to keep it at bay till his character was cleared. There was no acknowledged doctrine of the future to found upon. Of sheer necessity each burdened soul had to seek its own Apocalypse. He who had suffered with bleeding heart a lifelong sacrifice, he who had striven to free his fellow-slaves and sank at last overborne by tyrannous power, the brave defeated, the good betrayed, those who sought through heathen beliefs and those who

found in revealed religion the promises of God—all alike stood in sorrowful ignorance before inexorable death, beheld the shadows of the under-world and singly battled for hope amidst the deepening gloom. The sense of the overwhelming disaster of death to one whose life and religion are scornfully condemned is not ascribed to Job as a peculiar trial, rarely mingling with human experience. The writer of the book has himself felt it and has seen the shadow of it on many a face. "Where," as one asks, "were the tears of God as He thrust back into eternal stillness the hands stretched out to Him in dying faith?"

There was a religion which gave large and elaborate answer to the questions of mortality. The wide intelligence of the author of Job can hardly have missed the creed and ceremonial of Egypt; he cannot have failed to remember its "Book of the Dead." His own work, throughout, is at once a parallel and a contrast to that old vision of future life and Divine judgment. It has been affirmed that some of the forms of expression, especially in the nineteenth chapter, have their source in the Egyptian scripture, and that the "Book of the Dead" is full of spiritual aspirations which give it a striking resemblance to the Book of Job. Now, undoubtedly, the correspondence is remarkable and will bear examination. The soul comes before Osiris, who holds the shepherd's crook and the penal scourge. Thoth (or Logos) breathes new spirit into the embalmed body, and the dead pleads for himself before the assessors—"Hail to thee, great Lord of Justice. I arrive near thee. I am one of those consecrated to thee on the earth. I reach the land of eternity. I rejoin the eternal country. Living is he who dwelleth in darkness; all his grandeurs live." The dead is in fact not dead, he is recreated; *the mouth of no worm shall devour him.* At the close of the "Book of the Dead" it is written, the departed "shall be among the gods; his flesh and bones shall be healthy as one who is not dead. He shall shine as a star for ever and ever. He seeth God with his flesh." The defence of the soul in claiming beatitude is this: "I have committed no revenge in act or in heart, no excesses in love. I have injured no one with lies. I have driven away no beggars, committed no treacheries, caused no tears. I have not taken another's property, nor ruined another, nor destroyed the laws of righteousness. I have not aroused contests, nor neglected the Creator of my soul. I have not disturbed the joy of others. I have not passed by the oppressed, sinning against my Creator, or the Lord, or the heavenly powers. . . . I am pure, pure."*

There are many evident resemblances which have been already studied and would repay further attention; but the questions occur, how far the author of the Book of Job refused Egyptian influences, and why, in the face of a solution of his problem apparently thrust upon him with the authority of ages, he yet exerted himself to find a solution of his own, meanwhile throwing his hero into the hopelessness of one to whom death as a physical fact is final, compelled to forego the expectation of a daysman who should affirm his righteousness before the Lord of all. The "Book of the Dead" was, for one thing, identified with polytheism, with idolatry and a

priestly system; and a thinker whose belief was entirely monotheistic, whose mind turned decisively from ritual, whose interests were widely humane, was not likely to accept as a revelation the promises of Egyptian priests to their aristocratic patrons, or to seek light from the mysteries of Isis and Osiris. Throughout his book our author is advancing to a conclusion altogether apart from the ideas of Egyptian faith regarding the trust of the soul. But chiefly his mind seems to have been repelled by the excessive care given to the dead body, with the consequent materialising of religion. Life to him meant so much that he needed a far more spiritual basis for its continuance than could be found in the preservation of the worn-out frame. With rare and unsurpassed endeavour he was straining beyond time and sense after a vision of life in the union of man's spirit with its Maker, and that Divine constancy in which alone faith could have acceptance and repose. No thought of maintaining himself in existence by having his body embalmed is ever expressed by Job. The author seems to scorn that childish dream of continuance. Death means decay, corruption. This doom passed on the body the stricken life must endure, and the soul must stay itself upon the righteousness and grace of God.

CHAPTER XV.

A SCHEME OF WORLD-RULE.

JOB xviii. BILDAD SPEAKS.

COMPOSED in the orderly parallelism of the finished *mashal*, this speech of Bildad stands out in its strength and subtlety and, no less, in its cruel rigour quite distinct among those addressed to Job. It is the most trenchant attack the sufferer has to bear. The law of retribution is stated in a hard collected tone which seems to leave no room for doubt. The force that overbears and kills is presented rather as fate or destiny than as moral government. No attempt is made to describe the character of the man on whom punishment falls. We hear nothing of proud defiance or the crime of settling in habitations under the Divine curse. Bildad ventures no definitions that may not fit Job's case. He labels a man godless, and then, with a dogged relish, follows his entanglement in the net of disaster. All he says is general, abstract; nevertheless, the whole of it is calculated to pierce the armour of Job's supposed presumption. It is not to be borne longer that against all wisdom and certainty this man, plainly set among the objects of wrath, should go on defending himself as if the judgment of men and God went for nothing.

With singular inconsistency the wicked man is spoken of as one who for some time prospers in the world. He has a settlement from which he is ejected, a family that perishes, a name of some repute which he loses. Bildad begins by admitting what he afterwards denies, that a man of evil life may have success. It is indeed only for a time, and perhaps the idea is that he becomes wicked as he becomes rich and strong. Yet if the effect of prosperity is to make a man proud and cruel and so bring him at once into snares and pitfalls according to a rigorous natural law—how then can worldly success be the reward of virtue? Bildad is nearer the mark with

* See Renouf's Hibbert Lecture, also "The Unknown God," by C. Loring Brace.

description than with reasoning. It is as though he said to Job, Doubtless you were a good man once; you were my friend and a servant of God; but I very much fear that prosperity has done you harm. It is clear that, as a godless man, you are now driven from light into darkness, that fear and death wait for you. The speaker does not see that he is overturning his own scheme of world-rule.

There is bitterness here, the personal feeling of one who has a view to enforce. Does the man before him think he is of such account that the Almighty will intervene to become surety for him and justify his self-righteousness? It is necessary that Job shall not even seem to get the best of the argument. No bystander shall say his novel heresies appear to have a colour of truth. The speaker is accordingly very unlike what he was in his first address. The show of politeness and friendship is laid aside. We see the temper of a mind fed on traditional views of truth, bound in the fetters of self-satisfied incompetence. In his admirable exposition of this part of the book Dr. Cox cites various Arabic proverbs of long standing which are embodied, one way or other, in Bildad's speech. It is a cold creed which builds on this wisdom of the world. He who can use grim sayings against others is apt to think himself superior to their frailties, in no danger of the penalties he threatens. And the speech of Bildad is irritating just because everything is omitted which might give a hinge or loop to Job's criticism.

Nowhere is the skill of the author better shown than in making these protagonists of Job say false things plausibly and effectively. His resources are marvellous. After the first circle of speeches the lines of opposition to Job marked out by the tenor of the controversy might seem to admit no more or very little fresh argument. Yet this address is as graphic and picturesque as those before it. The full strength of the opposition is thrown into those sentences piling threat on threat with such apparent truth. The reason is that the crisis approaches. By Bildad's attack the sufferer is to be roused to his loftiest effort,—that prophetic word which is in one sense the *raison d'être* of the book. One may say the work done here is for all time. The manifesto of humanity against rabbinism, of the plain man's faith against hard theology, is set beside the most specious arguments for a rule dividing men into good and bad, simply as they appear to be happy or unfortunate.

Bildad opens the attack by charging Job with hunting for words—an accusation of a general kind apparently referring to the strong expressions he had used in describing his sufferings at the hand of God and from the criticism of men. He then calls Job to understand his own errors, that he may be in a position to receive the truth. Perverting and exaggerating the language of Job, he demands why the friends should be counted as beasts and unclean, and why they should be so branded by a man who was in revolt against providence.

“Why are we counted as beasts,
As unclean even in your sight?
Thou that tearest thyself in thine anger—
For thy sake shall the earth be forsaken,
And the rock be moved from its place?”

Ewald's interpretation here brings out the force of the questions. “Does this madman who complained that God's wrath tore him, but who,

on the contrary, sufficiently betrays his own bad conscience by tearing himself in his anger, really demand that on his account, that he may be justified, the earth shall be made desolate (since really, if God Himself should pervert justice, order, and peace, the blessings of the happy occupation of the earth could not subsist)? Does he also hope that what is firmest, the Divine order of the world, should be removed from its place? Oh, the fool, who in his own perversity and confusion rebels against the everlasting order of the universe!” All is settled from time immemorial by the laws of providence. Without more discussion Bildad reaffirms what the unchangeable decree, as he knows it, certainly is.

“Nevertheless the light of the wicked shall be put out,
And the gleam of his fire shall not shine.
The light shall fade in his tent,
And his lamp over him shall be put out.
The steps of his strength shall be straitened,
And his own counsel shall cast him down.
For into a net his own feet urge him,
And he walketh over the toils.
A snare seizeth him by the heel,
And a noose holdeth him fast:
In the ground its loop is hidden,
And its mesh in the path.”

By reiteration, by a play on words the fact as it appears to Bildad is made very clear—that for the wicked man the world is full of perils, deliberately prepared as snares for wild animals are set by the hunter. The general proposition is that the light of his prosperity is an accident. It shall soon be put out and his home be given to desolation. This comes to pass first by a restraint put on his movements. The sense of some inimical power observing him, pursuing him, compels him to move carefully and no longer with the free stride of security. Then in the narrow range to which he is confined he is caught again and again by the snares and meshes set for him by invisible hands. His best devices for his own safety bring him into peril. In the open country and in the narrow path alike he is seized and held fast. More and more closely the adverse power confines him, bearing upon his freedom and his life till his superstitious fears are kindled. Terrors confound him now on every side and suddenly presented startle him to his feet. This once strong man becomes weak; he who had abundance knows what it is to hunger. And death is now plainly in his cup. Destruction, a hateful figure, is constantly at his side, appearing as disease which attacks the body. It is leprosy, the very disease Job is suffering.

“It devoureth the members of his skin,
Devoureth his members, even the firstborn of death.
He is plucked from the tent of his confidence,
And he is brought to the king of terrors.”

The personification of death here is natural, and many parallels to the figure are easily found. Horror of death is a mark of strong healthy life, especially among those who see beyond only some dark Sheol of dreary hopeless existence. The “firstborn of death” is the frightful black leprosy, and it has that figurative name as possessing more than other diseases that power to corrupt the body which death itself fully exercises.

This cold prediction of the death of the godless from the very malady that has attacked Job is cruel indeed, especially from the lips of one who formerly promised health and felicity in this world as the result of penitence. We may say

that Bildad has found it his duty to preach the terrors of God, and the duty appears congenial to him, for he describes with insistence and ornament the end of the godless. But he should have deferred this terrible homily till he had clear proof of Job's wickedness. Bildad says things in his zeal of his spirit against the godless which he will afterwards bitterly regret.

Having brought the victim of destiny to the grave, the speaker has yet more to say. There were consequences that extended beyond a man's own suffering and extinction. His family, his name, all that was desired of remembrance in this world would be denied to the evil-doer. In the universe, as Bildad sees it, there is no room for repentance or hope even to the children of the man against whom the decree of fate has gone forth.

"They shall dwell in his tent that are none of his!
Brimstone shall be showered on his habitation;
His roots shall be dried up beneath,
And above his branches shall wither;
His memory shall perish from the land,
And he shall have no name in the earth—
It shall be driven from light into darkness,
And chased out of the world."

The habitation of the sinner shall either pass into the hand of utter strangers or be covered with brimstone and made accursed. The roots of his family or clan, those who still survive of an older generation, and the branches above—children or grandchildren, as in verse 19—shall wither away. So his memory shall perish, alike in the land where he dwelt and abroad in other regions. His name shall go into oblivion, chased with aversion and disgust out of the world. Such, says Bildad, is the fate of the wicked. Job saw fit to speak of men being astonished at the vindication he was to enjoy when God appeared for him. But the surprise would be of a different kind. At the utter destruction of the wicked man and his seed, his homestead and memory, they of the west would be astonished and they of the east affrighted.

As logical as many another scheme since offered to the world, a moral scheme also, this of Bildad is at once determined and incoherent. He has no doubt, no hesitation in presenting it. Were he the moral governor, there would be no mercy for sinners who refused to be convicted of sin in his way and according to his law of judgment. He would lay snares for them, hunt them down, snatch at every argument against them. In his view that is the only way to overcome unregenerate hearts and convince them of guilt. In order to save a man he would destroy him. To make him penitent and holy he would attack his whole right to live. Of the humane temper Bildad has almost none.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MY REDEEMER LIVETH."

JOB XIX. JOB SPEAKS.

WITH simple strong art sustained by exuberant eloquence the author has now thrown his hero upon our sympathies, blending a strain of expectancy with tender emotion. In shame and pain, sick almost to death, baffled in his attempts to overcome the seeming indifference of Heaven, the sufferer lies broken and dejected.

Bildad's last address describing the fate of the godless man has been deliberately planned to strike at Job under cover of a general statement of the method of retribution. The pictures of one seized by the "firstborn of death," of the lightless and desolate habitation, the withered branches and decaying remembrance of the wicked, are plainly designed to reflect Job's present state and forecast his coming doom. At first the effect is almost overwhelming. The judgment of men is turned backward and like the forces of nature and providence has become relentless. The united pressure on a mind weakened by the body's malady goes far to induce despair. Meanwhile the sufferer must endure the burden not only of his personal calamities and the alienation of all human friendships, but also of a false opinion with which he has to grapple as much for the sake of mankind as for his own. He represents the seekers after the true God and true religion in an age of darkness, aware of doubts other men do not admit, labouring after a hope of which the world feels no need. The immeasurable weight this lays on the soul is to many unknown. Some few there are, as Carlyle says, and Job appears one of them, who "have to realise a worship for themselves, or live unworshipping. In dim forecastings, wrestles within them the 'Divine Idea of the World,' yet will nowhere visibly reveal itself. The Godlike has vanished from the world; and they, by the strong cry of their soul's agony, like true wonder-workers, must again evoke its presence. . . . The doom of the Old has long been pronounced, and irrevocable; the Old has passed away; but, alas, the New appears not in its stead, the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New. Man has walked by the light of conflagrations and amid the sound of falling cities; and now there is darkness, and long watching till it be morning. The voice of the faithful can but exclaim: 'As yet struggles the twelfth hour of the night: birds of darkness are on the wing, spectres uproar, the dead walk, the living dream. Thou, Eternal Providence, wilt cause the day to dawn.'"

As in the twelfth hour of the night, the voices of men sounding hollow and strange to him, the author of the Book of Job found himself. Current ideas about God would have stifled his thought if he had not realised his danger and the world's danger and thrown himself forward, breaking through, even with defiance and passion, to make a way for reason to the daylight of God. Limiting and darkening statements he took up as they were presented to him over and over again; he tracked them to their sources in ignorance, pedantry, hardness of temper. He insisted that the one thing for a man is resolute clearness of mind, openness to the teaching of God, to the correction of the Almighty, to that truth of the whole world which alone corresponds to faith. Believing that the ultimate satisfying object of faith will disclose itself at last to every pure seeker, each in his degree, he began his quest and courageously pursued it, never allowing hope to wander where reason dared not follow, checking himself on the very brink of alluring speculation by a deliberate *reconnaissance* of the facts of life and the limitations of knowledge. Nowhere more clearly than in this speech of Job does the courageous truthfulness of the author show itself. He seems to find his oracle, and then with a sigh return to the path

of sober reality because as yet verification of the sublime idea is beyond his power. The vision appears and is fixed in a vivid picture—marking the highest flight of his inspiration—that those who follow may have it before them, to be examined, tried, perhaps approved in the long run. But for himself, or at any rate for his hero, one who has to find his faith through the natural world and its revelations of Divine faithfulness, the bounds within which absolute certainty existed for the human mind at that time are accepted unflinchingly. The hope remains; but assurance is sought on a lower level, where the Divine order visible in the universe sheds light on the moral life of man.

That inspiration should thus work within bounds, conscious of itself, yet restrained by human ignorance, may be questioned. The apprehension of transcendent truth not yet proved by argument, the authoritative statement of such truth for the guidance and confirmation of faith, lastly, complete independence of ordinary criticism—are not these the functions and qualities of inspiration? And yet, here, the inspired man, with insight fresh and marvellous, declines to allow his hero or any thinker repose in the very hope which is the chief fruit of his inspiration, leaving it as something thrown out, requiring to be tested and verified; and meanwhile he takes his stand as a prophet on those nearer, in a sense more common, yet withal sustaining principles that are within the range of the ordinary mind. Such we shall find to be the explanation of the speeches of the Almighty and their absolute silence regarding the future redemption. Such also may be said to be the reason of the epilogue, apparently so inconsistent with the scope of the poem. On firm ground the writer takes his stand—ground which no thinker of his time could declare to be hollow. The thorough saneness of his mind, shown in this final decision, gives all the more life to the flashes of prediction and the Divine intuitions which leap out of the dark sky hanging low over the suffering man.

The speech of Bildad in chap. xviii., under cover of an account of invariable law, was really a dream of special providence. He believed that the Divine King, who, as Christ teaches, "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust," really singles out the wicked for peculiar treatment corresponding to their iniquity. It is in one sense the sign of vigorous faith to attribute action of this kind to God, and Job himself in his repeated appeals to the unseen Vindicator shows the same conception of providence. Should not One intent on righteousness break through the barriers of ordinary law when doubt is cast on His equity and care? Pardonable to Job, whose case is altogether exceptional, the notion is one the author sees it necessary to hold in check. There is no Theophany of the kind Job desires. On the contrary his very craving for special intervention adds to his anxiety. Because it is not granted he affirms that God has perverted his right; and when at last the voice of the Almighty is heard, it is to recall the doubter from his personal desires to the contemplation of the vast universe as revealing a wide and wise fidelity. This undernote of the author's purpose, while it serves to guide us in the interpretation of Job's complaints, is not

allowed to rise into the dominant. Yet it rebukes those who think the great Divine law have not been framed to meet their case, who rest their faith not on what God does always and is in Himself, but on what they believe He does sometimes and especially for them. The thoughts of the Lord are very deep. Our lives float upon them like skiffs upon an unfathomable ocean of power and fatherly care.

Of the treatment he receives from men Job complains, yet not because they are the means of his overthrow.

"How long will ye vex my soul
And crush me utterly with sayings?
These ten times have ye reproached me;
Ye are not ashamed that ye condemn me,
And be it verily that I have erred,
Mine error remaineth to myself.
Will ye, indeed, exult against me
And reproach me with my disgrace?
Know now that God hath wronged me,
And compassed me about with His net."

Why should his friends be so persistent in charging him with offence? He has not wronged them. If he has erred, he himself is the sufferer. It is not for them to take part against him. Their exultation is of a kind they have no right to indulge, for they have not brought him to the misery in which he lies. Bildad spoke of the snare in which the wicked is caught. His tone in that passage could not have been more complacent if he himself claimed the honour of bringing retribution on the godless. But it is God, says Job, who hath compassed me with His net.

"Behold, of wrong I cry, but I am not heard;
I cry for help, but there is no judgment."

Day after day, night after night, pains and fears increase: death draws nearer. He cannot move out of the net of misery. As one neglected, outlawed, he has to bear his inexplicable doom, his way fenced in so that he cannot pass, darkness thrown over his world by the hand of God.

Plunging thus anew into a statement of his hopeless condition as one discredited, dishonoured, a broken man, the speaker has in view all along the hard human judgment which numbers him with the godless. He would melt the hearts of his relentless critics by pleading that their enmity is out of place. If the Almighty is his enemy and has brought him near to the dust of death, why should men persecute him as God? Might they not have pity? There is indeed resentment against providence in his mind; but the anxious craving for human sympathy reacts on his language and makes it far less fierce and bitter than in previous speeches. Grief rather than revolt is now his mood.

"He hath stripped me of my glory
And taken my crown from my head.
He hath broken me down on every side,
Uprooted my hope like a tree.
He hath also kindled his wrath against me
And counted me among His adversaries.
His troops come on together
And cast up their way against me
And encamp around my tent."

So far the Divine indignation has gone. Will his friends not think of it? Will they not look upon him with less of hardness and contempt though he may have sinned? A man in a hostile universe, a feeble man, stricken with disease, unable to help himself, the heavens frowning upon him—why should they harden their hearts?

And yet, see how his brethren have dealt with him! Mark how those who were his friends stand apart, Eliphaz and the rest, behind them others who once claimed kinship with him. How do they look? Their faces are clouded. They must be on God's side against Job. Yea, God Himself has moved them to this.

"He hath put my brethren far from me,
And my confidants are wholly estranged from me.
My kinsfolk have failed
And my familiar friends have forgotten me.
They that dwell in my house and my maids count me
for a stranger;
I am an alien in their sight.
I call my servant and he gives me no answer,
I must entreat him with my mouth.
My breath is offensive to my wife,
And my ill savour to the sons of my body.
Even young children despise me;
If I would arise they speak against me.
My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh,
And I am escaped with the skin of my teeth."

The picture is one of abject humiliation. He is rejected by all who once loved him, forced to entreat his servants, become offensive to his wife and grandsons, jeered at even by children of the place. The case appears to us unnatural and shows the almost fiendish hardness of the Oriental world; that is to say, if the account is not coloured for dramatic purposes. The intention is to represent the extremity of Job's wretchedness, the lowest depth to which he is reduced. The fire of his spirit is almost quenched by shame and desolation. He shows the days of his misery in the strongest shadow in order to compel, if possible, the sympathy so persistently withheld.

"Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends,
For the hand of God hath touched me.
Why do ye persecute me as God,
And are not satisfied with my flesh?"

Now we understand the purpose of the long description of his pain, both that which God has inflicted and that caused by the alienation and contempt of men. Into his soul the prediction of Bildad has entered, that he will share the fate of the wicked whose memory perishes from the earth, whose name is driven from light into darkness and chased out of the world. Is it to be so with him? That were indeed a final disaster. To bring his friends to some sense of what all this means to him—this is what he struggles after. It is not even the pity of it that is the chief point, although through that he seeks to gain his end. But if God is not to interpose, if his last hour is coming without a sign of heaven's relenting, he would at least have men stand beside him, take his words to heart, believe them possibly true, hand down for his memorial the claim he has made of integrity. Surely, surely he shall not be thought of by the next generation as Job the proud, defiant evildoer laid low by the judgments of an offended God—brought to shame as one who deserved to be counted amongst the offscourings of the earth. It is enough that God has persecuted him, that God is slaying him—let not men take it upon them to do so to the last. Before he dies let one at least say, Job, my friend, perhaps you are sincere, perhaps you are misjudged.

Urgent is the appeal. It is in vain. Not a hand is stretched out, not one grim face relaxes. The man has made his last attempt. He is now like a pressed animal between the hunter and the chasm. And why is the author so rigorous in his picture of the friends? It is made to all

appearance quite inhuman, and cannot be so without design. By means of this inhumanity Job is flung once for all upon his need of God from whom he had almost turned away to man. The poet knows that not in man is the help of the soul, that not in the sympathy of man, not in the remembrance of man, not in the care or even love of man as a passing tenant of earth can the labouring heart put its confidence. From the human judgment Job turned to God at first. From the Divine silence he had well-nigh turned back to human pity. He finds what other sufferers have found, that the silence is allowed to extend beneath him, between him and his fellows, in order that he may finally and effectually direct his hope and faith above himself, above the creaturely race, to Him from whom all came, in whose will and love alone the spirit of man has its life, its hope. Yes, God is bringing home to Himself the man whom He has approved for approval. The way is strange to the feet of Job, as it often is to the weary half-blinded pilgrim. But it is the one way to fulfil and transcend our longings. Neither corporate sympathy nor posthumous immortality can ever stand to a thinking soul instead of the true firm judgment of its life that waits within the knowledge of God. If He is not for us, the epitaphs and memoirs of time avail nothing. Man's place is in the eternal order or he does indeed cry out of wrong and is not heard.

From men to the written book, from men to the graven rock, more enduring, more public than the book—will this provide what is still un-found?

"Oh that now my words were written,
That they were inscribed in a book;
That with an iron stylus and with lead,
They were graven in the rock for ever."

As one accustomed to the uses of wealth Job speaks. He thinks first of a parchment in which his story and his claim may be carefully written and preserved. But he sees at once how perishable that would be and passes to a form of memorial such as great men employed. He imagines a cliff in the desert with a monumental inscription bearing that once he, the Emeer of Uz, lived and suffered, was thrown from prosperity, was accused by men, was worn by disease, but died maintaining that all this befell him unjustly, that he had done no wrong to God or man. It would stand there in the way of the caravans of Tema for succeeding generations to read. It would stand there till the ages had run their course. Kings represent on rocks their wars and triumphs. As one of royal dignity Job would use the same means of continuing his protest and his name.

Yet, so far as his life is concerned, what good,—the story spread northward to Damascus, but he, Job, lost in Sheol? His protest is against forms of death: his claim is for life. There is no life in the sculptured stone. Baffled again he halts midway. His foot on a crumbling point, there must be yet one spring for safety and refuge.

Who has not felt, looking at the records of the past, inscriptions on tablets, rocks and temples, the wistful throb of antiquity in those anxious legacies of a world of men too well aware of man's forgetfulness? "Whoever alters the work of my hand," says the conqueror called Sargon, "destroys my constructions, pulls down the walls

which I have raised—may Asshur, Ninêb, Râmân and the great gods who dwell there pluck his name and seed from the land and let him sit bound at the feet of his foe." Invocation of the gods in this manner was the only resource of him who in that far past feared oblivion and knew that there was need to fear. But to a higher God, in words of broken eloquence, Job is made to commit his cause, seeing beyond the perishable world the imperishable remembrance of the Almighty. So a Hebrew poet breathed into the wandering air of the desert that brave hope which afterwards, far beyond his thought, was in Israel to be fulfilled. Had he been exiled from Galilee? In Galilee was to be heard the voice that told of immortality and redemption.

We must go back in the book to find the beginning of the hope now seized. Already Job has been looking forth beyond the region of this little life. What has he seen?

First and always, Eloah. That name and what it represents do not fail him. He has had terrible experiences, and all of them must have been appointed by Eloah. But the name is venerable still, and despite all difficulties he clings to the idea that righteousness goes with power and wisdom. The power bewilders—the wisdom plans inconceivable things—but beyond there is righteousness.

Next. He has seen a gleam of light across the darkness of the grave, through the gloom of the under-world. A man going down thither, his body to moulder into dust, his spirit to wander a shadow in a prison of shadows,—may not remain there. God is almighty—He has the key of Sheol—a star has shown for a little, giving hope that out of the under-world life may be recovered. It is seen that Eloah, the Maker, must have a desire to the work of His hands. What does that not mean?

Again. It has been borne upon his mind that the record of a good life abides and is with the All-seeing. What is done cannot be undone. The wasting of the flesh cannot waste that Divine knowledge. The eternal history cannot be effaced. Spiritual life is lived before Eloah who guards the right of a man. Men scorn Job; but with tears he has prayed to Eloah to right his cause, and that prayer cannot be in vain.

A just prayer cannot be in vain because God is ever just. From this point thought mounts upward. Eloah for ever faithful—Eloah able to open the gate of Sheol—not angry for ever—Eloah keeping the tablet of every life, indifferent to no point of right,—these are the steps of progress in Job's thought and hope. And these are the gain of his trial. In his prosperous time none of these things had been before him. He had known the joy of God but not the secret, the peace, not the righteousness. Yet he is not aware how much he has gained. He is coming half unconsciously to an inheritance prepared for him in wisdom and in love by Eloah in whom he trusts. A man needs for life more than he himself can either sow or ripen.

And now, hear Job. Whether the rock shall be graven or not he cannot tell. Does it matter? He sees far beyond that inscribed cliff in the desert. He sees what alone can satisfy the spirit that has learned to live.

"'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want."

Not dimly this great truth flashes through the web of broken ejaculation, panting thought.

"But I know it: my Redeemer liveth;
And afterward on the dust He will stand up;
And after my skin they destroy, even this,
And without my flesh shall I see Eloah,
Whom I shall see FOR ME,
And mine eyes shall behold and not the stranger—
My reins are consumed in my bosom."

The Goël or Redeemer pledged to him by eternal justice is yet to arise, a living Remembrancer and Vindicator from all wrong and dishonour. On the dust that covers death He will arise when the day comes. The diseases that prey on the perishing body shall have done their work. In the grave the flesh shall have passed into decay; but the spirit that has borne shall behold Him. Not for the passing stranger shall be the vindication, but for Job himself. All that has been so confounding shall be explained, for the Most High is the Goël; He has the care of His suffering servant in His own hand and will not fail to issue it in clear satisfying judgment.

For the inspired writer of these words, declaring the faith which had sprung up within him; for us also who desire to share his faith and to be assured of the future vindication, three barriers stand in the way, and these have successively to be passed.

First is the difficulty of believing that the Most High need trouble Himself to disentangle all the rights from the wrongs in human life. Is humanity of such importance in the universe? God is very high; human affairs may be of little consequence to His eternal majesty. Is not this earth on which we dwell one of the smaller of the planets that revolve about the sun? Is not our sun one amongst a myriad, many of them far transcending it in size and splendour? Can we demand or even feel hopeful that the Eternal Lord shall adjust the disordered equities of our little state and appear for the right which has been obscured in the small affairs of time? A century is long to us; but our ages are "moments in the being of the eternal silence." Can it matter to the universe moving through perpetual cycles of evolution, new races and phases of creaturely life arising and running their course—can it matter that one race should pass away having simply contributed its struggle and desire to the far-off result? Conceivably, in the design of a wise and good Creator, this might be a destiny for a race of beings to subserve. How do we know it is not ours?

This difficulty has grown. It stands now in the way of all religion, even of the Christian faith. God is among the immensities and eternities; evolution breaks in wave after wave; we are but one. How can we assure our hearts that the inexterminable longing for equity shall have fulfilment?

Next there is the difficulty which belongs to the individual life. To enjoy the hope, feel the certainty to which Job reached forth, you or I must make the bold assumption that our personal controversies are of eternal importance. One is obscure; his life has moved in a very narrow circle. He has done little, he knows little. His sorrows have been keen, but they are brief and limited. He has been held down, scorned, afflicted. But after all why should God care? To adjust the affairs of nations, to bring out the world's history in righteousness may be God's

concern. But suppose a man lives bravely, bears patiently, preserves his life from evil, though he have to suffer and even go down in darkness, may not the end of the righteous King be gained by the weight his life casts into the scale of faith and virtue? Should not the man be satisfied with this result of his energy and look for nothing more? Does eternal righteousness demand anything more on behalf of a man? Included in this is the question whether the disputes between men, the small ignorances, egotisms, clashing of wills, need a final assize. Are they not trifling and transient? Can we affirm that in these is involved an element of justice which it concerns our Maker to establish before the worlds?

The third barrier is not less than the others to modern thought. How is our life to be preserved or revived, so that personally and consciously we shall have our share in the clearing up of the human story and be gladdened by the "Well done, good and faithful servant" of the Judge? That verdict is entirely personal; but how may the faithful servant live to hear it? Death appears inexorable. Despite the resurrection of Christ, despite the words He has spoken, "I am the resurrection and the life," even to Christians the vision is often clouded, the survival of consciousness hard to believe in. How did the author of Job pass this barrier—in thought, or in hope? Are we content to pass it in hope?

I answer all these questions together. And the answer lies in the very existence of the idea of justice, our knowledge of justice, our desire for it, the fragmentariness of our history till right has been done to us by others, by us to others, by man to God, and God to man—the full right, whatever that may involve.

Whence came our sense of justice? We can only say, From Him who made us. He gave us such a nature as cannot be satisfied nor find rest till an ideal of justice, that is of acted truth, is framed in our human life and everything possible done to realise it. Upon this acted truth all depends, and till it is reached we are in suspense. Deep in the mind of man lies that need. Yet it is always a hunger. More and more it unsettles him, keeps him in unrest, turning from scheme to scheme of ethic and society. He is ever making compromises, waiting for evolutions; but nature knows no compromises and gives him no clue save in present fact. Is it possible that He who made us will not overpass our poor best, will not sweep aside the shifts and evasions current in our imperfect economy? The passion for righteousness comes from him; it is a ray of Himself. The soul of the good man craving perfect holiness and toiling for it in himself, in others, can it be greater than God, more strenuous, more subtle than the Divine evolution that gave him birth, the Divine Father of his spirit? Impossible in thought, impossible in fact.

No. Justice there is in every matter. Surely science has taught us very little if it has not banished the notion that the *small* means the *unimportant*, that minute things are of no moment in evolution. For many years past science has been constructing for us the great argument of universal physical fidelity, universal weaving of the small details into the vast evolutionary design. The microscopist, the biologist, the chemist, the astronomer, each and all are engaged in building up this argument, forcing the confession that the

universe is one of inconceivably small things ordered throughout by law. Finish and care would seem to be given everywhere to minutiae as though, that being done, the great would certainly evolve. Further, science even when dealing with material things emphasises the importance of mind. The truthfulness of nature at any point in the physical range is a truthfulness of the Overnature to the mind of man, a correlation established between physical and spiritual existence. Wherever order and care are brought into view there is an exaltation of the human reason which perceives and relates. All would be thrown into confusion if the fidelity recognised by the mind did not extend to the mind itself, if the sanity and development of the mind were not included in the order of the universe. For the psychological student this is established, and the working of evolutionary law is being traced in the obscure phenomena of consciousness, sub-consciousness, and habit.

Is it of importance that each of the gases shall have laws of diffusion and combination, shall act according to those laws, unvaryingly affecting vegetable and animal life? Unless those laws wrought in constancy or equity at every moment all would be confusion. Is it of importance that the bird, using its wings, shall be able to soar into the atmosphere; that the wings adapted for flight shall find an atmosphere in which their exercise produces movement? Here again is an equity which enters into the very constitution of the cosmos, which must be a form of the one supreme law of the cosmos. Once more, is it of importance that the thinker shall find sequences and relations, when once established, a sound basis for prediction and discovery, that he shall be able to trust himself on lines of research and feel certain that, at every point, for the instrument of inquiry there is answering verity? Without this correspondence man would have no real place in evolution, he would flutter an aimless unrelated sensitiveness through a storm of physical incidents.

Advance to the most important facts of mind, the moral ideas which enter into every department of thought, the inductions through which we find our place in another range than the physical. Does the fidelity already traced now cease? Is man at this point beyond the law of faithfulness, beyond the invariable correlation of environment with faculty? Does he now come to a region which he cannot choose but enter, where, however, the cosmos fails him, the beating wing cannot rise, the inquiring mind reaches no verity, and the consciousness does flutter an inexplicable thing through dreams and illusions? A man has it in his nature to seek justice. Peace for him there is none unless he does what is right and can believe that right will be done. With this high conviction in his mind he is opposed, as in this Book of Job, by false men, overthrown by calamity, covered with harsh judgment. Death approaches and he has to pass away from a world that seems to have failed him. Shall he never see his right nor God's righteousness? Shall he never come to his own as a man of good will and high resolve? Has he been true to a cosmos which after all is treacherous, to a rule of virtue which has no authority and no issue? He believes in a Lord of infinite justice and truth; that his life, small as it is, cannot be apart from the pervading law of equity. Is that his dream? Then any mo-

ment the whole system of the universe may collapse like a bubble blown upon a marsh.

Now let us clearly understand the point and value of the argument. It is not that a man who has served God here and suffered here must have a joyful immortality. What man is faithful enough to make such a claim? But the principle is that God must vindicate His righteousness in dealing with the man He has made, the man He has called to trust Him. It matters not who the man is, how obscure his life has been, he has this claim on God, that to him the eternal righteousness ought to be made clear. Job cries for his own justification; but the doubt about God involved in the slur cast upon his own integrity is what rankles in his heart; from that he rises in triumphant protest and daring hope. He must live till God clears up the matter. If he dies he must revive to have it all made clear. And observe, if it were only that ignorant men cast doubt on providence, the resurrection and personal redemption of the believer would not be necessary. God is not responsible for the foolish things men say, and we could not look for resurrection because our fellow-creatures misrepresent God. But Job feels that God Himself has caused the perplexity. God sent the flash of lightning, the storm, the dreadful disease; it is God who by many strange things in human experience seems to give cause for doubt. From God in nature, God in disease, God in the earthquake and the thunderstorm, God whose way is in the sea and His path in the mighty waters—from this God, Job cries in hope, in moral conviction, to God the Vindicator, the eternally righteous One, Author of nature and Friend of man.

This life may terminate before the full revelation of right is made; it may leave the good in darkness and the evil flaunting in pride; the believer may go down in shame and the atheist have the last word. Therefore a future life with judgment in full must vindicate our Creator; and every personality involved in the problems of time must go forward to the opening of the seals and the fulfilment of the things that are written in the volumes of God. This evolution being for the earlier stage and discipline of life, it works out nothing, completes nothing. What it does is to furnish the awaking spirit with material of thought, opportunity for endeavour, the elements of life; with trial, temptation, stimulus, and restraint. No one who lives to any purpose or thinks with any sincerity can miss in the course of his life one hour at least in which he shares the tragical contest and adds the cry of his own soul to that of Job, his own hope to that of ages that are gone, straining to see the Goël who undertakes for every servant of God.

"I know it: my Redeemer liveth,
And afterward on the dust He will stand up;
And without my flesh I shall see Eloah."

By slow cycles of change the vast scheme of Divine providence draws toward a glorious consummation. The believer waits for it, seeing One who has gone before him and will come after him, the Alpha and Omega of all life. The fulness of time will at length arrive, the time foreordained by God, foretold by Christ, when the throne shall be set, the judgment shall be given, and the æons of manifestation shall begin.

And who in that day shall be the sons of God?

Which of us can say that he knows himself worthy of immortality? How imperfect is the noblest human life, how often it falls away into the folly and evil of the world! We need one to deliver us from the imperfection that gives to all we are and do the character of evanescence, to set us free from our entanglements and bring us into liberty. We are poor erring creatures. Only if there is a Divine purpose of grace that extends to the unworthy and the frail, only if there is redemption for the earthly, only if a Divine Saviour has undertaken to justify our existence as moral beings, can we look hopefully into the future. Job looked for a Redeemer who would bring to light a righteousness he claimed to possess. But our Redeemer must be able to awaken in us the love of a righteousness we alone could never see and to clothe us in a holiness we could never of ourselves attain. The problem of justice in human life will be solved because our race has a Redeemer whose judgment when it falls will fall in tenderest mercy, who bore our injustice for our sakes and will vindicate for us that transcendent righteousness which is for ever one with love.

CHAPTER XVII.

IGNORANT CRITICISM OF LIFE.

JOB XX. ZOPHAR SPEAKS.

THE great saying that quickens our faith and carries thought into a higher world conveyed no Divine meaning to the man from Naamah. The author must have intended to pour scorn on the hide-bound intelligence and rude bigotry of Zophar, to show him dwarfed by self-content and zeal not according to knowledge. When Job affirmed his sublime confidence in a Divine Vindicator, Zophar caught only at the idea of an avenger. What is this notion of a Goël on whose support a condemned man dares to count, who shall do judgment for him? And his resentment was increased by the closing words of Job:—

"If ye say, How may we pursue him?
And that the cause of the matter is in me—
Then beware of the sword!
For hot are the punishments of the sword.
That ye may know there is judgment."

If they went on declaring that the root of the matter, that is, the real cause of his affliction, was to be found in his own bad life, let them beware the avenging sword of Divine justice. He certainly implies that his Goël may become their enemy if they continue to persecute him with false charges. To Zophar the suggestion is intolerable. With no little irritation and anger he begins:—

"For this do my thoughts answer me,
And by reason of this there is haste in me—
I hear the reproof which puts me to shame,
And the spirit of my understanding gives me answer."

He speaks more hotly than in his first address, because his pride is touched, and that prevents him from distinguishing between a warning and a personal threat. To a Zophar every man is blind who does not see as he sees, and every word offensive that bids him take pause. Believers of his kind have always liked to appropriate the defence of truth, and they

have seldom done anything but harm. Conceive the dulness and obstinacy of one who heard an inspired utterance altogether new to human thought, and straightway turned in resentment on the man from whom it came. He is an example of the bigot in the presence of genius, a little uncomfortable, a good deal affronted, very sure that he knows the mind of God, and very determined to have the last word. Such were the Scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's time, most religious persons and zealous for what they considered sound doctrine. His light shone in darkness, and their darkness comprehended it not; they did Him to death with an accusation of impiety and blasphemy—"He made Himself the Son of God," they said.

Zophar's whole speech is a fresh example of the dogmatic hardness the writer was assailing, the closure of the mind and the stiffening of thought. One might not unjustly accuse this speaker of neglecting the moral difference between the profane whose triumph and joy he declares to be short, and the good man whose career is full of years and honour. We may almost say that to him outward success is the only mark of inward grace, and that prosperous hypocrisy would be mistaken by him for the most beautiful piety. His whole creed about providence and retribution is such that he is on the way to utter confusion of mind. Why, he has said to himself that Job is a wicked and false man—Job whose striking characteristic is outspoken truthfulness, whose integrity is the pride of his Divine Master. And if Zophar once accepts it as indisputable that Job is neither good nor sincere, what will the end be for himself? With more and more assurance he will judge from a man's prosperity that he is righteous, and from his afflictions that he is a reprobate. He will twist and torture facts of life and modes of thought, till the worship of property will become his real cult, and to him the poor will of necessity seem worthless. This is just what happened in Israel. It is just what slovenly interpretation of the Bible and providence has brought many to in our own time. Side by side with a doctrine of self-sacrifice incredible and mischievous, there is a doctrine of the earthly reward of godliness—religion profitable for the life that now is, in the way of filling the pockets and conducting to eminent seats—an absurd and hurtful doctrine, for ever being taught in one form if not another, and applied all along the line of human life. An honest, virtuous man, is he sure to find a good place in our society? The rich broker or manufacturer, because he washes, dresses, and has twenty servants to wait upon him, is he therefore a fine soul? Nobody will say so. Yet Christianity is so little understood in some quarters, is so much associated with the error of Zophar, that within the church a score are of his opinion for one who is in Job's perplexity. Outside, the proportion is much the same. The moral ideas and philanthropies of our generation are perverted by the notion that no one is succeeding as a man unless he is making money and rising in the social scale. So, independence of mind, freedom, integrity, and the courage by which they are secured, are made of comparatively little account.

It will be said that if things were rightly ordered, Christian ideas prevailing in business, in legislation and social intercourse, the best people would certainly be in the highest places and have

the best of life, and that, meanwhile, the improvement of the world depends on some approximation to this state of affairs. That is to say, spiritual power and character must come into visible union with the resources of the earth and possession of its good things, otherwise there will be no moral progress. Divine providence, we are told, works after that manner; and the reasoning is plausible enough to require close attention. There has always been peril for religion in association with external power and prestige—and the peril of religion is the peril of progress. Will spiritual ideas ever urge those whose lives they rule to seek with any solicitude the gifts of time? Will they not, on the other hand, increasingly, as they ought, draw the desires of the best away from what is immediate, earthly, and in all the lower senses personal? To put it in a word, must not the man of spiritual mind always be a prophet, that is, a critic of human life in its relations to the present world? Will there come a time in the history of the race when the criticism of the prophet shall no longer be needed and his mantle will fall from him? That can only be when all the Lord's people are prophets, when everywhere the earthly is counted as nothing in view of the heavenly, when men will seek continually a new revelation of good, and the criticism of Christ shall be so acknowledged that no one shall need to repeat after Him, "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" By heavenly means alone shall heavenly ends be secured, and the keen pursuit of earthly good will never bring the race of men into the paradise where Christ reigns. Outward magnificence is neither a symbol nor an ally of spiritual power. It hinders instead of aiding the soul in the quest of what is eternally excellent, touching the sensuous, not the divine, in man. Christ is still, as in the days of His flesh, utterly indifferent to the means by which power and distinction are gained in the world. The spread of His ideas, the manifestation of His Godhead, the coming of His Kingdom, depend not the least on the countenance of the great and the impression produced on rude minds by the shows of wealth. The first task of His gospel everywhere is to correct the barbaric tastes of men; and the highest and best in a spiritual age will be, as He was, thinkers, seers of truth, lovers of God and man, lowly in heart and life. These will express the penetrating criticism that shall move the world.

Zophar discourses of one who is openly unjust and rapacious. He is candid enough to admit that, for a time, the schemes and daring of the wicked may succeed, but affirms that, though his head may "reach to the clouds," it is only that he may be cast down.

"Knowest thou not this from of old,
 Since man was placed upon earth,
 That the triumphing of the wicked is short,
 And the joy of the godless but for a moment,
 Though his excellency ascend to heaven,
 And his head reach to the clouds,
 Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung:
 They who saw him shall say, Where is he?
 Like a dream he shall flee, no more to be found,
 Yea, he shall be chased away like a night-vision."

As a certainty, based on facts quite evident since the beginning of human history, Zophar presents anew the overthrow of the evil-doer. He is sure that the wicked does not keep his pros-

perity through a long life. Such a thing has never occurred in the range of human experience. The godless man is allowed, no doubt, to lift himself up for a time; but his day is short. Indeed he is great for a moment only, and that in appearance. He never actually possesses the good things of earth, but only seems to possess them. Then in the hour of judgment he passes like a dream and perishes for ever. The affirmation is precisely that which has been made again and again; and with some curiosity we scan the words of Zophar to learn what addition he makes to the scheme so often pressed.

Sooth to say, there is no reasoning, nothing but affirmation. He discusses no doubtful case, enters into no careful discrimination of the virtuous who enjoy from the godless who perish, makes no attempt to explain the temporary success granted to the wicked. The man he describes is one who has acquired wealth by unlawful means, who conceals his wickedness, rolling it like a sweet morsel under his tongue. We are told further that he has oppressed and neglected the poor and violently taken away a house, and he has so behaved himself that all the miserable watch for his downfall with hungry eyes. But these charges, virtually of avarice, rapacity, and inhumanity, are far from definite, far from categorical. Not without reason any man have so bad a reputation, and if deserved it would ensure the combination against him of all right-minded people. But men may be evil-hearted and inhuman who are not rapacious; they may be vile and yet not given to avarice. And Zophar's account of the ruin of the profane, though he makes it a Divine act, pictures the rising of society against one whose conduct is no longer endurable—a robber chief, the tyrant of a valley. His argument fails in this, that though the history of the proud evil-doer's destruction were perfectly true to fact, it would apply to a very few only amongst the population,—one in ten thousand, leaving the justice of Divine providence in greater doubt than ever, because the avarice and selfishness of smaller men are not shown to have corresponding punishment, are not indeed so much as considered. Zophar describes one whose bold and flagrant iniquity rouses the resentment of those not particularly honest themselves, not religious, nor even humane, but merely aware of their own danger from his violent rapacity. A man, however, may be avaricious who is not strong, may have the will to prey on others but not the power. The real distinction, therefore, of Zophar's criminal is his success in doing what many of those he oppresses and despoils would do if they were able, and the picturesque passage leaves no deep moral impression. We read it and seem to feel that the overthrow of this evil-doer is one of the rare and happy instances of poetical justice which sometimes occur in real life, but not so frequently as to make a man draw back in the act of oppressing a poor dependant or robbing a helpless widow.

In all sincerity Zophar speaks, with righteous indignation against the man whose ruin he paints, persuaded that he is following, step for step, the march of Divine judgment. His eye kindles, his voice rings with poetic exultation.

"He hath swallowed down riches; he shall vomit them again:
God shall cast them out of his belly.
He shall suck the poison of asps;

The viper's tongue shall slay him.
He shall not look upon the rivers,
The flowing streams of honey and butter.
That which he toiled for shall he restore,
And shall not swallow it down;
Not according to the wealth he has gotten
Shall he have enjoyment. . . .
There was nothing left that he devoured not;
Therefore his prosperity shall not abide.
In his richest abundance he shall be in straits;
The hand of every miserable one shall come upon him.
When he is about to fill his belly
God shall cast the fury of His wrath upon him
And rain upon him his food."

He has succeeded for a time, concealing or fortifying himself among the mountains. He has store of silver and gold and garments taken by violence, of cattle and sheep captured in the plain. But the district is roused. Little by little he is driven back into the uninhabited desert. His supplies are cut off and he is brought to extremity. His food becomes to him as the gall of asps. With all his ill-gotten wealth he is in straits, for he is hunted from place to place. Not for him now the luxury of the green oasis and the coolness of flowing streams. He is an outlaw, in constant danger of discovery. His children wander to places where they are not known and beg for bread. Reduced to abject fear, he restores the goods he had taken by violence, trying to buy off the enmity of his pursuers. Then come the last skirmish, the clash of weapons, ignominious death.

"He shall flee from the iron weapon,
And the bow of brass shall pierce him through.
He draweth it forth; it cometh out of his body:
Yea, the glittering shaft cometh out of his gall.
Terrors are upon him,
All darkness is laid up for his treasures;
A fire not blown shall consume him.
It shall devour him that is left in his tent.
The heaven shall reveal his iniquity,
And the earth shall rise against him.
The increase of his house shall depart,
Be washed away in the day of His wrath.
This is the lot of a wicked man from God,
And the heritage appointed to him by God."

Vain is resistance when he is brought to bay by his enemies. A moment of overwhelming terror, and he is gone. His tent blazes up and is consumed, as if the breath of God made hot the avenging flame. Within it his wife and children perish. Heaven seems to have called for his destruction and earth to have obeyed the summons. So the craft and strength of the freebooter, living on the flocks and harvests of industrious people, are measured vainly against the indignation of God, who has ordained the doom of wickedness.

A powerful word-picture. Yet if Zophar and the rest taught such a doctrine of retribution, and, put to it, could find no other; if they were in the way of saying, "This is the lot of a wicked man from God," how far away must Divine judgment have seemed from ordinary life, from the falsehoods daily spoken, the hard words and blows dealt to the slave, the jealousies and selfishness of the harem. Under the pretext of showing the righteous Judge, Zophar makes it impossible, or next to impossible, to realise His presence and authority. Men must be stirred up on God's behalf or His judicial anger will not be felt.

It is however when we apply the picture to the case of Job that we see its falsehood. Against the facts of his career Zophar's account of Divine judgment stands out as flat heresy, a foul slander charged on the providence of God. For he means that Job wore in his own settlement

the hypocritical dress of piety and benevolence and must have elsewhere made brigandage his trade, that his servants who died by the sword of Chaldeans and Sabceans and the fire of heaven had been his army of rieviers, that the cause of his ruin was heaven's intolerance and earth's detestation of so vile a life. Zophar describes poetic justice, and reasons back from it to Job. Now it becomes flagrant injustice against God and man. We cannot argue from what sometimes is to what must be. Although Zophar had taken in hand to convict one really and unmistakably a miscreant, truth alone would have served the cause of righteousness. But he assumes, conjectures, and is immeasurably unjust and cruel to his friend.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARE THE WAYS OF THE LORD EQUAL?

JOB XXI. JOB SPEAKS.

WITH less of personal distress and a more collected mind than before Job begins a reply to Zophar. His brave hope of vindication has fortified his soul and is not without effect upon his bodily state. The quietness of tone in this final address of the second colloquy contrasts with his former agitation and the growing eagerness of the friends to convict him of wrong. True, he has still to speak of facts of human life troublous and inscrutable. Where they lie he must look, and terror seizes him, as if he moved on the edge of chaos. It is, however, no longer his own controversy with God that disquiets him. For the time he is able to leave that to the day of revelation. But seeing a vaster field in which righteousness must be revealed, he compels himself, as it were, to face the difficulties which are encountered in that survey. The friends have throughout the colloquy presented in varying pictures the offensiveness of the wicked man and his sure destruction. Job, extending his view over the field they have professed to search, sees the facts in another light. While his statement is in the way of a direct negative to Zophar's theory, he has to point out what seems dreadful injustice in the providence of God. He is not, however, drawn anew into the tone of revolt.

The opening words are as usual expostulatory, but with a ring of vigour. Job sets the arguments of his friends aside and the only demand he makes now is for their attention.

"Hear diligently my speech,
And let that be your consolations.
Suffer me that I may speak;
And after I have spoken, mock on.
As for me, is my complaint of man?
And why should I not be impatient?"

What he has said hitherto has had little effect upon them; what he is to say may have none. But he will speak; and afterwards, if Zophar finds that he can maintain his theory, why, he must keep to it and mock on. At present the speaker is in the mood of disdaining false judgment. He quite understands the conclusion come to by the friends. They have succeeded in wounding him time after time. But what presses upon his mind is the state of the world as it really is. Another impatience than of human falsehood urges him to speak. He has returned upon the riddle of life he gave Zophar to read—why the tents

of robbers prosper and they that provoke God are secure (chap. xii. 6). Suppose the three let him alone for a while and consider the question largely, in its whole scope. They shall consider it, for, certainly, the robber chief may be seen here and there in full swing of success, with his children about him, gaily enjoying the fruit of sin, and as fearless as if the Almighty were his special protector. Here is something that needs clearing up. Is it not enough to make a strong man shake?

"Mark me, and be astonished,
And lay the hand upon the mouth.
Even while I remember I am troubled,
And trembling taketh hold of my flesh—
Wherefore do the wicked live,
Become old, yea, wax mighty in power?
Their seed is settled with them in their sight,
And their offspring before their eyes;
Their houses are in peace, without fear,
And the rod of God is not upon them. . . .
They send forth their little ones like a flock,
And their children dance;
They sing to the timbrel and lute,
And rejoice at the sound of the pipe.
They spend their days in ease,
And in a moment go down to Sheol.
Yet they said to God, Depart from us.
For we desire not to know Thy ways.
What is Shaddai that we should serve Him?
And what profit should we have if we pray unto Him?"

Contrast the picture here with those which Bildad and Zophar painted—and where lies the truth? Sufficiently on Job's side to make one who is profoundly interested in the question of Divine righteousness stand appalled. There was an error of judgment inseparable from that early stage of human education in which vigour and the gains of vigour counted for more than goodness and the gains of goodness, and this error clouding the thought of Job made him tremble for his faith. Is nature God's? Does God arrange the affairs of this world? Why then, under His rule, can the godless have enjoyment, and those who deride the Almighty feast on the fat things of His earth? Job has sent into the future a single penetrating look. He has seen the possibility of vindication, but not the certainty of retribution. The underworld into which the evil-doer descends in a moment, without protracted misery, appears to Job no hell of torment. It is a region of reduced, incomplete existence, not of penalty. The very clearness with which he saw vindication for himself, that is, for the good man, makes it needful to see the wrong-doer judged and openly condemned. Where then shall this be done? The writer, with all his genius, could only throw one vivid gleam beyond the present. He could not frame a new idea of Sheol, nor, passing its cloud confines, reach the thought of personality continuing in acute sensations either of joy or pain. The ungodly ought to feel the heavy hand of Divine justice in the present state of being. But he does not. Nature makes room for him and his children, for their gay dances and life-long hilarity. Heaven does not frown. "The wicked live, become old, yea, wax mighty in power; their houses are in peace, without fear."

From the climax of chap. xix. the speeches of Job seem to fall away instead of advancing. The author had one brilliant journey into the unseen, but the peak he reached could not be made a new point of departure. Knowledge he did not possess was now required. He saw before him a pathless ocean where no man had shown the way, and inspiration seems to have failed

him. His power lay in remarkably keen analysis and criticism of known theological positions and in glowing poetic sense. His inspiration working through these persuaded him that everywhere God is the Holy and True. It is scarcely to be supposed that condemnation of the evil could have seemed to him of less importance than vindication of the good. Our conclusion therefore must be that a firm advance into the other life was not for genius like his, nor for human genius at its highest. One more than man must speak of the great judgment and what lies beyond.

Clearly Job sees the unsolved enigma of the godless man's prosperous life, states it, and stands trembling. Regarding it what have other thinkers said? "If the law of all creation were justice," says John Stuart Mill, "and the Creator omnipotent, then in whatever amount suffering and happiness might be dispensed to the world, each person's share of them would be exactly proportioned to that person's good or evil deeds; no human being would have a worse lot than another without worse deserts; accident or favouritism would have no part in such a world, but every human life would be the playing out of a drama constructed like a perfect moral tale. No one is able to blind himself to the fact that the world we live in is totally different from this." Emerson, again, facing this problem, repudiates the doctrine that judgment is not executed in this world. He affirms that there is a fallacy in the concession that the bad are successful, that justice is not done now. "Every ingenuous and aspiring soul," he says, "leaves the doctrine behind him in his own experience; and all men feel sometimes the falsehood which they cannot demonstrate." His theory is that there is balance or compensation everywhere. "Life invests itself with inevitable conditions, which the unwise seek to dodge, which one and another brags that he does not know, that they do not touch him;—but the brag is on his lips, the conditions are in his soul. If he escapes them in one part, they attack him in another more vital part. . . . The ingenuity of man has always been dedicated to the solution of one problem,—how to detach the sensual sweet, the sensual strong, the sensual bright, from the moral sweet, the moral deep, the moral fair; that is, again, to contrive to cut clean off this upper surface so thin as to leave it bottomless; to get a *one end*, without an *other end*. . . . This dividing and detaching is steadily counteracted. Pleasure is taken out of pleasant things, profit out of profitable things, power out of strong things, so soon as we seek to separate them from the whole. We can no more halve things and get the sensual good, by itself, than we can get an inside that shall have no outside, or a light without a shadow. . . . For everything you have missed you have gained something else, and for everything you gain you lose something. If the gatherer gathers too much, nature takes out of the man what she puts into his chest; swells the estate but kills the owner. . . . We feel defrauded of the retribution due to evil acts, because the criminal adheres to his vice and contumacy, and does not come to a crisis or judgment anywhere in visible nature. There is no stunning confutation of his nonsense before men and angels. Has he therefore outwitted the law? Inasmuch as he carries the ma-

lignity and the lie with him, he so far deceases from nature. In some manner there will be a demonstration of the wrong to the understanding also; but, should we not see it, this deadly deduction makes square the account."* The argument reaches far beneath that superficial condemnation of the order of providence which disfigures Mr. Mill's essay on Nature. So far as it goes, it illuminates the present stage of human existence.† The light, however, is not sufficient, for we cannot consent to the theory that in an ideal scheme, a perfect or eternal state, he who would have holiness must sacrifice power, and he who would be true must be content to be despised. There is, we cannot doubt, a higher law; for this does not in any sense apply to the life of God Himself. In the discipline which prepares for liberty, there must be restraints and limitations, gain—that is, development—by renunciation; earthly ends must be subordinated to spiritual; sacrifices must be made. But the present state does not exhaust the possibilities of development nor close the history of man. There is a kingdom out of which shall be taken all things that offend. To Emerson's compensations must be added the compensation of Heaven. Still he lifts the problem out of the deep darkness which troubled Job.

And with respect to the high position and success bad men are allowed to enjoy, another writer, Bushnell, well points out that permission of their opulence and power by God aids the development of moral ideas. "It is simply letting society and man be what they are, to show what they are." The retributive stroke, swift and visible, is not needed to declare this. "If one is hard upon the poor, harsh to children, he makes, or may, a very great discovery of himself. What is in him is mirrored forth by his acts, and distinctly mirrored in them. . . . If he is unjust, passionate, severe, revengeful, jealous, dishonest, and supremely selfish, he is in just that scale of society or social relationship that brings him out to himself. . . . Evil is scarcely to be known as evil till it takes the condition of authority. We do not understand it till we see what kind of god it will make, and by what sort of rule it will manage its empire. . . . Just here all the merit of God's plan, as regards the permission of power in the hands of wicked men, will be found to hinge; namely, on the fact that evil is not only revealed in its baleful presence and agency, but the peoples and ages are put heaving against it and struggling after deliverance from it." † It was, we say, Job's difficulty that against the new conception of Divine righteousness which he sought the early idea stood opposed that life meant vigour mainly in the earthly range. During a long period of the world's history this belief was dominant, and virtue signified the strength of man's arm, his courage in conflict, rather than his truth in judgment and his purity of heart. The outward gains corresponding to that early virtue were the proof of the worth of life. And even when the moral qualities began to be esteemed, and a man was partly measured by the quality of his soul, still the tests of outward success and the gains of the inferior virtue continued to be applied to his life. Hence the perturbation of Job and, to some extent, the false judgment of providence quoted from a modern writer.

* Emerson, Essay III, "Compensation."

† Bushnell, "Moral Uses of Dark Things."

But the chapter we are considering shows, if we rightly interpret the obscure 16th verse, that the author tried to get beyond the merely sensuous and earthly reckoning. Those prospered who denied the authority of God and put aside religion with the rudest scepticism. There was no good in prayer, they said; it brought no gain. The Almighty was nothing to them. Without thought of His commands they sought their profit and their pleasure, and found all they desired. Looking steadfastly at their life, Job sees its hollowness, and abruptly exclaims:—

“Ha! their good is not in their hand:
The counsel of the wicked be far from me!”

Good! was that good which they grasped—their abundance, their treasure? Were they to be called blessed because their children danced to the lute and the pipe and they enjoyed the best earth could provide? The real good of life was not theirs. They had not God; they had not the exultation of trusting and serving Him; they had not the good conscience towards God and man which is the crown of life. The man lying in disease and shame would not exchange his lot for theirs.

But Job must argue still against his friends' belief that the wicked are visited with the judgment of the Most High in the loss of their earthly possessions. “The triumphing of the wicked is short,” said Zophar, “and the joy of the godless but for a moment.” Is it so?

“How often is the lamp of the wicked put out?
That their calamity cometh upon them?
That God distributeth sorrows in His anger?
That they are as stubble before the wind,
And as chaff that the storm carrieth away?”

One in a thousand, Job may admit, has the light extinguished in his tent and is swept out of the world. But is it the rule or the exception that such visible judgment falls even on the robber chief? The first psalm has it that the wicked are “like the chaff which the wind driveth away.” The words of that chant may have been in the mind of the author. If so, he disputes the doctrine. And further he rejects with contempt the idea that though a transgressor himself lives long and enjoys to the end, his children after him may bear his punishment.

“Ye say, God layeth up his iniquity for his children.
Let Him recompense it unto himself, that he may know
it.
Let his own eye see his destruction,
And let him drink of the wrath of Shaddai.
For what pleasure hath he in his house after him,
When the number of his moons is cut off in the midst?”

The righteous Job is in quest of will not be satisfied with visitation of the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. He will not accept the proverb which Ezekiel afterwards repudiated, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, the children's teeth are set on edge.” He demands that the ways of God shall be equal, that the soul that sinneth shall bear its punishment. Is it anything to a wicked man that his children are scattered and have to beg their bread when he has passed away? A man grossly selfish would not be vexed by the affliction of his family even if, down in Sheol, he could know of it. What Zophar has to prove is that every man who has lived a godless life is made to drink the cup of Shaddai's indignation. Though he trembles in sight of the truth, Job will press it on those who argue falsely for God.

And with the sense of the inscrutable purposes of the Most High burdening his soul he proceeds—

“Shall any teach God knowledge?
Seeing He judgeth those that are high?”

Easy was it to insist that thus or thus Divine providence ordained. But the order of things established by God is not to be forced into harmony with a human scheme of judgment. He who rules in the heights of heaven knows how to deal with men on earth; and for them to teach Him knowledge is at once arrogant and absurd. The facts are evident, must be accepted and reckoned with in all submission; especially must his friends consider the fact of death, how death comes, and they will then find themselves unable to declare the law of the Divine government.

As yet, even to Job, though he has gazed beyond death, its mystery is oppressive; and he is right in urging that mystery upon his friends to convict them of ignorance and presumption. Distinctions they affirm to lie between the good and the wicked are not made by God in appointing the hour of death. One is called away in his strong and lusty manhood; another lingers till life becomes bitter and all the bodily functions are impaired. “Alike they lie down in the dust and the worms cover them.” The thought is full of suggestion; but Job presses on, returning for a moment to the false charges against himself that he may bring a final argument to bear on his accusers.

“Behold, I know your thoughts,
And the devices ye wrongfully imagine against me.
For ye say, Where is the house of the prince?
And, Where the tents in which the wicked dwelt?
Have ye not asked them that go by the way?
And do ye not regard their tokens—
That the wicked is spared in the day of destruction,
That they are led forth in the day of wrath?”

So far from being overwhelmed in calamity the evil-doer is considered, saved as by an unseen hand. Whose hand? My house is wasted, my habitations are desolate, I am in extremity, ready to die. True: but those who go up and down the land would teach you to look for a different end to my career if I had been the proud transgressor you wrongly assume me to have been. I would have found a way of safety when the storm-clouds gathered and the fire of heaven burned. My prosperity would scarcely have been interrupted. If I had been what you say, not one of you would have dared to charge me with crimes against men or impiety towards God. You would have been trembling now before me. The power of an unscrupulous man is not easily broken. He faces fate, braves and overcomes the judgment of society.

And society accepts his estimate of himself, counts him happy,—pays him honour at his death. The scene at his funeral confutes the specious interpretation of providence that has been so often used as a weapon against Job. Perhaps Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar know something of obsequies paid to a prosperous tyrant, so powerful that they dared not deny him homage even when he lay on his bier. Who shall repay the evil-doer what he hath done?

“Yea, he is borne to the grave,
And they keep watch over his tomb;
The clouds of the valley are sweet to him,
And all men draw after him,
As without number they go before him.”

It is the gathering of a country-side, the tumultuous procession, a vast disorderly crowd before the bier, a multitude after it surging along to the place of tombs. And there, in nature's greenest heart, where the clods of the valley are sweet, they make his grave—and there as over the dust of one of the honourable of the earth they keep watch. Too true is the picture. Power begets fear and fear enforces respect. With tears and lamentations the Arabs went, with all the trappings of formal grief moderns may be seen in crowds following the corpse of one who had neither a fine soul nor a good heart, nothing but money and success to commend him to his fellow-men.

So the writer ends the second act of the drama, and the controversy remains much where it was. The meaning of calamity, the nature of the Divine government of the world are not extracted. This only is made clear, that the opinion maintained by the three friends cannot stand. It is not true that joy and wealth are the rewards of virtuous life. It is not always the case that the evil-doer is overcome by temporal disaster. It is true that to good and bad alike death is appointed, and together they lie down in the dust. It is true that even then the good man's grave may be forsaken in the desert, while the impious may have a stately sepulchre. A new way is made for human thought in the exposure of the old illusions and the opening up of the facts of existence. Hebrew religion has a fresh point of departure, a clearer view of the nature and end of all things. The thought of the world receives a spiritual germ; there is a making ready for Him who said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" When we know what the earthly cannot do for us we are prepared for the gospel of the spiritual and for the living word.

THE THIRD COLLOQUY.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOGMATIC AND MORAL ERROR.

JOB XXII. ELIPHAZ SPEAKS.

THE second colloquy has practically exhausted the subject of debate between Job and his friends. The three have really nothing more to say in the way of argument or awful example. It is only Eliphaz who tries to clinch the matter by directly accusing Job of base and cowardly offences. Bildad recites what may be called a short ode, and Zophar, if he speaks at all, simply repeats himself as one determined if possible to have the last word.

And why this third round? While it has definite marks of its own and the closing speeches of Job are important as exhibiting his state of mind, another motive seems to be required. And the following may be suggested. A last indignity offered, last words of hard judgment spoken, Job enters upon a long review of his life, with the sense of being victorious in argument, yet with sorrow rather than exultation because his

prayers are still unanswered; and during all this time the appearance of the Almighty is deferred. The impression of protracted delay deepens through the two hundred and twenty sentences of the third colloquy in which, one may say, all the resources of poetry are exhausted. A tragic sense of the silence God keeps is felt to hang over the drama, as it hangs over human life. A man vainly strives to repel the calumnies that almost break his heart. His accusers advance from innuendo to insolence. He seeks in the way of earnest thought escape from their false reasoning; he appeals from men to God, from God in nature and providence to God in supreme and glorious righteousness behind the veil of sense and time. Unheard apparently by the Almighty, he goes back upon his life and rehearses the proofs of his purity, generosity, and faith; but the shadow remains. It is the trial of human patience and the evidence that neither a man's judgment of his own life nor the judgment expressed by other men can be final. God must decide, and for His decision men must wait. The author has felt in his own history this delay of heavenly judgment, and he brings it out in his drama. He has also seen that on this side death there can be no final reading of the judgment of God on a human life. We wait for God; He comes in a prophetic utterance which all must reverently accept; yet the declaration is in general terms. When at last the Almighty speaks from the storm the righteous man and his accusers alike have to acknowledge ignorance and error; there is an end of self-defence and of condemnation by men, but no absolute determination of the controversy. "The vision is for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. ii. 3, 4).

Eliphaz begins with a singular question, which he is moved to state by the whole tenor of Job's reasoning and particularly by his hope that God would become his Redeemer. "*Can a man be profitable unto God?*" Not quite knowing what he asks, meaning simply to check the boldness of Job's hope, he advances to the brink of an abyss of doubt. You, Job, he seems to say, a mere mortal creature, afflicted enough surely to know your own insignificance, how can you build yourself up in the notion that God is interested in your righteousness? You think God believes in you and will justify you. How ignorant you must be if you really suppose your goodness of any consequence to the Almighty, if you imagine that by making your ways perfect, that is, claiming an integrity which man cannot possess, you will render any service to the Most High. Man is too small a creature to be of any advantage to God. Man's respect, faithfulness, and devotion are essentially of no profit to Him.

One must say that Eliphaz opens a question of the greatest interest both in theology or the knowledge of God, and in religion or the right feelings of man toward God. If man as the highest energy, the finest blossoming, and most articulate voice of the creation, is of no consequence to his Creator, if it makes no difference to the perfection or complacency of God in Himself whether man serves the end of his being or not, whether man does or fails to do the right

he was made to love; if it is for man's sake only that the way of life is provided for him and the privilege of prayer given him,—then our glorifying of God is not a reality but a mere form of speech. The only conclusion possible would be that even when we serve God earnestly in love and sacrifice we are in point of fact serving ourselves. If one wrestles with evil, clings to the truth, renounces all for righteousness' sake, it is well for him. If he is hard-hearted and base, his life will decay and perish. But, in either case, the eternal calm, the ineffable completeness of the Divine nature are unaffected. Yea, though all men and all intelligent beings were overwhelmed in eternal ruin the Creator's glory would remain the same, like a full-orbed sun shining over a desolate universe.

... "We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded by a sleep."

Eliphaz thinks it is for man's sake alone God has created him, surrounded him with means of enjoyment and progress, given him truth and religion, and laid on him the responsibilities that dignify his existence. But what comes then of the contention that, because Job has sinned, desolation and disease have come to him from the Almighty? If man's righteousness is of no account to God, why should his transgressions be punished? Creating men for their own sake, a beneficent Maker would not lay upon them duties the neglect of which through ignorance must needs work their ruin. We know from the opening scenes of the book that the Almighty took pleasure in His servant. We see Him trying Job's fidelity for the vindication of His own creative power and heavenly grace against the scepticism of such as the Adversary. Is a faithful servant not profitable to one whom he earnestly serves? Is it all the same to God whether we receive His truth or reject His covenant? Then the urgency of Christ's redemptive work is a fiction. Satan is not only correct in regard to Job but has stated the sole philosophy of human life. We are to fear and serve God for what we get; and our notions of doing bravely in the great warfare on behalf of God's kingdom are the fancies of men who dream.

"Can a man be profitable unto God?
Surely he that is wise is profitable to himself.
Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art
righteous?
Or is it gain to Him that thou makest thy ways perfect?
Is it for thy fear of Him that He reproveth thee,
That He entereth with thee into judgment?"

Regarding this what are we to say? That it is false, an ignorant attempt to exalt God at the expense of man, to depreciate righteousness in the human range for the sake of maintaining the perfection and self-sufficiency of God. But the virtues of man, love, fidelity, truth, purity, justice, are not his own. The power of them in human life is a portion of the Divine energy, for they are communicated and sustained by the Divine Spirit. Were the righteousness, love, and faith instilled into the human mind to fail of their result, were they, instead of growing and yielding fruit, to decay and die, it would be waste of Divine power; the moral cosmos would be relapsing into a chaotic state. If we affirm that the obedience and redemption of man do not profit the Most High, then this world and the inhabitants of it have been called into existence

by the Creator in grim jest, and He is simply amusing Himself with our hazardous game.

With the same view of the absolute sovereignty of God in creation and providence on which Eliphaz founds in this passage, Jonathan Edwards sees the necessity of escaping the conclusion to which these verses point. He argues that God's delight in the emanations of His fullness in the work of creation shows "His delight in the infinite fullness of good there is in Himself and the supreme respect and regard He has for Himself." An objector may say, he proceeds, "If it could be supposed that God needed anything; or that the godness of His creatures could extend to Him; or that they could be profitable to Him, it might be fit that God should make Himself and His own interest His highest and last end in creating the world. But seeing that God is above all need and all capacity of being added to and advanced, made better and happier in any respect; to what purpose should God make Himself His end, or seek to advance Himself in any respect by any of His works?" The answer is—"God may delight with true and great pleasure in beholding that beauty which is an image and communication of His own beauty, an expression and manifestation of His own loveliness. And this is so far from being an instance of His happiness not being in and from Himself, that it is an evidence that He is happy in Himself, or delights and has pleasure in His own beauty." Nor does this argue any dependence of God on the creature for happiness. "Though He has real pleasure in the creature's holiness and happiness; yet this is not properly any pleasure which He receives from the creature. For these things are what He gives the creature."* Here to a certain extent the reasoning is cogent and meets the difficulty of Eliphaz; and at present it is not necessary to enter into the other difficulty which has to be faced when the Divine reprobation of sinful life needs explanation. It is sufficient to say that this is a question even more perplexing to those who hold with Eliphaz than to those who take the other view. If man for God's glory has been allowed a real part in the service of eternal righteousness, his failure to do the part of which he is capable, to which he is called, must involve his condemnation. So far as his will enters into the matter he is rightly held accountable, and must suffer for neglect.

Passing to the next part of Eliphaz's address we find it equally astray for another reason. He asks "*Is not thy wickedness great?*" and proceeds to recount a list of crimes which appear to have been charged against Job in the base gossip of ill-doing people.

"Is not thy wickedness great,
And no limit to thy iniquities?
For thou hast taken pledges of thy brother for nought,
And stripped the naked of their clothing,
Thou hast not given water to the weary,
And thou hast withholden bread from the famished.
The man of might—his is the earth;
And he that is in honour dwelt therein.
Thou hast sent widows away empty,
And the arms of the orphans have been broken."

The worst here affirmed against Job is that he has overborne the righteous claims of widows and orphans. Bildad and Zophar made a mistake in alleging that he had been a robber and a freebooter. Yet is it less unfriendly to give

* Jonathan Edwards, "Dissertation concerning the End for which God created the World," Section IV.

ear to the cruel slanders of those who in Job's day of prosperity had not obtained from him all they desired and are now ready with their complaints? No doubt the offences specified are such as might have been committed by a man in Job's position and excused as within his right. To take a pledge for debt was no uncommon thing. When water was scarce, to withhold it even from the weary was no extraordinary baseness. Vambéry tells us that on the steppes he has seen father and son fighting almost to the death for the dregs of a skin of water. Eliphaz, however, a good man, counts it no more than duty to share this necessary of life with any fainting traveller, even if the wells are dry and the skins are nearly empty. He also makes it a crime to keep back corn in the year of famine. He says truly that the man of might, doing such things, acts disgracefully. But there was no proof that Job had been guilty of this kind of inhumanity, and the gross perversion of justice to which Eliphaz condescends recoils on himself. It does not always happen so within our knowledge. Pious slander gathered up and retailed frequently succeeds. And Eliphaz endeavours to make good his opinion by showing providence to be for it; he keeps the ear open to any report that will confirm what is already believed; and the circulating of such a report may destroy the usefulness of a life, the usefulness which is denied.

Take a broader view of the same controversy. Is there no exaggeration in the charges thundered sometimes against poor human nature? Is it not often thought a pious duty to extort confession of sins men never dreamed of committing, so that they may be driven to a repentance that shakes life to its centre and almost unhinges the reason? With conviction of error, unbelief, and disobedience the new life must begin. Yet religion is made unreal by the attempt to force on the conscience and to extort from the lips an acknowledgment of crimes which were never intended and are perhaps far apart from the whole drift of the character. The truthfulness of John the Baptist's preaching was very marked. He did not deal with imaginary sins. And when our Lord spoke of the duties and errors of men either in discourse or parable, He never exaggerated. The sins He condemned were all intelligible to the reason of those addressed, such as the conscience was bound to own, must recognise as evil things, dishonouring to the Almighty.

Having declared Job's imaginary crimes, Eliphaz exclaims, "*Therefore snares are round about thee and sudden fear troubleth thee.*" With the whole weight of assumed moral superiority he bears down upon the sufferer. He takes upon him to interpret providence, and every word is false. Job has clung to God as his Friend. Eliphaz denies him the right, cuts him off as a rebel from the grace of the King. Truly, it may be said, religion is never in greater danger than when it is upheld by hard and ignorant zeal like this.

Then, in the passage beginning at the twelfth verse, the attempt is made to show Job how he had fallen into the sins he is alleged to have committed.

"Is not God in the height of heaven?
And behold the cope of the stars how high they are.
And thou saidst—What doth God know?
Can He judge through thick darkness?
Thick clouds are a covering to Him that He seeth not,
And He walketh on the round of heaven."

Job imagined that God whose dwelling-place is beyond the clouds and the stars could not see what he did. To accuse him thus is to pile offence upon injustice, for the knowledge of God has been his continual desire.

Finally, before Eliphaz ends the accusation, he identifies Job's frame of mind with the proud indifference of those whom the deluge swept away. Job had talked of the prosperity and happiness of men who had not God in all their thoughts. Was he forgetting that dreadful calamity?

"Wilt thou keep the old way
Which wicked men have trodden?
Who were snatched away before their time,
Whose foundation was poured out as a stream:
Who said to God, Depart from us;
And what can the Almighty do unto us?
Yet He filled their houses with good things:
But the counsel of the wicked is far from me!"

One who chose to go on in the way of transgressors would share their fate; and in the day of his disaster as of theirs the righteous should be glad and the innocent break into scornful laughter.

So Eliphaz closes, finding it difficult to make out his case, yet bound as he supposes to do his utmost for religion by showing the law of the vengeance of God. And, this done, he pleads and promises once more in the finest passage that falls from his lips:—

"Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace:
Thereby good shall come unto thee.
Receive, I pray thee, instruction from His mouth,
And lay up His words in thy heart.
If thou return to Shaddai, thou shalt be built up;
If thou put iniquity far from thy tents:
And lay thy treasure in the dust,
And among the stones of the streams the gold of Ophir;
Then shall Shaddai be thy treasure
And silver in plenty unto thee."

At last there seems to be a strain of spirituality. "Acquaint now thyself with God and be at peace." Reconciliation by faith and obedience is the theme. Eliphaz is ignorant of much; yet the greatness and majesty of God, the supreme power which must be propitiated occupy his thoughts, and he does what he can to lead his friend out of the storm into a harbour of safety. Though even in this strophe there mingles a taint of sinister reflection, it is yet far in advance of anything Job has received in the way of consolation. Admirable in itself is the picture of the restoration of a reconciled life from which unrighteousness is put far away. He seems indeed to have learned something at last from Job. Now he speaks of one who in his desire for the favour and friendship of the Most High sacrifices earthly treasure, flings away silver and gold as worthless. No doubt it is ill-gotten wealth to which he refers, treasure that has a curse upon it. Nevertheless one is happy to find him separating so clearly between earthly riches and heavenly treasure, advising the sacrifice of the lower for what is infinitely higher. There is even yet hope of Eliphaz, that he may come to have a spiritual vision of the favour and friendship of the Almighty. In all he says here by way of promise there is not a word of renewed temporal prosperity. Returning to Shaddai in obedience Job will pray and have his prayer answered. Vows he has made in the time of trouble shall be redeemed, for the desired aid shall come. Beyond this there shall be, in the daily life, a strength, decision, and freedom previously unknown. "*Thou shalt decree a*

thing, and it shall be established unto thee." The man who is at length in the right way of life, with God for his ally, shall form his plans and be able to carry them out.

"When they cast down, thou shalt say, Uplifting!
And the humble person He shall save.
He will deliver the man not innocent;
Yea he shall be delivered through the cleanness of thine hands."

True, in the future experience of Job there may be disappointment and trouble. Eliphaz cannot but see that the ill-will of the rabble may continue long, and perhaps he is doubtful of the temper of his own friends. But God will help His servant who returns to humble obedience. And having been himself tried Job will intercede for those in distress, perhaps on account of their sin, and his intercession will prevail with God.

Put aside the thought that all this is said to Job, and it is surely a counsel of wisdom. To the proud and self-righteous it shows the way of renewal. Away with the treasures, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, that keep the soul from its salvation. Let the Divine love be precious to thee and the Divine statutes thy joy. Power to deal with life, to overcome difficulties, to serve thy generation shall then be thine. Standing securely in God's grace thou shalt help the weary and heavy-laden. Yet Eliphaz cannot give the secret of spiritual peace. He does not really know the trouble at the heart of human life. We need for our Guide One who has borne the burden of a sorrow which had nothing to do with the loss of worldly treasure but with the unrest perpetually gnawing at the heart of humanity, who "bore our sin in His own body unto the tree" and led captivity captive. What the old world could not know is made clear to eyes that have seen the cross against the falling night and a risen Christ in the fresh Easter morning.

CHAPTER XX.

WHERE IS ELOAH?

JOB xxiii., xxiv. JOB SPEAKS.

THE obscure couplet with which Job begins appears to involve some reference to his whole condition alike of body and mind.

"Again, to-day, my plaint, my rebellion!
The hand upon me is heavier than my groanings."

I must speak of my trouble and you will count it rebellion. Yet, if I moan and sigh, my pain and weariness are more than excuse. The crisis of faith is with him, a protracted misery, and hope hangs trembling in the balance. The false accusations of Eliphaz are in his mind; but they provoke only a feeling of weary discontent. What men say does not trouble him much. He is troubled because of that which God refuses to do or say. Many indeed are the afflictions of the righteous. But every case like his own obscures the providence of God. Job does not entirely deny the contention of his friends that unless suffering comes as a punishment of sin there is no reason for it. Hence, even though he maintains with strong conviction that the good are often poor and afflicted while the wicked prosper, yet he does not thereby clear up the matter. He must admit to himself that

he is condemned by the events of life. And against the testimony of outward circumstance he makes appeal in the audience chamber of the King.

Has the Most High forgotten to be righteous for a time? When the generous and true are brought into sore straits, is the great Friend of truth neglecting His task as Governor of the world? That would indeed plunge life into profound darkness. And it seems to be even so. Job seeks deliverance from this mystery which has emerged in his own experience. He would lay his cause before Him who alone can explain.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come even to His seat!
I would order my cause before Him,
And fill my mouth with arguments.
I would know the words which He would answer me,
And understand what He would say unto me."

Present to Job's mind here is the thought that he is under condemnation, and along with this the conviction that his trial is not over. It is natural that his mind should hover between these ideas, holding strongly to the hope that judgment, if already passed, will be revised when the facts are fully known.

Now this course of thought is altogether in the darkness. But what are the principles unknown to Job, through ignorance of which he has to languish in doubt? Partly, as we long ago saw, the explanation lies in the use of trial and affliction as the means of deepening spiritual life. They give gravity and therewith the possibility of power to our existence. Even yet Job has not realised that one always kept in the primrose path, untouched by the keen air of "misfortune," although he had, to begin, a pious disposition and a blameless record, would be worth little in the end to God or to mankind. And the necessity for the discipline of affliction and disappointment, even as it explains the smaller troubles, explains also the greatest. Let ill be heaped on ill, disaster on disaster, disease on bereavement, misery on sorrow, while stage by stage the life goes down into deeper circles of gloom and pain, it may acquire, it will acquire, if faith and faithfulness towards God remain, massiveness, strength, and dignity for the highest spiritual service.

But there is another principle, not yet considered, which enters into the problem and still more lightens up the valley of experience which to Job appeared so dark. The poem touches the fringe of this principle again and again, but never states it. The author says that men were born to trouble. He made Job suffer more because he had his integrity to maintain than if he had been guilty of transgressions by acknowledging which he might have pacified his friends. The burden lay heavily upon Job because he was a conscientious man, a true man, and could not accept any make-believe in religion. But just where another step would have carried him into the light of blessed acquiescence in the will of God, the power failed, he could not advance. Perhaps the genuineness and simplicity of his character would have been impaired if he had thought of it, and we like him better because he did not. The truth, however, is that Job was suffering for others, that he was, by the grace of God, a martyr, and so far forth in the spirit and position of that suffering Servant of Jehovah of whom we read in the prophecies of Isaiah.

The righteous sufferers, the martyrs, what are

they? Always the vanguard of humanity. Where they go and the prints of their bleeding feet are left, there is the way of improvement, of civilisation, of religion. The most successful man, preacher or journalist or statesman, is popularly supposed to be leading the world in the right path. Where the crowd goes shouting after him, is that not the way to advance? Do not believe it. Look for a teacher, a journalist, a statesman who is not so successful as he might be, because he will, at all hazards, be true. The Christian world does not yet know the best in life, thought, and morality for the best. He who sacrifices position and esteem to righteousness, he who will not bow down to the great idol at the sound of sackbut and psaltery, observe where that man is going, try to understand what he has in his mind. Those who under defeat or neglect remain steadfast in faith have the secrets we need to know. To the ranks even of the afflicted and broken the author of Job turned for an example of witness-bearing to high ideas and the faith in God which brings salvation. But he wrought in the shadow, and his hero is unconscious of his high calling. Had Job seen the principles of Divine providence which made him a helper of human faith, we should not now hear him cry for an opportunity of pleading his cause before God.

"Would He contend with me in His mighty power?
Nay, but He would give heed to me.
Then an upright man would reason with Him;
So should I get free for ever from my Judge."

It is in a sense startling to hear this confident expectation of acquittal at the bar of God. The common notion is that the only part possible to man in his natural state is to fear the judgment to come and dread the hour that shall bring him to the Divine tribunal. From the ordinary point of view the language of Job here is dangerous, if not profane. He longs to meet the Judge; he believes that he could so state his case that the Judge would listen and be convinced. The Almighty would not contend with him any longer as his powerful antagonist, but would pronounce him innocent and set him at liberty for ever. Can mortal man vindicate himself before the bar of the Most High? Is not every one condemned by the law of nature and of conscience, much more by Him who knoweth all things? And yet this man who believes he would be acquitted by the great King has already been declared "perfect and upright, one that feareth God and escheweth evil." Take the declaration of the Almighty Himself in the opening scenes of the book, and Job is found what he claims to be. Under the influence of that Divine grace which the sincere and upright may enjoy he has been a faithful servant and has earned the approbation of his Judge. It is by faith he is made righteous. Religion and love of the Divine law have been his guides; he has followed them; and what one has done may not others do? Our book is concerned not so much with the corruption of human nature, as with the vindication of the grace of God given to human nature. Corrupt and vile as humanity often is, imperfect and spiritually ignorant as it always is, the writer of this book is not engaged with that view. He directs attention to the virtuous and honourable elements and shows God's new creation in which He may take delight.

We shall indeed find that after the Almighty

has spoken out of the storm, Job says, "I repudiate my words and repent in dust and ashes." So he appears to come at last to the confession which, from one point of view, he ought to have made at the first. But those words of penitence imply no acknowledgment of iniquity after all. They are confession of ignorant judgment. Job admits with sorrow that he has ventured too far in his attempt to understand the ways of the Almighty, that he has spoken without knowledge of the universal providence he had vainly sought to fathom.

The author's intention plainly is to justify Job in his desire for the opportunity of pleading his cause, that is, to justify the claim of the human reason to comprehend. It is not an offence to him that much of the Divine working is profoundly difficult to interpret. He acknowledges in humility that God is greater than man, that there are secrets with the Almighty which the human mind cannot penetrate. But so far as suffering and sorrow are appointed to a man and enter into his life, he is considered to have the right of inquiry regarding them, an inherent claim on God to explain them. This may be held the error of the author which he himself has to confess when he comes to the Divine interlocution. There he seems to allow the majesty of the Omnipotent to silence the questions of human reason. But this is really a confession that his own knowledge does not suffice, that he shares the ignorance of Job as well as his cry for light. The universe is vaster than he or any of the Old Testament age could even imagine. The destinies of man form part of a Divine order extending through the immeasurable spaces and the developments of eternal ages.

Once more Job perceives or seems to perceive that access to the presence of the Judge is denied. The sense of condemnation shuts him in like prison walls and he finds no way to the audience chamber. The bright sun moves calmly from east to west; the gleaming stars, the cold moon in their turn glide silently over the vault of heaven. Is not God on high? Yet man sees no form, hears no sound.

"Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit
can meet;
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and
feet."

But Job is not able to conceive a spiritual presence without shape or voice.

"Behold, I go forward, but He is not there;
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him:
On the left hand where He doth work, but I behold Him
not:
He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see
Him."

Nature, thou hast taught this man by thy light and thy darkness, thy glorious sun and thy storms, the clear-shining after rain, the sprouting corn and the clusters of the vine, by the power of man's will and the daring love and justice of man's heart. In all thou hast been a revealer. But thou hidest whom thou dost reveal. To cover in thought the multiplicity of thy energies in earth and sky and sea, in fowl and brute and man, in storm and sunshine, in reason, in imagination, in will and love and hope;—to attach these one by one to the idea of a Being almighty, infinite, eternal, and so to *conceive* this God of the universe—it is, we may say, a super-human task. Job breaks down in the effort to

realise the great God. I look behind me, into the past. There are the footprints of Eloah when He passed by. In the silence an echo of His step may be heard; but God is not there. On the right hand, away beyond the hills that shut in the horizon, on the left hand where the ways leads to Damascus and the distant north—not there can I see His form; nor out yonder where day breaks in the east. And when I travel forward in imagination, I who said that my Redeemer shall stand upon the earth, when I strive to conceive His form, still, in utter human incapacity, I fail. "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself."

And yet, Job's conviction of his own uprightness, is it not God's witness to his spirit? Can he not be content with that? To have such a testimony is to have the very verdict he desire. Well does Boethius, a writer of the old world though he belonged to the Christian age, press beyond Job where he writes: "He is always Almighty, because He always wills good and never any evil. He is always equally gracious. By His Divine power He is everywhere present. The Eternal and Almighty always sits on the throne of His power. Thence He is able to see all, and renders to every one with justice, according to his works. Therefore it is not in vain that we have hope in God; for He changes not as we do. But pray ye to Him humbly, for He is very bountiful and very merciful. Hate and fly from evil as ye best may. Love virtues and follow them. Ye have great need that ye always do well, for ye always in the presence of the Eternal and Almighty God do all that ye do. He beholds it all, and He will recompense it all."*

Amiel, on the other hand, would fain apply to Job a reflection which has occurred to himself in one of the moods that come to a man disappointed, impatient of his own limitations. In his journal, under date January 29th, 1866, he writes: "It is but our secret self-love which is set upon this favour from on high; such may be our desire, but such is not the will of God. We are to be exercised, humbled, tried and tormented to the end. It is our patience which is the touchstone of our virtue. To bear with life even when illusion and hope are gone; to accept this position of perpetual war, while at the same time loving only peace; to stay patiently in the world, even when it repels us as a place of low company and seems to us a mere arena of bad passions; to remain faithful to one's own faith without breaking with the followers of false gods; to make no attempt to escape from the human hospital, long-suffering and patient as Job upon his dung-hill;—this is duty."† An evil mood prompts Amiel to write thus. A thousand times rather would one hear him crying like Job on the great Judge and Redeemer and complaining that the Goël hides Himself. It is not in bare self-love or self-pity Job seeks acquittal at the bar of God; but in the defence of conscience, the spiritual treasure of mankind and our very life. No doubt his own personal justification bulks largely with Job, for he has strong individuality. He will not be overborne. He stands at bay against his three friends and the unseen adversary. But he loves integrity, the virtue, first; and for himself he cares as the representative of that which the Spirit of God gives to faithful

men. He may cry, therefore, he may defend himself, he may complain; and God will not cast him off.

"For He knoweth the way that I take;
If He tried me, I should come forth as gold.
My foot hath held fast to His steps,
His way have I kept, and not turned aside.
I have not gone back from the commandments of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my needful food."

Bravely, not in mere vaunt he speaks, and it is good to hear him still able to make such a claim. Why do we not also hold fast to the garment of our Divine Friend? Why do we not realise and exhibit the resolute godliness that anticipates judgment: "If He tried me, I should come forth as gold"? The psalmists of Israel stood thus on their faith; and not in vain, surely, has Christ called us to be like our Father who is in heaven.

But again from brave affirmation Job falls back exhausted.

"Oh thou Hereafter! on whose shore I stand—
Waiting each toppling moment to engulf me,
What am I? Say thou Present! say thou Past!
Ye three wise children of Eternity!—
A life?—A death?—and an immortal?—All?
Is this the threefold mystery of man?
The lower, darker Trinity of earth?
It is vain to ask. Nought answers me—not God.
The air grows thick and dark. The sky comes down.
The sun draws round him streaky clouds—like God
Gleaming up wrath. Hope hath leapt off my heart,
Like a false sibyl, fear-smote, from her seat,
And overturned it."*

So, as Bailey makes his Festus speak, might Job have spoken here. For now it seems to him that to call on God is fruitless. Eloah is of one mind. His will is steadfast, immovable. Death is in the cup and death will come. On this God has determined. Nor is it in Job's case alone so sore a doom is performed by the Almighty. Many such things are with Him. The waves of trouble roll up from the deep dark sea and go over the head of the sufferer. He lies faint and desolate once more. The light fades, and with a deep sigh because he ever came to life he shuts his lips.

Natural religion ends always with a sigh. The sense of God found in the order of the universe, the dim vision of God which comes in conscience, moral life and duty, in fear and hope and love, in the longing for justice and truth—these avail much; but they leave us at the end desiring something they cannot give. The Unknown God whom men ignorantly worshipped had to be revealed by the life and truth and power of the Man Christ Jesus. Not without this revelation, which is above and beyond nature, can our eager quest end in satisfying knowledge. In Christ alone the righteousness that justifies, the love that compassionates, the wisdom that enlightens are brought into the range of our experience and communicated through reason to faith.

In chap. xxiv. there is a development of the reasoning contained in Job's reply to Zophar in the second colloquy, and there is also a closer examination of the nature and results of evil-doing than has yet been attempted. In the course of his acute and careful discrimination Job allows something to his friends' side of the

* "Consolation of Philosophy," chap. xliii.

† Mrs. Ward's translation, p. 116.

* "Festus," edition 1864, p. 503.

argument, but all the more emphasises the series of vivid touches by which the prosperous tyrant is represented. He modifies to some extent his opinion previously expressed that all goes well with the wicked. He finds that certain classes of miscreants do come to confusion, and he separates these from the others, at the same time separating himself beyond question from the oppressor on this side and the murderer and adulterer on that. Accepting the limits of discussion chosen by the friends he exhausts the matter between himself and them. By the distinctions now made and the choice offered, Job arrests personal accusation, and of that we hear no more.

Continuing the idea of a Divine assize which has governed his thought throughout this reply, Job asks why it should not be held openly from time to time in the world's history.

"Why are times not set by the Almighty?
And why do not they who know Him see His days?"

Emerson says the world is full of judgment-days; Job thinks it is not, but ought to be. Passing from his own desire to have access to the bar of God and plead there, he now thinks of an open court, a public vindication of God's rule. The Great Assize is never proclaimed. Ages go by; the Righteous One never appears. All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. Men struggling, sinning, suffering, doubt or deny the existence of a moral Ruler. They ask, Who ever saw this God? If He exists, He is so separate from the world by His own choice that there is no need to consider Him. In pride or in sorrow men raise the question. But *no God* means no justice, no truth, no penetration of the real by the ideal; and thought cannot rest there.

With great vigour and large knowledge of the world the writer makes Job point out the facts of human violence and crime, of human condonation and punishment. Look at the oppressors and those who cringe under them, the despots never brought to justice, but on the contrary growing in power through the fear and misery of their serfs. Already we have seen how perilous it is to speak falsely for God. Now we see, on the other hand, that whoever speaks truly of the facts of human experience prepares the way for a true knowledge of God. Those who have been looking in vain for indications of Divine justice and grace are to learn that not in deliverance from the poverty and trouble of this world but in some other way they must realise God's redemption. The writer of the book is seeking after that kingdom which is not meat and drink nor long life and happiness, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Observe first, says Job, the base and cruel men who remove landmarks and claim as their own a neighbour's heritage, who drive into their pastures flocks that are not theirs, who even take away the one ass of the fatherless and the one ox the widow has for ploughing her scanty fields, who thus with a high hand overbear all the defenceless people within their reach. Zophar had charged Job with similar crimes, and no direct reply was given to the accusation. Now, speaking strongly of the iniquity of such deeds, Job makes his accusers feel their injustice towards him. There are men who do such things. I have seen them, wondered at them, been

amazed that they were not struck down by the hand of God. My distress is that I cannot understand how to reconcile their immunity from punishment with my faith in Him whom I have served and trusted as my Friend.

The next picture, from the fifth to the eighth verse, shows in contrast to the tyrant's pride and cruelty the lot of those who suffer at his hands. Deprived of their land and their flocks, herding together in common danger and misery like wild asses, they have to seek for their food such roots and wild fruits as can be found here and there in the wilderness. Half enslaved now by the man who took away their land they are driven to the task of harvesting his fodder and gathering the gleanings of his grapes. Naked they lie in the field, huddling together for warmth, and out among the hills they are wet with the impetuous rains, crouching in vain under the ledges of the rock for shelter.

Worse things too are done, greater sufferings than these have to be endured. Men there are who pluck the fatherless child from the mother's breast, claiming the poor little life as a pledge. Miserable debtors, faint with hunger, have to carry the oppressor's sheaves of corn. They have to grind at the oil-presses, and with never a cluster to slake their thirst tread the grapes in the hot sun. Nor is it only in the country cruelties are practised. Perhaps in Egypt the writer has seen what he makes Job describe, the misery of city life. In the city the dying groan unceasing, and the soul of the wounded crieth out. Universal are the scenes of social iniquity. The world is full of injustice. And to Job the sting of it all is that "*God regardeth not the wrong.*"

Men talk nowadays as if the penury and distress prevalent in our large towns proved the churches to be unworthy of their name and place. It may be so. If this can be proved, let it be proved; and if the institution called The Church cannot justify its existence and its Christianity where it should do so by freeing the poor from oppression and securing their rights to the weak, then let it go to the wall. But here is Job carrying the accusation a stage farther, carrying it, with what may appear blasphemous audacity, to the throne of God. He has no church to blame, for there is no church. Or, he himself represents what church there is. And as a witness for God, what does he find to be his portion? Behold him, where many a servant of Divine righteousness has been in past times and is now, down in the depths, poorest of the poor, bereaved, diseased, scorned, misunderstood, hopeless. Why is there suffering? Why are there many in our cities outcasts of society, such as society is? Job's case is a partial explanation; and here the church is not to blame. Pariahs of society, we say. If society consists to any great extent of oppressors who are enjoying wealth unjustly gained, one is not so sure that there is any need to pity those who are excluded from society. Am I trying to make out that it may be well there are oppressors, because oppression is not the worst thing for a brave soul? No: I am only using the logic of the Book of Job in justifying Divine providence. The church is criticised and by many in these days condemned as worthless because it is not banishing poverty. Perhaps it might be more in the way of duty and more likely to succeed if it sought to banish excessive wealth. Are we of the twentieth Christian century to hold still by the error of

Eliphaz and the rest of Job's friends? Are we to imagine that those whom the gospel blesses it must of necessity enrich, so that in their turn they may be tempted to act the Pharisee? Let us be sure God knows how to govern His world. Let us not doubt His justice because many are very poor who have been guilty of no crimes and many very rich who have been distinguished by no virtues. It is our mistake to think that all would be well if no bitter cries were heard in the midnight streets and every one were secured against penury. While the church is partly to blame for the state of things, the salvation of society will not be found in any earthly socialism. On that side lies a slough as deep as the other from which it professes to save. The large Divine justice and humanity which the world needs are those which Christ alone has taught, Christ to whom property was only something to deal with on the way to spiritual good,—humility, holiness, love, and faith.

The emphatic "*These*" with which verse 13 begins must be taken as referring to the murderer and adulterer immediately to be described. Quite distinct from the strong oppressors who maintain themselves in high position are these cowardly miscreants who "rebel against the light" (ver. 13), who "in the dark dig through houses" and "know not the light" (ver. 16), to whom the morning is as the shadow of death, whose "portion is cursed in the earth." The passage contains Job's admission that there are vile transgressors of human and Divine law whose unrighteousness is broken as a tree (ver. 20). Without giving up his main contention as to high-handed wickedness prospering in the world he can admit this; nay, asserting it, he strengthens his position against the arguments of his friends. The murderer who rising towards daybreak waylays and kills the poor and needy for the sake of their scanty belongings, the adulterer who waits for the twilight, disguising his face, and the thief who in the dark digs through the clay wall of a house—these do find the punishment of their treacherous and disgusting crimes in this life. The coward who is guilty of such sin is loathed even by the mother who bore him and has to skulk in by-ways, familiar with the terrors of the shadow of death, daring not to turn in the way of the vineyards to enjoy their fruit. The description of these reprobates ends with the twenty-first verse, and then there is a return to the "mighty" and the Divine support they appear to enjoy.

The interpretation of verses 18-21 which makes them "either actually in part the work of a popular hand, or a parody after the popular manner by Job himself," has no sufficient ground. To affirm that the passage is introduced ironically and that verse 22 resumes the real history of the murderer, the adulterer, and the thief is to neglect the distinction between those "who rebel against the light" and the mighty who live in the eye of God. The natural interpretation is that which makes the whole a serious argument against the creed of the friends. In their eagerness to convict Job they have failed to distinguish between men whose base crimes bring them under social reprobation and the proud oppressors who prosper through very arrogance. Regarding these the fact still holds that apparently they are under the protection of Heaven.

"Yet He sustaineth the mighty by His power,
They rise up though they despaired of life,
He giveth them to be safe, and they are upheld,
And His eyes are upon their ways.
They rise high: in a moment they are not;
They are brought low, like all others gathered in,
And cut out as the tops of corn.
If not—who then will make me a liar,
And to nothing bring my speech?"

Is the daring right-defying evil-doer wasted by disease, preyed upon by terror? Not so. When he appears to have been crushed, suddenly he starts up again in new vigour, and when he dies, it is not prematurely but in the ripeness of full age. With this reaffirmation of the mystery of God's dealings Job challenges his friends. They have his final judgment. The victory he gains is that of one who will be true at all hazards. Perhaps in the background of his thought is the vision of a redemption not only of his own life but of all those broken by the injustice and cruelty of this earth.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DOMINION AND THE BRIGHTNESS.

JOB XXV. BILDAD SPEAKS.

THE argument of the last chapter proceeded entirely on the general aspect of the question whether the evil are punished in proportion to their crimes. Job has met his friends so far as to place them in a great difficulty. They cannot assail him now as a sort of infidel. And yet what he has granted does not yield the main ground. They cannot deny his contrast between the two classes of evil-doers nor refuse to admit that the strong oppressor has a different fate from the mean adulterer or thief. Bildad therefore confines himself to two general principles, that God is the supreme administrator of justice and that no man is clean. He will not now affirm that Job has been a tyrant to the poor. He dares not call him a murderer or a house-breaker. A snare has been laid for him who spoke much of snares, and seeing it he is on his guard.

"Dominion and fear are with Him;
He maketh peace in His high places.
Is there any number of His armies?
And on whom doth not His light shine?
How then can man be just with God?
Or how can he of woman born be clean?
Behold, even the moon hath no brightness,
And the stars are not pure in His sight.
How much less man that is a worm,
And the son of man, the worm!"

The brief ode has a certain dignity raising it above the level of Bildad's previous utterances. He desires to show that Job has been too bold in his criticism of providence. God has sole dominion and claims universal adoration. Where He dwells in the lofty place of unapproachable glory His presence and rule create peace. He is the Lord of innumerable armies (the stars and their inhabitants perhaps), and His light fills the breadth of interminable space, revealing and illuminating every life. Upon this assertion of the majesty of God is based the idea of His holiness. Before so great and glorious a Being how can man be righteous? The universality of His power and the brightness of His presence stand in contrast to the narrow range of human energy and the darkness of the human mind. Behold,

says Bildad, the moon is eclipsed by a glance of the great Creator and the stars are cast into shadow by His effulgence; and how shall man whose body is of the earth earthly claim any cleanness of soul? He is like the worm; his kinship is with corruption; his place is in the dust like the creeping things of which he becomes the prey.

The representation of God in His exaltation and glory has a tone of impressive piety which redeems Bildad from any suspicion of insolence at this point. He is including himself and his friends among those whose lives appear impure in the sight of Heaven. He is showing that successfully as Job may repel the charges brought against him, there is at all events one general condemnation in which with all men he must allow himself to be involved. Is he not a feeble ignorant man whose will, being finite, must be imperfect? On the one hand is the pious exaltation of God, on the other the pious abasement of man.

It is, however, easy to see that Bildad is still bound to a creed of the superficial kind without moral depth or spiritual force. The ideas are those of a nature religion in which the one God is a supreme Baal or Master, monopolising all splendour, His purity that of the fire or the light. We are shown the Lord of the visible universe whose dwelling is in the high heavens, whose representative is the bright sun from the light of which nothing is hidden. It is easy to point to this splendid apparition and, contrasting man with the great fire-force, the perennial fountain of light, to say—How dark, how puny, how imperfect is man! The brilliance of an Arabian sky through which the sun marches in unobstructed glory seems in complete contrast to the darkness of human life. Yet, is it fair, is it competent to argue thus? Is anything established as to the moral quality of man because he cannot shine like the sun or even with the lesser light of moon or stars? One may allow a hint of strong thought in the suggestion that boundless majesty and power are necessary to perfect virtue, that the Almighty alone can be entirely pure. But Bildad cannot be said to grasp this idea. If it gleams before his mind, the faint flash passes unrecognised. He has not wisdom enough to work out such a thought. And it is nature that according to his argument really condemns man. Job is bidden look up to the sun and moon and stars and know himself immeasurably less pure than they.

But the truth stands untouched that man whose body is doomed to corruption, man who labours after the right, with the heat of moral energy in his heart, moves on a far higher plane as a servant of God than any fiery orb which pours its light through boundless space. We find ignorance of man and therefore of his Maker in Bildad's speech. He does not understand the dignity of the human mind in its straining after righteousness. "With limitless duration, with boundless space and number without end, Nature does at least what she can to translate into visible form the wealth of the creative formula. By the vastness of the abysses into which she penetrates in the effort, the unsuccessful effort, to house and contain the eternal thought we may measure the greatness of the Divine mind. For as soon as this mind goes out of itself and seeks to explain itself, the effort at utterance heaps universe upon universe during myriads of cen-

turies, and still it is not expressed and the great oration must go on for ever and ever." The inanimate universe majestic, ruled by eternal law, cannot represent the moral qualities of the Divine mind, and the attempt to convict a thinking man, whose soul is bent on truth and purity, by the splendour of that light which dazzles his eye, comes to nothing.

The commonplaces of pious thought fall stale and flat in a controversy like the present. Bildad does not realise wherein the right of man in the universe consists. He is trying in vain to instruct one who sees that moral desire and struggle are the conditions of human greatness, who will not be overborne by material splendours nor convicted by the accident of death.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OUTSKIRTS OF HIS WAYS.

JOB xxvi., xxvii. JOB SPEAKS.

BEGINNING his reply Job is full of scorn and sarcasm.

"How hast thou helped one without power!
How hast thou saved the strengthless arm!
How hast thou counselled one void of knowledge,
And plentifully declared the thing that is known!"

Well indeed hast thou spoken, O man of singular intelligence. I am very weak, my arm is powerless. What reassurance, what generous help thou hast provided! I, doubtless, know nothing, and thou hast showered illumination on my darkness.—His irony is bitter. Bildad appears almost contemptible. "*To whom hast thou uttered words?*" Is it thy mission to instruct me? "*And whose spirit came forth from thee?*" Dost thou claim Divine inspiration? Job is rancorous; and we are scarcely intended by the writer to justify him. Yet it is galling indeed to hear that calm repetition of the most ordinary ideas when the controversy has been carried into the deep waters of thought. Job desired bread and is offered a stone.

But since Bildad has chosen to descant upon the greatness and imperial power of God, the subject shall be continued. He shall be taken into the abyss beneath, where faith recognises the Divine presence, and to the heights above that he may learn how little of the dominion of God lies within the range of a mind like his, or indeed of mortal sense.

First there is a vivid glance at that mysterious under-world where the shades or spirits of the departed survive in a dim vague existence.

"The shades are shaken
Beneath the waters and their inhabitants.
Sheol is naked before Him,
And Abaddon hath no covering."

Bildad has spoken of the lofty place where God makes peace. But that same God has the sovereignty also of the nether world. Under the bed of the ocean and those subterranean waters that flow beneath the solid ground where, in the impenetrable darkness, poor shadows of their former selves, those who lived once on earth congregate age after age—there the power of the Almighty is revealed. He does not always exert His will in order to create tranquillity. Down in Sheol the *refaim* are agitated. And nothing is

hid from His eye. Abaddon, the devouring abyss, is naked before Him.

Let us distinguish here between the imagery and the underlying thought, the inspired vision of the writer and the form in which Job is made to present it. These notions about Sheol as a dark cavern below earth and ocean to which the spirits of the dead are supposed to descend are the common beliefs of the age. They represent opinion, not reality. But there is a new flash of inspiration in the thought that God reigns over the abode of the dead, that even if men escape punishment here, the judgments of the Almighty may reach them there. This is the writer's prophetic insight into fact; and he properly assigns the thought to his hero who, already almost at the point of death, has been straining as it were to see what lies beyond the gloomy gate. The poetry is infused with the spirit of inquiry into God's government of the present and the future. Set beside other passages both in the Old and New Testaments this is found continuous with higher revelations, even with the testimony of Christ when He says that God is Lord not of the dead but of the living.

From Sheol, the under-world, Job points to the northern heavens ablaze with stars. God, he says, stretches that wonderful dome over empty space—the immovable polar star probably appearing to mark the point of suspension. The earth, again, hangs in space on nothing, even this solid earth on which men live and build their cities. The writer is of course ignorant of what modern science teaches, but he has caught the fact which no modern knowledge can deprive of its marvellous character. Then the gathering in immense volumes of watery vapour, how strange is that, the filmy clouds holding rains that deluge a continent, yet not rent asunder. One who is wonderful in counsel must indeed have ordered this universe; but His throne, the radiant seat of His everlasting dominion, He shutteth in with clouds; it is never seen.

“A bound He hath set on the face of the waters,
On the confines of light and darkness.
The pillars of heaven tremble
And are astonished at His rebuke.
He stilleth the sea with His power;
And by His understanding He smites through Rahab;
By His breath the heavens are made bright;
His hand pierceth the fleeing serpent.
Lo, these are the outskirts of His ways,
And what a whisper is that which we hear of Him!
But the thunder of His powers who can apprehend?”

At the confines of light and darkness God sets a boundary, the visible horizon, the ocean being supposed to girdle the earth on every side. The pillars of heaven are the mountains, which might be seen in various directions apparently supporting the sky. With awe men looked upon them, with greater awe felt them sometimes shaken by mysterious throbs as if at God's rebuke. From these the poet passes to the sea, the great storm waves that roll upon the shore. God smites through Rahab, subdues the fierce sea—represented as a raging monster. Here, as in the succeeding verse where the fleeing serpent is spoken of, reference is made to nature-myths current in the East. The old ideas of heathen imagination are used simply in a poetical way. Job does not believe in a dragon of the sea, but it suits him to speak of the stormy ocean-current under this figure so as to give vividness to his picture of Divine power. God quells the

wild waves; His breath as a soft wind clears away the storm clouds and the blue sky is seen again. The hand of God pierces the fleeing serpent, the long track of angry clouds borne swiftly across the face of the heavens.

The closing words of the chapter are a testimony to the Divine greatness, negative in form yet in effect more eloquent than all the rest. It is but the outskirts of the ways of God we see, a whisper of Him we hear. The full thunder falls not on our ears. He who sits on the throne which is for ever shrouded in clouds and darkness is the Creator of the visible universe but always separate from it. He reveals Himself in what we see and hear, yet the glory, the majesty remain concealed. The sun is not God, nor the storm, nor the clear shining after rain. The writer is still true to the principle of never making nature equal to God. Even where the religion is in form a nature religion, separateness is fully maintained. The phenomena of the universe are but faint adumbrations of the Divine life. Bildad may come short of the full clearness of belief, but Job has it. The great circle of existence the eye is able to include is but the skirt of that garment by which the Almighty is seen.

The question may be asked, What place has this poetical tribute to the majesty of God in the argument of the book? Viewed simply as an effort to outdo and correct the utterance of Bildad the speech is not fully explained. We ask further what is meant to be in Job's mind at this particular point in the discussion; whether he is secretly complaining that power and dominion so wide are not manifested in executing justice on earth, or, on the other hand, comforting himself with the thought that judgment will yet return to righteousness and the Most High be proved the All-just? The inquiry has special importance because, looking forward in the book, we find that when the voice of God is heard from the storm it proclaims His matchless power and incomparable wisdom.

At present it must suffice to say that Job is now made to come very near his final discovery that complete reliance upon Eloah is not simply the fate but the privilege of man. Fully to understand Divine providence is impossible, but it can be seen that One who is supreme in power and infinite in wisdom, responsible always to Himself for the exercise of His power, should have the complete confidence of His creatures. Of this truth Job lays hold; by strenuous thought he has forced his way almost through the tangled forest, and he is a type of man at his best on the natural plane. The world waited for the clear light which solves the difficulties of faith. While once and again a flash came before Christ, He brought the abiding revelation, the day-spring from on high which giveth light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

According to his manner Job turns now from a subject which may be described as speculative to his own position and experience. The earlier part of chap. xxvii. is an earnest declaration in the strain he has always maintained. As vehemently as ever he renews his claim to integrity, emphasising it with a solemn adjuration.

“As God liveth who hath taken away my right,
And the Almighty who hath embittered my soul;
(For still my life is whole in me,
And the breath of the High God in my nostrils),

My lips do not speak iniquity,
Nor does my tongue utter deceit.
Far be it from me to justify you;
Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me.
My righteousness I hold fast, and let it not go;
My heart reproacheth not any of my days."

This is in the old tone of confident self-defence. God has taken away his right, denied him the outward signs of innocence, the opportunity of pleading his cause. Yet, as a believer, he swears by the life of God that he is a true man, a righteous man. Whatever betides he will not fall from that conviction and claim. And let no one say that pain has impaired his reason, that now, if never before, he is speaking deliriously. No: his life is whole in him; God-given life is his, and with the consciousness of it he speaks, not ignorant of what is a man's duty, not with a lie in his right hand, but with absolute sincerity. He will not justify his accusers, for that would be to deny righteousness, the very rock which alone is firm beneath his feet. Knowing what is a man's obligation to his fellow-men and to God, he will repeat his self-defence. He goes back upon his past, he reviews his days. Upon none of them can his conscience fix the accusation of deliberate baseness or rebellion against God.

Having affirmed his sincerity Job proceeds to show what would be the result of deceit and hypocrisy at so solemn a crisis of his life. The underlying idea seems to be that of communion with the Most High, the spiritual fellowship necessary to man's inner life. He could not speak falsely without separating himself from God and therefore from hope. As yet he is not rejected; the consciousness of truth remains with him, and through that he is in touch at least with Eloah. No voice from on high answers him; yet this Divine principle of life remains in his soul. Shall he renounce it?

"Let mine enemy be as the wicked,
And he that riseth against me as the unrighteous."

If I have aught to do with a wicked man such as I am now to describe, one who would pretend to pure and godly life while he had behaved in impious defiance of righteousness, if I have to do with such a man, let it be as an enemy.

"For what is the hope of the godless whom He cutteth off,
When God taketh his soul?
Will God hear his cry
When trouble cometh upon him?
Will he delight himself in the Almighty
And call upon Eloah at all times?"

The topic is access to God by prayer, that sense of security which depends on the Divine friendship. There comes one moment at least, there may be many, in which earthly possessions are seen to be worthless and the help of the Almighty is alone of any avail. In order to enjoy hope at such a time a man must habitually live with God in sincere obedience. The godless man previously described, the thief, the adulterer whose whole life is a cowardly lie, is cut off from the Almighty. He finds no resource in the Divine friendship. To call upon God always is no privilege of his; he has lost it by neglect and revolt. Job speaks of the case of such a man as in contrast to his own. Although his own prayers remain apparently unanswered he has a reserve of faith and hope. Before God he can still assure himself as the servant of His righteousness, in fellow-

ship with Him who is eternally true. The address closes with these words of retrospection (vv. 11, 12):—

"I would teach you concerning the hand of God,
That which is with Shaddai would I not conceal.
Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it;
Why then are ye become altogether vain?"

At this point begins a passage which creates great difficulty. It is ascribed to Job, but is entirely out of harmony with all he has said. May we accept the conjecture that it is the missing third speech of Zophar, erroneously incorporated with the "parable" of Job? Do the contents warrant this departure from the received text?

All along Job's contention has been that though an evil-doer could have no fellowship with God, no joy in God, yet such a man might succeed in his schemes, amass wealth, live in glory, go down to his grave in peace. Yea, he might be laid in a stately tomb and the very clods of the valley might be sweet to him. Job has not affirmed this to be always the history of one who defies the Divine law. But he has said that often it is; and the deep darkness in which he himself lies is not caused so much by his calamity and disease as by the doubt forced upon him whether the Most High does rule in steadfast justice on this earth. How comes it, he has cried again and again, that the wicked prosper and the good are often reduced to poverty and sorrow?

Now does the passage from the twelfth verse onwards correspond with this strain of thought? It describes the fate of the wicked oppressor in strong language—defeat, desolation, terror, rejection by God, rejection by men. His children are multiplied only for the sword. Sons die and widows are left disconsolate. His treasures, his garments shall not be for his delight; the innocent shall enjoy his substance. His sudden death shall be in shame and agony, and men shall clap their hands at him and hiss him out of his place. Clearly, if Job is the speaker, he must be giving up all he has hitherto contended for, admitting that his friends have argued truly, that after all judgment does fall in this world upon arrogant men. The motive of the whole controversy would be lost if Job yielded this point. It is not as if the passage ran, This or that may take place, this or that may befall the evil-doer. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar never present more strongly their own view than that view is presented here. Nor can it be said that the writer may be preparing for the confession Job makes after the Almighty has spoken from the storm. When he gives way then, it is only to the extent of withdrawing his doubts of the wisdom and justice of the Divine rule.

The suggestion that Job is here reciting the statements of his friends cannot be entertained. To read "Why are ye altogether vain, saying, This is the portion of the wicked man from God," is incompatible with the long and detailed account of the oppressor's overthrow and punishment. There would be no point or force in mere recapitulation without the slightest irony or caricature. The passage is in grim earnest. On the other hand, to imagine that Job is modifying his former language is, as Dr. A. B. Davidson shows, equally out of the question. With his own sons and daughters lying in their graves, his own riches dispersed, would he be likely to

say—"If his children be multiplied it is for the sword"? and

"Though he heap up silver as the dust,
And prepare raiment as the clay;
He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on
And the innocent shall divide the silver?"

Against supposing this to be Zophar's third speech the arguments drawn from the brevity of Bildad's last utterance and the exhaustion of the subjects of debate have little weight, and there are distinct points of resemblance between the passage under consideration and Zophar's former addresses. Assuming it to be his, it is seen to begin precisely where he left off;—only he adopts the distinction Job has pointed out and confines himself now to "oppressors." His last speech closed with the sentence: "This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God." He begins here (ver. 13): "This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors which they receive from the Almighty." Again, without verbal identity, the expressions "God shall cast the fierceness of His wrath upon him" (chap. xx. 23), and "God shall hurl upon him and not spare" (chap. xxvii. 21), show the same style of representation, as also do the following: "Terrors are upon him. . . . His goods shall flow away in the day of his wrath" (chap. xx. 25, 28), and "Terrors overtake him like waters" (chap. xxvii. 20). Other similarities may be easily traced; and on the whole it seems by far the best explanation of an otherwise incomprehensible passage to suppose that here Zophar is holding doggedly to opinions which the other two friends have renounced. Job could not have spoken the passage, and there is no reason for considering it to be an interpolation by a later hand.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHORAL INTERLUDE.

JOB xxviii.

THE controversy at length closed, the poet breaks into a chant of the quest of Wisdom. It can hardly be supposed to have been uttered or sung by Job. But if we may go so far as to imagine a chorus after the manner of the Greek dramas, this ode would fitly come as a choral descant reflecting on the vain attempts made alike by Job and by his friends to penetrate the secrets of Divine providence. How poor and unsatisfying is all that has been said. To fathom the purposes of the Most High, to trace through the dark shadows and entanglements of human life that unerring righteousness with which all events are ordered and overruled—how far was this above the sagacity of the speakers. Now and again true things have been said, now and again glimpses of that vindication of the good which should compensate for all their sufferings have brightened the controversy. But the reconciliation has not been found. The purposes of the Most High remain untraced. The poet is fully aware of this, aware even that on the ground of argument he is unable to work out the problem which he has opened. With an undertone of wistful sadness, remembering passages of his country's poetry that ran in too joyous a strain,

as if wisdom lay within the range of human ken, he suspends the action of the drama for a little to interpose this cry of limitation and unrest. There is no complaint that God keeps in his own hand sublime secrets of Design. What is man that he should be discontented with his place and power? It is enough for him that the Great God rules in righteous sovereignty, gives him laws of conduct to be obeyed in reverence, shows him the evil he is to avoid, the good he is to follow. "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." Those who have a world to explore and use, the Almighty to adore and trust, if they must seek after the secret of existence and ever feel themselves baffled in the endeavour, may still live nobly, bear patiently, find blessed life within the limit God has set.

First the industry of man is depicted, that search for the hidden things of the earth which is significant alike of the craving and ingenuity of the human mind.

"Surely there is a mine for silver
And a place for gold which they refine.
Iron is taken out of the earth,
And copper is molten out of the stone.
Man setteth an end to darkness,
And searcheth, to the furthest bound,
The stones of darkness and gloom.
He breaks a shaft away from where men dwell;
They are forgotten of the foot;
Afair from men they hang and swing to and fro."

The poet has seen, perhaps in Idumæa or in Midian where mines of copper and gold were wrought by the Egyptians, the various operations here described. Digging or quarrying, driving tunnels horizontally into the hills or sinking shafts in the valleys, letting themselves down by ropes from the edge of a cliff to reach the vein, then, suspended in mid air, heaving at the ore, the miners variously ply their craft. Away in remote gorges of the hills the pits they have dug remain abandoned, forgotten. The long winding passages they make seem to track to the utmost limit the stones of darkness, stones that are black with the richness of the ore.

On the earth's surface men till their fields, but the hidden treasures that lie below are more valuable than the harvest of maize or wheat.

"As for the earth, out of it cometh bread;
And from beneath it is turned up as by fire.
The stones thereof are the place of sapphires,
And it hath dust of gold."

The reference to fire as an agent in turning up the earth appears to mark a volcanic district, but sapphires and gold are found either in alluvial soil or associated with gneiss and quartz. Perhaps the fire was that used by the miners to split refractory rock. And the cunning of man is seen in this, that he carries into the very heart of the mountains a path which no vulture or falcon ever saw, which the proud beasts and fierce lions have not trodden.

"He puts forth his hand upon the flinty rock,
He overturneth mountains by the roots."

Slowly indeed as compared with modern work of the kind, yet surely, where those earnest toilers desired a way, excavations went on and tunnels were formed with wedge and hammer and pickaxe. The skill of man in providing tools and devising methods, and his patience and assiduity made him master of the very mountains. And when he had found the ore he could extract its precious metal and gems.

"He cutteth out channels among the rocks;
And his eye seeth every precious thing.
He bindeth the streams that they trickle not;
And the hidden thing brings he forth to light."

For washing his ore when it has been crushed he needs supplies of water, and to this end makes long aqueducts. In Idumæa a whole range of reservoirs may still be seen, by means of which even in the dry season the work of gold-washing might be carried on without interruption. No particle of the precious metal escaped the quick eye of the practised miner. And again, if water began to percolate into his shaft or tunnel, he had skill to bind the streams that his search might not be hindered.

Such then is man's skill, such are his perseverance and success in the quest of things he counts valuable—iron for his tools, copper to fashion into vessels, gold and silver to adorn the crowns of kings, sapphires to gleam upon their raiment. And if in the depths of earth or anywhere the secrets of life could be reached, men of eager adventurous spirit would sooner or later find them out.

It is to be noticed that, in the account given here of the search after hidden things, attention is confined to mining operations. And this may appear strange, the general subject being the quest of wisdom, that is understanding of the principles and methods by which the Divine government of the world is carried on. There was in those days a method of research, widely practised, to which some allusion might have been expected—the so-called art of astrology. The Chaldeans had for centuries observed the stars, chronicled their apparent movements, measured the distances of the planets from each other in their unexplained progress through the constellations. On this survey of the heavens was built up a whole code of rules for predicting events. The stars which culminated at the time of any one's birth, the planets visible when an undertaking was begun, were supposed to indicate prosperity or disaster. The author of the Book of Job could not be ignorant of this art. Why does he not mention it? Why does he not point out that by watching the stars man seeks in vain to penetrate Divine secrets? And the reply would seem to be that keeping absolute silence in regard to astrology he meant to refuse it as a method of inquiry. Patient, eager labour among the rocks and stones is the type of fruitful endeavour. Astrology is not in any way useful; nothing is reached by that method of questioning nature.

The poet proceeds:—

"Where shall wisdom be found,
And where is the place of understanding?
Man knoweth not the way thereof,
Neither is it to be found in the land of the living.
The deep saith, It is not in me;
And the sea saith, It is not with me."

The whole range of the physical cosmos, whether open to the examination of man or beyond his reach, is here declared incapable of supplying the clue to that underlying idea by which the course of things is ordered. The land of the living is the surface of the earth which men inhabit. The deep is the under-world. Neither there nor in the sea is the great secret to be found. As for its price, however earnestly men may desire to possess themselves of it, no treasures are of any use; it is not to be bought in any market.

49—Vol. II.

"Never is wisdom got for gold,
Nor for its price can silver be told.
For the gold of Ophir it may not be won,
The onyx rare or the sapphire stone.
Gold is no measure and glass no hire,
Jewels of gold twice fined by fire.
Coral and crystal tell in vain,
Pearls of the deep for wisdom's gain.
Topaz of Cush avails thee nought,
Nor with gold of glory is it bought."

While wisdom is thus of value incommensurate with all else men count precious and rare, it is equally beyond the reach of all other forms of mundane life. The birds that soar high into the atmosphere see nothing of it, nor does any creature that wanders far into uninhabitable wilds. Abaddon and Death indeed, the devouring abyss and that silent world which seems to gather and keep all secrets, have heard a rumour of it. Beyond the range of mortal sense some hint there may be of a Divine plan governing the mutations of existence, the fulfilment of which will throw light on the under-world where the spirits of the departed wait in age-long night. But death has no knowledge any more than life. Wisdom is God's prerogative, His activities are His own to order and fulfil.

"God understandeth the way thereof,
And He knoweth the place thereof.
For He looketh to the ends of the earth,
And seeth under the whole heaven,
Making weight for the winds;
And He meteth out the waters by measure.
When He made a decree for the rain,
And a way for the lightning of thunder,
Then did He see it and number it,
He established it, yea, and searched it out."

The evolution, as we should say, of the order of nature gives fixed and visible embodiment to the wisdom of God. We must conclude, therefore, that the poet indicates the complete idea of the world as a cosmos governed by subtle all-pervading law for moral ends. The creation of the visible universe is assumed to begin, and with the created before Him God sees its capacities, determines the use to which its forces are to be put, the relation all things are to have to each other, to the life of man and to His own glory. But the hokhma or understanding of this remains for ever beyond the discovery of the human intellect. Man knoweth not the way thereof. The forces of earth and air and sea and the deep that lieth under do not reveal the secret of their working; they are but instruments. And the end of all is not to be found in Sheol, in the silent world of the dead. God Himself is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.

Yet man has his life and his law. Though intellectual understanding of his world and destiny may fail however earnestly he pursues the quest, he should obtain the knowledge that comes by reverence and obedience. He can adore God, he can distinguish good from evil and seek what is right and true. There lies his hokhma, there, says the poet, it must continue to lie.

"And unto man He said,
Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
And to depart from evil is understanding."

The conclusion lays a hush upon man's thought—but leaves it with a doctrine of God and faith reaching above the limitations of time and sense. Reverence for the Divine will not fully known, the pursuit of holiness, fear of the Unseen God are no agnosticism, they are the true springs of religious life.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AS A PRINCE BEFORE THE KING.

JOB XXIX.-XXXI. JOB SPEAKS.

FROM the pain and desolation to which he has become inured as a pitiable second state of existence, Job looks back to the years of prosperity and health which in long succession he once enjoyed. This parable or review of the past ends his contention. Honour and blessedness are apparently denied him for ever. With what has been he compares his present misery and proceeds to a bold and noble vindication of his character alike from secret and from flagrant sins.

In the whole circle of Job's lamentations this chant is perhaps the most affecting. The language is very beautiful, in the finest style of the poet, and the minor cadences of the music are such as many of us can sympathise with. When the years of youth go by and strength wanes, the Eden we once dwelt in seems passing fair. Of those beyond middle life there are few who do not set their early memories in sharp contrast to the ways they now travel, looking back to a happy valley and long bright summers that are left behind. And even in opening manhood and womanhood the troubles of life often fall, as we may think, prematurely, coming between the mind and the remembered joy of burdenless existence.

"How changed are they!—how changed am I!
The early spring of life is gone,
Gone is each youthful vanity,—
But what with years, oh what is won?"

"I know not—but while standing now
Where opened first the heart of youth,
I recollect how high would glow
Its thoughts of Glory, Faith, and Truth—"

"How full it was of good and great,
How true to heaven, how warm to men.
Alas! I scarce forbear to hate
The colder breast I bring again."

First in the years past Job sees by the light of memory the blessedness he had when the Almighty was felt to be his preserver and his strength. Though now God appears to have become an enemy he will not deny that once he had a very different experience. Then nature was friendly, no harm came to him; he was not afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness nor the destruction that wasteth at noon-day, for the Almighty was his refuge and fortress. To refuse this tribute of gratitude is far from the mind of Job, and the expression of it is a sign that now at length he is come to a better mind. He sees on the way fully to recover his trust.

The elements of his former happiness are recounted in detail. God watched over him with constant care, the lamp of Divine love shone on high and lighted up the darkness, so that even in the night he could travel by a way he knew not and feel secure. Days of strength and pleasure were those when the secret of God, the sense of intimate fellowship with God, was on his tent, when his children were about him, that beautiful band of sons and daughters who were his pride. Then his steps were bathed in abundance, butter provided by innumerable kine, rivers of oil which seemed to flow from the rock, where terrace

above terrace the olives grew luxuriantly and yielded their fruit without fail.

Chiefly Job remembers with gratitude to God the esteem in which he was held by all about him. Nature was friendly and not less friendly were men. When he went into the city and took his seat in the "broad place" within the gate, he was acknowledged chief of the council and court of judgment. The young men withdrew and stood aside, yea the elders, already seated in the place of assembly, stood up to receive him as their superior in position and wisdom. Discussion was suspended that he might hear and decide. And the reasons for this respect are given. In the society thus with idyllic touches represented, two qualities were highly esteemed—regard for the poor and wisdom in counsel. Then, as now, the problem of poverty caused great concern to the elders of cities. Though the population of an Arabian town could not be great, there were many widows and fatherless children, families reduced to beggary by disease or the failure of their poor means of livelihood, blind and lame persons utterly dependent on charity, besides wandering strangers and the vagrants of the desert. By his princely munificence to these Job had earned the gratitude of the whole region. Need was met, poverty relieved, justice done in every case. He recounts what he did, not in boastfulness, but as one who rejoiced in the ability God had given him to aid suffering fellow-creatures. Those were indeed royal times for the generous-hearted man. Full of public spirit, his ear and hand always open, giving freely out of his abundance, he commended himself to the affectionate regard of the whole valley. The ready way of almsgiving was that alone by which relief was provided for the destitute, and Job was never appealed to in vain.

"The ear that heard me blessed me,
The eye that saw bare witness to me,
Because I delivered the poor that cried,
And the fatherless who had no helper.
The blessing of him that was ready to die came upon me,
And I caused the widow's heart to sing with joy."

So far Job rejoices in the recollection of what he had been able to do for the distressed and needy in those days when the lamp of God shone over him. He proceeds to speak of his service as magistrate or judge.

"I put on righteousness and it indued itself with me,
My justice was as a robe and a diadem;
I was eyes to the blind,
And feet was I to the lame."

With righteousness in his heart so that all he said and did revealed it and wearing judgment as a turban, he sat and administered justice among the people. Those who had lost their sight and were unable to find the men that had wronged them came to him and he was as eyes to them, following up every clue to the crime that had been committed. The lame who could not pursue their enemies appealed to him and he took up their cause. The poor, suffering under oppression, found him a protector, a father. Yea, "the cause of him that I knew not I searched out." On behalf of total strangers as well as of neighbours he set in motion the machinery of justice.

"And I brake the jaws of the wicked
And plucked the spoil from his teeth."

None were so formidable, so daring and lion-like, but he faced them, brought them to judg-

ment, and compelled them to give up what they had taken by fraud and violence.

In those days, Job confesses, he had the dream that as he was prosperous, powerful, helpful to others by the grace of God, so he would continue. Why should any trouble fall on one who used power conscientiously for his neighbours? Would not Eloah sustain the man who was as a god to others?

“Then I said, I shall die in my nest,
And I shall multiply my days as the Phoenix;
My root shall spread out by the waters,
And the dew shall be all night on my branch:
My glory shall be fresh in me,
And my bow shall be renewed in my hand.”

A fine touch of the dream-life which ran on from year to year, bright and blessed as if it would flow for ever. Death and disaster were far away. He would renew his life like the Phoenix, attain to the age of the antediluvian fathers, and have his glory or life strong in him for uncounted years. So illusion flattered him, the very image he uses pointing to the futility of the hope.

The closing strophe of the chapter proceeds with even stronger touch and more abundant colour to represent his dignity. Men listened to him and waited. Like a refreshing rain upon thirsty ground—and how thirsty the desert could be!—his counsel fell on their ears. He smiled upon them when they had no confidence, laughed away their trouble, the light of his countenance never dimmed by their apprehensions. Even when all about him were in dismay his hearty hopeful outlook was unclouded. Trusting God, he knew his own strength and gave freely of it.

“I chose out their way, and sat as a chief,
And dwelt as a king in the crowd,
As one that comforteth the mourners.”

Looked up to with this great esteem, acknowledged leader in virtue of his overflowing goodness and cheerfulness, he seemed to make sunshine for the whole community. Such was the past. All that had been is gone, apparently for ever.

How inexpressibly strange that power so splendid, mental, physical, and moral strength used in the service of less favoured men should be destroyed by Eloah! It is like blotting out the sun from heaven and leaving a world in darkness. And most strange of all is the way in which low men assist the ruin that has been wrought.

The thirtieth chapter begins with this. Job is derided by the miserable and base whose fathers he would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flock. He paints these people, gaunt with hunger and vice, herding in the wilderness where alone they are suffered to exist, plucking mallows or salt-wort among the bushes and digging up the roots of broom for food. Men hunted them into the desert, crying after them as thieves, and they dwelt in the clefts of the wadies, in caves and amongst rocks. Like wild asses they brayed in the scrub and flung themselves down among the nettles. Children they were of fools, base-born, men who had dishonoured their humanity and been whipped out of the land. Such are they whose song and by-word Job is now become. These, even these abhor him and spit in his face. He makes the contrast deep and dreadful as to his own experience and the moral confusion that has followed Eloah's

strange work. For good there is evil, for light and order there is darkness. Does God desire this, ordain it?

One is inclined to ask whether the abounding compassion and humaneness of the Book of Job fail at this point. These wretched creatures who make their lair like wild beasts among the nettles, outcasts, branded as thieves, a wandering base-born race, are still men. Their fathers may have fallen into the vices of abject poverty. But why should Job say that he would have disdained to set them with the dogs of his flock? In a previous speech (chap. xxiv.) he described victims of oppression who had no covering in the cold and were drenched with the rain of the mountains, clinging to the rock for shelter; and of them he spoke gently, sympathetically. But here he seems to go beyond compassion.

Perhaps one might say the tone he takes now is pardonable, or almost pardonable, because these wretched beings, whom he may have treated kindly once, have seized the occasion of his misery and disease to insult him to his face. While the words appear hard, the uselessness of the pariah may be the main point. Yet a little of the pride of birth clings to Job. In this respect he is not perfect; here his prosperous life needs a check. The Almighty must speak to him out of the tempest that he may feel himself and find “the blessedness of being little.”

These outcasts throw off all restraint and behave with disgraceful rudeness in his presence.

“Upon my right hand rise the low brood,
They push away my feet,
And cast up against me their ways of destruction;
They mar my path,
And force on my calamity—
They who have no helper.
They come in as through a wide breach,
In the desolation they roll themselves upon me.”

The various images, of a besieging army, of those who wantonly break up paths made with difficulty, of a breach in the embankment of a river, are to show that Job is now accounted one of the meanest, whom any man may treat with indignity. He was once the idol of the populace: “now none so poor to do him reverence.” And this persecution by base men is only a sign of deeper abasement. As a horde of terrors sent by God he feels the reproaches and sorrows of his state.

“Terrors are turned upon me;
They chase away mine honour as the wind,
And my welfare passeth as a cloud,
And now my soul is poured out in me
The days of affliction have taken hold upon me.”

Thought shifts naturally to the awful disease which has caused his body to swell and to become black as with dust and ashes. And this leads him to his final vehement complaint against Eloah. How can He so abase and destroy His servant?

“I cry unto Thee and Thou dost not hear me;
I stand up, and Thou lookest at me.
Thou art turned to be cruel unto me:
With the might of Thine hand Thou persecutest me.
Thou liftest me up to the wind, Thou causest me to ride on it;
And Thou dissolvest me in the storm.
For I know that Thou wilt bring me to death,
And to the house appointed for all living.
Yet in overthrow doth not one stretch out his hand?
In destruction, doth he not because of this utter a cry?”

Standing up in his wretchedness he is fully visible to the Divine eye, still no prayer moves

Eloah the terrible from His purpose. It seems to be finally appointed that in dishonour Job shall die. Yet, destined to this fate, his hope a mockery, shall he not stretch out his hand, cry aloud as life falls to the grave in ruin? How differently is God treating him from the way in which he treated those who were in trouble! He is asking in vain that pity which he himself had often shown. Why should this be? How can it be, and Eloah remain the Just and Living One? Pained without and within, unable to refrain from crying out when people gather about him, a brother to jackals whose howlings are heard all night, a companion to the grieving ostrich, his bones burned by raging fever, his harp turned to wailing and his lute into the voice of them that weep, he can scarce believe himself the same man that once walked in honour and gladness in the sight of earth and heaven.

Thus the full measure of complaint is again poured out, unchecked by thought that dignity of life comes more with suffering patiently endured than with pleasure. Job does not know that out of trouble like his a man may rise more human, more noble, his harp furnished with new strings of deeper feeling, a finer light of sympathy shining in his soul. Consistently, throughout, the author keeps this thought in the background, showing hopeless sorrow, affliction, unrelieved by any sense of spiritual gain, pressing with heaviest and most weary weight upon a good man's life. The only help Job has is the consciousness of virtue, and that does not check his complaint. The antinomies of life, the past as compared with the present, Divine favour exchanged for cruel persecution, well-doing followed by most grievous pain and dishonour, are to stand at the last full in view. Then He who has justice in His keeping shall appear. God Himself shall declare and claim His supremacy and His design.

This purpose of the author achieved, the last passage of Job's address—chap. xxxi.—rings bold and clear like the chant of a victor, not serene indeed in the presence of death, for this is not the Hebrew temper and cannot be ascribed by the writer to his hero, yet with firm ground beneath his feet, a clear conscience of truth lighting up his soul. The language is that of an innocent man before his accusers and his judge, yea of a prince in presence of the King. Out of the darkness into which he has been cast by false arguments and accusations, out of the trouble into which his own doubt has brought him, Job seems to rise with a new sense of moral strength and even of restored physical power. No more in reckless challenge of heaven and earth to do their worst, but with a fine strain of earnest desire to be clear with men and God, he takes up and denies one by one every possible charge of secret and open sin. Is the language he uses more emphatic than any man has a right to employ? If he speaks the truth, why should his words be thought too bold? The Almighty Judge desires no man falsely to accuse himself, will have no man leave an unfounded suspicion resting upon his character. It is not evangelical meekness to plead guilty to sins never committed. Job feels it part of his integrity to maintain his integrity; and here he vindicates himself not in general terms but in detail, with a decision which cannot be mistaken. Afterwards, when the Almighty has spoken, he acknowledges

the ignorance and error which have entered into his judgment, making the confession we must all make even after years of faith.

I. From the taint of lustful and base desire he first clears himself. He has been pure in life, innocent even of wandering looks which might have drawn him into uncleanness. He has made a covenant with his eyes and kept it. Sin of this kind, he knew, always brings retribution, and no indulgence of his ever caused sorrow and dishonour. Regarding the particular form of evil in question he asks:—

“For what is the portion from God above,
And the heritage of the Almighty from on high?
Is it not calamity to the unrighteous,
And disaster to them that work iniquity?”

Grouped along with this “lust of the flesh” is the “lust of the eyes,” covetous desire. The itching palm to which money clings, false dealing for the sake of gain, crafty intrigues for the acquisition of a plot of ground or some animal—such things were far from him. He claims to be weighed in a strict balance, and pledges himself that as to this he will not be found wanting. So thoroughly is he occupied with this defence that he speaks as if still able to sow a crop and look for the harvest. He would expect to have the produce snatched from his hand if the vanity of greed and getting had led him astray. Returning then to the more offensive suspicion that he had laid wait treacherously at his neighbour's door, he uses the most vigorous words to show at once his detestation of such offence and the result he believes it always to have. It is an enormity, a nefarious thing to be punished by the judges. More than that, it is a fire that consumes to Abaddon, wasting a man's strength and substance so that they are swallowed as by the devouring abyss. As to this, Job's reading of life is perfectly sound. Wherever society exists at all, custom and justice are made to bear as heavily as possible on those who invade the foundation of society and the rights of other men. Yet the keenness with which immorality of the particular kind is watched fans the flame of lust. Nature appears to be engaged against itself; it may be charged with the offence, it certainly joins in bringing the punishment.

II. Another possible imputation was that as a master or employer he had been harsh to his underlings. Common enough it was for those in power to treat their dependants with cruelty. Servants were often slaves; their rights as men and women were denied. Regarding this, the words put into the mouth of Job are finely humane, even prophetic:—

“If I despised the cause of my man-servant or maid
When they contended with me . . .
What then shall I do when God riseth up?
And when He visiteth what shall I answer Him?
Did not He that made me in the womb make him?
And did not One fashion us in the womb?”

The rights of those who toiled for him were sacred, not as created by any human law which for so many hours' service might compel so much stipulated hire, but as conferred by God. Job's servants were men and women with an indefeasible claim to just and considerate treatment. It was accidental, so to speak, that Job was rich and they poor, that he was master and they under him. Their bodies were fashioned like his, their minds had the same capacity of

thought, of emotion, of pleasure and pain. At this point there is no hardness of tone or pride of birth and place. These are well-doing people to whom as head of the clan Job stands in place of a father.

And his principle, to treat them as their inheritance of the same life from the same Creator gave them a right to be dealt with, is prophetic, setting forth the duties of all who have power to those who toil for them. Men are often used like beasts of burden. No tyranny on earth is so hateful as many employers, driving on their huge concerns at the utmost speed, dare to exercise through representatives or underlings. The simple patriarchal life which brought employer and employed into direct personal relations knew little of the antagonism of class interests and the bitterness of feeling which often menaces revolution. None of this will cease till simplicity be resumed and the customs which keep men in touch with each other, even though they fail to acknowledge themselves members of the one family of God. When the servant who has done his best is, after years of exhausting labour, dismissed without a hearing by some subordinate set there to consider what are called the "interests" of the employer—is the latter free from blame? The question of Job, "What then shall I do when God riseth up, and when He visiteth what shall I answer Him?" strikes a note of equity and brotherliness many so-called Christians seem never to have heard.

III. To the poor, the widow, the fatherless, the perishing, Job next refers. Beyond the circle of his own servants there were needy persons whom he had been charged with neglecting and even oppressing. He has already made ample defence under this head. If he has lifted his hand against the fatherless, having good reason to presume that the judges would be on his side—then may his shoulder fall from the shoulder-blade and his arm from the collar-bone. Calamity from God was a terror to Job, and recognising the glorious authority which enforces the law of brotherly help he could not have lived in proud enjoyment and selfish contempt.

IV. Next he repudiates the idolatry of wealth and the sin of adoring the creature instead of the Creator. Rich as he was, he can affirm that he never thought too much of his wealth, nor secretly vaunted himself in what he had gathered. His fields brought forth plentifully, but he never said to his soul, Thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. He was but a steward, holding all at the will of God. Not as if abundance of possessions could give him any real worth, but with constant gratitude to his Divine Friend, he used the world as not abusing it.

And for his religion: true to those spiritual ideas which raised him far above superstition and idolatry, even when the rising sun seemed to claim homage as a fit emblem of the unseen Creator, or when the full moon shining in a clear sky seemed a very goddess of purity and peace, he had never, as others were wont to do, carried his hand to his lips. He had seen the worship of Baal and Ishtar, and there might have come to him, as to whole nations, the impulses of wonder, of delight, of religious reverence. But he can fearlessly say that he never yielded to the temptation to adore anything in

heaven or earth. It would have been to deny Eloah the Supreme. Dr. Davidson reminds us here of a legend embodied in the Koran for the purpose of impressing the lesson that worship should be paid to the Lord of all creatures, "whose shall be the kingdom on the day whereon the trumpet shall be sounded." The Almighty says: "Thus did We show unto Abraham the kingdom of heaven and earth, that he might become of those who firmly believe. And when the night overshadowed him he saw a star, and he said, This is my Lord; but when it set he said, I like not those that set. And when he saw the moon rising he said, This is my Lord; but when he saw it set he said, Verily, if my Lord direct me not, I shall become one of the people who go astray. And when he saw the rising sun he said, This is my Lord; this is the greatest; but when it set he said, O my people, verily I am clear of that which ye associate with God; I direct my face unto Him who hath created the heavens and the earth." Thus from very early times to that of Mohammed monotheism was in conflict with the form of idolatry that naturally allured the inhabitants of Arabia. Job confesses the attraction, denies the sin. He speaks as if the laws of his people were strongly against sun-worship, whatever might be done elsewhere.

V. He proceeds to declare that he has never rejoiced over a fallen enemy nor sought the life of any one with a curse. He distinguishes himself very sharply from those who in the common Oriental way dealt curses without great provocation, and those even who kept them for deadly enemies. So far was this rancorous spirit from him that friends and enemies alike were welcome to his hospitality and help. Verse 31 means that his servants could boast of being unable to find a single stranger who had not sat at his table. Their business was to furnish it every day with guests. Nor will Job allow that after the manner of men he skilfully covered transgressions. "If, guilty of some base thing, I concealed it, as men often do, because I was afraid of losing caste, afraid lest the great families would despise me. . . ." Such a thought or fear never presented itself to him. He could not thus have lived a double life. All had been above-board, in the clear light of day, ruled by one law.

In connection with this it is that he comes with princely appeal to the King.

"Oh that I had one to hear me!—
Behold my signature—let the Almighty answer me.
And oh that I had my Opponent's charge!
Surely I would carry it on my shoulder,
I would bind it unto me as a crown,
I would declare unto Him the number of my steps,
As a prince would I go near unto Him."

The words are to be defended only on the ground that the Eloah to whom a challenge is here addressed is God misunderstood, God charged falsely with making unfounded accusations against His servant and punishing him as a criminal. The Almighty has not been doing so. The vicious reasoning of the friends, the mistaken creed of the age make it appear as if He had. Men say to Job, You suffer because God has found evil in you. He is requiting you according to your iniquity. They maintain that for no other reason could calamities have come upon him. So God is made to appear as the man's adversary; and Job is forced to the demonstration that he has been unjustly con-

denied. "Behold my signature," he says: I state my innocence; I set to my mark; I stand by my claim; I can do nothing else. Let the Almighty prove me at fault. God, you say, has a book in which His charges against me are written out. I wish I had that book! I would fasten it upon my shoulder as a badge of honour; yea, I would wear it as a crown. I would show Eloah all I have done, every step I have taken through life by day and night. I would evade nothing. In the assurance of integrity I would go to the King; as a prince I would stand in His presence. There face to face with Him whom I know to be just and righteous I would justify myself as His servant, faithful in His house.

Is it audacity, impiety? The writer of the book does not mean it to be so understood. There is not the slightest hint that he gives up his hero. Every claim made is true. Yet there is ignorance of God, and that ignorance puts Job in fault so far. He does not know God's action though he knows his own. He ought to reason from the misunderstanding of himself and see that he may fail to understand Eloah. When he begins to see this he will believe that his sufferings have complete justification in the purpose of the Most High.

The ignorance of Job represents the ignorance of the old world. Notwithstanding the tenor of his prologue the writer is without a theory of human affliction applicable to every case, or even to the experience of Job. He can only say and repeat, God is supremely wise and righteous, and for the glory of His wisdom and righteousness He ordains all that befalls men. The problem is not solved till we see Christ, the Captain of our salvation, made perfect by suffering, and know that our earthly affliction "which is for the moment worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."

The last verses of the chapter may seem out of place. Job speaks as a landowner who has not encroached on the fields of others but honestly acquired his estate, and as a farmer who has tilled it well. This seems a trifling matter compared with others that have been considered. Yet, as a kind of afterthought, completing the review of his life, the detail is natural.

"If my land cry out against me,
And the furrows thereof weep together,
If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money,
Or have caused the owners to lose their life:
Let thistles grow instead of wheat
And cockle instead of barley.
The words of Job are ended."

A farmer of the right kind would have great shame if poor crops or wet furrows cried against him, or if he could otherwise be accused of treating the land ill. The touch is realistic and forcible.

Still it is plain at the close that the character of Job is idealised. Much may be received as matter of veritable history; but on the whole the life is too fine, pure, saintly for even an extraordinary man. The picture is clearly typical. And it is so for the best reason. An actual life would not have set the problem fully in view. The writer's aim is to rouse thought by throwing the contradictions of human experience so vividly upon a prepared canvas that all may see. Why do the righteous suffer? What does the Almighty mean? The urgent questions of the race are made as insistent as art and passion,

ideal truth and sincerity, can make them. Job lying in the grime of misery, yet claiming his innocence as a prince before the Eternal King, demands on behalf of humanity the vindication of providence, the meaning of the world scheme.

ELIHU INTERVENES.

CHAPTER XXV.

POST-EXILIC WISDOM.

JOB xxxii.-xxxiv.

A PERSONAGE hitherto unnamed in the course of the drama now assumes the place of critic and judge between Job and his friends. Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, appears suddenly and as suddenly disappears. The implication is that he has been present during the whole of the colloquies, and that, having patiently waited his time, he expresses the judgment he has slowly formed on arguments to which he has given close attention.

It is significant that both Elihu and his representations are ignored in the winding up of the action. The address of the Almighty from the storm does not take him into account and seems to follow directly on the close of Job's defence. It is a very obvious criticism, therefore, that the long discourse of Elihu may be an interpolation or an afterthought—a fresh attempt by the author or by some later writer to correct errors into which Job and his friends are supposed to have fallen and to throw new light on the matter of discussion. The textual indications are all in favour of this view. The style of the language appears to belong to a later time than the other parts of the book. But to reject the address as unworthy of a place in the poem would be too summary. Elihu indeed assumes the air of the superior person from the first, so that one is not engaged in his favour. Yet there is an honest, reverent, and thoughtful contribution to the subject. In some points this speaker comes nearer the truth than Job or any of his friends, although the address as a whole is beneath the rest of the book in respect of matter and argument, and still more in poetical feeling and expression.

It is suggested by M. Renan that the original author, taking up his work again after a long interval, at a period in his life when he had lost his verve and his style, may have added this fragment with the idea of completing the poem. There are strong reasons against such an explanation. For one thing there seems to be a misconception where, at the outset, Elihu is made to assume that Job and his friends are very old. The earlier part of the poem by no means affirms this. Job, though we call him a patriarch, was not necessarily far advanced in life, and Zophar appears considerably younger. Again the contention in the eighth verse—"There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding"—seems to be the justification a later writer would think it needful to introduce. He acknowledges the Divine gift of the original poet and adding his criticism claims for Elihu, that is, for himself, the lucidity God bestows on every calm and reverent student of His ways. This is considerably different from anything we find in the addresses of the other speakers. It

seems to show that the question of inspiration had arisen and passed through some discussion. But the rest of the book is written without any consciousness, or at all events any admission of such a question.

Elihu appears to represent the new "wisdom" which came to Hebrew thinkers in the period of the exile; and there are certain opinions embodied in his address which must have been formed during an exile that brought many Jews to honour. The reading of affliction given is one following the discovery that the general sinfulness of a nation may entail chastisement on men who have not personally been guilty of great sin, yet are sharers in the common neglect of religion and pride of heart, and further that this chastisement may be the means of great profit to those who suffer. It would be harsh to say the tone is that of a mind which has caught the trick of "voluntary humility," of pietistic self-abasement. Yet there are traces of such a tendency, the beginning of a religious strain opposed to legal self-righteousness, running, however, very readily to excess and formalism. Elihu, accordingly, appears to stand on the verge of a descent from the robust moral vigour of the original author towards that low ground in which false views of man's nature hinder the free activity of faith.

The note struck by the Book of Job had stirred eager thought in the time of the exile. Just as in the Middle Ages of European history the Divine Comedy of Dante was made a special study, and chairs were founded in universities for its exposition, so less formally the drama of Job was made the subject of inquiry and speculation. We suppose then that among the many who wrote on the poem, one acting for a circle of thinkers incorporated their views in the text. He could not do so otherwise than by bringing a new speaker on the stage. To add anything to what Eliphaz or Bildad or Job had said would have prevented the free expression of new opinion. Nor could he without disrespect have inserted the criticism after the words of Jehovah. Selecting as the only proper point of interpolation the close of the debate between Job and the friends, the scribe introduced the Elihu portion as a review of the whole scope of the book, and may indeed have subtly intended to assail as entirely heterodox the presupposition of Job's integrity and the Almighty's approval of His servant. That being his purpose, he had to veil it in order to keep the discourse of Elihu in line with the place assigned to him in the dramatic movement. The contents of the prologue and epilogue and the utterance of the Almighty from the storm affect, throughout, the added discourse. But to secure the unity of the poem the writer makes Elihu speak like one occupying the same ground as Eliphaz and the others, that of a thinker ignorant of the original motive of the drama; and this is accomplished with no small skill. The assumption is that reverent thought may throw new light, far more light than the original author possessed, on the case as it stood during the colloquies. Elihu avoids assailing the conception of the prologue that Job is a perfect and upright man approved by God. He takes the state of the sufferer as he finds it, and inquires how and why it is, what is the remedy. There are pedantries and obscurities in the discourse, yet the author must not be denied the merit of a careful and successful attempt to adapt

his character to the place he occupies in the drama. Beyond this, and the admission that something additional is said on the subject of Divine discipline, it is needless to go in justifying Elihu's appearance. One can only remark with wonder, in passing, that Elihu should ever have been declared the Angel Jehovah, or a personification of the Son of God.

The narrative verses which introduce the new speaker state that his wrath was kindled against Job because he justified himself rather than God, and against the three friends because they had condemned Job and yet found no answer to his arguments. The mood is that of a critic rather hot, somewhat too confident that he knows, beginning a task that requires much penetration and wisdom. But the opening sentences of the speech of Elihu betray the need the writer felt to justify himself in making his bold venture.

"I am young and ye are very old;
Wherefore I held back and durst not show my knowledge.
I thought, Days should speak,
And the multitude of years teach wisdom.
Still, there is a spirit in man,
And the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding.
Not the great in years are wise,
Nor do the aged understand what is right.
Therefore I say: Hearken to me;
I also will show my opinion."

These verses are a defence of the new writer's boldness in adding to a poem that has come down from a previous age. He is confident in his judgment, yet realises the necessity of commending it to the hearers. He claims that inspiration which belongs to every reverent conscientious inquirer. On this footing he affirms a right to express his opinion, and the right cannot be denied.

Elihu has been disappointed with the speeches of Job's friends. He has listened for their reasons, observed how they cast about for arguments and theories; but no one said anything convincing. It is an offence to this speaker that men who had so good a case against their friend made so little of it. The intelligence of Elihu is therefore from the first committed to the hypothesis that Job is in the wrong. Obviously the writer places his spokesman in a position which the epilogue condemns; and if we assume this to have been deliberately done a subtle verdict against the scope of the poem must have been intended. May it not be surmised that this implied comment or criticism gave the interpolated discourse value in the eyes of many? Originally the poem appeared somewhat dangerous, out of the line of orthodoxy. It may have become more acceptable to Hebrew thought when this caveat against bold assumptions of human perfectibility and the right of man in presence of his Maker had been incorporated with the text.

Elihu tells the friends that they are not to say We have found wisdom in Job, unexpected wisdom which the Almighty alone is able to vanquish. They are not to excuse themselves nor exaggerate the difficulties of the situation by entertaining such an opinion. Elihu is confident that he can overcome Job in reasoning. As if speaking to himself he describes the perplexity of the friends and states his intention.

"They were amazed, they answered no more;
They had not a word to say,
And shall I wait because they speak not,
Because they stand still and answer no more?
I also will answer my part,
I also will show my opinion."

His convictions become stronger and more urgent. He must open his lips and answer. And he will use no flattery. Neither the age nor the greatness of the men he is addressing shall keep him from speaking his mind. If he were insincere he would bring on himself the judgment of God. "My Maker would soon take me away." Here again the second writer's self-defence colours the words put into Elihu's mouth. Reverence for the genius of the poet whose work he is supplementing does not prevent a greater reverence for his own views.

The general exordium closes with the thirty-second chapter, and in the thirty-third Elihu, addressing Job by name, enters on a new vindication of his right to intervene. His claim is still that of straightforwardness, sincerity. He is to express what he knows without any other motive than to throw light on the matter in hand. He feels himself, moreover, to be guided by the Divine Spirit. The breath of the Almighty has given him life; and on this ground he considers himself entitled to enter the discussion and ask of Job what answer he can give. This is done with dramatic feeling. The life he enjoys is not only physical vigour as contrasted with Job's diseased and infirm state, but also intellectual strength, the power of God-given reason. Yet, as if he might seem to claim too much, he hastens to explain that he is quite on Job's level nevertheless.

"Behold, I am before God even as thou art;
I also am formed out of the clay.
Lo, my terror shall not make thee afraid,
Neither shall my pressure be heavy upon thee."

Elihu is no great personage, no heaven-sent prophet whose oracles must be received without question. He is not terrible like God, but a man formed out of the clay. The dramatising appears overdone at this point, and can only be explained by the desire of the writer to keep on good terms with those who already revered the original poet and regarded his work as sacred. What is now to be said to Job is spoken with knowledge and conviction, yet without pretension to more than the wisdom of the holy. There is, however, a covert attack on the original author as having made too much of the terror of the Almighty, the constant pain and anxiety that bore down Job's spirit. No excuse of the kind is to be allowed for the failure of Job to justify himself. He did not *because he could not*. The fact was, according to this critic, that Job had no right of self-defence as perfect and upright, without fault before the Most High. No man possessed or could acquire such integrity. And all the attempts of the earlier dramatist to put arguments and defences into his hero's mouth had of necessity failed. The new writer comprehends very well the purpose of his predecessor and intends to subvert it.

The formal indictment opens thus:—

"Surely thou hast spoken in my hearing
And I have heard thy words:—
I am clean without transgression;
I am innocent, neither is there iniquity in me.
Behold, He findeth occasions against me,
He counteth me for His enemy;
He putteth me in the stocks,
He marketh all my paths."

The claim of righteousness, the explanation of his troubles given by Job that God made occasions against him and without cause treated him

as an enemy, are the errors on which Elihu fastens. They are the errors of the original writer. No one endeavouring to represent the feelings and language of a servant of God should have placed him in the position of making so false a claim, so base a charge against Eloah. Such criticism is not to be set aside as either incompetent or over bold. But the critic has to justify his opinion, and, like many others, when he comes to give reasons his weakness discloses itself. He is certainly hampered by the necessity of keeping within dramatic lines. Elihu must appear and speak as one who stood beside Job with the same veil between him and the Divine throne. And perhaps for this reason the effort of the dramatist comes short of the occasion.

It is to be noted that attention is fixed on isolated expressions which fell from Job's lips, that there is no endeavour to set forth fully the attitude of the sufferer towards the Almighty. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had made Job an offender for a word and Elihu follows them. We anticipate that his criticism, however telling it may be, will miss the true point, the heart of the question. He will possibly establish some things against Job, but they will not prove him to have failed as a brave seeker after truth and God.

Opposing the claim and complaint he has quoted, Elihu advances in the first instance a proposition which has the air of a truism—"God is greater than man." He does not try to prove that even though a man has appeared to himself righteous he may really be sinful in the sight of the Almighty, or that God has the right to afflict an innocent person in order to bring about some great and holy design. The contention is that a man should suffer and be silent. God is not to be questioned; His providence is not to be challenged. A man, however he may have lived, is not to doubt that there is good reason for his misery if he is miserable. He is to let stroke after stroke fall and utter no complaint. And yet Job had erred in saying, "*God giveth not account of any of His matters.*" It is not true, says Elihu, that the Divine King holds Himself entirely aloof from the inquiries and prayers of His subjects. He discloses in more than one way both His purposes and His grace.

"Why dost thou contend against God
That He giveth not account of any of His matters?
For God speaketh once, yea twice,
Yet man perceiveth it not."

The first way in which, according to Elihu, God speaks to men is by a dream, a vision of the night; and the second way is by the chastisement of pain.

Now as to the first of these, the dream or vision, Elihu had, of course, the testimony of almost universal belief, and also of some cases that passed ordinary experience. Scriptural examples, such as the dreams of Jacob, of Joseph, of Pharaoh, and the prophetic visions already recognised by all pious Hebrews, were no doubt in the writer's mind. Yet if it is implied that Job might have learned the will of God from dreams, or that this was a method of Divine communication for which any man might look, the rule laid down was at least perilous. Visions are not always from God. A dream may come "by the multitude of business." It is true, as Elihu says, that one who is bent on some proud and dangerous course may be more himself in a dream than in his waking hours. He may see

a picture of the future which scares him, and so he may be deterred from his purpose. Yet the waking thoughts of a man, if he is sincere and conscientious, are far more fitted to guide him, as a rule, than his dreams.

Passing to the second method of Divine communication, Elihu appears to be on safer ground. He describes the case of an afflicted man brought to extremity by disease, whose soul draweth near to the grave and his life to the destroyers or death-angels. Such suffering and weakness do not of themselves insure knowledge of God's will, but they prepare the sufferer to be instructed. And for his deliverance an interpreter is required.

"If there be with him an angel,
An interpreter, one among a thousand,
To show unto man what is his duty;
Then He is gracious unto him and saith,
Deliver him from going down to the pit,
I have found a ransom."

Elihu cannot say that such an angel or interpreter will certainly appear. He may; and if he does and points the way of uprightness, and that way is followed, then the result is redemption, deliverance, renewed prosperity. But who is this angel? "One of the ministering spirits sent forth to do service on behalf of the heirs of salvation"? The explanation is somewhat far-fetched. The ministering angels were not restricted in number. Each Hebrew was supposed to have two such guardians. Then Malachi says, "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the angel (messenger) of Jehovah Sabaoth." Here the priest appears as an angel-interpreter, and the passage seems to throw light on Elihu's meaning. As no explicit mention is made of a priest or any priestly function in our text, it may at least be hinted that interpreters of the law, scribes or incipient rabbis, are intended, of whom Elihu claims to be one. In this case the ransom would remain without explanation. But if we take that as a sacrificial offering, the name "angel-interpreter" covers a reference to the properly accredited priest. The passage is so obscure that little can be based upon it; yet assuming the Elihu discourses to be of late origin and intended to bring the poem into line with orthodox Hebrew thought, the introduction of either priest or scribe would be in harmony with such a purpose. Mediation at all events is declared to be necessary as between the sufferer and God; and it would be strange indeed if Elihu, professing to explain matters, really made Divine grace to be consequent on the intervention of an angel whose presence and instruction could in no way be verified. Elihu is realistic and would not rest his case at any point on what might be declared purely imaginary.

The promise he virtually makes to Job is like those of Eliphaz and the others,—renewed health, restored youth, the sense of Divine favour. Enjoying these, the forgiven penitent sings before men, acknowledging his fault and praising God for his redemption. The assurance of deliverance was probably made in view of the epilogue, with Job's confession and the prosperity restored to him. But the writer misunderstands the confession, and promises too glibly. It is good to receive after great affliction the guidance of a wise interpreter; and to seek God again in humility is certainly a man's duty. But would submission and the forgiveness of God bring re-

sults in the physical sphere, health, renewed youth and felicity? No invariable nexus of cause and effect can be established here from experience of the dealings of God with men. Elihu's account of the way in which the Almighty communicates with His creatures must be declared a failure. It is in some respects careful and ingenious, yet it has no sufficient ground of evidence. When he says—

"Lo, all these things worketh God
Ofentimes with man,
To bring back his soul from the pit"—

the design is pious, but the great question of the book is not touched. The righteous suffer like the wicked from disease, bereavement, disappointment, anxiety. Even when their integrity is vindicated the lost years and early vigour are not restored. It is useless to deal in the way of pure fancy with the troubles of existence. We say to Elihu and all his school, Let us be at the truth, let us know the absolute reality. There are valleys of human sorrow, suffering, and trial in which the shadows grow deeper as the traveller presses on, where the best are often most afflicted. We need another interpreter than Elihu, one who suffers like us and is made perfect by suffering, through it entering into His glory.

An invocation addressed by Elihu to the bystanders begins chap. xxxiv. Again he emphatically asserts his right to speak, his claim to be a guide of those who think on the ways of God. He appeals to sound reason and he takes his auditors into counsel—"Let us choose to ourselves judgment; let us know among ourselves what is good." The proposal is that there shall be conference on the subject of Job's claim. But Elihu alone speaks. It is he who selects "what is good."

Certain words that fell from the lips of Job are again his text. Job hath said, I am righteous, I am in the right; and, God hath taken away my judgment or vindication. When those words were used the meaning of Job was that the circumstances in which he had been placed, the troubles appointed by God seemed to prove him a transgressor. But was he to rest under a charge he knew to be untrue? Stricken with an incurable wound though he had not transgressed, was he to lie against his right by remaining silent? This, says Elihu, is Job's unfounded impious indictment of the Almighty; and he asks:—

"What man is like Job,
Who drinketh up impiety like water,
Who goeth in company with the workers of iniquity,
And walketh with wicked men?"

Job had spoken of his right which God had taken away. What was his right? Was he, as he affirmed, without transgression? On the contrary, his principles were irreligious. There was infidelity beneath his apparent piety. Elihu will prove that so far from being clear of blame he has been imbibing wrong opinions and joining the company of the wicked. This attack shows the temper of the writer. No doubt certain expressions put into the mouth of Job by the original dramatist might be taken as impeaching the goodness or the justice of God. But to assert that even the most unguarded passages of the book made for impiety was a great mistake. Faith in God is to be traced not obscurely but as a shaft of light through all

the speeches put into the mouth of his hero by the poet. One whose mind is bound by certain pious forms of thought may fail to see the light, but it shines nevertheless.

The attempt made by Elihu to establish his charge has an appearance of success. Job, he says, is one who drinks up impiety like water and walks with wicked men,—

"For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing
That he should delight himself with God."

If this were true, Job would indeed be proved irreligious. Such a statement strikes at the root of faith and obedience. But is Elihu representing the text with anything like precision? In chap. ix. 22 these words are put into Job's mouth:—

"It is all one, therefore I say,
He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked."

God is strong and is breaking him with a tempest. Job finds it useless to defend himself and maintain that he is perfect. In the midst of the storm he is so tossed that he despises his life; and in perplexity he cries,—It is all one whether I am righteous or not, God destroys the good and the vile alike. Again we find him saying, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" And in another passage he inquires why the Almighty does not appoint days of judgment. These are the expressions on which Elihu founds his charge, but the precise words attributed to Job were never used by him, and in many places he both said and implied that the favour of God was his greatest joy. The second author is either misapprehending or perverting the language of his predecessor. His argument accordingly does not succeed.

Passing at present from the charge of impiety, Elihu takes up the suggestion that Divine providence is unjust and sets himself to show that, whether men delight themselves in the Almighty or not, He is certainly All-righteous. And in this contention, so long as he keeps to generalities and does not take special account of the case which has roused the whole controversy, he speaks with some power. His argument comes properly to this, If you ascribe injustice or partiality to Him whom you call God, you cannot be thinking of the Divine King. From His very nature and from His position as Lord of all, God cannot be unjust. As Maker and Preserver of life He must be faithful.

"Far be from God a wickedness,
From the Almighty an injustice!
For every one's work He requiteth him,
And causeth each to find according to his ways.
Surely, too, God doth not wickedness,
The Almighty perverteth not justice."

Has God any motive for being unjust? Can any one urge Him to what is against His nature? The thing is impossible. So far Elihu has all with him, for all alike believe in the sovereignty of God. The Most High, responsible to Himself, must be conceived of as perfectly just. But would He be so if He were to destroy the whole of His creatures? Elihu says, God's sovereignty over all gives Him the right to act according to His will; and His will determines not only what is, but what is right in every case.

"Who hath given Him a charge over the earth?
Or who hath disposed the whole world?
Were He to set His mind upon Himself,
To gather to Himself His spirit and His breath,
Then all flesh would die together,
Man would return to his dust."

The life of all creatures implies that the mind of the Creator goes forth to His universe, to rule it, to supply the needs of all living beings. He is not wrapped up in Himself, but having given life He provides for its maintenance.

Another personal appeal in verse 16 is meant to secure attention to what follows, in which the idea is carried out that the Creator must rule His creatures by a law of justice.

"Shall one that hateth right be able to control?
Or wilt thou condemn the Just, the Mighty One?
Is it fit to say to a king, Thou wicked?
Or to princes, Ye ungodly?
How much less to Him who accepts not the persons of
princes,
Nor regardeth the rich more than the poor?"

Here the principle is good, the argument or illustration inconclusive. There is a strong foundation in the thought that God, who could if He desired withdraw all life, but on the other hand sustains it, must rule according to a law of perfect righteousness. If this principle were kept in the front and followed up we should have a fruitful argument. But the philosophy of it is beyond this thinker, and he weakens his case by pointing to human rulers and arguing from the duty of subjects to abide by their decision and at least attribute to them the virtue of justice. No doubt society must be held together by a head either hereditary or chosen by the people, and, so long as his rule is necessary to the well-being of the realm, what he commands must be obeyed and what he does must be approved as if it were right. But the writer either had an exceptionally favourable experience of kings, as one, let us suppose, honoured like Daniel in the Babylonian exile, or his faith in the Divine right of princes blinded him to much injustice. It is a mark of his defective logic that he rests his case for the perfect righteousness of God upon a sentiment or what may be called an accident.

And when Elihu proceeds, it is with some rambling sentences in which the suddenness of death, the insecurity of human things, and the trouble and distress coming now on whole nations, now on workers of iniquity, are all thrown together for the demonstration of Divine justice. We hear in these verses (20 to 28) the echoes of disaster and exile, of the fall of thrones and empires. Because the afflicted tribes of Judah were preserved in captivity and restored to their own land, the history of the period which is before the writer's mind appears to him to supply a conclusive proof of the righteousness of the Almighty. But we fail to see it. Eliphaz and Bildad might have spoken in the same terms as Elihu uses here. Everything is assumed that Job by force of circumstance has been compelled to doubt. The whole is a homily on God's irresponsible power and penetrating wisdom which, it is taken for granted, must be exercised in righteousness. Where proof is needed nothing but assertion is offered. It is easy to say that when a man is struck down in the open sight of others it is because he has been cruel to the poor and the Almighty has been moved by the cry of the afflicted. But here is Job struck down in the open sight of others; and is it for harshness to the poor? If Elihu does not mean that, what does he mean? The conclusion is the same as that reached by the three friends; and this speaker poses, like the rest, as a generous man declaring that the iniquity God is al-

ways sure to punish is tyrannical treatment of the orphan and the widow.

Leaving this unfortunate attempt at reasoning we enter at verse 31 on a passage in which the circumstances of Job are directly dealt with.

"For hath any one spoken thus unto God,
'I have suffered though I offend not.'
That which I see not teach Thou;
If I have done iniquity I will do it no more?'
Shall God's recompense be according to thy mind
That thou dost reject it?
For thou must choose, and not I:
Therefore speak what thou knowest."

Here the argument seems to be that a man like Job, assuming himself to be innocent, if he bows down before the sovereign Judge, confesses ignorance, and even goes so far as to acknowledge that he may have sinned unwittingly and promises amendment, such a one has no right to dictate to God or to complain if suffering and trouble continue. God may afflict as long as He pleases without showing why He afflicts. And if the sufferer dares to complain he does so at his own peril. Elihu would not be the man to complain in such a case. He would suffer on silently. But the choice is for Job to make; and he has need to consider well before he comes to a decision. Elihu implies that as yet Job is in the wrong mind, and he closes this part of his address in a sort of brutal triumph over the sufferer because he had complained of his sufferings. He puts the condemnation into the mouth of "men of understanding"; but it is his own.

"Men of understanding will say to me,
And the wise who hears me will say:—
Job speaks without intelligence,
And his words are without wisdom:
Would that Job were tried unto the end
For his answers after the manner of wicked men.
For he addeth rebellion to his sin;
He clappeth his hands amongst us
And multiplieth his words against God."

The ideas of Elihu are few and fixed. When his attempts to convince betray his weakness in argument, he falls back on the vulgar expedient of brow-beating the defendant. He is a type of many would-be interpreters of Divine providence, forcing a theory of religion which admirably fits those who reckon themselves favourites of heaven, but does nothing for the many lives that are all along under a cloud of trouble and grief. The religious creed which alone can satisfy is one throwing light adown the darkest ravines human beings have to thread, in ignorance of God which they cannot help, in pain of body and feebleness of mind not caused by their own sin but by the sins of others, in slavery or something worse than slavery.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DIVINE PREROGATIVE.

Job xxxv.-xxxvii.

AFTER a long digression Elihu returns to consider the statement ascribed to Job, "It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God" (chap. xxxiv. 9). This he laid hold of as meaning that the Almighty is unjust, and the accusation has been dealt with. Now he resumes the question of the profitableness of religion.

"Thinkest thou this to be in thy right,
And callest thou it 'My just cause before God.'
That thou dost ask what advantage it is to thee,
And 'What profit have I more than if I had sinned?'"

In one of his replies Job, speaking of the wicked, represented them as saying, "What is the Almighty that we should serve Him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" (chap. xxi. 15). He added then, "The counsel of the wicked be far from me." Job is now declared to be of the same opinion as the wicked whom he condemned. The man who again and again appealed to God from the judgment of his friends, who found consolation in the thought that his witness was in heaven, who, when he was scorned, sought God in tears and hoped against hope for His redemption, is charged with holding faith and religion of no advantage. Is it in misapprehension or with design the charge is made? Job did indeed occasionally seem to deny the profit of religion, but only when the false theology of his friends drove him to false judgment. His real conviction was right. Once Eliphaz pressed the same accusation and lost his way in trying to prove it. Elihu has no fresh evidence, and he too falls into error. He confounds the original charge against Job with another, and makes an offence of that which the whole scope of the poem and our sense of right completely justify.

"Look unto the heavens and see,
And regard the clouds which are higher than thou.
If thou sinnest, what doest thou against Him?
Or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto Him?
If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him?
Or what receiveth He at thy hands?"

Elihu is actually proving, not that Job expects too little from religion and finds no profit in it, but that he expects too much. Anxious to convict, he will show that man has no right to make his faith depend on God's care for his integrity. The prologue showed the Almighty pleased with His servant's faithfulness. That, says Elihu, is a mistake.

Consider the clouds and the heavens which are far above the world. Thou canst not touch them, affect them. The sun and moon and stars shine with undiminished brightness, however vile men may be. The clouds come and go quite independently of the crimes of men. God is above those clouds, above that firmament. Neither can the evil hands of men reach His throne, nor the righteousness of men enhance His glory. It is precisely what we heard from the lips of Eliphaz (chap. xxii. 2-4), an argument which abuses man for the sake of exalting God. Elihu has no thought of the spiritual relationship between man and his Creator. He advances with perfect composure as a hard dogma what Job said in the bitterness of his soul.

If, however, the question must still be answered, What good end is served by human virtue? the reply is,—

"Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art;
And thy righteousness may profit a son of man."

God sustains the righteous and punishes the wicked, not for the sake of righteousness itself but purely for the sake of men. The law is that of expediency. Let not man dream of witnessing for God, or upholding any eternal principle dear to God. Let him confine religious fidelity and aspiration to their true sphere, the service of mankind. Regarding which doctrine we may simply say that, if religion is profitable in this way only, it may as well be frankly given up and the cult of happiness adopted for it everywhere. But Elihu is not true to his own dogma.

The next passage, beginning with verse 9, seems to be an indictment of those who in grievous trouble do not see and acknowledge the Divine blessings which are the compensations of their lot. Many in the world are sorely oppressed. Elihu has heard their piteous cries. But he has this charge against them, that they do not realise what it is to be subjects of the heavenly King.

"By reason of the multitude of oppressions men cry out,
They cry for help by reason of the arm of the mighty;
But none saith, Where is God my Maker,
Who giveth songs in the night,
Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth,
And maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?
There they cry because of the pride of evil men;
But none giveth answer."

These cries of the oppressed are complaints against pain, natural outbursts of feeling, like the moans of wounded animals. But those who are cruelly wronged may turn to God and endeavour to realise their position as intelligent creatures of His who should feel after Him and find Him. If they do so, then hope will mingle with their sorrow and light arise on their darkness. For in the deepest midnight God's presence cheers the soul and tunes the voice to songs of praise. The intention is to show that when prayer seems of no avail and religion does not help, it is because there is no real faith, no right apprehension by men of their relation to God. Elihu, however, fails to see that if the righteousness of men is not important to God as righteousness, much less will He be interested in their grievances. The bond of union between the heavenly and the earthly is broken; and it cannot be restored by showing that the grief of men touches God more than their sin. Job's distinction is that he clings to the ethical fellowship between a sincere man and his Maker and to the claim and the hope involved in that relationship. There we have the jewel in the lotus-flower of this book, as in all true and noble literature. Elihu, like the rest, is far beneath Job. If he can be said to have a glimmering of the idea it is only that he may oppose it. This moral affinity with God as the principle of human life remains the secret of the inspired author; it lifts him above the finest minds of the Gentile world. The compiler of the Elihu portion, although he has the admirable sentiment that God giveth songs in the night, has missed the great and elevating truth which fills with prophetic force the original poem.

From verse 14 onward to the close of the chapter the argument is turned directly against Job, but is so obscure that the meaning can only be conjectured.

"Surely God will not hear vanity,
Neither will the Almighty regard it."

If any one cries out against suffering as an animal in pain might cry, that is vanity, not merely emptiness but impiety, and God will not hear nor regard such a cry. Elihu means that Job's complaints were essentially of this nature. True, he had called on God; that cannot be denied. He had laid his case before the Judge and professed to expect vindication. But he was at fault in that very appeal, for it was still of suffering he complained, and he was still impious.

"Even when thou sayest that thou seest Him not,
That thy cause is before Him and thou waitest for Him;

Even then because His anger visiteth not,
And He doth not strictly regard transgression,
Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vanity,
He multiplieth words without knowledge."

The argument seems to be: God rules in absolute supremacy, and His will is not to be questioned; it may not be demanded of Him that He do this or that. What is a man that he should dare to state any "righteous cause" of his before God and claim justification? Let Job understand that the Almighty has been showing leniency, holding back His hand. He might kill any man outright and there would be no appeal nor ground of complaint. It is because He does not strictly regard iniquity that Job is still alive. Therefore appeals and hopes are offensive to God.

The insistence of this part of the book reaches a climax here and becomes repulsive. Elihu's opinions oscillate we may say between Deism and Positivism, and on either side he is a special pleader. It is by the mercy of the Almighty all men live; yet the reasoning of Elihu makes mercy so remote and arbitrary that prayer becomes an impertinence. No doubt there are some cries out of trouble which cannot find response. But he ought to maintain, on the other hand, that if sincere prayer is addressed to God by one in sore affliction desiring to know wherein he has sinned and imploring deliverance, that appeal shall be heard. This, however, is denied. For the purpose of convicting Job Elihu takes the singular position that though there is mercy with God man is neither to expect nor ask it, that to make any claim upon Divine grace is impious. And there is no promise that suffering will bring spiritual gain. God has a right to afflict His creatures, and what He does is to be endured without a murmur because it is less than He has the right to appoint. The doctrine is adamant and at the same time rent asunder by the error which is common to all Job's opponents. The soul of a man resolutely faithful like Job would turn away from it with righteous contempt and indignation. The light which Elihu professes to enjoy is a midnight of dogmatic darkness.

Passing to chap. xxxvi. we are still among vague surmisings which appear the more inconsequent that the speaker makes a large claim of knowledge.

"Suffer me a little and I will show thee,
For I have somewhat yet to say on God's behalf.
I will fetch my knowledge from afar,
And will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.
For truly my words are not false:
One that is perfect in knowledge is with thee."

Elihu is zealous for the honour of that great Being whom he adores because from Him he has received life and light and power. He is sure of what he says, and proceeds with a firm step. Preparation thus made, the vindication of God follows—a series of sayings which draw to something useful only when the doctrine becomes hopelessly inconsistent with what has already been laid down.

"Behold God is mighty and despiseth not any;
He is mighty in strength of understanding.
He preserveth not the life of the wicked,
But giveth right to the poor.
He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous,
But, with kings on the throne,
He setteth them up for ever, and they are exalted.
And if they be bound in fetters,
If they be held in cords of affliction,

Then He showeth them their work
And their transgressions, that they have acted proudly,
He openeth their ear to discipline
And commandeth that they return from iniquity."

"God despiseth not any"—this appears to have something of the humane breath hitherto wanting in the discourses of Elihu. He does not mean, however, that the Almighty estimates every life without contempt, counting the feeblest and most sinful as His creatures; but that He passes over none in the administration of His justice. Illustrations of the doctrine as Elihu intends it to be received are supplied in the couplet, "He preserveth not the life of the wicked, but giveth right to the poor." The poor are helped, the wicked are given up to death. As for the righteous, two very different methods of dealing with them are described. For Elihu himself, and others favoured with prosperity, the law of the Divine order has been, "With kings on the throne God setteth them up for ever." A personal consciousness of merit leading to honourable rank in the state seems at variance with the hard dogma of the evil desert of all men. But the rabbi has his own position to fortify. The alternative, however, could not be kept out of sight, since the misery of exile was a vivid recollection, if not an actual experience, with many reputable men who were bound in fetters and held by cords of affliction. It is implied that, though of good character, these are not equal in righteousness to the favourites of kings. Some errors require correction; and these men are cast into trouble, that they may learn to renounce pride and turn from iniquity. Elihu preaches the benefits of chastening, and in touching on pride he comes near the case of Job. But the argument is rude and indiscriminative. To admit that a man is righteous and then speak of his transgressions and iniquity, must mean that he is really far beneath his reputation or the estimate he has formed of himself.

It is difficult to see precisely what Elihu considers the proper frame of mind which God will reward. There must be humility, obedience, submission to discipline, renunciation of past errors. But we remember the doctrine that a man's righteousness cannot profit God, can only profit his fellow-men. Does Elihu, then, make submission to the powers that be almost the same thing as religion? His reference to high position beside the throne is to a certain extent suggestive of this.

"If they obey and serve God,
They shall spend their days in prosperity
And their years in pleasures.
But if they obey not
They shall perish by the sword,
And they shall die without knowledge."

Elihu thinks over much of kings and exaltation beside them and of years of prosperity and pleasure, and his own view of human character and merit follows the judgment of those who have honours to bestow and love the servile pliant mind.

In the dark hours of sorrow and pain, says Elihu, men have the choice to begin life anew in lowly obedience or else to harden their hearts against the providence of God. Instruction has been offered, and they must either embrace it or trample it under foot. And passing to the case of Job, who, it is plain, is afflicted because he needs chastisement, not having attained to

Elihu's perfectness in the art of life, the speaker cautiously offers a promise and gives an emphatic warning.

"He delivereth the afflicted by his affliction
And openeth their ear in oppression.
Yea, He would allure thee out of the mouth of thy distress
Into a broad place where is no straitness;
And that which is set on thy table shall be full of fatness.
But if thou art full of the judgment of the wicked,
Judgment and justice shall keep hold on thee.
For beware lest wrath lead thee away to mockery,
And let not the greatness of the ransom turn thee aside.
Will thy riches suffice that are without stint?
Or all the forces of thy strength?
Choose not that night,
When the peoples are cut off in their place:
Take heed thou turn not to iniquity,
For this thou hast chosen rather than affliction."

A side reference here shows that the original writer dealing with his hero has been replaced by another who does not realise the circumstances of Job with the same dramatic skill. His appeal is forcible, however, in its place. There was danger that one long and grievously afflicted might be led away by wrath and turn to mockery or scornfulness, so forfeiting the possibility of redemption. Job might also say in bitterness of soul that he had paid a great price to God in losing all his riches. The warning has point, although Job never betrayed the least disposition to think the loss of property a ransom exacted of him by God. Elihu's suggestion to this effect is by no means evangelical; it springs from a worldly conception of what is valuable to man and of great account with the Almighty. Observe, however, the reminiscences of national disaster. The picture of the night of a people's calamity had force for Elihu's generation, but here it is singularly inappropriate. Job's night had come to himself alone. If his afflictions had been shared by others, a different complexion would have been given to them. The final thrust, that the sufferer had chosen iniquity rather than profitable chastisement, has no point whatsoever.

The section closes with a strophe (vv. 22-25) which, calling for submission to the Divine ordinance and praise of the doings of the Almighty, forms a transition to the final theme of the address.

Chap. xxxvi. 26-xxxvii. 24. There need be little hesitation in regarding this passage as an ode supplied to the second writer or simply quoted by him for the purpose of giving strength to his argument. Scarcely a single note in the portion of Elihu's address already considered approaches the poetical art of this. The glory of God in His creation and His unsearchable wisdom are illustrated from the phenomena of the heavens without reference to the previous sections of the address. One who was more a poet than a reasoner might indeed halt and stumble as the speaker has done up to this point and find liberty when he reached a theme congenial to his mind. But there are points at which we seem to hear the voice of Elihu interrupting the flow of the ode as no poet would check his muse. At chap. xxxvii. 14 the sentence is interjected, like an aside of the writer drawing attention to the words he is quoting,—"*Hearken unto this, O Job; stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.*" Again (vv. 19, 20), between the description of the burnished mirror of the sky and that of the clearness after the sweeping wind, without any

reference to the train of thought, the ejaculation is introduced,—“*Teach us what we shall say unto Him, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. Shall it be told Him that I speak? If a man speak surely he shall be swallowed up.*” The final verses also seem to be in the manner of Elihu.

But the ode as a whole, though it has the fault of endeavouring to forestall what is put into the mouth of the Almighty speaking from the storm, is one of the fine passages of the book. We pass from “cold, heavy, and pretentious” dogmatic discussions to free and striking pictures of nature, with the feeling that one is guiding us who can present in eloquent language the fruits of his study of the works of God. The descriptions have been noted for their felicity and power by such observers as Baron Humboldt and Mr. Ruskin. While the point of view is that invariably taken by Hebrew writers, the originality of the ode lies in fresh observation and record of atmospheric phenomena, especially of the rain and snow, rolling clouds, thunderstorms and winds. The pictures do not seem to belong to the Arabian desert but to a fertile peopled region like Aram or the Chaldean plain. Upon the fields and dwellings of men, not on wide expanses of barren sand, the rains and snows fall, and they seal up the hand of man. The lightning clouds cover the face of the “habitable world”; by them God judgeth the peoples.

In the opening verses the theme of the ode is set forth—the greatness of God, the vast duration of His being, transcending human knowledge.

“Behold God is great and we know Him not,
The number of His years is unsearchable.”

To estimate His majesty or fathom the depths of His eternal will is far beyond us who are creatures of a day. Yet we may have some vision of His power. Look up when rain is falling, mark how the clouds that float above distil the drops of water and pour down great floods upon the earth. Mark also how the dark cloud spreading from the horizon obscures the blue expanse of the sky. We cannot understand; but we can realise to some extent the majesty of Him whose is the light and the darkness, who is heard in the thunder-peal and seen in the forked lightning.

“Can any understand the spreadings of the clouds,
The crashings of His pavilion?
Behold He spreadeth His light about Him;
And covereth it with the depths of the sea.
For by these judgeth He the peoples;
He giveth meat in abundance.”

Translating from the Vulgate the two following verses, Mr. Ruskin gives the meaning, “He hath hidden the light in His hands and commanded it that it should return. He speaks of it to His friend; that it is His possession, and that he may ascend thereto.” The rendering cannot be received, yet the comment may be cited. “These rain-clouds are the robes of love of the Angel of the Sea. To these that name is chiefly given, the ‘spreadings of the clouds,’ from their extent, their gentleness, their fulness of rain.” And this is “the meaning of those strange golden lights and purple flushes before the morning rain. The rain is sent to judge and feed us; but the light is the possession of the friends of God, that they may ascend thereto,—where the tabernacle veil will cross and part its rays no more.”*

* “Modern Painters,” vol. v., 141.

The real import does not reach this spiritual height. It is simply that the tremendous thunder brings to transgressors the terror of judgment, and the copious showers that follow water the parched earth for the sake of man. Of the justice and grace of God we are made aware when His angel spreads his wings over the world. In the darkened sky there is a crash as if the vast canopy of the firmament were torn asunder. And now a keen flash lights the gloom for a moment; anon it is swallowed up as if the inverted sea, poured in cataracts upon the flame, extinguished it. Men recognise the Divine indignation, and even the lower animals seem to be aware.

“He covereth His hands with the lightning,
He giveth it a charge against the adversary.
Its thunder telleth concerning Him,
Even the cattle concerning that which cometh up.”

Continued in the thirty-seventh chapter, the description appears to be from what is actually going on, a tremendous thunderstorm that shakes the earth. The sound comes, as it were, out of the mouth of God, reverberating from sky to earth and from earth to sky, and rolling away under the whole heaven. Again there are lightnings, and “*He stayeth them not when His voice is heard.*” Swift ministers of judgment and death they are darted upon the world.

We are asked to consider a fresh wonder, that of the snow which at certain times replaces the gentle or copious rain. The cold fierce showers of winter arrest the labour of man, and even the wild beasts seek their dens and abide in their lurking-places. “The Angel of the Sea,” says Mr. Ruskin, “has also another message,—in the ‘great rain of His strength,’ rain of trial, sweeping away ill-set foundations. Then his robe is not spread softly over the whole heaven as a veil, but sweeps back from his shoulders, ponderous, oblique, terrible—leaving his sword-arm free.” God is still directly at work. “*Out of His chamber cometh the storm and cold out of the north.*” His breath gives the frost and straitens the breadth of waters. Towards Armenia, perhaps, the poet has seen the rivers and lakes frozen from bank to bank. Our science explains the result of diminished temperature; we know under what conditions hoar-frost is deposited and how hail is formed. Yet all we can say is that thus and thus the forces act. Beyond that we remain like this writer, awed in presence of a heavenly Will which determines the course and appoints the marvels of nature.

“By the breath of God ice is given,
And the breadth of the waters is straitened.
Also He ladeth the thick cloud with moisture,
He spreadeth His lightning cloud abroad;
And it is turned about by His guidance,
That it may do whatsoever He commandeth
Upon the face of the whole earth.”

Here, again, moral purpose is found. The poet attributes to others his own susceptibility. Men see and learn and tremble. It is for correction, that the careless may be brought to think of God’s greatness, and the evil-doers of His power, that sinners being made afraid may turn from their rebellion. Or, it is for His earth, that rain may beautify it and fill the rivers and springs at which the beasts of the valley drink. Or, yet again, the purpose is mercy. Even the tremendous thunderstorm may be fraught with mercy to men. From the burning heat, oppressive, intolerable, the rains that follow bring deliverance.

Men are fainting for thirst, the fields are languishing. In compassion God sends His great cloud on its mission of life.

More delicate, needing finer observation, are the next objects of study.

'Dost thou know how God layeth His charge on them,
And causeth the light of His cloud to shine?
Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds,
The wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge?'

It is not clear whether the light of the cloud means the lightning again or the varied hues which make an Oriental sunset glorious in purple and gold. But the balancings of the clouds must be that singular power which the atmosphere has of sustaining vast quantities of watery vapour—either miles above the earth's surface where the filmy cirrus floats, dazzling white against the blue sky, or lower down where the rain-cloud trails along the hill-tops. Marvelous it is that, suspended thus in the air, immense volumes of water should be carried from the surface of the ocean to be discharged in fructifying rain.

Then again:—

"How are thy garments warm
When the earth is still because of the south wind?"

The sensation of dry hot clothing is said to be very notable in the season of the siroccos or south winds, also the extraordinary stillness of nature under the same oppressive influence. "There is no living thing abroad to make a noise. The air is too weak and languid to stir the pendant leaves even of the tall poplars."

Finally the vast expanse of the sky, like a looking-glass of burnished metal stretched far over sea and land, symbolises the immensity of Divine power.

"Canst thou with Him spread out the sky
Which is strong as a molten mirror? . . .
And now men see not the light which is bright in the skies:
Yet the wind passeth and cleanseth them."

It is always bright beyond. Clouds only hide the splendid sunshine for a time. A wind rises and sweeps away the vapours from the glorious dome of heaven. "*Out of the north cometh golden splendour*"—for it is the north wind that drives on the clouds which, as they fly southward, are gilded by the rays of the sun. But with God is a splendour greater far, that of terrible majesty.

So the ode finishes abruptly, and Elihu states his own conclusion:—

"The Almighty! we cannot find Him out; He is excellent in power.
And in judgment and plenteous justice; He will not afflict.
Men do therefore fear Him;
He regardeth not any that are wise of heart."

Is Job wise in his own conceit? Does he think he can challenge the Divine government and show how the affairs of the world might have been better ordered? Does he think that he is himself treated unjustly because loss and disease have been appointed to him? Right thoughts of God will check all such ignorant notions and bring him a penitent back to the throne of the Eternal. It is a good and wise deduction; but Elihu has not vindicated God by showing in harmony with the noblest and finest ideas of righteousness men have, God supremely righteous, and beyond the

best and noblest mercy men love, God transcendently merciful and gracious. In effect his argument has been—The Almighty must be all-righteous, and any one is impious who criticises life. The whole question between Job and the friends remains unsettled still.

Elihu's failure is significant. It is the failure of an attempt made, as we have seen, centuries after the Book of Job was written, to bring it into the line of current religious opinion. Our examination of the whole reveals the narrow foundation on which Hebrew orthodoxy was reared and explains the developments of a later time. Job may be said to have left no disciples in Israel. His brave personal hope and passionate desire for union with God seem to have been lost in the fervid national bigotry of post-exilic ages; and while they faded, the Pharisee and Sadducee of after days began to exist. They are both here in germ. Springing from one seed, they are alike in their ignorance of Divine justice; and we do not wonder that Christ, coming to fulfil and more than fulfil the hope of humanity, appeared to both the Pharisee and Sadducee of His time as an enemy of religion, of the country, and of God.

THE VOICE FROM THE STORM.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MUSIC IN THE BOUNDS OF LAW."

JOB xxxviii.

OVER the shadowed life of Job, and the world shadowed for him by his own intellectual and moral gloom, a storm sweeps, and from the storm issues a voice. With the symbol of vast Divine energy comes an answer to the problem of tried and troubled human life. It has seemed, as time went by, that the appeals of the sufferer were unheard, that the rigid silence of heaven would never break. But had he not heard? "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Job should have known. What is given will be a fresh presentation of ideas now to be seen in their strength and bearing because the mind is prepared and made eager. The man, brought to the edge of pessimism, will at last look abroad and follow the doings of the Almighty even through storm and darkness. Does the sublime voice issue only to overbear and reduce him to silence? Not so. His reason is addressed, his thought demanded, his power to recognise truth is called for. A great demonstration is made, requiring at every step the response of mind and heart. The Creator reveals His care for the creation, for the race of men, for every kind of being and every need. He declares His own glory, of transcendent power, of immeasurable wisdom, also of righteous and holy will. He can afflict men, and yet do them no wrong but good, for they are His men, for whom He provides as they cannot provide for themselves. Trial, sorrow, change, death—is anything "disastrous" that God ordains? Impossible. His care of His creation is beyond our imagining. There are no disasters in His universe unless where the will of man divorced from faith would tear a way

for itself through the fastnesses of His eternal law.

Eloah is known through the tempest as well as in the dewdrop and the tender blossom. What is capable of strength must be made strong. That is the Divine law throughout all life, for the cedar on Lebanon, the ox in the yoke, the lion of the Libyan desert. Chiefly the moral nature of man must find its strength. The glory of God is to have sons who can endure. The easy piety of a happy race, living among flowers and offering incense for adoration, cannot satisfy Him of the eternal will, the eternal power. Men must learn to trust, to endure, to hold themselves undismayed when the fury of tempest scours their world and heaps the driven snow above their dwellings and death comes cold and stark. Struggle man shall, struggle on through strange and dreadful trials till he learn to live in the thought of Divine Will and Love, co-ordinate in one Lord true to Himself, worthy to be trusted through all cloud and clash. Ever is He pursuing an end conformable to the nature of the beings He has created, and, with man an end conformable to his nature, the possibilities of endless moral development, the widening movements of increasing life. Let man know this and submit, know this and rejoice. A dream-life shall be impossible to man, use his day as he will.

Is this Divine utterance from the storm required by the progress of the drama? Some have doubted whether its tenor is consistent with the previous line of thought; yet the whole movement sets distinctly towards it, could terminate in no other way. The prologue, affirming God's satisfaction with His servant, left us assured that if Job remained pure and kept his faith his name would not be blotted from the book of life. He has kept his integrity; no falsehood or baseness can be charged against him. But is he still with God in sincere and humble faith? We have heard him accuse the Most High of cruel enmity. At the close he lies under the suspicion of impious daring and revolt, and it appears that he may have fallen from grace. The author has created this uncertainty knowing well that the verdict of God Himself is needed to make clear the spiritual position and fate of His servant.

Besides this, Job's own suspense remains, of more importance from a dramatic point of view. He is not yet reconciled to providence. Those earnest cries for light, which have gone forth passionately, pathetically to heaven, wait for an answer. They must have some reply, if the poet can frame a fit deliverance for the Almighty. The task is indeed severe. On one side there is restraint, for the original motive of the whole action and especially the approval of Job by his Divine Master are not to be divu'ged. The tried man must not enjoy vindication at the risk of losing humility, his victory over his friends must not be too decisive for his own spiritual good, nor out of keeping with the ordinary current of experience. On the other side lies the difficulty of representing Divine wisdom in contrast to that of man, and of dealing with the hopes and claims of Job, for vindication, for deliverance from Sheol, for the help of a Redeemer, either in the way of approving them or setting them definitely aside. Urged by a necessity of his own creating, the author has to seek a solution, and he finds one equally convincing and modest,

crowning his poem with a passage of marvellous brilliance, aptness, and power.

It has already been remarked that the limitations of genius and inspiration are distinctly visible here. The bold prophetic hopes put into Job's mouth were beyond the author's power to verify even to his own satisfaction. He might himself believe in them, ardently, as flashes of heavenly foresight, but he would not affirm them to be Divine in their source because he could not give adequate proof. The ideas were thrown out to live in human thought, to find verification when God's time came. Hence, in the speeches of the Almighty, the ground taken is that of natural religion, the testimony of the wonderful system of things open to the observation of all. Is there a Divine Redeemer for the faithful whose lives have been overshadowed? Shall they be justified in some future state of being when their bodies have mouldered into dust? The voice from on high does not affirm that this shall be; the reverence of the poet does not allow so daring an assumption of the right to speak for God. On the contrary, the danger of meddling with things too high is emphasised in the very utterance which a man of less wisdom and humility would have filled with his own ideas. Nowhere is there a finer instance of self-denying moderation for the sake of absolute truth. This writer stands among men as a humble student of the ways of God—is content to stand there at the last, making no claim beyond the knowledge of what may be learned from the creation and providence of God.

And Job is allowed no special providence. The voice from the storm is that which all may hear; it is the universal revelation suited to every man. At first sight we are disposed to agree with those who think the appearance of the Almighty upon the scene to be in itself strange. But there is no Theophany. There is no revelation or message to suit a particular case, to gratify one who thinks himself more important than his fellow-creatures, or imagines the problem of his life abnormally difficult. Again the wisdom of the author goes hand in hand with his modesty; what is within his compass he sees to be sufficient for his end.

To some the utterances put into the mouth of the Almighty may seem to come far short of the occasion. Beginning to read the passage they may say:—Now we are to have the fruit of the poet's most strenuous thought, the highest inspiration. The Almighty when He speaks in person will be made to reveal His gracious purposes with men and the wisdom of His government in those cases that have baffled the understanding of Job and of all previous thinkers. Now we shall see a new light penetrating the thick darkness and confusion of human affairs. Since this is not done there may be disappointment. But the author is concerned with religion. His maxim is, "The fear of God that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." He has in his drama done much for human thought and theology. The complications which had kept faith from resting in true spirituality on God have been removed. The sufferer is a just man, a good man whom God Himself has pronounced to be perfect. Job is not afflicted because he has sinned. The author has set in the clearest possible light all arguments he could find for the old notion that transgression and wickedness alone are followed by suffering in

this world. He has shown that this doctrine is not in accordance with fact, and has made the proof so clear that a thoughtful person could never afterwards remember the name of Job and hold that false view. But apart from the prologue, no explanation is given of the sufferings of the righteous in this life. The author never says in so many words that Job profited by his afflictions. It might be that the righteous man, tried by loss and pain, was established in his faith for ever, above all possibility of doubt. But this is not affirmed. It might be that men were purified by their sufferings, that they found through the hot furnace a way into the noblest life. But this is not brought forward as the ultimate explanation. Or it might be that the good man in affliction was the burden-bearer of others, so that his travail and blood helped their spiritual life. But there is no hint of this. Jehovah is to be vindicated. He appears; He speaks out of the storm, and vindicates Himself. Not, however, by showing the good His servant has gained in the discipline of bereavement, loss, and pain. It is by claiming implicit trust from men, by showing that their wisdom at its highest is foolishness to His, and that His administration of the affairs of His world is in glorious faithfulness as well as power.

Is it disappointing? Does the writer neglect the great question his drama has stirred? Or has he not, with art far more subtle than we may at first suppose, introduced into the experience of Job a certain spiritual gain—thoughts and hopes that widen and clear the horizon of his life? In the depth of despondency, just because he has been driven from every earthly comfort and stay, and can look only for miserable death, Job sees in prophetic vision a higher hope. He asks, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The question remains with him and seeks an answer in the intervals of suffering. Then at length he ventures on the presage of a future state of existence, "whether in the body or out of the body he cannot tell, God knoweth,"—"My Redeemer liveth; I shall see God for me." This prevision, this dawning of the light of immortality upon his soul is the gain that has entered into Job's experience. Without the despondency, the bitterness of bereavement, the sense of decay, and the pressure of cruel charges made against him, these illuminating thoughts would never have come to the sufferer; and along this line the author may have intended to justify the afflictions of the righteous man and quietly vindicate the dealings of God with him.

If further it be asked why this is not made prominent in the course of the Almighty's address from the storm, an answer may be found. The hope did not remain clear, inspiring, in the consciousness of Job. The waves of sorrow and doubt rolled over his mind again. It was but a flash, and like lightning at midnight it passed and left the gloom once more. Only when by long reflection and patient thought Job found himself reassured in the expectation of a future life, would he know what trouble had done for him. And it was not in keeping with the gradual development of religious faith that the Almighty should forestall discovery by reviving the hope which for a time had faded. We may take it that with rare skill the writer avoids insistence on the value of a vision which could appear charged with sustaining hope only after it was again apprehended, first as a possibility, then as

a revelation, finally as a sublime truth disentangled from doubt and error.

Assuming this to have been in the author's mind, we understand why the Almighty, speaking from the storm, makes no reference to the gain of affliction. There is a return upon the original motive of the drama,—the power of the Creator to inspire, the right of the Creator to expect faith in Himself, whatever losses and trials men have to endure. Neither the integrity of man nor the claim of man upon God is first in the mind of the author, but the majestic Godhead that gathers to itself the adoration of the universe. Man is of importance because he glorifies his Creator. Human righteousness is of narrow range. It is not by his righteousness man is saved, that is to say, finds his true place, the development of his nature and the end of his existence. He is redeemed from vanity and evanescence by his faith, because in exercising it, clinging to it through profoundest darkness, amidst thunder and storm, when deep calleth to deep, he enters into that wise and holy order of the universe which God has appointed,—he lives and finds more abundant life.

It is not denied that on the way toward perfect trust in his Creator man is free to seek explanation of all that befalls him. Our philosophy is no impertinence. Thought must have liberty; religion must be free. The light of justice has been kindled within us that we may seek the answering light of the sublime justice of God in all His dealings with ourselves and with mankind. This is clearly before the mind of the author, and it is the underlying idea throughout the long colloquies between Job and his friends. They are allowed a freedom of thought and speech that sometimes astonishes, for they are engaged in the great inquiry which is to bring clear and uplifting knowledge of the Creator and His will. For us it is a varied inquiry, much of it to be conducted in pain and sorrow, on the bare hillside or on the rough sea, in the face of peril, change, and disappointment. But if always the *morale* of life, the fulfilment of life bestowed by God as man's trust and inestimable possession are kept in view, freedom is ample, and man, doing his part, need have no fear of incurring the anger of the Divine Judge: the terrors of low religions have no place here.

But now Job is given to understand that liberty has its limitation; and the lesson is for many. To one half of mankind, allowing the mind to lie inert or expending it on vanities, the word has come—Inquire what life is, what its trials mean, how the righteous government of God is to be traced. Now, to the other half of mankind, too adventurous in experiment and judgment, the address of the Almighty says: Be not too bold; far beyond your range the activities of the Creator pass: it is not for you to understand the whole, but always to be reverent, always to trust. The limits of knowledge are shown, and, beyond them, the Divine King stands in glory inaccessible, proved true and wise and just, claiming for Himself the dutiful obedience and adoration of His creatures. Throughout the passage we now consider this is the strain of argument, and the effect on Job's mind is found in his final confession.

Let man remember that his main business here is not to question but to glorify his Creator. For the time when this book was written the truth lay here; and here it lies even for us, and

will lie for those who come after us. In these days it is often forgotten. Science questions, philosophy probes into the reasons of what has been and is, men lose themselves in labyrinths at the far extremities of which they hope to find something which shall make life inexpressibly great or strong or sweet. And even theology and criticism of the Bible occasionally fall into the same error of fancying that to inquire and know are the main things, that although inquiry and knowledge do not at every stage aid the service of the Most High they may promote life. The colloquies and controversies over Job and his friends are recalled to their real duty, which is to recognise the eternal majesty and grace of the Unseen God, to trust Him and do His will. And our experiments and questions over in every department of knowledge, to this we ought to come. Nay, every step in our quest of knowledge should be taken with the desire to find God more gloriously wise and faithful, that our obedience may be more zealous, our worship more profound. There are only two states of thought or dominant methods possible when we enter on the study of the facts of nature and providence or any research that allures our reason. We must go forward either in the faith of God or with the desire to establish ourselves in knowledge, comfort, and life apart from God. If the second way is chosen, light is turned into darkness, all discoveries prove mere apples of Sodom, and the end is vanity. But on the other line, with life which is good to have, with the consciousness of ability to think and will and act, faith should begin, faith in life and the Maker of life; and if every study is pursued in resolute faith, man refusing to give existence itself the lie, the mind seeking and finding new and larger reasons for trust and service of the Creator, the way will be that of salvation. The faults and errors of one who follows this way will not enter into his soul to abide there and darken it. They will be confessed and forgiven. Such is the philosophy of the Book of Job, and the final vindication of His servant by the Almighty.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RECONCILIATION.

JOB xxxviii. 1-xlii. 6.

THE main argument of the address ascribed to the Almighty is contained in chaps. xxxviii. and xxxix., and in the opening verses of chap. xlii. Job makes submission and owns his fault in doubting the faithfulness of Divine providence. The intervening passage containing descriptions of the great animals of the Nile is scarcely in the same high strain of poetic art or on the same high level of cogent reasoning. It seems rather of a hyperbolic kind, suggesting failure from the clear aim and inspiration of the previous portion.

The voice proceeding from the storm-cloud, in which the Almighty veils Himself and yet makes His presence and majesty felt, begins with a question of reproach and a demand that the intellect of Job shall be roused to its full vigour in order to apprehend the ensuing argument. The closing words of Job had shown misconception of his position before God. He spoke of presenting a claim to Eloah and setting forth his

integrity so that his plea would be unanswerable. Circumstances had brought upon him a stain from which he had a right to be cleared, and, implying this, he challenged the Divine government of the world as wanting in due exhibition of righteousness. This being so, Job's rescue from doubt must begin with a conviction of error. Therefore the Almighty says:—

“Who is this darkening counsel
By words without knowledge?
Gird up now thy loins like a man;
For I will demand of thee and answer thou Me.”

The aim of the author throughout the speech from the storm is to provide a way of reconciliation between man in affliction and perplexity and the providence of God that bewilders and threatens to crush him. To effect this something more than a demonstration of the infinite power and wisdom of God is needed. Zophar affirming the glory of the Almighty to be higher than heaven, deeper than Sheol, longer than the earth, broader than the sea, basing on this a claim that God is unchangeably just, supplies no principle of reconciliation. In like manner Bildad, requiring the abasement of man as sinful and despicable in presence of the Most High with whom are dominion and fear, shows no way of hope and life. But the series of questions now addressed to Job forms an argument in a higher strain, as cogent as could be reared on the basis of that manifestation of God which the natural world supplies. The man is called to recognise not illimitable power only, the eternal supremacy of the Unseen King, but also other qualities of the Divine rule. Doubt of providence is rebuked by a wide induction from the phenomena of the heavens and of life upon the earth, everywhere disclosing law and care co-operant to an end.

First Job is asked to think of the creation of the world or visible universe. It is a building firmly set on deep-laid foundations. As if by line and measure it was brought into symmetrical form according to the archetypal plan; and when the corner-stone was laid as of a new palace in the great dominion of God there was joy in heaven. The angels of the morning broke into song, the sons of the Elohim, high in the ethereal dwellings among the fountains of light and life, shouted for joy. In poetic vision the writer beholds that work of God and those rejoicing companies; but to himself, as to Job, the question comes—What knows man of the marvellous creative effort which he sees in imagination? It is beyond human range. The plan and the method are equally incomprehensible. Of this let Job be assured—that the work was not done in vain. Not for the creation of a world the history of which was to pass into confusion would the morning stars have sung together. He who beheld all that He had made and declared it very good would not suffer triumphant evil to confound the promise and purpose of His toil.

Next there is the great ocean flood, once confined as in the womb of primæval chaos, which came forth in living power, a giant from its birth. What can Job tell, what can any man tell of that wonderful evolution, when, swathed in rolling clouds and thick darkness, with vast energy the flood of waters rushed tumultuously to its appointed place? There is a law of use and power for the ocean, a limit also beyond which

it cannot pass. Does man know how that is?—must he not acknowledge the wise will and benignant care of Him who holds in check the stormy devastating sea?

And who has control of the light? The morning dawns not by the will of man. It takes hold of the margin of the earth over which the wicked have been ranging, and as one shakes out the dust from a sheet, it shakes them forth visible and ashamed. Under it the earth is changed, every object made clear and sharp as figures on clay stamped with a seal. The forests, fields, and rivers are seen like the embroidered or woven designs of a garment. What is this light? Who sends it on the mission of moral discipline? Is not the great God who commands the dayspring to be trusted even in the darkness? Beneath the surface of earth is the grave and the dwelling-place of the nether gloom. Does Job know, does any man know, what lies beyond the gates of death? Can any tell where the darkness has its central seat? One there is whose is the night as well as the morning. The mysteries of futurity, the arcana of nature lie open to the Eternal alone.

Atmospheric phenomena, already often described, reveal variously the unsearchable wisdom and thoughtful rule of the Most High. The force that resides in the hail, the rains that fall on the wilderness where no man is, satisfying the waste and desolate ground and causing the tender grass to spring up, these imply a breadth of gracious purpose that extends beyond the range of human life. Whose is the fatherhood of the rain, the ice, the hoar-frost of heaven? Man is subject to the changes these represent; he cannot control them. And far higher are the gleaming constellations that are set in the forehead of night. Have the hands of man gathered the Pleiades and strung them like burning gems on a chain of fire? Can the power of man unloose Orion and let the stars of that magnificent constellation wander through the sky? The Mazzaroth or Zodiacal signs that mark the watches of the advancing year, the Bear and the stars of her train—who leads them forth? The laws of heaven, too, those ordinances regulating the changes of temperature and the seasons, does man appoint them? Is it he who brings the time when thunderstorms break up the drought and open the bottles of heaven, or the time of heat "when the dust gathers into a mass, and the clods cleave fast together"? Without this alternation of drought and moisture recurring by law from year to year the labour of man would be in vain. Is not He who governs the changing seasons to be trusted by the race that profits most of His care?

At verse 39 attention is turned from inanimate nature to the living creatures for which God provides. With marvellous poetic skill they are painted in their need and strength, in the urgency of their instincts, timid or tameless or cruel. The Creator is seen rejoicing in them as His handiwork, and man is held bound to exult in their life and see in the provision made for its fulfilment a guarantee of all that his own bodily nature and spiritual being may require. Notable especially to us is the close relation between this portion and certain sayings of our Lord in which the same argument brings the same conclusion. "Two passages of God's speaking," says Mr. Ruskin, "one in the Old and one in the New Testament, possess, it seems

to me, a different character from any of the rest, having been uttered, the one to effect the last necessary change in the mind of a man whose piety was in other respects perfect; and the other as the first statement to all men of the principles of Christianity by Christ Himself—I mean the 38th to 41st chapters of the Book of Job and the Sermon on the Mount. Now the first of these passages is from beginning to end nothing else than a direction of the mind which was to be perfected, to humble observance of the works of God in nature. And the other consists only in the inculcation of three things: 1st, right conduct; 2nd, looking for eternal life; 3rd, trusting God through watchfulness of His dealings with His creation."* The last point is that which brings into closest parallelism the doctrine of Christ and that of the author of Job, and the resemblance is not accidental, but of such a nature as to show that both saw the underlying truth in the same way and from the same point of spiritual and human interest.

"Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lioness?
Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
When they couch in their dens
And abide in the covert to lie in wait?
Who provideth for the raven his food,
When his young ones cry unto God
And wander for lack of meat?"

Thus man is called to recognise the care of God for creatures strong and weak, and to assure himself that his life will not be forgotten. And in His Sermon on the Mount our Lord says "Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?" The parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke approaches still more closely the language in Job—"Consider the ravens that they sow not neither reap."

The wild goats or goats of the rock and their young that soon become independent of the mothers' care; the wild asses that make their dwelling-place in the salt land and scorn the tumult of the city; the wild ox that cannot be tamed to go in the furrow or bring home the sheaves in harvest; the ostrich that "leaveth her eggs on the earth and warmeth them in the dust"; the horse in his might, his neck clothed with the quivering mane, mocking at fear, smelling the battle afar off; the hawk that soars into the blue sky; the eagle that makes her nest on the rock,—all these, graphically described, speak to Job of the innumerable forms of life, simple, daring, strong, and savage, that are sustained by the power of the Creator. To think of them is to learn that, as one among the dependants of God, man has his part in the system of things, his assurance that the needs God has ordained will be met. The passage is poetically among the finest in Hebrew literature, and it is more. In its place, with the limit the writer has set for himself, it is most apt as a basis of reconciliation and a new starting-point in thought for all like Job who doubt the Divine faithfulness. Why should man, because he can think of the providence of God, be alone suspicious of the justice and wisdom on which all creatures rely? Is not his power of thought given to him that he may pass beyond the animals and praise the Divine Provider on their behalf and his own?

* "Modern Painters," vol. iii., p. 397.

Man needs more than the raven, the lion, the mountain goat, and the eagle. He has higher instincts and cravings. Daily food for the body will not suffice him, nor the liberty of the wilderness. He would not be satisfied if, like the hawk and eagle, he could soar above the hills. His desires for righteousness, for truth, for fullness of that spiritual life by which he is allied to God Himself, are his distinction. So, then, He who has created the soul will bring it to perfectness. Where or how its longings shall be fulfilled may not be for man to know. But he can trust God. That is his privilege when knowledge fails. Let him lay aside all vain thoughts and ignorant doubts. Let him say: God is inconceivably great, unsearchably wise, infinitely just and true; I am in His hands, and all is well.

The reasoning is from the less to the greater, and is therefore in this case conclusive. The lower animals exercise their instincts and find what is suited to their needs. And shall it not be so with man? Shall he, able to discern the signs of an all-embracing plan, not confess and trust the sublime justice it reveals? The slightness of human power is certainly contrasted with the omnipotence of God, and the ignorance of man with the omniscience of God; but always the Divine faithfulness, glowing behind, shines through the veil of nature, and it is this Job is called to recognise. Has he almost doubted everything, because from his own life outward to the verge of human existence wrong and falsehood seemed to reign? But how, then, could the countless creatures depend upon God for the satisfaction of their desires and the fulfilment of their varied life? Order in nature means order in the scheme of the world as it affects humanity. And order in the providence which controls human affairs must have for its first principle fairness, justice, so that every deed shall have due reward.

Such is the Divine law perceived by our inspired author "through the things that are made." The view of nature is still different from the scientific, but there is certainly an approach to that reading of the universe praised by M. Renan as peculiarly Hellenic, which "saw the Divine in what is harmonious and evident." Not here at least does the taunt apply that, from the point of view of the Hebrew, "ignorance is a cult and curiosity a wicked attempt to explain," that "even in the presence of a mystery which assails and ruins him, man attributes in a special manner the character of grandeur to that which is inexplicable," that "all phenomena whose cause is hidden, all beings whose end cannot be perceived, are to man a humiliation and a motive for glorifying God." The philosophy of the final portion of Job is of that kind which presses beyond secondary causes and finds the real ground of creaturely existence. Intellectual apprehension of the innumerable and far-reaching threads of Divine purpose and the secrets of the Divine will is not attempted. But the moral nature of man is brought into touch with the glorious righteousness of God. Thus the reconciliation is revealed for which the whole poem has made preparation. Job has passed through the furnace of trial and the deep waters of doubt, and at last the way is opened for him into a wealthy place. Till the Son of God Himself come to clear the mystery of suffering no larger reconciliation is possible. Accepting the

inevitable boundaries of knowledge, the mind may at length have peace.

And Job finds the way of reconciliation.

"I know that Thou canst do all things,
And that no purpose of Thine can be restrained.
'Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge?'
Then have I uttered what I understood not,
Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.
'Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me.'
I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now mine eye seeth Thee,
Wherefore I repudiate my words and repent in dust
and ashes."

All things God can do, and where His purposes are declared there is the pledge of their accomplishment. Does man exist?—it must be for some end that will come about. Has God planted in the human mind spiritual desires?—they shall be satisfied. Job returns on the question that accused him—"Who is this darkening counsel?" It was he himself who obscured counsel by ignorant words. He had only heard of God then, and walked in the vain belief of a traditional religion. His efforts to do duty and to avert the Divine anger by sacrifice had alike sprung from the imperfect knowledge of a dream-life that never reached beyond words to facts and things. God was greater far than he had ever thought, nearer than he had ever conceived. His mind is filled with a sense of the Eternal power, and overwhelmed by proofs of wisdom to which the little problems of man's life can offer no difficulty.

"Now mine eye seeth Thee." The vision of God is to his soul like the dazzling light of day to one issuing from a cavern. He is in a new world where every creature lives and moves in God. He is under a government that appears new because now the grand comprehensiveness and minute care of Divine providence are realised. Doubt of God and difficulty in acknowledging the justice of God are swept away by the magnificent demonstration of vigour, spirit, and sympathy, which Job had as yet failed to connect with the Divine Life. Faith therefore finds freedom, and its liberty is reconciliation, redemption. He cannot indeed behold God face to face and hear the judgment of acquittal for which he had longed and cried. Of this, however, he does not now feel the need. Rescued from the uncertainty in which he had been involved—all that was beautiful and good appearing to quiver like a mirage—he feels life again to have its place and use in the Divine order. It is the fulfilment of Job's great hope, so far as it can be fulfilled in this world. The question of his integrity is not formally decided. But a larger question is answered, and the answer satisfies meantime the personal desire.

Job makes no confession of sin. His friends and Elihu, all of whom endeavour to find evil in his life, are entirely at fault. The repentance is not from moral guilt, but from the hasty and venturesome speech that escaped him in the time of trial. After all one's defence of Job one must allow that he does not at every point avoid the appearance of evil. There was need that he should repent and find new life in new humility. The discovery he has made does not degrade a man. Job sees God as great and true and faithful as he had believed Him to be, yea, greater and more faithful by far. He sees himself a creature of this great God and is exalted, an ignorant creature and is reproved. The larger

horizon which he demanded having opened to him, he finds himself much less than he had seemed. In the microcosm of his past dream-life and narrow religion he appeared great, perfect, worthy of all he enjoyed at the hand of God; but now, in the macrocosm, he is small, unwise, weak. God and the soul stand sure as before; but God's justice to the soul He has made is viewed along a different line. Not as a mighty sheik can Job now debate with the Almighty he has invoked. The vast ranges of being are unfolded, and among the subjects of the Creator he is one,—bound to praise the Almighty for existence and all it means. His new birth is finding himself little, yet cared for in God's great universe.

The writer is no doubt struggling with an idea he cannot fully express; and in fact he gives no more than the pictorial outline of it. But, without attributing sin to Job, he points, in the confession of ignorance, to the germ of a doctrine of sin. Man, even when upright, must be stung to dissatisfaction, to a sense of imperfection—to realise his fall as a new birth in spiritual evolution. The moral ideal is indicated, the boundlessness of duty and the need for an awakening of man to his place in the universe. The dream-life now appears a clouded partial existence, a period of lost opportunities and barren vain-glory. Now opens the greater life in the light of God.

And at the last the challenge of the Almighty to Satan with which the poem began stands justified. The Adversary cannot say,—The hedge set around Thy servant broken down, his flesh afflicted, now he has cursed Thee to Thy face. Out of the trial Job comes, still on God's side, more on God's side than ever, with a nobler faith more strongly founded on the rock of truth. It is, we may say, a prophetic parable of the great test to which religion is exposed in the world, its difficulties and dangers and final triumph. To confine the reference to Israel is to miss the grand scope of the poem. At the last, as at the first, we are beyond Israel, out in a universal problem of man's nature and experience. By his wonderful gift of inspiration, painting the sufferings and the victory of Job, the author is a herald of the great advent. He is one of those who prepared the way not for a Jewish Messiah, the redeemer of a small people, but for the Christ of God, the Son of Man, the Saviour of the world.

A universal problem, that is, a question of every human age, has been presented and within limits brought to a solution. But it is not the supreme question of man's life. Beneath the doubts and fears with which this drama has dealt lie darker and more stormy elements. The vast controversy in which every human soul has a share oversweeps the land of Uz and the trial of Job. From his life the conscience of sin is excluded. The author exhibits a soul tried by outward circumstances; he does not make his hero share the thoughts of judgment of the evil-doer. Job represents the believer in the furnace of providential pain and loss. He is neither a sinner nor a sin-bearer. Yet the book leads on with no faltering movement toward the great drama in which every problem of religion centres. Christ's life, character, work cover the whole region of spiritual faith and struggle, of conflict and reconciliation, of temptation and victory, sin and salvation; and while the problem

is exhaustively wrought out the Reconciler stands divinely free of all entanglement. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Job's honest life emerges at last, from a narrow range of trial into personal reconciliation and redemption through the grace of God. Christ's pure heavenly life goes forward in the Spirit through the full range of spiritual trial, bearing every need of erring man, confirming every wistful hope of the race, yet revealing with startling force man's immemorial quarrel with the light, and convicting him in the hour that it saves him. Thus for the ancient inspired drama there is set, in the course of evolution, another, far surpassing it, the Divine tragedy of the universe, involving the spiritual omnipotence of God. Christ has to overcome not only doubt and fear, but the devastating godlessness of man, the strange sad enmity of the carnal mind. His triumph in the sacrifice of the cross leads religion forth beyond all difficulties and dangers into eternal purity and calm. That is—through Him the soul of believing man is reconciled by a transcendent spiritual law to nature and providence, and his spirit consecrated for ever to the holiness of the Eternal.

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God, as set forth in the drama of Job with freshness and power by one of the masters of theology, by no means covers the whole ground of Divine action. The righteous man is called and enabled to trust the righteousness of God; the good man is brought to confide in that Divine goodness which is the source of his own. But the evil-doer remains unconstrained by grace, unmoved by sacrifice. We have learned a broader theology, a more strenuous yet a more gracious doctrine of the Divine sovereignty. The induction by which we arrive at the law is wider than nature, wider than the providence that reveals infinite wisdom, universal equity and care. Rightly did a great Puritan theologian take his stand on the conviction of God as the one power in heaven and earth and hell; rightly did he hold to the idea of Divine will as the one sustaining energy of all energies. But he failed just where the author of Job failed long before: he did not fully see the correlative principle of sovereign grace. The revelation of God in Christ, our Sacrifice and Redeemer, vindicates with respect to the sinful as well as the obedient the Divine act of creation. It shows the Maker assuming responsibility for the fallen, seeking and saving the lost; it shows one magnificent sweep of evolution which starts from the manifestation of God in creation and returns through Christ to the Father, laden with the manifold immortal gains of creative and redeeming power.

CHAPTER XXIX.

EPILOGUE.

JOB xlii. 7-17.

AFTER the argument of the Divine voice from the storm the epilogue is a surprise, and many have doubted whether it is in line with the rest of the work. Did Job need these multitudes of camels and sheep to supplement his new faith and his reconciliation to the Almighty will? Is there not something incongruous in the large

award of temporal good, and even something unnecessary in the renewed honour among men? To us it seems that a good man will be satisfied with the favour and fellowship of a loving God. Yet, assuming that the conclusion is a part of the history on which the poem was founded, we can justify the blaze of splendour that bursts on Job after sorrow, instruction, and reconciliation.

Life only can reward life. That great principle was rudely shadowed forth in the old belief that God protects His servants even to a green old age. The poet of our book clearly apprehended the principle; it inspired his noblest flights. Up to the closing moment Job has lived strongly, alike in the mundane and the moral region. How is he to find continued life? The author's power could not pass the limits of the natural in order to promise a reward. Not yet was it possible, even for a great thinker, to affirm that continued fellowship with Eloah, that continued intellectual and spiritual energy which we name eternal life. A vision of it had come to him; he had seen the day of the Lord afar off, but dimly, by moments. To carry a life into it was beyond his power. Sheol made nothing perfect; and beyond Sheol no prophet eye had ever travelled.

There was nothing for it, then, but to use the history as it stood, adding symbolic touches, and show the restored life in development on earth, more powerful than ever, more esteemed, more richly endowed for good action. In one point the symbolism is very significant. Priestly office and power are given to Job; his sacrifice and intercession mediate between the friends who traduced him and Eloah who hears His faithful servant's prayer. The epilogue, as a parable of the reward of faithfulness, has deep and abiding truth. Wider opportunity of service, more cordial esteem and affection, the highest office that man can bear, these are the reward of Job; and with the terms of the symbolism we shall not quarrel who have heard the Lord say: "Well done, thou good servant, because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities!"

Another indication of purpose must not be overlooked. It may be said that Job's renewal in soul should have been enough for him, that he might have spent humbly what remained of life, at peace with men, in submission to God. But our author was animated by the Hebrew realism, that healthy belief in life as the gift of

God, which kept him always clear on the one hand of Greek fatalism, on the other of Oriental asceticism. This strong faith in life might well lead him into the details of sons and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, flocks, tribute, and years of honour. Nor did he care at the end though any one said that after all the Adversary was right. He had to show expanding life as God's recompense of faithfulness. Satan has long ago disappeared from the drama; and in any case the epilogue is chiefly a parable. It is, however, a parable involving, as our Lord's parables always involve, the sound view of man's existence, neither that of Prometheus on the rock nor of the grim anchorite in the Egyptian cave.

The writer's finest things came to him by flashes. When he reached the close of his book he was not able to make a tragedy and leave his readers rapt above the world. No pre-Christian thinker could have bound together the gleams of truth in a vision of the spirit's undying nature and immortal youth. But Job must find restored power and energy; and the close had to come, as it does, in the time sphere. We can bear to see a soul go forth naked, driven, tormented; we can bear to see the great good life pass from the scaffold or the fire, because we see God meeting it in the heaven. But we have seen Christ.

A third point is that for dramatic completeness the action had to bring Job to full acquittal in view of his friends. Nothing less will satisfy the sense of poetic justice which rules the whole work.

Finally, a biographical reminiscence may have given colour to the epilogue. If, as we have supposed, the author was once a man of substance and power in Israel, and, reduced to poverty in the time of the Assyrian conquest, found himself an exile in Arabia—the wistful sense of impotence in the world must have touched all his thinking. Perhaps he could not expect for himself renewed power and place; perhaps he had regretfully to confess a want of faithfulness in his own past. All the more might he incline to bring his great work to a close with a testimony to the worth and design of the earthly gifts of God, the temporal life which He appoints to man, that present discipline most graciously adapted to our present powers and yet full of preparation for a higher evolution, the life not seen, eternal in the heavens.



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