

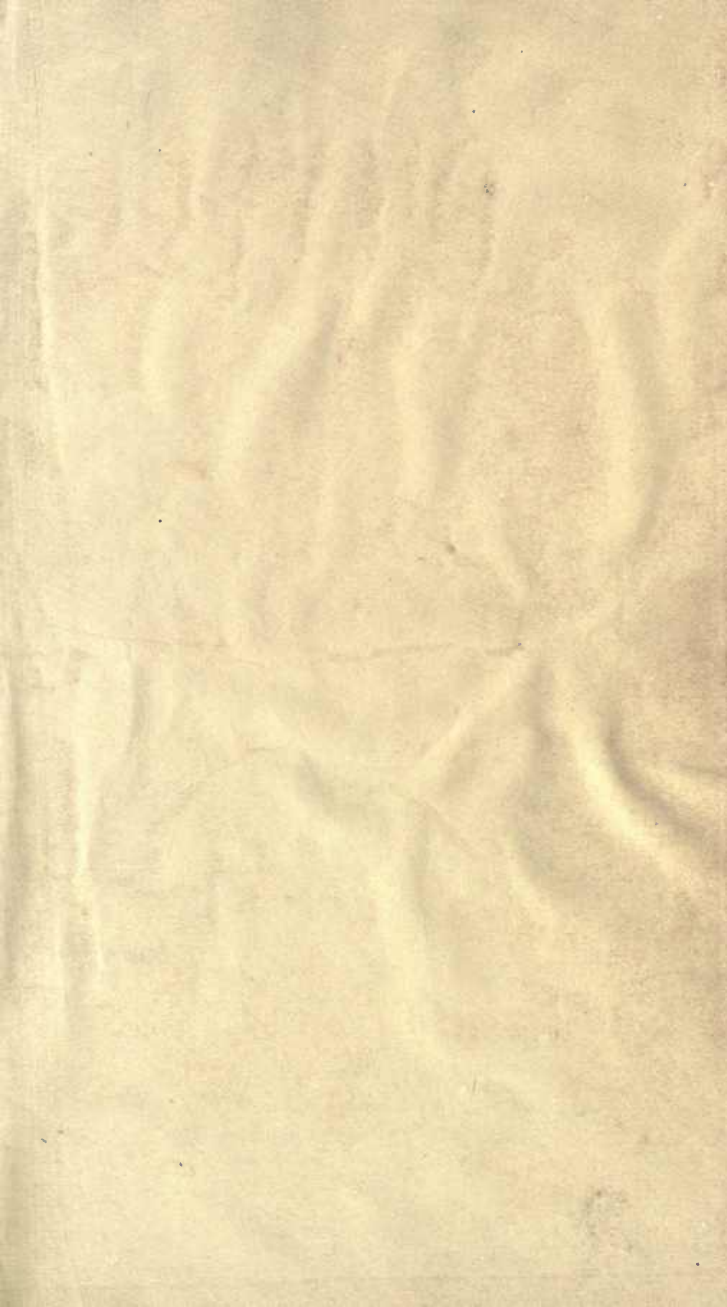
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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS volume brings down the female biography of Scripture from the age of Jephthah's daughter to the close of the Old Testament history.





לדעת מרבך, בהפצך וכן את  
על תלה באופן נכרך העתיק, לסדר את  
המסמכים לשבת על כסאם לעצור  
המה אשר?

המנהג להקריש ולהעריך את  
הדברים שעליהם יאסרו מקורש  
עד כה נעכרת אלילים, כל אלה יעברו  
החרה בעצם הימה תקום עתה לקחת  
אתה שיל אחך הנהגו והופיע להם  
יאועלין והיה  
נואל ופאק

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# SERMON I.

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## SAMSON'S MOTHER.

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JUDGES xiii. 22—24.

“And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson : and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him.”

THE mother of Samson, or the wife of Manoah, is the third female Scripture character of any note, whose name is not recorded by the pen of inspiration ; Lot's wife being the first, and the daughter of Pharaoh the second. But although her name is not transmitted, her history, like the brief notice of the Egyptian princess, is full of interest and instruction ; and in the passage we have selected for our text, she exhibits a strength of faith and understanding equal to that of any holy women whose lives we have been contemplating, and most worthy of our careful study and sedulous imitation.

We propose now to set before you the events with which she was connected, and to point out their practical application.

After the deliverance by the hand of Jephthah, the children of Israel appear to have enjoyed peace and prosperity for a considerable period. He lived six years after his second return to Mizpeh and the fulfilment of his vow, and he was succeeded in the government of his nation by Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, who, being men of great power, and exercising a salutary influence, maintained Israel in a flourishing state for twenty-five years more. At the end of that period, and perhaps partly in consequence of the death of these wise rulers, they relapsed into some of their former sins, and did evil again in the sight of the Lord. For this backsliding they were punished again with a severe and long-continued affliction: "And the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." What a blessing to a nation are wise and pious rulers! While such stand at the helm of affairs, the people are in security and happiness. And what a blessing to a nation are enlightened and judicious and holy ministers and chief pastors, who carefully watch over for good the flocks over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers! While such are invested with authority, the spiritual Zion shall strengthen her stakes, lengthen her cords, enlarge the place of her tent, stretch out the curtains of her habi-



tation, and break forth on every hand in the fruits of righteousness and joy. And what a calamity to a nation and its religion, when faithful guides are withdrawn, and perhaps succeeded by tyrants and hypocrites! Let us then ever pray that our dear country may be superintended by men of integrity and wisdom, and whose heart is right with God.

Israel had often before suffered from the incursions of the Philistines, from whom they were partly delivered in the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath; but they had never been so long and completely under the oppressive power of that nation as now. Forty years of bondage was the sore punishment inflicted for the evil which Jehovah's people had done in his sight. Forty years of wandering in a weary wilderness had been their punishment on a former occasion for their unbelief and disobedience. But since their entrance into Canaan, they had never, until now, been visited with such long-continued affliction. They were only eight years in subjection to Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, from which they were delivered by Othniel; only eighteen years in subjection to Eglon, king of Moab, from which they were delivered by Ehud; only twenty years in subjection to Jabin, king of Canaan, from which they were delivered by Deborah, Barak, and Jael; only seven years in subjection to the Midianites, from which they were delivered by Gideon the Abi-ezrite; and only

eighteen years in subjection to the children of Ammon, from which they were delivered by Jephthah the Gileadite. Their present bondage was therefore double the length of any one of their former oppressions by the heathens around them; and like the bondage of Egypt, seeming for a time to be interminable, was well calculated to overwhelm them with gloom and despair. And we cannot wonder at the severity and duration of their punishment, when we consider how often they had been admonished, how often reprov'd before without producing any permanent effect, how frequently they had been already delivered out of their distress on crying unto the Lord in their trouble, and making resolutions of amendment, and how, notwithstanding the Divine goodness towards them, they had relapsed again and again into idolatrous and abominable practices. We wonder not that a whole generation was allowed to pass away under a cloud of sorrow, before the Lord would again interpose in behalf of Israel—an emblematic representation of the doom of those in every age, who, regardless of God's threats and promises, of his judgments and mercies, persist in impenitence, and unbelief, and iniquity, until they are consigned to the blackness of darkness for ever.

Another generation had now sprung up, and the children, disciplined in the salutary school of affliction, sought the help of that God whom

their fathers had forsaken; and He, who in wrath remembers mercy, gave ear unto their cry. But so riveted were the chains of their slavery, by the continual oppression of forty years, that their emancipation had become a matter of extraordinary and almost unexampled difficulty. It was something like the difficulty of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Accordingly, we find a preparation made for it analogous to the mission of Moses to the court of Pharaoh. An angel of God makes his appearance, and mingles with the fiery flames in the presence of Manoah and his wife. He first presents himself to the wife, and announces unto her, who had hitherto been childless, the glad intelligence, that she should become a mother, saying unto her, "Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son." Many eminent persons have been born of mothers who were for many years childless wives, as Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Samuel, God often withholds his blessings, in order that we may the more appreciate them when they come; and they who wait for them with prayer, faith, and patience, shall at last obtain them in greater abundance than many who once appeared more highly favoured, according to the words of Isaiah, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child:

—for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.” And all persons whose birth or infancy has called forth remarkable Divine manifestations, have been either typically or instrumentally, or in both ways, connected with mighty deliverances wrought by Jehovah for the children of men. Isaac, whose birth was announced by the angel of God at Mamre, was that son of Abraham with whom Jehovah established his special covenant, and who was to be a type and progenitor of the Saviour of the world. Moses, who in childhood was so marvellously rescued from the drowning river, was destined to lead forth the chosen race out of the house of bondage. Samuel, who was the child of many prayers and many tears, and dedicated from his infancy by a grateful mother to the service of Jehovah, proved a national blessing in his day and generation. John the Baptist, whose birth was announced by the angel Gabriel, was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” And he, concerning whose birth and education a solemn communication was made by an angel of the Lord to the wife of Manoah, was to “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.” And all were but shadows of Him, concerning whom it was declared by an angel of God, “She shall bring



forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus : for he shall save his people from their sins."

The wife of Manoah immediately informed her husband of the extraordinary appearance she had witnessed, and the welcome intelligence she had heard. It was a man of God, according to her designation of him, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible. She had not ascertained from whence he came, nor by what name he was called, but there was such a majesty in his gait, such a lustre in his eyes, such a dignity in his mien, as commanded her respect and reverence, and constrained her implicit belief and confidence. The intelligence he had imparted was of the most gladsome and important character, and the instruction she had received was of a very strict and peculiar kind, directly bearing upon the end and object of the surprising communication, and therefore calculated to impress conviction of its reality and truth. She was to give birth to a son : that was news enough to thrill with joy the heart of a wife in Israel. But more than that, she was to give birth to a son who should cause the light of liberty to dawn on her oppressed country, and "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." This child of exalted destiny was to be brought up in a particular manner, and demanded the observance of a peculiarly sober and abstemious conduct on the part of his highly favoured

mother. She was to drink no wine nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; and no razor was to come on his head, for he was to be "a Nazarite unto God from the womb." We learn from the sixth chapter of Numbers, that those who vowed the vow of a Nazarite, or who separated themselves by a solemn dedication to the service of God, were, during the time of such separation, which was generally limited, required to observe the rules here specified<sup>1</sup>. But, in the case of this peculiar child, stricter observances still were required. Even the mother was to abstain from the meats and drinks forbidden to the Nazarite, and the son was to be a Nazarite, not for a limited time, but from his birth to his death: whence you may learn, that they who would be eminently serviceable to the cause of God and his people, must be very careful of their manner of living, give none offence by the conduct of themselves or families, and avoid every appearance of evil, following the example and praying for the spirit of Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

Manoah, upon receiving this intelligence from his wife, betook himself by earnest prayer unto God, and entreated that *he* might have an interview with the heavenly messenger, and learn from his own lips how he was to educate the promised child. God condescended to

<sup>1</sup> See Note I.



hearken to his prayer, and the angelic visitant appeared again to his wife, for the purpose of a more distinct and convincing manifestation; whereupon, she immediately went and informed her husband of it, and brought him to the place where the heavenly messenger presented himself. Manoah expressed entire satisfaction with the prospect held out to him from the information of his wife, saying to the mysterious visitant, "Now let thy words come to pass," and requested to know how the child of so extraordinary a promise was to be brought up. The angel answered, that the directions already given to his wife were to be exactly observed. He added no new precept to those he had given before. Manoah's curiosity and anxiety elicited no more than heaven had already vouchsafed to reveal. The will of God may be imparted in a few words, and the simplest, who are possessed of an honest and good heart, may without difficulty ascertain it. Manoah was not favoured with more knowledge than had been already communicated, but was only urged to practise what he knew to the best of his ability. Those who are not disposed to conform to the revealed will of heaven, without receiving some greater evidences than God has condescended to give, will be disappointed. Enough is revealed unto all to guide them in the way of salvation. That way is so plain, that the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein; and the simple and ignorant, if

there be a willing heart, may discover it as easily as the most learned and the most curious. I remember reading in the life of a very eminent scholar, that he complained to a friend of his imperfect perception of spiritual things, and faint realization of redeeming love. His friend answered, "The only way to obtain a greater and full assurance of faith is, to lead a holier life." If then we are ever troubled with doubts and misgivings, let us follow this excellent advice, remembering the words of our Saviour, "If any man shall do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

Manoah had desired no more information as to the promised child, but he wished to evince his gratitude to the herald of so great a blessing, and requested that he would partake of his hospitality. The heavenly messenger declined his invitation, and recommended him rather to offer a burnt offering unto the Lord. Manoah, perplexed as to the character of his mysterious visitant, endeavoured to ascertain some more particulars respecting him, by asking what was his name, and was answered, "Why askest thou my name, seeing it is secret?" or, as it may be more correctly translated, seeing it is wonderful. He then followed the recommendation to perform an act of worship, and offered up a burnt offering. He "took a kid, with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord," *i.e.* instead of preparing the kid to feast

his guests as he had intended, he changed it into a burnt offering, and the adjoining rock into an altar, and made an oblation unto the great disposer of all things. Then the angel of God did wondrously, in accordance with the intimation he had given of his name, being "mysteriously wonderful;" "for it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife," who had been quiet, but intensely interested spectators of the scene, "fell down on their faces to the ground." It would appear that the wonders he wrought were similar to those exhibited in the interview with Gideon, causing fire to rise up out of the rock and consume the sacrifice. But he did more on this occasion: like him, who spake unto Moses out of the midst of the burning bush, he mingled with the rising flame, and still, more than that, he ascended up to heaven in the sight of the astonished worshippers. The Being who did thus wondrously, was, according to the opinions of the best divines, the same being who appeared to Abraham and his wife at Mamre, and promised that Sarah should have a son; the same who wrestled with Jacob, and changed his name into Israel; the same who presented himself to the eyes of Joshua as captain of the Lord's host; the same who protected the three children in the midst of the burning fiery fur-

nace, even the second Person of the adorable Trinity, the only begotten Son of God, the destined Saviour of our fallen race from spiritual bondage and eternal ruin. He was the antitype of all temporal deliverers, and, therefore, He made Himself visible on many occasions previous to his incarnation, to indicate his presence with his imperilled and afflicted people, and to intimate that He should one day sojourn among the sons of men, and work out for them a mighty salvation indeed, and bring them into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Hence his appearance now to Manoah and his wife, to point out the approaching emancipation of Israel from the sore Philistine oppression of forty years. And whereas He commanded a burnt offering, He intimated "that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," and no possibility of escaping the kindling wrath of heaven against the workers of iniquity. And whereas He intermingled Himself with the rising flame, He taught us that these sacrifices were but shadows of the great atonement to be made for transgression, and that He must Himself become the propitiation for our sins, in order to completely re-establish the broken union between God and man, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness. "It is not possible," saith the Apostle to the Hebrews, "that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he



saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure." They did but typify; they afforded in themselves no real satisfaction to God's justice for the violation of his holy law. "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God: by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the ~~one~~ ~~once~~ ~~for~~ ~~all~~ once for all." He ascended up to heaven in the sight of Manoah and his wife, and thereby presignified the glorious period when, after "suffering death upon the cross for our redemption, and making there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," He should rise again from the dead, triumphant over all the powers of darkness, and show Himself again alive by many infallible proofs; and finally, while his disciples steadfastly looked on, ascend to his Father and their Father, and to his God and their God, there to be seated on the right hand of the Majesty in heaven till the time when He shall come again with great glory to judge the quick and dead. Even here then we have ~~preached~~ preached unto men; the far-darting rays of the sun of righteousness heralding his glorious approach long before his actual appearance above the horizon of our world. How many and various are the manifestations of his loving regard for a

sinful race! How the beams of his benignity pervade and penetrate the records of history, the details of biography, the revelations of prophecy, and the ceremonies of religion! How the indications of his interposing mercy mingle with the trials of patriarchs, the missions of legislators, the persecutions of saints, and the achievements of heroes! How, from the moment of the promise of the woman's seed in Eden, that love has never ceased to be exerted in behalf of a fallen and wretched race! Who, then, with so many demonstrations of its active existence shall doubt its reality, or question its sufficiency? Who shall not receive it with a grateful and obedient heart? and who shall refuse to offer themselves, their souls and bodies, in return for that unspeakable gift of the love of God

“Oh, for that love let rocks and hills  
Their lasting silence break,  
And all harmonious human tongues  
Their Maker's praises speak.”

The amazing spectacle exhibited to the eyes of Manoah and his wife struck them both for the moment with insupportable awe, and they fell on their faces to the ground. Manoah could not overcome the impression of dread he had received upon discovering that he had been conversing with an inhabitant of the invisible world; and upon beholding his marvellous ascent in the burning flame, he apprehended fatal consequences from the strange phenome-



non, and "said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these." What a striking and instructive contrast between the fear of the man and the confidence of the woman! The weaker vessel is seen to aid and support the drooping spirits of the stronger. A superstitious notion appears to have prevailed among the Israelites, that if God, an angel, or a spirit, presented himself to any individual of our race, that individual was doomed to a speedy, if not an instant death. Thus Gideon exclaimed, "Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face;" and the evil which he feared appears from the answer he received from the Lord, who said unto him, "Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." Thus Jacob, when he had conversed and wrestled with a mysterious visitant on his return from Padan-aram, counted it a strange thing, and a matter for great thankfulness, that he should survive the wonderful interview; and to commemorate the extraordinary circumstance, he called the name of the place, which was the scene of the occurrence, Peniel, which signifies, the *face of God*, "because," said he, "I have seen God face to

face, and my life is preserved." Manoah, under the influence of that widely prevailing notion, gave way to the deepest despondency, and the gloomiest foreboding. How inconsistent is frail man while surrounded by the infirmities and weaknesses of a fallen nature! He had just before expressed great confidence in the expectation of a son, wishing only, in his prayer to God, to obtain more particular information as to the manner of bringing him up. But now the very spectacle which was vouchsafed in answer to his own entreaty, for the purpose of confirming that expectation, threw him into confusion and distress of mind, and so overwhelmed him with perplexity and terror, that he could not refrain from exclaiming, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" Alas! we know not what is best for us. Let us, then, not seek to pry into mysteries which are too deep for our present faculties to comprehend or to bear; they are veiled in mercy from our weak sight. Let us be content to follow with meek obedience the light which has been already given in the inspired Word of God, persuaded that, if we diligently search the Scriptures, we shall neither be "afraid with any amazement," nor fail of thence deriving a knowledge of eternal life.

Manoah's wife answered her husband's desponding exclamation by the most just and judicious reasoning; and she showed herself, on this occasion, a help most meet for him in

time of need. "Nay," said she, "let us not be so unreasonable as to convert Heaven's conspicuous blessings into sources of grief and despair. The scene we have witnessed is the greatest security we can have for the continuance of our life and happiness. If God had intended our destruction, He would never have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands. That was a ransom for our lives, and the fire fastening upon that, was a plain indication that his wrath was turned away from us. Neither, if He had doomed us to death, would He have showed us all these things. He would never have mocked and tantalized us with such blessed revelations. He would never have made such great and precious promises relating to the birth of a son that shall fill the important position of a Nazarene from the womb, and achieve glorious exploits for the deliverance of his oppressed people Israel." And, brethren, is not this reasoning most sound and scriptural, and applicable to many more cases than that of the desponding Manoah? Ye who are tempted to fear eternal death, as you think of the terrors of the Lord, let me ask you, would God have accepted the great sacrifice of Calvary for sinners, had He been pleased to kill them? would He have ever made it known to you, and brought you to plead its merits in your behalf, and to offer it

up again, as it were, by your strong cries and earnest prayers, had He predestined your destruction? He would never have given you the blessed volume of the Scriptures, had He not intended that your diligent search of them should issue in eternal life. He would never have made unto you such gracious revelations—He would never have acquainted you with such exceeding great and precious promises—He would never have told you all these things without a purpose of good, the very reverse of your groundless fears—even the conferring upon you the distinguished privileges of honour, glory, happiness, and immortality. Oh, then, ye who strive, by God's grace, to be his servants indeed, remember the many merciful declarations, invitations, and encouragements of his word, and above all, the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice offered for your sins, and let not your heart be any longer troubled, neither let it be afraid.

In due time the woman who thus answered her husband's fears by the well-grounded assurances of faith and hope, realized the precious promise of heaven, and bare a son, and called his name Samson. As we might have expected of a mother of such enlightened and exemplary piety, she observed with regard to the child the exact regulations prescribed by the celestial visitant. She brought him up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and the happy

consequence was, that the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and endowed him with unusual strength and courage, and qualified him to encounter with success the hostile forces of the Philistines, and to break the oppressive yoke which they had laid on the neck of his country. It is beside our purpose to enter into the details of his life. Suffice it just to observe, that all his victories and successes emanated under God from his pious mother's bringing him up according to the Divine direction; and that all his misery, and his final capture by his insolent enemies, were the consequences of allying himself with strange and heathen women, and of departing from the principles inculcated upon him in infancy and youth. When he first proposed to marry a Philistine woman, his father and mother remonstrated with him, and endeavoured to dissuade him from such a connexion, bearing in mind the evils which, before the Deluge, had followed from the sons of God intermarrying with "the daughters of men." But he persisted in the choice; and although God out of this evil educes good for his people by the eventual punishment of their oppressors, yet to Samson himself the alliance produced any thing but happiness or comfort. Her treachery in discovering the secret of his riddle, induced him abruptly to quit her company, and involved him in a quarrel with her people. During his absence she was given



to another. For this affront he revenged himself upon the whole country, and by means of foxes, which he let loose with firebrands attached to each, destroyed the standing corn and the shocks of corn, and the vineyards and olives round about. The Philistines were so enraged at this injury, that they burnt both his wife and his father-in-law with fire, as the original causes of the mischief. Such was the tragical catastrophe of the first alliance between Samson and a heathen woman. A second alliance with one of the same nation exposed him to great personal danger, and it was only by the supernatural strength which enabled him to carry off the gates of Gaza, that he escaped with his life. His third alliance with a woman of that country led to his capture, his imprisonment, and his death. He revealed to that woman—Delilah by name—the secret of his strength, which lay in his unshorn hair. By making that revelation, he virtually violated his Nazarite's vow<sup>1</sup>, for the revelation presently led to the cutting off of his hair, which no steel had ever touched before; and when the command of God, which had been given concerning him before he was born, and which had hitherto been solemnly observed, was trampled upon by the instrumentality of a strange woman, who had won his heart, no wonder that the help of God was withdrawn,

<sup>1</sup> See Note I.

and he became weak as an ordinary mortal. He was taken by the Philistines, had his eyes put out, was bound with fetters of brass, and compelled to grind in the prison-house in the city of Gaza. In that humiliating and shameful situation he was detained until, on one occasion, he was brought forth to be made a ridiculous spectacle of before the lords of the Philistines, and a great concourse of people. To enjoy the exhibition, three thousand men and women were assembled upon the roof of the house, and Samson determined to punish their cruel insolence, and avenge the wrongs of his country, by one great effort, even at the sacrifice of his own life. His hair having grown since the commencement of his captivity, probably to its former length, and with it his previous strength having returned, he directed the boy that led him to place him near the two pillars which supported the house, and laying hold of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left hand, and praying to the Almighty for aid, he exerted his utmost strength, and succeeded in pulling down the whole edifice at once, and he and all the spectators were buried in the ruins.

Behold then in this history a conspicuous display of female influence, either for good or for evil, and see how much it is in the power of women to benefit or to injure those with whom they are connected. See, on the one hand, the

baneful effect on the mind of Samson, and on the well-being of himself and his country, of the alliance he had formed with women not actuated by the fear of God. To them are traceable all his errors and all his woes, his afflictive imprisonment, and his violent death. Though he had doubtless grace to repent of his departure from the piety of his early days, and though doubtless he was, by means of sore affliction, re-established in the favour of God before his death, since he is reckoned among the patterns of faith, yet what an illustration have we in this case of the wisdom of S. . . . precept, "Be not ye unequally yoked with unbelievers;" and of Solomon's warning, "My son, keep thee from the strange woman, for she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her."

See, on the other hand, the salutary influence of a wise and pious woman in the example of the mother of Samson. By her strong faith and enlightened piety, she guarded the mind and reassured the heart of her husband in an hour of fear and despondency. By her strict attention to the Divine directions in regard to the education of her son, she secured for him the blessing of God, and brought him up to be a worker of mighty deliverances for her oppressed people. Wives and mothers, walk in her holy steps, and learn from her conduct what a comfort and support your prudence and piety

may afford your partners in seasons of darkness and perplexity, and how much you may advance the usefulness and happiness of your children, by dedicating them early to God, and carefully bringing them up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

## SERMON II.

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NAOMI.

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RUTH i. 1, 2.

“ Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi.”

NAOMI, whose instructive life we propose now to consider, is the first female mentioned in the interesting book of Ruth. That book is to be regarded as an appendix to the book of Judges, and not a continuation of the Scripture history. It relates events, which, according to the best chronologers, took place long before the times of Samson or Jephthah, the periods referred to in our last and two preceding discourses; but, as it is placed in our Bibles between the books of Judges and Samuel, I have followed that order in laying its contents before you, as more simple, and less perplexing to the memory and comprehension of the generality of hearers. There is, also, a fitness in appending its history



to rather than inserting it in that of the Judges, from the circumstance of its concluding with the genealogy of David, whose celebrated life is narrated in the succeeding books of Samuel. It was written, according to some, by Ezra; according to others, by Hezekiah; but most probably by Samuel, or the author of the books called after his name: and it is a very important record, as exhibiting the descent of David, who according to the flesh was forefather to the Messiah, from Judah, the fourth son of Jacob; and demonstrating the fulfilment of the remarkable prophecy of dying Israel, "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

While Josephus would refer the events recorded in this book to the time when Eli judged Israel, and others to those of Gideon, or Abimelech, and others to a date as early as that of Ehud, who delivered Israel by killing Eglon, king of Moab, the most probable period of their occurrence, according to the generally approved chronology, is the time of Shamgar, who repelled the incursions of the Philistines; or just before the memorable defeat and death of Sisera by Deborah, Barak, and Jael. It was a period of great desolation for the chosen race, as we have shown in former discourses. Their sin against God had converted the land, which once flowed with milk and honey, into a dry and

barren land, and rendered it no longer desirable as a country to dwell in. The judgment of Jehovah had fallen upon his backsliding people; and had either caused the harvest to fail, or permitted the Philistines, or the Canaanites to plunder the country, and appropriate to themselves its fruitful produce; and the consequence was a sore "famine in the land," which induced some of the inhabitants to quit their homes, and to seek sustenance for themselves by settling among foreign and heathen nations. Among these emigrants was a man of Bethlehem Judah. Elimelech by name, with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. There is a prophetic signification in the names of most of the remarkable characters recorded in Scripture, and that appears to have been the case with the names of these parents, and their children. The names of the father, *Elimelech*, *God is my king*, and of the mother, *Naomi*, *pleasant, happy*, indicate Divine favour and worldly prosperity. The names of the sons, *Mahlon*, signifying *weakness, sickness*, and *Chilion*, meaning *consumption, decay*, imply the very reverse of health and comfort. Perhaps they were respectively given them by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, to indicate the mournful contrast between the once flourishing condition of the hopeful pair, and the subsequent sore adversity and blighting desolation of the family. The father is supposed to have been brother to that Salmon,

who married Rahab, and who was the son of Nashon, a prince of the children of Judah; and Naomi is supposed to have been his niece; and, consequently, they were nearly connected with the highest families of the land. How greatly, then, must they have been reduced in circumstances, when they were compelled, by the dreaded want of the necessaries of life, to quit their homes, and seek a more comfortable subsistence in a foreign land! How fleeting often is worldly prosperity! How frail is high connexion, when the Almighty frowns! How perishable is worldly wealth, when the Disposer of all withdraws his blessing! How weak are all earthly supports, when He dries up the streams of consolation! "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; neither let the mighty glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, saith the Lord."

The visitation of famine, which at this time afflicted the land of Canaan, had been distinctly declared in the law of Moses to be one of the judgments of God against the workers of iniquity. "If ye will not hearken unto me," saith Jehovah in Leviticus<sup>1</sup>, "and will not do all my commandments, your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield her increase; neither shall the trees of the land yield

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xxvi. 14. 20.

their fruits." It was one of the arrows, which He selected out of his quiver for the punishment of David's sin in numbering the people of Israel, and so dreadful was the havoc which it was known to make, when let fly upon a land, that the distressed and perplexed monarch deprecated it as much as the edge of the all-conquering sword, and preferred to either, that the *plague* should be let loose upon the length and breadth of his kingdom. It was a weapon so keen, and penetrating, and all-pervading, that it reached even the vicinity and village of Bethlehem, the very meaning of which is the *house of bread*. Not only was the land, which once flowed with milk and honey, become generally barren by reason of the sin of its inhabitants, but even its most fruitful region, and best furnished storehouse, had been exhausted. Let our own nation beware of provoking the wrath of God, by backsliding from the way of his commandments. Like the Israelites of old, the lot of our inheritance has been cast in pleasant places. We have been blessed with a prosperity beyond any people on the face of the earth. Victory in war has been ours. Pre-eminence in commerce, literature, and arts has been ours. The possession of civil liberty and religious freedom has been ours. Exemption from the sword, the pestilence, and the famine for ages has been ours. And these blessings, with insignificant exceptions, have abounded in our

land, chiefly from the period when we came out of the bondage of popish superstitions, galling as the bondage of Egypt, and when we passed into the purer atmosphere of reformed and protestant Christianity. If we return to the idolatries of a corrupt faith—if we backslide to the wretched darkness of the middle ages, from which *our* Moseses, and Joshuas, and Baraks, and Samsons, the immortal champions of our Reformation, emancipated us, then let us prepare for the pestilence, and the sword, and the famine, which were the almost inseparable concomitants of those wretched times. Let us not vainly look at our present prosperity, and confide in our position as at the head of all nations, and, thinking such apprehensions groundless, imagine our mountain to be so strong that it cannot be moved at any time. Be assured that the Gospel alone is the ark of our strength, and if we despise it, or substitute hay and stubble for its pure gold, the glory will depart from our country. Not only is there an almost necessary connexion between national purity and vitality of religion, and national enjoyment of temporal prosperity; but we may most reasonably fear the infliction of divine judgments for the disregard of such dear-bought blessings; and flourishing as we may be now, we shall find Him able and ready, as of old, to vindicate the truth of his word; “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into a dry



ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.”

We may well suppose that Naomi felt as a great affliction, the necessity of quitting the land of her birth, and of going into a foreign and heathen country. This necessity was probably imposed by the will of her husband, whom she would not disobey, rather than by an immediate and absolute pressure of circumstances; for we infer from the subsequent part of the history, that Elimelech was influenced, rather by the fear than by the actual experience of destitution. He seems to have lost all confidence in the resources of the promised land, and he hastened prematurely away into a region of heathens and idolaters. We may imagine Naomi to have remonstrated against this rashness and precipitation. There was no precedent for such a step. Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob had indeed left Canaan for Egypt under the pressure of famine. But they were destined to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth, without any fixed habitation. It was not so with their descendants, when Jehovah had driven out the Canaanites before them, and given them their land for an everlasting possession. *There* therefore it was their duty to abide as long as they were not driven away by irresistible violence or uncontrollable necessity. *There* was the ark of the covenant; *there* was the tabernacle of worship; *there* was to be expected the

fulfilment of the great and glorious promises made to the chosen race. To quit the scene of so many solemn injunctions, sacred associations, and bright anticipations, was like going out of the true Church, and apostatizing from the God of Israel. When Elimelech determined upon the step, though Naomi did not feel it to be her duty to refuse accompanying her husband and her sons, yet her tender and pious heart might well be apprehensive of the worst consequences, for they were about to go, not from one tribe to another, not from one part of her native country to another province of the same, but from the land of Canaan to the land of the Moabites, from the inheritance of the Israelites to the habitation of heathens, from the place where Jehovah had fixed his residence and name, to a region of abominable superstitions and idolatries. When men, from motives of gain or advancement in the world, or from distrustful fears of poverty and distress, quit the Church of God, and depart from the communion of the saints and the society of the pious, and associate with godless companions, and link themselves with worldly and unprincipled connexions; let them fear the worst from their short-sighted wisdom, and let them be assured that they will one day be compelled in bitterness to confess, "I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me nothing."

The gloomiest forebodings that Naomi might

have entertained were mournfully realized, as we shall learn, if we pursue the history of the family into the land of Moab. It was a trial to a pious mind to be separated from the communion of the people of God, and to be compelled to hold intercourse with a people who worshipped false gods. It was a trial to any mind to quit country, friends, connexions, and scenes interwoven with the dearest recollections and associations of the heart and memory. But, although compelled to leave the land of her birth, yet it may be said, that she carried her home with her. It is not a house, or a street, or a locality, that constitutes a home. It is the presence of those whom we value most on earth. Naomi, though in a strange land, enjoyed the company of such, for she had a husband and two sons, and though in the midst of idolaters, she could with these dear members of her family, lift up her heart in prayer and praise to the throne of the true God. The little family was a little Church in the desert of sin, a little spiritual *oasis* in the wild and desolate wilderness, and all its several members must in consequence of this spiritual isolation have become more than ever all in all to one another. How dear to Naomi's heart, in such a case, must have been the lives of her husband and her two sons! How incalculably enhanced in value, if possible, beyond what they had been when living among her countrymen and co-religionists! Oh! if there

was a prayer that escaped her lips for temporal blessings more fervent, more earnest, more importunate than another, it was that those precious lives might be spared. If there was a calamity which she deprecated beyond any other on earth, it was the departure of those beloved ones before herself into another world. But, alas! that which she would have most avoided overtook her, and she could say with Job in his affliction, "The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." One of the small community, and that the chief staff of its support, is called away. "Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons." We know not exactly how soon this took place after the commencement of their residence in Moab. It does not appear to have been many years. It was, then, as we have already intimated, a very short-sighted wisdom in Elimelech to leave his country on account of a temporary pressure, and to forego the invaluable privileges of the commonwealth of Israel, for the sake of advancing his worldly interests. It would appear that he died prematurely and unexpectedly, and left his wife and children in a far worse condition than when he quitted the land of Canaan. And is not his case a type of many in the present day? Under the pretence of providing for those that are dear unto him, but really from a spirit of discontent with his present inferior condition,

and from an unhallowed ambition to attain a higher than Providence has allotted him, a man will devote himself to this world without reference to another, and in the keen and eager pursuit of wealth make shipwreck of faith and good conscience, and, after all, gain not one of the objects he laboured to accomplish, but cause by his reckless worldliness many a pang to conscientious members of his family while living, and being cut off in the midst of his career, and all his thoughts perishing, leave them suddenly without provision or protection in a hard-hearted and un pitying world. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Naomi is now a widow; a condition, which is set forth in Scripture as calling for peculiar compassion, and repeatedly represented as having attracted the especial commiseration of Jehovah and of his most eminent servants. Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament recommend it to our consideration. Elijah was so moved with pity at the desolation of a widow of Sarepta, that he raised her son from death to life. Elisha was so moved with pity at the desolation of a widow of Shunem, that he performed the same office in her behalf. *Who was*



greater than any prophet, felt a similar sympathy for the sad bereavement of a widow of Nain, when He met the funeral procession that was conveying the body of her son to its last earthly resting-place. Addressing to her the touching consolation "weep not," and placing his hand upon the bier, he said, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother." To regard the widow's affliction is by St. James specified as an essential part of pure and undefiled religion. To have caused her heart to sing for joy was Job's comfort in his deepest affliction. Yea, the Almighty himself has declared himself to be her especial guardian according to the words of the Psalmist, "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation." Naomi then was now reduced to a condition, which she recognizes as peculiarly pitiable. It was aggravated by the circumstance of being far away from brothers, sisters, and dear relatives among her own people. It was as yet, however, far from being inconsolable. She had two sons, who, if not already arrived, she hoped soon to see arrived, at man's estate. To them she turned her eyes with fond affection, as the pledges of her husband's love, and the dear tokens of departed happiness. To them she looked forward as the solace of her remaining life, and the props of her declining age. With

them she hoped one day to return to Zion, and to appear again in the “amiable tabernacles of the Lord of hosts.” Them she loved to think she should one day behold as the heads of flourishing houses in Israel. But, alas! she was doomed to disappointment in regard to them. Instead of keeping themselves aloof from the surrounding idolaters, and preparing at the first opportunity to revisit the homes of their fathers and join the worshippers of Jehovah, they formed matrimonial connexions with the daughters of the land, “and they took them wives of the women of Moab,” of whom the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. This was according to some contrary to the decree of God. It was certainly a practice discountenanced by the inspired writers, and disapproved of by pious parents in Israel. The corruption of the antediluvian race, and the degeneracy of the antediluvian race, are ascribed to the intermarriage of the sons of God with the daughters of men. Abraham made his servant swear a solemn oath, that he would not “take a wife unto his son of the daughters of the Canaanites, but go for this purpose unto his own country and to his own kindred.” Rebekah complained, that she was weary of her life, because of the daughters of Heth, whom Esau had married, and expressed a most earnest wish that Jacob would abstain from such alliances, and marry one of his own relations. Samson’s

father and mother lamented their son's choice, when he declared his intention to marry a woman of Timnath, and regretfully remonstrated with him, saying, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all thy people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" Deep, then, must have been the grief of the pious Naomi to find her two sons, her only hope in the world, determined to unite themselves in marriage with two Gentile women, accustomed to pagan worship, attached to a pagan country, and possessed with pagan prejudices, and pagan predilections. The prospect presented by such an alliance must have been gloomy in many ways. The hearts of her sons might become so linked with these foreign connexions, that they would never return to their native land. Their souls might become so corrupted by so intimate a union with those who had been brought up in the abominations of idolatry, that they would entirely forget their allegiance to the God of Israel. Oh, it was a sad contemplation for a pious mother! But, alas! what other result was reasonably to have been expected from the unwise step of their father, in taking up his residence among heathens, and consequently bringing his sons into the society of idolatrous women? Let parents beware of sacrificing the spiritual interests of their children to the hopes of worldly advancement, and remember that

nothing can alter or invalidate the apostolic quotation "Evil communications corrupt good manners," nor the wise man's truthful declaration, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Troubles upon troubles accumulated on the head of Naomi as years passed away. It was sad to leave her native land for a land of strangers. It was grievous to be surrounded by heathens and idolaters. It was dreadful to be left a widow under such circumstances. It was a melancholy prospect for an Israelitish mother to see both her sons connect themselves with pagan families; which might have the effect of winning their hearts alike from their country and their God. But still she had hopes of them: she derived consolation from their presence: they were in the land of the living: they might prosper in the world: they might hold fast to their faith in the midst of unfavourable associations: they might, as better times returned, revisit Canaan and spend the remainder of their days in the land of Judah and within the commonwealth of Israel. But, alas! even this prospect was destined to be blighted. After the lapse of ten years from their arrival in Moab, or perhaps from their marriage, Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them; and "the woman was left of her two sons and her husband." Wave after wave of affliction had broken

over her before, and she had been able to sustain the shock. But this stormy billow shattered her last earthly hopes, and overwhelmed her in the fathomless ocean of despair—despair we mean of any chance of happiness or comfort in the land she dwelt in. Like Noah's dove flying over the unbroken waste of waters, she could now discover not one green spot in Moab whereon to rest the sole of her foot. What remained for her, then, but to betake herself to the country of her own kindred and her own people? It appears, however, that her amiable temper and fervent piety had won the deep attachment of the Moabitish women who had married her sons. They would not allow her to commence her journey to her native land alone. They accompanied her, as it would appear, without thought of parting, to the extreme borders of their own country. And even there, both were very reluctant, and one of them absolutely refused to separate from their beloved mother-in-law. When she at last counselled them to return, each to her own mother's house—when she pronounced upon them her most hearty benediction, and prayed that the Lord would deal kindly with them, as they had dealt kindly with the dead and her—when she expressed on their behalf the disinterested wish that they might form more prosperous connexions than her own shortlived and afflicted sons had proved—when she sealed her



undying affection for them by the kiss of peace and farewell—she recalled the memory of their wedded love, opened afresh the fountains of their grief for their dear departed ones, and knit their hearts more closely than ever to the only living memorial of those they had lost, “and they lift up their voice and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.” Naomi, though loth to part with them, remonstrated strongly against this resolution, on the ground of its temporal disadvantage to them. She endeavoured in the most disinterested manner to convince them that she saw no prospect of earthly prosperity for them in her own country and among her own connexions. She lamented much the afflictive dispensation, which had caused their union with her sons, to issue so prematurely and so disastrously, but declared her opinion that, under the circumstances which it had pleased Providence to ordain, the most prudent step they could take was to return to the land of their birth and the home of their childhood. It was a hard and perplexing case—it was to make a choice between fond attachment and worldly wisdom—yea, more, between true religion and earthly comforts; and we wonder not that “they lift up their voice and wept again.”

The result, however, was different with the two daughters-in-law, which result we hope to consider at large in our next discourse, Orpah

being persuaded to return to her own people, and Ruth determining to cast her lot with her mother-in-law and to cleave to her and her nation. With the latter, Naomi proceeds to Bethlehem, and takes up her abode in the place of her former habitation. Her arrival after so long an absence created a great sensation in the city. Her reduced circumstances, her bereaved condition, her altered mien, her faded beauty, increased the interest which her reappearance excited, and induced her old acquaintances to ask with wonder and with pity, "Is this Naomi?" Is this she, whose person and prosperity once so happily corresponded with her name, *the beautiful, the blessed one*? Is this the wife of the once affluent, but too ambitious Elimelech? Is this she, whose personal attractions were universally admired, and whose benevolent heart and bountiful hand scattered blessings all around? This stricken deer, this withered form, this destitute pilgrim, this desolate widow, is this Naomi? "Oh," replied she, "utter not again that word. It awakens too many sad remembrances in this sorrow-deluged heart. Call me not Naomi." The bloom of former happiness is all gone, and nothing is left but the sere leaf. The rose is all withered, and nothing remains but the hard and prickly thorn. "Call me *Mara* now," which signifies bitterness, "for very bitter is my unhappy lot." "I went out full, and the

Lord hath brought me home empty." I went out with comparative comfort and with hope, but I return in desolation and despondency. I went out with a dear partner and two beloved sons, but they are all gone from the land of the living, and, behold, I am left alone. Why, then, pronounce a word, which recalls joys departed never to return, of which the remembrance is now so bitter? "Why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

Among the many lessons presented by this instructive history, learn, *first*, from the change in the circumstances of Naomi's husband, not to trust in the uncertain possessions of this world. You may now be wealthy and respectable among your neighbours and acquaintances. A few years, or months, may reduce you to a condition of discomfort, if not of poverty and indigence. Remember, it is not the contriving head, or the toiling hand, but it is the Lord that maketh rich and maketh poor, and lifteth up and casteth down. Let this remind you of the duty, while ye have this world's goods, to spend them in his service and to his glory, and gratefully to say, with one of old, "All things come of thee."

2. Learn, from the consequences of the step taken by Elimelech, the peril of discontentedness and impatience under adverse circumstances. Should riches make themselves wings,

and poverty threaten to be your lot, beware of rashly changing your habits and connexions. Especially beware of seeking to mend your fortune by associating with the unprincipled and the irreligious. However gloomy the prospect, and however threatening the storm, never think of having recourse to forbidden methods of escape. But rather hold ye more fast than ever your confidence in the promised aid of a gracious God, exclaiming with the Psalmist, "My soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast."

3. Ye that are parents, surrounded with a family of children, learn from this history to reflect how soon those children may be taken away; and, oh! strive and pray, above all things, that they may be the children of God. Though it may be hard to see them sinking and withering away before your eyes, like a flower nipped in its early bloom, yet, how will your heart be lightened, and your sorrow soothed, by the thought that they are fallen asleep in *rest* and by the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life! Bring them to *rest*, while living, and your bereaved hearts shall have the unspeakable comfort of saying of them when departed, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

4. Learn from Naomi's trials the beneficial effects of affliction, and from her resolution to re-

turn to her native land—the land of Jehovah's worship, that the only true refuge in affliction is pure and undefiled religion. All her chief calamities befell her while in the land of idolatry and darkness. All her remaining hope lay in quitting the melancholy scene, and revisiting the neighbourhood of Zion. She felt, as she confessed on her return to Bethlehem, that it was the Lord who had, in those dispensations, testified against her, and the Almighty who had afflicted her. God had been contending with her to bring her to a more excellent way, even as by severe discipline He compelled the prodigal to arise and go to his father. Perhaps, if her husband and sons had not died, she would have spent her days in the land of Moab, and become accustomed and attached to the society of those who lived without God in the world. And so it may be with some of you whom God visits with his chastening rod. You are in danger of continuing in a state of alienation, and of perishing in your sins, and therefore God, in love to your souls, takes away the desire of your eyes with a stroke, and bereaves you of your children or partner, or sends poverty or pain, to bring you to reflection, to repentance, to a reconsideration of your ways, and to a return unto the Lord your God. My afflicted friends, seek not to defeat the gracious and merciful design. Look not for relief or consolation in your state of distance and rebellion. But return unto the



spiritual Zion ; repair to the sanctuary of Judah ;  
cast yourself at the feet of Shiloh there ; and  
say—

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Despise not, shrewd reckoner, the God of a good  
man's worship,  
Neither let thy calculating folly gainsay the unity of  
Nor scorn another's creed, although he cannot solve thy  
doubts ;  
Reason is the follower of faith, where he may not be  
precursor :  
It is written, and so we believe, waiting not for outward  
proof,  
Inasmuch as mysteries inscrutable are the clear preroga-  
tives of godhead.  
Reason hath nothing positive, faith hath nothing  
doubtful ;  
And the height of unbelieving wisdom is to question all  
things.  
When there is marvel in a doctrine, faith is joyful and  
adoreth ;

But when all is clear, what place is left for faith ?  
Tell me the sum of thy knowledge,—is it yet assured of  
anything ?  
Despise not what is wonderful, when all things are won-  
derful around thee.  
From the multitude of like effects, thou sayest, behold  
a law :  
And the matter thou art baffled in unmaking is to thy  
mind an element.  
Then look abroad, I pray thee, for analogy holdeth  
everywhere,

## SERMON III.

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### ORPAH AND RUTH.

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RUTH i. 14.

“And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law ; but Ruth clave unto her.”

To the former clause of this sentence, the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures adds the words, “And she returned to her own people ;” and several other versions of high authority contain expressions to the same effect. But, even without such addition, the decision of Orpah is sufficiently manifested by her returning the valedictory salutation of Naomi. The afflicted mother-in-law had given both the farewell kiss ; but after that a very interesting and affecting conversation took place between them, expressive of a strong determination on the part of both Orpah and Ruth to accompany Naomi to her own country and people. Upon hearing that determination, Naomi set forth the discouraging prospects of a temporal nature which she and her resources held out, and pointed to their own country and their own connexions as far more likely to advance their earthly com-

forts and worldly prosperity. Influenced at last by these considerations, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, that is, by returning the salutation, signified her acquiescence in the reasons adduced for going back to Moab, but Ruth withheld the token of assent, and "clave unto her."

Naomi then addresses herself to Ruth alone; and she said, "'Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law;' she is persuaded that she can be happier in her native land than by proceeding with me to my country. She has seen little but affliction in connexion with me and mine; and, therefore, discouraged from sharing my lot any longer, she is gone back unto her own people and her gods. Return thou after her; for what canst thou hope from me more than she could?" But Ruth said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me <sup>1</sup>."

The difference between the final resolutions of these two daughters-in-law, thus particularly detailed, was, doubtless, intended

<sup>1</sup> See Note II.

to convey most important instruction; and the chief purpose of this discourse is to lay the particulars of that instruction before your minds. May the same Divine Spirit make it profitable to your immortal souls!

1. We observe that both Orpah and Ruth appear to have been at first equally attached to Naomi. They both accompanied her to the very borders of Canaan. They were both alike commended for their conduct as wives and daughters-in-law. They both lifted up their voice and wept at the thought of parting, and said to Naomi, "Surely, we will return with thee, and to thy people." But when she proceeded to describe the desolate circumstances of her situation—the dreary prospects before them—the hopelessness of deriving earthly consolation or advantage from sharing her humble lot, Orpah wavered in her mind, and staggered at the difficulty, and thought of her own mother's more comfortable home; and, at last, determined to retrace her steps to her own country, and to her own people. Behold in this conduct an illustration of what our Saviour has since, on more than one occasion taught, relative to the reluctance of the human heart to abide all the consequences of true religion. Orpah was like him "that receiveth the seed of God's word into stony places, who heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile;

for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

Orpah loved Naomi: but her attachment was not strong enough to encounter all the perils and difficulties which her fortune might involve. Many of the Jews, and his people to a certain extent; but their affections are not sufficiently fixed on things above, to induce the sacrifice of worldly comforts and worldly prospects for their sake and the glory of God. Like Agrippa, their reason, and judgment, and conscience are favourable to the cause of truth; but their hearts are riveted to earthly joys; and, like him, they go no farther than to say, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Let such remember the Lord's warning words: "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me: and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

2. We observe that Orpah and Ruth had the same opportunities of becoming acquainted with the true God. They were married to two Israelites: they were alike in the company, and under the influence of their pious mother-in-law. We cannot for a moment suppose that either of them had remained ignorant of Jehovah's incomparable superiority over Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites: they had both heard, beyond a doubt, of the marvellous



things He had done for his people, and of the exceeding great and precious promises, the bright anticipations, and the eternal hopes which were the privileges of the chosen race. Yes: they had heard from the same lips the same blessed and gracious truths. And yet how different was the final result! Orpah, after receiving such valuable instruction, stumbled upon the entrance of Canaan, and returned unto her people and to her gods. And is not this a case of frequent occurrence in the present day? We see the same instruction given, the same opportunities afforded, the same gospel preached, the same means of grace, and the same ordinances of religion administered to men, without producing the same desirable effect. While some find grace to enter the spiritual Canaan, and resolve to share the lot of God's people through evil report and through good report, others doubt, and hesitate, and stumble at the threshold of the good Shepherd's fold, and remain in the land of idolatry and sin. While some become immovable, indeed, and altogether, and stand immovable as the rock in the pure faith, others, however near they may at times seem to come to the land of safety, in the hour of temptation and trial fall away. The difference is not in the seed, but in the soil. It was the same seed that fell among the thorns and was choked—that fell on the wayside and was snatched up

by the fowls of the air—that fell upon the rock and withered away through lack of moisture—and that fell on the good ground, and brought forth fruit, fifty, sixty, and a hundred fold. How just, then, will be the final condemnation of the unbelieving and disobedient! How fearful and lamentable the thought that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light! Pray ye, brethren, for “an honest and good heart,” that ye may receive the word of God in the love of it, and bring forth the fruit of repentance and holiness, and attain unto the blessed end of everlasting life.

3. Again, Orpah and Ruth were equally the subjects of sore affliction. The death of Elimelech, the head of the family, had been a calamity to both alike. They had been bereaved each of the youthful partner of her life. They felt each a deep sympathy in the sorrows and woes of Naomi; and yet the chastisement did not lead both to the same blessed determination. While it brought Ruth to Bethlehem, it left Orpah in the land of Moab. Affliction in itself will not, any more than the divine word, work the salvation of sinners, except the heart be prepared by grace to receive the lesson with faith and prayer. Pharaoh felt the chastising hand of God in the many calamities which befell his kingdom, and even acknowledged the finger of God therein; and yet he resumed his

hardness of heart again and again, and finally died in impenitence. Saul felt the chastising hand of God in the successes of his enemies, and the reverses his arms sustained, and even confessed that God was contending with him, and yet he refused to be reformed, and ended his life in despair. Beware, then, of despising the chastisement of the Lord. When poverty comes, or sickness or death comes, and makes your homes desolate, think not that it is a chance which has brought about the visitation. Be assured that it is an arrow from the Almighty's quiver, winged with purposes of good towards you. Receive it then with patience; receive it with an anxious desire to profit by it. Pray that it may be the means of drawing your hearts from things temporal to things eternal—of leading you from the idolatry of present objects into a more excellent way, and that you may be enabled by blessed experience to say, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

4. We find that Orpah and Ruth had been equally amiable, faithful, and kind, as wives and daughters-in-law. Naomi, when urging them to return to their own kindred, speaks of them both with the same feelings of gratitude and commendation. They had both dealt kindly with the dead, and they were on that

account very dear to her heart. We have reason to infer from her sons' names<sup>2</sup>, that they were both weak and sickly, and it is possible that these affectionate wives had had to attend to their many wants through a painful and tedious illness, and to watch through many weary days and sleepless nights, the sinking frame, the languid eye, the pallid cheek, the trembling nerve, until death at last came and closed the mournful scene. A bereaved mother could not recall these kind attentions to her dear departed ones, without being melted into tears of tender gratitude towards those who had been such friends and helpers in time of need. Perhaps there are none of whom we think more highly in this vale of tears, than those who showed kindness to our beloved relatives now no more. Hence Naomi seems to have loved these dear partners of her lost sons, with a deep and indelible affection. They had both dealt kindly also with herself. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are often at variance. Alas! that in this short life, so soon to end, those who are so closely knit together by the bonds of kindred, should so often be severed by envy, jealousy, strife, and unnatural hatred. It was not so in this little family. We have the willing testimony of the mother, that the daughters had been to her all that she

<sup>2</sup> See Sermon on Naomi.

could have wished. Yea, they had been kind to her in time of sore affliction. When she lost her husband, they had helped to soothe her sorrow, and to dry up her tears. When she lost her sons, and the last link between her and them seemed to be dissolved, they still manifested the same unbroken attachment. Like those who have been kind to our dear departed ones, we naturally retain a very thankful feeling towards those who have shown kindness to ourselves in the season of tribulation, comforted us when we had no other comforters in the wide world, and befriended us when we had no other friends on earth. Naomi then had the strongest possible reasons to speak well of Orpah and Ruth, and to speak well of them alike. They had both dealt kindly with the dead: they had both dealt kindly with herself in her adversity and in her woe; and, therefore, she prayed the Lord, who alone could reward them adequately, to bestow upon them his richest blessings. Brethren, when the hour of parting with near and dear relatives shall come, as at last it must come to all, the trial will be robbed of half its bitterness if they can testify of you, as Naomi did of her two daughters-in-law. If they can say of you, with their last breath, you have been uniformly kind to me, and to those dear relatives who died before me—if they can sincerely thank you and heartily bless you for your dutiful, peaceable,



and affectionate conduct to them and theirs, oh, what a balm the testimony will be to your broken heart—what a soothing recollection as you follow them to the grave—what a sweet drop in the cup of sorrowful meditation as you recall the memory of those who are gone! Children, remember this. Sons and daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, anticipate the closing scene, and be ye habitually affectionate and kind to your aged parents, and in their parting benediction and grateful testimony ye shall receive a rich and invaluable reward.

Very lovely, and, as appears, equally lovely, had been the conduct of Orpah and Ruth towards Naomi. And yet, notwithstanding their previous similarity of demeanour, there was a very striking difference in the ultimate determinations of their minds. The one bade farewell to her mother-in-law and returned to her country and to her gods, but the other clave unto her, and accompanied her to Bethlehem. Let us now consider the conduct of Ruth at this parting scene, and we shall more clearly perceive the affectingly instructive difference between their real characters. We have seen that they were equally amiable as wives and daughters. They had sustained the same affliction. They had possessed the same opportunities of spiritual illumination. They appear to have loved Naomi with the same attachment. Even Orpah at first expressed

her determination to go to Bethlehem. But when Naomi distinctly and particularly set before her the temporal difficulties, disadvantages, and discouragements of such a step, though she had a regard for her mother-in-law, she was deterred from accompanying her any further, and returned to the land of idolaters.

But not so Ruth. The opportunities of acquainting herself with the true God, had been by her improved to a knowledge of the things that belonged to her everlasting peace. The chastising hand of the Almighty had brought her to see the vanity of the idolatrous customs and sinful pleasures of her own country and her own people. Her attachment to her pious mother-in-law was laid on a deeper and more lasting foundation than the soil of earthly love. From her company and converse she had received light into her darkened mind—she had received a heavenly consolation to her broken heart—she had received a great and precious boon, which made smooth paths for her feet through the rugged soil of sin and sorrow, and opened to her admiring gaze a bright and blessed inheritance beyond the gloomy grave. A pearl of great price had become hers through the blessed means of Naomi's family, and Naomi's teaching, and Naomi's afflictive trials. Her heart was changed from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and all through the instrumentality of the con-

nexion, of which Naomi was the sole surviving member. She would, therefore, sooner tear her heart from her bosom, than tear herself away from one, who was associated in her mind with so unspeakable a gift; and she resisted every argument, and set at nought every consideration calculated to dissuade her from proceeding with Naomi, and to induce a return to Moab; and she at last put an end to the debate by the decided expression of her firm and immovable purpose in those ever memorable words: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." Here we have a blessed response to the challenge of Joshua, the servant of God, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Here we have a happy imitation of Israel's decision on that memorable day, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods.—Nay; but we will serve the Lord." Ruth had counted the cost, and no representation of peril or difficulty could alter her pious determination. Her affections were irrevocably fixed on things eternal, and no example of defection on the part of others could incline her to draw back. "Thy sister-in-

law," said Naomi, "is gone back to her people, and gone back to her gods." Why shouldst thou act differently? Is not the example enough to stagger thy resolution? she will renew the associations of her early days ere affliction had yet clouded her brow. She will plunge again into the amusements of her own people, which she enjoyed while yet a stranger to the people of God. She will return to the worship of Chemosh, the God of the Moabites, and find greater pleasure, and experience less self-denial in the vanities of that superstition, than in the pure service of the High and the Lofty One, whom without holiness no man shall see. Her path will be smoother and wider far than this narrow and rugged one which thou proposhest to tread with me. Canst thou resist the influence of her example? Hast thou faith and courage to take the harder, though ultimately wiser part; to follow the more difficult, though eventually the more excellent way? Is thy mind made up, without regard to the opinion or conduct of others, without regard to the loss of pleasure and profit, to "come and follow me?" O, replied the firm believer, "none of these things move." Cease from further efforts to dissuade me from my purpose<sup>3</sup>, "entreat me not to leave thee." Even entreaties cannot shake that resolution, which thy former valuable in-

<sup>3</sup>.See Note II.

struction and noble conduct have been the means of working within this once dark and sinful heart. "Whither thou goest, I will go." Though I know not the country which thou art entering, yet I feel certain of being safe in thy company, and I confidently rely on the memorable advice and promise, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." "Where thou lodgest I will lodge." However humble thy dwelling, with thee it will be better than a royal abode without thee. The grace of God, of which thou art a partaker, and the Divine blessing which accompanies thee, will make an humble and poor cottage far more precious, than the rich tents of ungodliness and the gorgeous palaces<sup>4</sup> of idolatry. Thy people shall be my people: yea, though they may be visited again with famine and subjected to many calamities, I will cast in my lot among them, for it is better to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, and then to perish for ever. "Thy God shall be my God." I bid an eternal farewell to the gods of Moab, and renounce for ever those lying vanities which once commanded my ignorant allegiance. Those other lords which once had a dominion over me, I abjure with all my heart, and am henceforth determined to make mention only of the God of Israel's name. "Where

<sup>4</sup> Some Jewish teachers have held, that Ruth was daughter of Eglon, king of Moab.



thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.”  
“ Oh, yes : let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” With thee my spirit hopes to commune at the approach of the king of terrors, and on the dark borders of the sepulchre. With thee I hope to stand on the right hand of the Judge of quick and dead. In thy company I hope to lift up my head with a multitude which no man can number, of those who have come out of great tribulation to enjoy the glory of eternity. Possessed of thy all-conquering faith, I can say to death, Where is thy sting ? and to the grave, Where is thy victory ? In communion with thee and thy people, I can look at both without dismay, and my departing soul shall quit this earthly tabernacle in sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life, and of a joyful meeting again in realms of endless bliss. “ And therefore where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.” She completed her irrevocable determination by the sanction of an inviolable oath. “ God do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.” Death parts those whom nothing else can part, but then the parting is only for a time between them who belong to the Israel of God. Death alone can separate the true believer from the company and converse of those who are members of spiritual fellowship here on earth. No inconvenience can part him : no discouragement can part him : no required self-denial can part him : no

disappointment in those from whom more might have been hoped for can part him: no apparent unkindness on the part of those who were expected to be all love to one another can part him. No: nothing but the dissolution of this perishable frame, and the departure of the free spirit into a world of eternal rest, can part him, who has tasted that the Lord is precious, from his servants here below: nothing in short can do it but that which brings him into a more blessed company still, the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect in glory. And we have the secret determination of every one that is truly born again, expressed in the strong language of Ruth to Naomi, "God do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

1. From this subject it is manifest that God can bring good out of what appears at first to be an unmixed evil. The union of Naomi's sons with two gentile women was not according to the practice of the chosen race and the dictates of the word of God; and it is possible, as some Jewish teachers have held, that their premature death was a judgment upon them for deviating from the hallowed customs of their nation in that respect. Nevertheless, a gracious God ultimately overruled the evil to the consolation of his afflicted servant, and to the salvation of an immortal soul. To Naomi the union

proved a source of consolation in the lowest depths of woe, for Orpah and Ruth befriended her, and solaced her, and stood by her when she had no other comforter or companion in the wide world. To Ruth the connexion proved an unspeakable gain, for it was the means of bringing her from the condition of an alien and a foreigner to that of a member of the commonwealth of Israel, and of joining her ultimately to the happy throng that shall come from the north and from the south, from the east and from the west, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of their God. Here then is encouragement, not indeed to the worldly-minded or the presumptuous hypocrite who says, "Let us do evil that good may come;" but to the afflicted one that is already plunged in a sea of troubles. Even though these troubles may have been partly owing to your own want of faith, or to the errors of those who were very dear unto you, yet do not despair. There is a God in heaven who can even out of these calamities work out unexpected and invaluable blessings. He can rule the fiercest tempests, and cause the stormiest winds and waves of sorrow to waft your frail bark to a haven of peace and joy at last. O then "cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee," and whatever be your lot in this vale of tears, learn to say with the Psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou

disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

2. From Naomi's conduct in setting clearly before the minds of her daughters-in-law the difficulties and discouragements connected with her future home and prospects, we gather the duty of Ministers of the Gospel fully to acquaint sinners with the trials, and self-denials, and present disadvantages to be expected by the heirs of salvation. We find our Lord speaking very plainly and unreservedly upon that point. "Strait is the gate," said he on one occasion, "and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that go in thereat." And on another occasion, when a man said unto him, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," He answered in effect, Be not so hasty in making the resolution: thou knowest not the hardships of my lot. It is more trying far than you appear to imagine; for "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." That is my case, and therefore whoever cometh after me must deny himself and take up his cross. Those who embrace the service of Christ without being prepared to encounter all and to risk all for his sake—to suffer scorn, and contempt, and poverty, and destitution in his service, will in the hour of trial, like Orpah, return to their own country and to their own

gods. Mindful of this, we would anxiously warn men against taking up a hollow and superficial profession of religion—a religion that will last only during the sunshine of fashion or prosperity—or a religion that requires but a partial renunciation of the world, the flesh, and the devil—or a religion that stops short of following out the whole revealed will of God. “Ye cannot serve the Lord,” said Joshua to assembled Israel, wishing plainly to guard them against self-deception, “ye cannot serve the Lord:” and why? “for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins:” *i.e.* you cannot serve Him acceptably unless you are pure in heart, for He is a holy God; not unless you give Him your undivided homage, for He is a jealous God; not unless you discontinue every evil habit, for He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins while they are unforsaken. And we say unto you, brethren, you cannot be ~~accepted~~ indeed, while your minds are divided between God and the world, and your lives stained with daily transgression. Cleanse your hands, therefore, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded men; and then shall ye acceptably draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you.

3. We learn from this subject, that much amiability may exist in the character without any grace in the heart. Orpah was an affection-



ate and dutiful wife. She was a kind and attentive and attached daughter-in-law. She sympathized in Naomi's sorrow, and accompanied her a long way towards her native home, and even expressed an intention to follow her to the end of her journey, and to participate in all the remaining contingencies of her earthly lot. And yet she stopped short of Canaan, and returned to Moab. We cannot but lament that one of so fair a promise should have drawn back to the darkness of idolatry and heathenism. All our partialities and best wishes are in favour of persons displaying such qualities as hers, and we grieve to think that they should come short of the kingdom of heaven. We cannot help loving the young men and women who appear faithful to all their moral duties, faultless in the eye of the world, and correct in all the relations of life. Nay, it is expressly said, that our blessed Saviour himself, on one occasion, loved a character such as these. One came running unto Him, and kneeled to Him, and said, "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And when he enumerated the commandments, he replied, "All these have I observed from my youth." How amiable and lovely! Respectful in approaching, and deferential in addressing the great Teacher, and literally exact in his obedience to the moral law. And yet, when he was wishing to save his soul, distinctly told him what he must do and endure

to obtain that eternal life, concerning which he had inquired, he shrunk from the difficulty of the enterprise. When, however, out of regard to his highest interests, said, "One thing thou lackest yet: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, and take up the cross and follow me. He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had many possessions." It is clear, then, that you may bear a very fair and promising character before men, and yet be destitute of the one thing needful. Oh, what a solemn and awful thought! to love and to be loved here, and to lie under the curse and the wrath of God hereafter. How shall we save you, my friends, both young and old, from such a fearful peril? We must pray, indeed, that God will give you his grace, and give you a new heart, and put a right spirit within you, and "take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." But we must also insist upon your imitating the conduct of Ruth. You must not be satisfied with a formal worship, like that of idolaters, but must take the true God for your God, and worship Him in spirit and in truth. You must no longer associate with the careless or the profane, nor think of turning again to the unhallowed pleasures of a world that passeth away, but you must choose God's people for your people, and willingly unite in the communion of the saints.

You must cleave unto them until death, and say from the ground of the heart, and by daily practice, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." You must allow no difficulties to deter you from the steadfastness of such a purpose; and you must, like Ruth, take a solemn oath of inviolable attachment and eternal adherence to Jehovah and his people. That oath you will have an opportunity of taking in this place on the morning of the next Sabbath; for the very meaning of the word Sacrament is an oath of fidelity. Oh, that all that hear me would so devote themselves to the reasonable service, and say, with one heart and one mind, "Come and let us henceforth join ourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall never be forgotten." Amen.

## SERMON IV.

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### RUTH.

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RUTH ii. 2, 3.

“And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.”

RUTH, whose determination to cleave to her mother-in-law we considered at large in our last discourse, accompanied Naomi to Bethlehem. The inhabitants of that place received the pilgrims with mingled feelings of surprise and grief, at the havoc which affliction had made in the once prosperous house of Elimelech<sup>1</sup>. But their sympathy seems to have extended no further than to expressions of pity and condolence; and the prospect of temporal comfort there appeared, at first, fully as gloomy as Naomi had represented it to her two daugh-

<sup>1</sup> See Sermon on Naomi.

ters-in-law, when she recommended them to return to the land of Moab. Ruth was obliged to support herself, and probably her mother-in-law also, by the fruits of her own industry. The time of their arrival at Bethlehem was the beginning of barley harvest<sup>2</sup>, and she proposed to Naomi to avail herself of the opportunity presented by the season of the year to obtain the means of subsistence by the labour of her hands. "Let me now go," said she, "to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace."

Although the manners of those times were far more simple than the present, and women of rank were often found engaged in pursuits now considered menial, yet, we are sure that this occupation of gleaning was, even in those early ages, and Eastern countries, confined to persons in distressed and troubled circumstances, as appears from these passages in the law of Moses: "When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again; when thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterwards; when ye reap the harvest of the land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them for the poor, for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow."

<sup>2</sup> About the 15th day of the month Nisan, which corresponds nearly with our month of March.



It appears, however, from Ruth's expression, "In whose sight I shall find grace," and from other expressions in this book, that the owner of the land had a right to choice and exclusion with regard to the individuals who should enjoy these advantages. By the providence of God, in which she now evidently trusted on every occasion, she entered the field of one predisposed to kindness and liberality in her behalf. The servant who was over the reapers, aware, doubtless, of his master's sentiments, had already complied with her request that she might "glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." And when the master himself arrived, and ascertained who she was, he confirmed the permission, and enhanced its value by the most encouraging language, and by the addition of other marks of welcome and kindness. He addressed her by the condescending and affectionate appellation of "daughter." He told her that she need not trouble herself to ask the favour of any other proprietor of land, and urged her to continue her industrious labours within his own possessions. He charged all his servants to treat her with respect and kindness. She was a stranger and a foreigner: her language, her dress, her general appearance were probably different from those of his dependants; and therefore it was the more necessary to caution them against any conduct that might cause her pain. How considerate and delicate

a behaviour was this! There are many who mar the good effects of their charity, by forgetting that the poor have feelings as well as the rich. This truly generous man was as careful to guard the destitute damsel against insult, as he was to supply her with the necessaries of life. He also consulted her immediate comforts, and invited her to partake of the refreshing water provided for his own servants, which was probably brought from the delicious well of Bethlehem, the same which David, ages after, on a memorable occasion, so earnestly longed to drink of<sup>3</sup>, saying unto her, "When thou art athirst, go unto the vessels which the young men have drawn."

These words of kindness and demonstrations of unusual welcome filled the poor daughter of affliction with sentiments of wondering and overwhelming gratitude; and she could not refrain from asking the reason of a reception so far beyond all that she had ventured to hope for. "She fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" He answered, that he was not ignorant of her history, and said unto her, "It hath been fully shown me, all that thou hast done since the death of thine husband: and how thou

<sup>3</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 15. 1 Chron. xi. 17.

hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore." From this language it is clear, that though Naomi had counselled her on prudential grounds to return to Moab, like Orpah, her magnanimous and self-denying conduct in following the fortunes of the desolate mother at the sacrifice of early associations and domestic comforts, had excited the warmest admiration of Naomi herself, and Naomi's people. This excellent man had deeply appreciated a disinterested attachment such as that, and, therefore, he added an earnest prayer that Heaven itself might abundantly bless it. "The Lord," said he, "recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Thus, when the redeemed shall stand at the right hand of their chief Friend, and hear his gracious accents bidding them welcome into glory and bliss, and they shall fall down at his feet, lost in wonder, love, and praise, at his marvellous loving-kindness, so far beyond what they had presumed to hope, He will say unto them, It hath fully been showed me, how ye willingly renounced the sinful pleasures and idolatrous predilections of yonder world, to join yourselves to my family and country—how you severed yourselves from youthful companions, early friends, yea, even near relatives, because

they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, to hold sweet communion with the saints of God—how you left as it were your father and mother and the land of your nativity, and came unto a people that you knew not before—how you inconvenienced yourselves to show kindness to the bereaved, destitute, and woe-begone members of my flock in the vale of tears. O think ye that I knew not or felt not those self-denying works of faith, and those most generous labours of love? I was afflicted in all the afflictions of those broken-hearted ones, and I count all your goodness towards them as a kindness bestowed upon me. I was in their persons hungry and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, a stranger and ye took me in, sick and in prison and ye visited me. And, therefore, everlasting recompenses and rewards shall be yours: and come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” O then, who shall not strive to imitate according to their circumstances and opportunities the noble conduct of Ruth?

The master's subsequent conduct to the grateful stranger, proved as liberal as his words had been gracious. He bade her sit down and eat with his own family, and helped her to food with his own hand. He commanded his young men to allow her greater privileges than ordinary gleaners, saying unto them, “Let her

glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not." Thus encouraged and favoured, she proceeded industriously with her work throughout the day, and at its close found that she had gathered an ephah of barley. This quantity of corn,<sup>4</sup> which was probably more than the usual fruit of one day's gleaning, she carried home to share it with Naomi. It appears also, that, mindful of her mother-in-law's wants, she brought her part of the victuals which she had received in the field, as we may infer from the words, "And she brought forth, and gave her that she had reserved, after she was sufficed." Naomi, surprised and delighted by the successful result of her day's labour, asked her where she had toiled, and before she could receive an answer, blessed the man, whoever he might be, that had shown so much of kindness and generosity to her beloved daughter-in-law. When Ruth told her that his name was Boaz, and doubtless also related the particulars of the conversation that had taken place between them, Naomi felt doubly grateful to him for having thought of the dead as well as the living, and for having been influenced in his generous behaviour to Ruth by a kind remem-

<sup>4</sup> An ephah was three pecks and three pints.



brance of her dear departed ones. She then accounted to her daughter-in-law, in some measure, for the extraordinary and unexpected goodness which he had displayed, by explaining the near relationship which existed between Boaz and the family of Elimelech, and advised her carefully to avail herself of the kind invitation he had given to continue gleaning in his fields alone, and to persevere in working among his labourers, "until they had ended all the harvest." Ruth faithfully acted upon the advice, kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest.

whom Boaz was a type, is merciful and gracious to the weary and heavy laden, because He is their near kinsman. He assumed our nature with all its pains and trials. He has been experimentally afflicted in our afflictions. He has been sorely *assaulted* by our temptations. He therefore feels a sympathetic tenderness for the woes and sorrows of fallen humanity, and is most willing to console, as He is most able to succour, all that come unto Him for help. O then, go unto Him in your desolation and distress. Say unto Him, like Ruth, "Let me find favour in thy sight, my Lord," and He will feed you with the bread of life, and refresh you with the streams of salvation, and cause you to go on your way rejoicing. Be advised to continue among his people, like Ruth, throughout the

barley harvest and the wheat harvest. Through every season, through youth, through manhood, and through old age, seek not to increase your happiness out of the Good Shepherd's fold, but be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the works of the Lord; and when the harvest of probation is past, and the summer of life is ended, you shall enter into that blessed rest which remaineth for the people of God.

To proceed with the history of Ruth: it was one of the provisions of the Levitical law, that the brother or nearest kinsman<sup>5</sup> of a deceased husband should marry his widow, and that her first-born son, after such a marriage, should succeed to the name of her first husband, "that his name should not be put out in Israel." Now Naomi deemed it right that her widowed daughter should avail herself of the privilege to which she was entitled by this enactment. She imagined that Boaz stood the nearest in that relation, and was encouraged by his kindness already showed to Ruth to hope that he would do the kinsman's part according to the letter of the law. She therefore advised Ruth to go and assert this claim. There was nothing unusual in such an assertion. It was

<sup>5</sup> The letter of the law (Deut. xxv. 5.) seems to have required this only of brothers, but custom probably extended the obligation afterwards to relatives, especially those who were heirs-at-law to the deceased.

customary in Israel for widows so to do, though the manner of doing so on this occasion might not be free from objection. By some the conduct of Naomi, in dictating that manner of obtaining justice for her daughter-in-law is strongly censured, since we must beware not only of *doing* evil, but of *risking* evil, that good may come. By others it is contended that the customs of those simple times are not to be judged by the standard of the present artificial and refined state of society—that Naomi had perfect confidence in the high characters both of Ruth and Boaz—that the claim would be more likely to succeed with a man of Boaz's generous nature, if made in a private, than if preferred in a more open and public manner—and that, therefore, apprehending no evil consequences from the step she advised, she recommended it as the most likely to secure for her excellent daughter-in-law the temporal blessings which would arise from a union with Boaz, and which she had a legal right to aspire to. But however correct the motives of Naomi, and however equitable the claims of Ruth, it appears from the language and conduct of Boaz himself, that the counsel of the mother to the daughter on this occasion so far as the manner of proceeding was concerned, was to a certain extent censurable, and incapable of being altogether justified, whence you may learn that you must guard against claiming

or doing that which is true and just in a manner calculated to excite suspicions of your integrity and holiness. Exactly to the same effect the Apostle exhorts, "Avoid all appearance of evil," and "let not your good be evil spoken of."

Boaz, however, did not, like a proud and hard-hearted man seeking an excuse for neglecting a poor relation, make the injudicious mode in which the claim had been made, a ground for rejecting the claim altogether. On the contrary, he spoke graciously to her as he had done the day he first saw her in the field, praised her virtuous, generous, and exemplary conduct, and promised to do all in his power to promote her prosperity and happiness. He informed her that she was mistaken in supposing him to be the most nearly related to her deceased husband, that there was a nearer kinsman living in the city, and that under those circumstances it did not belong to him to marry Mahlon's widow. But he added, that if that person refused to comply with the directions of the law upon the subject, he as the next related after him would, and he confirmed that promise by a solemn appeal to the Searcher of hearts. With this assurance, and with a present of corn from Boaz, she returned to her mother-in-law, and related to her all the particulars of the interview. Naomi was perfectly satisfied with the result, and encouraged Ruth to wait with patient yet

confident hope in Boaz's continued goodness, saying, "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not bein rest until he have finished the thing this day." Excellent advice this, founded on the best possible ground, the general character of Boaz, and his particular goodness already shewed to the applicant. "Sit still," said Naomi to Ruth, "and see how the matter will turn out." She had done her duty in making her claim as directed by the law, and now she was to give herself no further anxiety on the subject, but to leave the issue in the hands of a gracious Providence. "Be careful for nothing," says the apostle, "but in every thing by prayer and supplication let your wants be made known unto God." Do not suffer yourselves to be distracted by cares and anxieties about the future. Having done what you could for the best, and having solicited the Divine blessing on your efforts, quietly wait the event whatever it may be. Ruth was encouraged so to do from the known character of Boaz. Even so, every Christian may confidently rely upon Him who has done so much for sinful men. See how good and condescending He has already been. He has visited you in your low estate. He has encouraged you by words of welcome and consolation. He has invited you to his own blessed table. He has made unto you exceeding great and precious promises. O then let not the contin-



gencies of this evanescent world disturb your minds. "Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you. Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he will sustain thee. 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 upon 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."

Boaz amply fulfilled the hopes of Naomi. He embraced the first opportunity of doing justice to the claims of Ruth. According to the directions of the law in such a case, he called the nearest kinsman to a court of elders, held at the gate of the city, the usual place for the administration of justice, and made him acquainted with the distressed circumstances of Naomi, recently returned from the country of Moab. He informed him that she had a parcel of land to sell, which had probably been mortgaged by Elimelech on quitting his country for the land of strangers, and the remaining value of which the widow's urgent necessities compelled her to convert into money, (or if, as some suppose, it was Naomi's own jointure, the same necessities required that it should now be sold). He reminded him that he as the heir-at-law had the first right—a right established by the custom of the country, or conceded by the honour-

able and courteous feelings of Boaz—to purchase that property. He asked him to come to a decision upon the subject in the presence of witnesses, giving him to understand, that if he declined the possession he himself, as the next of kin after him, would become the buyer of it. Upon that person expressing his readiness to redeem it, Boaz stated that one condition of the sale was, that the purchaser should marry the relict of Naomi's son. This condition was either imposed by the Divine law, or established by the custom of the country, or insisted upon by the mother as an indispensable part of the contract. The nearest kinsman on receiving this information declined the engagement, assigning as a reason, "lest he should mar his own inheritance." Some suppose that he was already a husband, and that although the law of Moses did not absolutely forbid a multiplicity of wives, he wisely feared the introduction by such a step of strife and contention into his family, which would have the effect of marring the comfort, peace and happiness of his house. Others are of opinion that he apprehended the additional burden which such a marriage would impose, would be more than proportionable to the additional property it would bring, and that he dreaded lest the division of his property among a greater number of children should lower the rank and consequence of his posterity, and *mar* the respectability of those who should

*inherit* his possessions. Or he might be unwilling that his own name should be merged or lost in his whose widow he married. Whatever was the precise reason for his refusal, we are rather inclined to think it was a reason which was satisfactory to the court of elders, and which reflected upon him no personal discredit, since he was spared the contemptuous treatment which the rigid letter of the law prescribed in such a case<sup>6</sup>. Boaz, upon hearing the decision of the nearest kinsman, and receiving his consent to purchase the property for himself, willingly entered upon the engagement, and called all the people assembled to attest the contract, saying, "Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day." We cannot be said to strain the meaning of Scripture, when we hold out this part of Boaz's conduct as strikingly typical of His, who became our Goël, who "did" unto us "the kinsman's part" by redeeming the lost inheritance, which was forfeited by our first parents' sad im-

<sup>6</sup> Compare Ruth iv. 8. with Deut. xxv. 9.

prudence and calamity in Eden. He beheld our fallen race in its poverty and desolation, felt towards it the yearnings of a tender compassion, and declared his purpose of adopting some plan to bring it into a more prosperous state. Perhaps many plans for the purpose were suggested by angels and archangels in the councils of eternity ; but they were all found inadequate to achieve the mighty enterprise. Perhaps suggestions were thrown out regarding the resources of the human family itself, as capable of being employed for its restoration—the wisdom, the intellect, the conscientiousness, the morality of some of its own members, but there were not found in one of them both the willingness and the ability to rescue it from woe. “There was no one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, able to open the book” of human redemption, and “to loose the seals thereof,” save “the lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David<sup>7</sup>.” “And when he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor, his own arm brought salvation unto him ; and his righteousness, it sustained him” in the mighty and gracious scheme. He entered our family, assumed our nature, became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and thus stepped into the situation of a near kinsman, and acquired a right to redeem us and

<sup>7</sup> Rev. v. 3, 5.

ours, and to improve our spiritual state and eternal prospects. "He called us," according to the prophet's words, "as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, that was refused<sup>8</sup>." Yea, though our father was an Amorite and our mother a Hittite—a parentage that had apostatised from the true God—though we lay as it were polluted in our own blood, and no eye did pity, and no hand could save us<sup>9</sup>, that celestial Kinsman came and said unto us, "Live and dwell with me." He ventured the marring of his own inheritance to give us an inheritance that fadeth not away; for though he was rich, He for our sake became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. He submitted to contempt and pain and contumely and death and the perfection of sufferings, in order to accomplish the grand and generous design of bringing many sons to glory. He declared his blessed purpose by types, by prophecies, by signs and by miracles. He sent forth his apostles "to witness" it like St. Paul "to small and great" and to them that were afar off and to them that were near. And now He proclaims to all the human family, "I have purchased you to myself to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, and therefore awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and I will give thee light. Come unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah liv. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ezek. xvi. 6.



When Boaz declared his intention to marry Ruth, the people appear to have expressed great admiration of his noble conduct towards the memory of the departed, and the affliction of the living, and implored the richest blessings of heaven upon him and upon his bride, saying, "The Lord make the woman that is come unto thine house like Rachel, and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Beth-lehem." And when a son was born unto them, Naomi's friends poured their congratulations on her aged head, and blessed the Lord, who had brought her out of great tribulation into a condition of comfort and prosperity at last,—given her a child that would replace those who were gone, and perpetuate her name and family in Israel, and raised her up a beloved relative that should be a restorer of her life, and a nourisher of her old age. That son Naomi took under her own especial care, and was nursed by herself, and called by the name of Obed, or *servant*, to indicate, as it is supposed, how *subservient* and attentive he was to the comfort and happiness of the once afflicted grandmother during the remainder of her peaceful days. Obed became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, king of Israel; from whom sprang a renowned line of princes, saints, and heroes. How important and wonderful,

then, were the results of Ruth's happy choice, when she stedfastly clave to Naomi, and said, with full purpose of heart, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God!" She was not only raised to unexpected affluence in her own lifetime; she was not only enabled to solace the declining years of her aged mother-in-law, to whom she had manifested so tender an attachment; but she became the foremother of the most celebrated characters, and the most renowned personages recorded in the annals of our race. From her came David, the hero-king, and the hero-saint, the sweet singer of Israel, and the man after God's own heart. From her came Solomon, the most magnificent of monarchs, the most instructive of moral writers, and the wisest of men. From her came Hezekiah, at whose supplication his term of life was prolonged, and a formidable host of enemies miraculously destroyed. From her came Josiah, the reformer of abuses, the exterminator of idolatries, and the restorer of the pure worship of Jehovah. From her, probably, came Daniel, who returned unhurt from the den of fierce lions; and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who passed unscathed through the burning fiery furnace. And, above all, from her came He who was higher than any earthly monarch, and superior to any human teacher or prophet, "greater than Solomon"—"greater than Jonah"

—the Counsellor, the Wonderful, the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer of all men, and the Saviour of every one that believeth.

When we consider this last-mentioned fact, the Messiah's descent from her—and, as we have already said, accurately to exhibit this genealogy was one of the chief purposes of the Holy Spirit in recording her history<sup>1</sup>—the choice of Ruth becomes invested with an importance of a singularly interesting and almost<sup>2</sup> unrivalled character. It appears to have been peculiarly directed by the finger of God, not only to promote the salvation of one individual, but also to serve the purpose of teaching a truth of universal moment; the connexion of the Heathens as well as the Jews with the incarnation of the Son of God. By the union of Ruth the Moabite with Boaz the lineal descendant of Judah, the Saviour of sinners, as touching his humanity, was descended from Gentile as well as from Israelitish ancestry; and we are thereby given clearly to understand that when He appeared to bring in an everlasting righteousness, the wall of partition would be broken down, that the descendants of Abraham, according to the flesh, were no longer to be a peculiar people and to enjoy a preference of religious privileges,

<sup>1</sup> See Sermon on Naomi.

<sup>2</sup> The determination of Rahab in favour of the spies was of a similar character. See Sermons on Rahab, First Series.

but that the door of hope would be opened to all nations, peoples, and tongues, that all the ends of the earth should one day see the salvation of our God, and that all the tribes of our divided race should form one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Who could have foreseen such a variety of blessed results from the inviolable attachment and resolute piety of Ruth? As little, my brethren, can you imagine the multifarious benefits that will arise from serving the true God, and cleaving to the people of God, through good report, and through evil report. Godliness has promise of the life that now is. I have no doubt that the preponderance of real happiness in this world is vastly in favour of Jehovah's faithful servants; and it is past all dispute that none but they have any chance of happiness in that which is to come. Oh, then, imitate the decided conduct of Ruth, and elevation and joys shall be yours, the extent and splendour of which it hath never entered into the heart of man to conceive. Choose the God of Israel, as revealed in the volume of inspired truth, for your God, and his people for your people; and even here you shall enter into rest, and joy, and peace, that passeth all understanding, and henceforth you shall inherit diadems of glory, and drink of rivers of bliss at God's right hand for evermore.

## SERMON V.

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HANNAH.

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1 SAM. i. 10.

“And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.”

THE person, whose mingled affliction and devotion are thus described, was Hannah, whose life we propose now to consider. She was the wife of Elkanah, a Levite, of the house of Kohath. Some of the Kohathites, upon the settlement of Israel in Canaan, took up their residence in Ephratah, or Beth-lehem-judah; and of this branch of the Kohathites, individuals afterwards, from time to time, removed to the neighbourhood of mount Ephraim. A branch of the Kohathites had also fixed their habitations near mount Ephraim, on the original division of the country<sup>1</sup>, the Levites not having been allotted a continuous tract of territory, like the other tribes, but having, by Divine ordinance, been dispersed throughout the coun-

<sup>1</sup> Josh. xxi. 4, 5.



try for the more convenient instruction of the whole nation, whose appointed teachers they were. There was, therefore, a family connexion between Beth-lehem or Ephratah and the neighbourhood of mount Ephraim, which will account for the recorded removal of individual Levites from the one place to the other, as that of Micah's Levite mentioned in the book of Judges<sup>2</sup>, who came from Beth-lehem to mount Ephraim, and will explain the description given of Elkanah's residence, and genealogy, that he was a man of Ramathaim-zophim<sup>3</sup>, of mount Ephraim, and yet, that his ancestor Zuph was an Ephrathite, or a native of Beth-lehem-judah.

Elkanah is supposed to have lived about the time of Manoah, the father of Samson, which was the middle of the twelfth century before our Saviour's birth. He was regularly attentive to his religious duties, for he went at the appointed times of the year to worship God at Shiloh, where the ark and tabernacle had continued from the days of Joshua. But he had departed from the original institution relating to marriage, and had taken to himself two wives, of whom, the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. This departure from the ordinance of Eden, though, as we have often had occasion to observe, not absolutely forbidden by the Mosaic law, appears to

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xvii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> The Arimathea of the New Testament.

have been almost invariably attended with family troubles, dissensions, and jealousies. You will remember its effects in the household of Abraham, the heart-burnings it occasioned to Sarah, the arrogance and vain-glory it excited in Hagar, and the final banishment of the latter with her youthful son from the patriarch's opulent home into the waste and barren wilderness. You will remember its effects in the family of Jacob, the parental partialities to which it gave rise, the envy and jealousies between the children which followed, the unnatural treatment of Joseph by his brethren, and the cruel presentation to the aged father of the coat of many colours dipped in blood. Similar were the effects of polygamy in the family of Elkanah ; and when we consider that all such evils are traceable to a deviation from the original institution of marriage as ordained by God, we are reminded of the wise man's remark, " God hath made man upright, but they have found out many inventions."

Hannah was, probably, his first wife ; but she was debarred the blessing of children, so earnestly desired by the wives of Israel, each of them hoping that from herself might descend the Messiah, the King of kings. And it might be with Hannah's own consent, as in the case of Sarah and Hagar, that her husband was induced to marry a second wife, to prevent the obliteration of his name in Israel ; and, perhaps, in hopes of his becoming an ancestor of the Mes-

siah. This other wife, as Hagar, before her heart was touched by Divine grace, did unto Sarah, behaved to Hannah with cruel insolence and contemptuousness. She reproached her with that, which she already regarded as the greatest affliction, the want of children. This was most ungenerous and unkind conduct, and had the effect of plunging Hannah into a deep sea of mental distress and anguish. If we are visited by misfortune, it becomes incalculably more bitter, when we find it made a ground of obloquy and insulting triumph by rivals and by enemies. This state of things continued, we know not how many years, in the family of Elkanah. Notwithstanding these jealousies and heartburnings in his household, he did not discontinue attending the courts of the Lord's house. He went up three times in the year according to the law at the feasts of the passover, the pentecost, and the tabernacles, to sacrifice unto the Lord at Shiloh. It appears, however, that on these public occasions, which ought to have been devoted to more solemn meditations, Peninnah made an especial display of her superiority over the afflicted Hannah. The former could appear before the Lord with a numerous train of children, while the latter presented the desolate appearance of one debarred from the envied honours of maternity. Her husband would endeavour to console her despondency by peculiar marks of

affection and regard ; for while he gave to Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters portions of the sacrifice which they were to partake of in token of their communion with God, to Hannah he gave a *worthy portion*, or a double portion, in proof of his especial love and respect. ‘This preference inflamed Peninnah’s violent temper beyond all power of control, and caused her to avenge her husband’s partiality to Hannah by upbraiding her with her barrenness more insultingly than before ; and “she provoked her soul to make her fret because the Lord had shut up her womb.” She would probably ask her, “Where are thy sons and daughters, who are to perpetuate in Israel these feasts of the Lord? Shalt thou have a double portion of the meat of a sacrifice in which thou canst have comparatively but little interest? And shall I, a mother of God’s children, be set in honour below thee, whom, if all the mothers in the land had resembled, this ordinance, designed for us and for our posterity for evermore, had long ceased for the want of persons to celebrate it. I have not made the Lord’s promises of none effect. See how largely they have been fulfilled in these many sons and daughters who surround my table. Why He hath withheld them from thee thou best canst tell. Doubtless thy sin hath

† See Evans’s Scrip. Biog.

herein found thee out. Thou hast committed some grievous offence against the Lord, and his judgment has overtaken thee, and his curse has fallen upon thee."

Often had she heard some such language as this, and often had she shed floods of tears under the barbarous treatment, and often had these reproaches interrupted her enjoyment of the religious festival. Although her husband said unto her on these sad occasions, "Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" yet she refused to be comforted. There are troubles of the mind which no human counsel can assuage. There are wounds of the heart which neither human friendship nor human love can heal. There are times when we are compelled to say of all human instruments of solace and support, "Miserable comforters are ye all." Hannah felt this, and while, doubtless, she was grateful for her husband's kind solicitude in endeavouring to cheer her heavy laden spirit, she saw there was no remedy for her broken heart, but in the almighty grace and goodness of the Lord. She therefore resolved to have recourse to Him by humble and earnest prayer. The time and place happened to be very favourable for the purpose. She was at Shiloh, where was the special house of prayer, and where God had promised to meet his people.



She, with her family, had just offered unto the Lord their peace offerings, which typified the mediatorial services of the Redeemer, and had held communion with Him at his holy altar. She availed herself of the convenient place, and accepted time, to unburden the load of her grief, and to prefer an earnest petition for the merciful interposition of Heaven. It was not a lukewarm prayer which she offered, but the earnest appeal of a breaking heart, "for she was in bitterness of soul." It was not a dry and tearless supplication, but while she prayed unto the Lord, "she wept sore." It was not the request of a selfish and thankless mind, which, having obtained its desire, cared not about afterwards acknowledging its obligations, but she vowed a solemn vow of deepest gratitude, and said, "O Lord God of hosts<sup>5</sup>, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." All this was spoken, though very earnestly, yet so softly, that no articulate voice or sound reached any human ear. She thus proved her faith in Jehovah's omniscience, and the conviction that she was speaking to One who knew the thoughts and

<sup>5</sup> This is the first place in Scripture where this title is given to God.

intents of the heart, and who needed not to be addressed in audible speech. She also manifested her modesty and humility, such as became a sinful person approaching the High and the Holy One, in whose sight the heavens are not clean, and who chargeth his angels with folly. Whence you may gather, that though on the one hand we are not to be ashamed of prayer, we are on the other hand to guard against praying for the purpose of being seen of men; and while it is a plain duty to join visibly and audibly in the public worship of God in the congregation, there are private devotions to be performed, of which none are cognisant but our own earnest souls, and He, "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid."

But Hannah, with all her modesty, sincerity, and true devotion, could not escape censure and rebuke. She had retired from the presence of the adversary, to seek consolation in the presence of God. But even here her conduct at first subjected her to misconstruction and reproof, and that from a quarter where she might have expected encouragement and support. Eli, the high priest, who was seated in the tabernacle<sup>6</sup>, observing her lips move, sus-

<sup>6</sup> In the text, the word "temple" is used,—a substitution which is by some regarded as one proof that the compiler of the books of Samuel lived after the building of the first temple.

pected her of being in a state most unbecoming a frequenter of God's house, and directly charged her with the shameful vice of drunkenness. It was the imputation cast upon Peter and the rest of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, when in fact they were under the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit. It was great rashness, in both cases, to pass so severe a censure without better information, but more especially in Eli, the priest of the Lord, who should have had compassion on the afflicted as well as the ignorant, and who should have been withheld from finding fault, except on the foundation of undoubted proof. Let all hence learn to be cautious how they judge the devotions of others, and apply the hard names of hypocrisy, or fanaticism, to that which is no other than a hearty earnestness and an ardent zeal in the reasonable service of God. Let them beware, too, of embittering the feelings of a spirit already wounded by the imputation of evil motives; and even though their suspicions may be excited, yet, while certainty is not attained, let them rather incline to a favourable construction, remembering that the heavenly grace of charity, with which every true believer is clothed, "is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, but beareth all things, and hopeth all things." Hannah, though now unjustly accused, as before she had been cruelly reproached, did not forget the temper that became a woman

professing godliness, nor the respect which was due to the priest of God. She never thought of making a sharp retort, and of upbraiding him with the dissolute and profligate conduct of his own sons. She did not tell him how ill it became one who restrained not his own children from notorious debauchery, to overwhelm a desolate worshipper with such severity of rebuke. No: She thought she had no right to go beyond the vindication of her own character, and contenting herself with a modest, yet firm, denial of the charge, she answered, in a manner that conveyed conviction to her reprover's heart, "No; my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto," *i.e.* I am dejected in mind, and discomposed by sore vexation and solicitude, and that is the reason why my conduct may appear strange and extraordinary. Mine eyes are not red with wine, but with streams of bitter tears. I have not been talking to myself like the fools who are overcome with drink, but I have been conversing with One who can understand the inarticulate language of a broken heart, and the noiseless appeal of a wounded spirit. A daughter of Belial should I justly be regarded, did I give way to that abominable vice, so de-

structive both to body and soul. Most profane, and wicked, and most deserving of the gravest censure should I be, did I venture to come in such a state into the courts of the Lord's house. But blessed be God, with all my sorrows, I have not that to be sorry for. My conduct has been actuated by very different causes. With prayer and supplication I have been making known my wants to the Source of all consolation, and pouring forth at his footstool the heavy load of my grief. Eli, upon hearing this, immediately endeavoured to soothe the feelings he had unjustly hurt. A pious man may fall into error respecting the character of others, but he will no sooner discover his mistake, than he will endeavour to make all the reparation in his power for the pain or injury he has occasioned. It is only the unprincipled and the malignant that will persist in groundless suspicions and unsustainable accusations. The aged priest addressed her now in very different language, poured balm into the wounds of her mind, and dismissed her with a blessing and an earnest prayer for her prosperity and success, saying, "Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him!" That benediction and her own supplications the God of Israel graciously heard, and eventually carried into effect; and Hannah, having a full assurance of faith that it would "be unto her even as she willed," ceased to



fast and to grieve, but went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. She had received "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Blessed are they that mourn before the Lord, for they shall be comforted."

Hannah was not disappointed in her expectations. She became a mother, and called the child by a name which indicated that he had been given her in answer to prayer, Samuel, or asked of God. Nor did she forget the vow of thanksgiving which she had made in the season of her tribulation. No sooner was her son weaned, which was probably at the age of three years, than she brought him to Shiloh and presented him to the Lord to abide in his tabernacle for ever. She reminded Eli of her earnest prayer in the house of God. She now came to pay her vow for the success of her petition. She offered a burnt offering and a meat offering on the occasion, and said unto the aged priest, "O my Lord, as my soul liveth, my Lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition, which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him<sup>7</sup> to the

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew verb, from which the word Samuel is derived, signifies in one conjugation "asked" and in another "lent;" accordingly, the name may be translated either "asked of the Lord," or "lent to the Lord."

Lord. As long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord. All the blessings we enjoy, whether asked for or not, are the gifts of God. And whatever we give Him in return, we do but give Him of his own. The children in whom we take delight come from the same source, and if we like Hannah will lend them unto the Lord, we shall receive a return of incalculable blessings in their and our own spiritual and eternal good. And let us not merely do like all the mothers of Israel, who presented their first-born in the tabernacle or the temple at the age of forty days and then took them home—dedicate them at baptism only, and then neglect the bringing of them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—but let us like Hannah lend them unto the Lord for ever, and strive and pray that they may keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of their life. You may well expect the divine blessing on such godly efforts. Samuel, early initiated into the service of the tabernacle by a pious mother, appears to have presently taken to the delightful and heavenly work, for it is distinctly added immediately after his dedication, that he "worshipped the Lord there." And believers have reason in every age to hope the best of those who have been the objects of parental solicitude, parental supplication, and careful parental introduction into the fruitful vineyard of the Lord. "Train

up a child in the way he should go," and the blessed promise is, "when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Hannah on presenting her son unto the Lord, and offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or perhaps on some subsequent occasion of visiting her son, at Shiloh, poured forth the feelings of her full heart in a beautiful hymn of praise. From that hymn we find sentiments and expressions borrowed by Habakkuk, by David the sweet singer of Israel, and by Zecharias the father of John the Baptist, a proof of its extraordinary merit and propriety as a poetical and devotional effusion. And more than all, it was in a great measure adopted by the blessed Mary, to express her wondering gratitude at the marvellous condescension and goodness, which had made her so eminently blessed among women, there being a close parallel between it and the *magnificat*, so often read or chanted in the service of our Church. Thus, with the exception of the book of Psalms, which is a collection of songs, we find the principal and the finest poetical compositions of Scripture partly or wholly emanating from women; such as the song of Moses, in which Miriam took a conspicuous part, the song of Deborah and Barak, most probably composed by that eminent prophetess, the song of Hannah now under consideration, and the parallel but still more beautiful song of the blessed

In the fervid strain of mingled poetry and devotion uttered on this occasion by the mother of Samuel, we have exclamations of joy and confidence in Jehovah alternating with allusions to the former pride and arrogance of her enemies, now stripped of their boasted superiority. But her feelings of gratitude and admiration towards her gracious Benefactor evidently predominate over those of exultation and triumph towards the adversary by whom her soul had once been made sorrowful. To Him she traces every good gift, and to Him therefore she ascribes all the praise. His glorious attributes call forth her rapturous and repeated eulogy, such as His unrivalled purity, for "there is none holy as the Lord;" His unparticipated divinity, "for there is none beside thee;" His unequalled power, for "neither is there any rock like our God;" His sublime omniscience, "for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed;" His absolute control over life and death, for "the Lord killeth and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up;" His minute superintendence over the distribution of the world's goods, for the "Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; He bringeth low and lifteth up;" His creative and sustaining power, by which this terraqueous globe was made and continues to be supported, "for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them;" His unfa-

ing care of those who put their trust in Him, and his irresistible wrath against the children of disobedience, "for He preserveth the way of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness;" and, lastly, His impartial and universal judgment, whereby the wicked shall be utterly destroyed, and the righteous crowned with glory, for "the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces: out of heaven shall He thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, and He shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." How weak, she would seem to say, is the subtlety or violence of the devil or man against such an array of bright perfections, and how peaceful in their minds, how confident of help and defence may all the servants of the Lord feel, when they consider that all these perfections are engaged in their behalf. How little have they to fear from the assaults of enemies, and how safe they may believe themselves to be while under the care of so powerful a Friend, since by "human strength no man can prevail," either to do injury or to escape peril! How foolish it is to look with envious admiration at the prosperity of the rich and great of this world, and to fret at the adversity of the poor and humble, when the Almighty, if He please, can cause them to exchange places the one with the other, "for do I not see that the bows of the mighty are broken, while they that slumbered are girt with strength?"



Yea, they that were full have hired out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry ceased; so that the barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children hath waxed feeble. Surely mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies. I will therefore rejoice in the Lord, and delight in the God of my salvation." But we have in this heavenly song, agreeably to the typical and prophetic character of the sayings and doings of ancient saints, far greater things intimated and shadowed forth than the fluctuations of earthly prosperity and adversity. We here behold as in a glass the enemy of all righteousness vanquished and disgraced, and the anointed of the Lord exalted to universal dominion. We have also a figurative representation of those who shall have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and reached the happy state whence sorrow and sighing shall flee away. They are here in heaviness through many temptations and trials—sometimes the children of distress and poverty, sometimes the subjects of pain and sickness, often the marks for the contempt and scorn of men, always struggling with spiritual foes, who seek to cover them with dishonour and to overwhelm them with destruction; but the time is coming on, when He to whom they have often poured forth their souls in sighs and lamentations and earnest prayers, shall raise them far

above the storms and billows of this vale of tears, and put in their mouth a song of everlasting triumph and exultation, and enable them rejoicingly to say, "to Him who loved us, and made us kings and priests unto our God, be honour and blessing and glory and praise for ever and ever." Then, beloved, partakers of the heavenly calling, whatever be your lot here below, hope ye in God, for ye "shall yet praise him, who is the health of your countenance and your God."

We further read of Hannah that she went up every year with her husband to Shiloh, and was very attentive to the comfort and welfare of her first-born, whom she had consecrated to the Lord; "she made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." She did not think she had done enough by giving him over to the charge of the high priest. She watched over him with maternal solicitude, and continued to minister to his prosperity and happiness; and her conduct throughout was so acceptable to the aged Eli, now probably deriving a melancholy consolation from the society of the devout child under the sad and heart-breaking disappointment occasioned by the profligacy of his own sons, that he pronounced an additional solemn blessing upon her and her husband, and earnestly prayed that Heaven might grant them the then most highly valued gift of many children; and there were

born unto them three sons and two daughters. And as for the child Samuel, who was thus carefully trained in the way he should go, language is used to describe his expanding virtues and amiable qualities, similar to that which was afterwards applied to his Divine Antitype, our great High Priest, and Prophet and King. "He grew on, and was in favour with God and man." Revelations were made to him, while yet of very tender age, concerning the coming destruction of Eli's house, on account of the profane and dissolute conduct of his sons, and it became known before long from Dan to Beersheba that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. He was eminently a type of Christ, being not only a prophet, but, as some suppose, a priest also, and one who exercised sovereign power, and he had the high honour of delegating from God sovereign power to the two first monarchs of Israel, having been expressly commanded from heaven to anoint Saul to be king, and David to be his successor on the throne. Such advancement, both temporal and spiritual, was the happy effect of Hannah's solicitude that her son should remember his Creator in the days of his youth, and such is the illustration which this history presents of the memorable proclamation of divine wisdom, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honours are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness."

## SERMON VI.

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### PHINEHAS' WIFE.

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1 Sam. iv. 22.

“And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.”

THIS was the exclamation of the wife of Phinehas, the son of Eli the high priest of Israel. That exclamation was uttered under the most affecting circumstances. It is those circumstances, connected as they are with events of a very solemnly instructive character, which give importance to a distinct notice of one, concerning whose personal history so few particulars are recorded. She had just given birth to a child, and she was already in the agonies of death; and it was the language of deep despondency, indicating the chief cause of her premature and fatal labour, to which she gave utterance, when “she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.”

I propose, therefore, to trace the events which

ended in this melancholy catastrophe, as being calculated under the divine blessing to lead to many solemn and salutary meditations. We have already intimated in our last discourse, that though Eli himself was a pious man, his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, bore a very different character. They disgraced and desecrated their offices as priests of Jehovah, by a rapacious, oppressive, and dissolute course of life. They exacted of those who came to offer sacrifice beyond the liberal allowance which the law of Moses prescribed for their use, and they exacted it in an arrogant and imperious manner, most unbecoming the demeanour of those who ought to have been examples to the other worshippers of the Lord, and to their cupidity and tyranny they added the vilest profligacy and licentiousness. The effect of such conduct was to make the people lose all reverence for the appointed solemnities of religion, and to inspire them with contempt and abhorrence for its most sacred rites and ordinances. Their evil report reached the ears of their aged father, who, bowed down with years and infirmities, could scarcely bear the additional load of grief which this sad intelligence brought upon his grey hairs. He remonstrated with them upon their horrid impiety, and inexcusable wickedness. He set before them the many and repeated complaints which all the people made of their conduct. He reminded them of



the aggravated nature of their sins, from the conspicuous situation they occupied, and the sacred offices they sustained. He admonished them of the scandal they occasioned in the eyes of God, and of the transgressions which the evil example of men in their position gave rise to in others. He sought to convince them, that the course they were pursuing was peculiarly offensive to the Almighty, and, if not abandoned, must inevitably bring down his unappeasable wrath. He thus expostulated with them indeed, and that apparently with much seriousness. But he appears to have spoken too tenderly and too gently for such a very grave occasion. He seems to have confined himself to reasoning and entreaty, when he ought to have issued his positive commands, and repressed their crying abominations by an exercise of the strong authority with which, as a father, and a judge in Israel, he was abundantly invested. The consequence was such as may always be expected of unrestrained and ungrateful children. They hearkened not to his voice, but regardless alike of the feelings of their father, the interests of their people, and the judgment of their God, they resumed their former career of profane rapacity and impious profligacy.

Parental admonition having failed, and parental authority not having been sufficiently put forth to restrain the evil doings of the sons

of Eli, the Almighty took the matter into his own hand, and sent a prophet on purpose to denounce the wrath of heaven against his irreclaimable house. That divinely appointed messenger presented himself to the aged high priest, and recalled to his consideration the glorious and unequalled privileges bestowed upon his family and ancestors—the appearance of Jehovah in Egypt to Aaron, his elevation to the distinguished honour of the priesthood, the continuation of that sacred office in his descendants, and the ample remuneration provided for the performance of its functions. He animadverted in severe terms upon the ingratitude and impiety which could, under such circumstances, desecrate by rapacity the holy oblations of the altar; and he charged the parental indulgence, which refused to put a stop to such a profanity, with a wilful preference of affection and partiality towards children to the supreme attachment and devotion which are due unto God. He declared Jehovah's determination to punish such complicated iniquity, by degrading his descendants from the dignities and emoluments of the holy office which his libertine sons had disgraced. He prophesied the invasion of the country by enemies, who should spoil the wealth so much coveted by his sons, and cut off the members of his family from the old age, the venerable influence of which he had refused properly to

exert. He predicted the reduction of his surviving posterity to poverty, to disgrace, to beggary, and to premature death. He held forth an awful signal of the realisation of these terrific threats in the coming destruction of his two sons on the same day, and concluded with an announcement of the Divine purpose, to transfer the functions of the high priesthood to a worthier branch of the house of Aaron, saying, "And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart, and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever <sup>1</sup>."

The truth of the prophet's mission was presently confirmed in a remarkable manner by the instrumentality of Samuel, whose mother was the subject of our last discourse. He had now been probably some years in the discharge of those duties at the tabernacle, to which maternal gratitude had consecrated him. His amiable and pious life strongly contrasted with those of Eli's sons, and the descriptions of their respective characters are interwoven in the text of the sacred narrative, so as to place that contrast in a more conspicuous and striking view. While *they* lived in open defiance of both human and Divine laws, "*he* grew in favour with God and man." To the aged Eli he was evidently

<sup>1</sup> See Note III.

a source of melancholy comfort under the gloom cast upon his declining years by the conduct of his own offspring. By God he was honoured at a very early period, and in a very distinguished manner, being presently made the channel of further communication from heaven concerning the house of Eli. "The word of God, it is said, was precious in those days: there was no open vision," *i. e.* there was not one person known as the established prophet of the Lord, to whom the people could confidently resort for help in difficulty and for counsel in perplexity. This honour was now to be conferred upon Samuel. A voice arrested his attention while he was laid down to sleep, and called him by his name. The child, mistaking it for that of Eli, rose up and presented himself to the aged priest, saying, "Here am I, for thou calledst me." Eli answered, that he had not called, and bade him return to his rest. The same voice came a second and a third time, and a second and a third time Samuel rose, and came to Eli, and requested to know his commands. Eli then perceived that it was a voice from heaven, and directed Samuel, when it came again, to answer, by saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." When the voice came a fourth time, Samuel followed Eli's direction. Whereupon the Lord made an awful communication confirmatory of all that the first messenger of heaven had declared

against Eli and his house. He repeated his purpose, to take vengeance upon the sons for their vile conduct, and upon the father for his sinful remissness in not restraining them, by an overwhelming, astounding, and exterminating judgment. He reiterated, with the solemnity of an oath, that offences had been committed which no sacrifice could ever purge away, and that such notorious and complicated abominations must issue in total and irremediable ruin. How dreadful to persist in evil against repeated admonition and warning! What aggravated guilt to continue in the abuse of religious privileges, and in the profane contempt of religious obligations and religious ordinances! "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Samuel heard the tremendous denunciations of Heaven with silent awe, and when the morning arose he was afraid to communicate their terrific import to the aged high priest. But Eli presently examined him upon the subject, and adjured him under a heavy imprecation to conceal from him no particle of the revelations which he had received. When the child, in obedience to this demand, related, without reserve, the particulars of the celestial message—the guilt of the sons—the negligence of the father—the ruin that was to follow, who can describe the bitter feelings and sad reflections



which rent the heart of Eli? But, though he was doubtless much to blame for his remissness as a magistrate and a parent, his heart was in the main right with God, and, therefore, though he heard, we may be sure, the threatened vengeance against himself and his house with an anguish of grief too deep for utterance, he spoke not one syllable of murmuring or disapprobation, but exclaimed with meek resignation to the Divine will, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Aaron before him had manifested the same pious acquiescence on a similar occasion. When his sons were slain for their impiety by fire from the Lord, he humbly submitted to the dispensation, and held his peace. Hezekiah after him, when threatened with Divine judgments, presumed not to utter a word of discontent, but devoutly replied, "Good is the word of the Lord." How different from the rebellious and despairing spirit of Cain, who answered to the rebuke of the Almighty, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" Be not ye, brethren, in your day of tribulation, like that wicked one, but rather imitate the humility and resignation of Eli, and Aaron, and Hezekiah, under their deep affliction. Restrain your loud complaints and bitter accusations against the wisdom of Providence. Remember your sinfulness, and carelessness, and your unworthiness, when placed beside the demands of the High and the

Holy One. Acknowledge his justice, submit to his authority, and learn to trust in the merciful disposal of Him who saith, "Be still; and know that I am God."

We proceed now to the events, by which the Divine threats against the house of Eli were carried into execution. The Philistines, whose power had been weakened by the strong arm of Samson, and whose chief nobility had been buried in that hero's grave, had now resumed their insolence, and recommenced their encroachments on the land of Israel. When the inhabitants met them in a pitched battle, the Philistines were permitted to prevail. The Israelitish army was defeated with the loss of four thousand men left dead on the field. God had promised to his people that one of them should chase a thousand; but sin had rendered that promise of none effect, and they were, consequently, now made to flee, perhaps, before an equal, or even a smaller number of their enemies. A council of the elders of Israel was held to inquire into the cause of this discomfiture. It was admitted that it had taken place in consequence of the withdrawal of Jehovah's sustaining arm, for they agitated the question, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" The reason, also, of that withdrawal they might have easily discovered in the notorious conduct of the two priests, and their profanation of God's worship,

had not their minds been blinded by the prevalence of general corruption. But, instead of recognising the true reason, and humbling themselves for the national wickedness, which was the natural effect of the profligacy of the ministers of the altar, they had recourse to a step which indicated a bold, impenitent, and presumptuous spirit. They determined, as if to extort the powerful aid of that Lord who had so often scattered before them the armies of the aliens, to fetch his ark from Shiloh to the theatre of war<sup>2</sup>. The ark was a coffer or chest of wood, constructed in the wilderness under the superintendence of Moses, and according to the directions given him by God himself on mount Sinai. It was two cubits and a half long, one cubit and a half broad, and one cubit and a half deep, or about fifty-two inches long, thirty-one broad, and thirty-one deep. The wooden material was overlaid within and without with plates of pure gold; and round about it was a crown or cornice of gold. The cover of it, which was called the mercy-seat, consisted entirely of pure gold. At each end of the mercy-seat was the golden figure of an angel or a cherub, representing the ministering spirits which wait upon God. These two cherubim stood face to face, stretching out their wings so as by the extremities of their wings to meet each other above either side in the middle. Between the two cherubim, and directly over the cover of the ark, or the mercy-

<sup>2</sup> See Note I V .

seat, was the Shechinah, or luminous cloud, which was the symbolical representation of the special presence of Jehovah in the midst of his people. Whence the expression of the Psalmist, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth<sup>3</sup>." Within the ark were placed by Divine command, first, the two tables of the law, written by God's own hand<sup>4</sup>, and afterwards the rod of Aaron, which miraculously budded and bloomed, and brought forth almonds, to demonstrate his supreme right to the priesthood<sup>5</sup>; and a golden pot full of manna, to commemorate the feeding of Israel in the wilderness by food sent down from heaven<sup>6</sup>. This precious casket was placed in that part of the tabernacle which was held the most sacred, and called the Holy of Holies; and Jehovah delivered, concerning the valuable deposit so situated, the following memorable promise, "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim, which are upon the ark of the testimony of all things, which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel." The ark, thus possessing so many badges of Jehovah's peculiar favour, was justly regarded by the children of Israel with unrivalled esteem and veneration. They thought that power and

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxx. 1.    <sup>4</sup> Exod. xxv. 16.    <sup>5</sup> Numb. xvii. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Exod. xvi. 33.    Heb. ix. 4.

success must inevitably attend, as of old, its progress, whithersoever it went. They, therefore, resolved to bring it from its place of rest in Shiloh to the battle field against the Philistines. It came accompanied by the two reckless sons of Eli, already referred to, Hophni and Phinehas. Its presence in the camp spread joy and exultation through the army; and they expressed their feelings at its arrival by "shouting with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." The far-sounding acclamations reached the ears, and excited the curiosity of the Philistines; and when they ascertained the cause they were affected with great terror and alarm. In all their encounters with the Israelites, they had never encountered such a formidable auxiliary as this. They feared that it might bring immediately to bear against them the irresistible arm of that God that had done so wondrously for His people in Egypt, and in the perilous wilderness. They exclaimed in undisguised dismay, "Woe unto us; for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us; who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods?" and thinking the crisis had come which would decide their fate as an independent nation, they urged one another to the exertion of unusual and desperate efforts, as the only resource left them under circumstances so menacing and alarming, and said, "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be



not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you : quit yourselves like men and fight."

Great was the anxiety at Shiloh, the residence of Eli, about the results of a conflict for which such mighty and extraordinary preparations had been made on either side. That venerable high priest was urged by his intense solicitude about the issue, especially about the safety of the ark, to take his seat in the open air on the way side, to watch for the very first intelligence from the field of battle. While there, a loud wail of woe suddenly burst upon his aged ears, and he had scarcely time to inquire into the meaning of the tumult and the cry which filled the air, and rent the city, when a man presented himself before him "with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head," the usual outward signs of heart-breaking sorrow and despondency. He was a man of Benjamin ; and, according to a Jewish tradition he was Saul, the son of Kish, who afterwards became the first king of Israel. He had come out of the army, and with difficulty made his escape from the perilous encounter with the enemy ; and he brought this doleful news : "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead ; and the ark of God is taken." The circumstances here related successively increase in distress and horror ; but the aged minister of the sanctuary bore up under each

stroke of disaster, until he heard the last. It was most grievous to him, as a judge, or a ruler, to learn the discomfiture of the army, and the slaughter of so many as thirty thousand of the people; but he sustained the blow. It was dreadful to find that his two sons had been taken away by a violent death, and before they had repented of their evil ways; but even that calamity he seems to have endured, as he had previously endured the prediction of it, with patience and resignation. But when the messenger added to his melancholy tale that the ark of God had been taken, his strength gave way, and his heart entirely failed him, and he fell from off his seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died. Oh sad and deplorable death of one who had ministered before the Lord as a high priest, and who, as a ruler, had judged Israel forty years!

But this was not the only fatal effect of the sad and shocking news. The wife of Phinehas, one of those two sons who had incurred the Divine displeasure, and died on the bloody field, was with child, near to be delivered. Her husband's death, her father-in-law's death, and the capture of God's ark, caused her such a grievous and trembling agitation of mind, that her pains suddenly came upon her, and terminated her life. She appears to have been a woman of great tenderness, and of still greater piety. She felt deeply—how deeply none can

tell—the successive calamities that had taken place; but, like Eli, she felt most of all the one last mentioned by the messenger of evil tidings, the capture of the ark of God. The knowledge of her husband's death, and that of her heart-broken father-in-law, doubtless, helped to hasten her travail: but it is clear, from her dying words, that a concern for the interests of religion, occasioned by the loss of the ark, lay nearest to her heart. The women endeavoured to comfort her by the information of the birth of a son. They hoped that the sorrows of her travail would be “forgotten for joy that a man child had been born into the world.” But what was that joy to one that was sinking into the arms of death? No joy but that which is spiritual and divine could then yield her any consolation; and, therefore, she “answered not” to the information, “neither did she regard it.” What comfort could her departing spirit derive from having a son born in Israel, when Israel's highest distinction and most sacred treasure, the symbol of Jehovah's presence, was gone away into a strange land? and, therefore, she indicated with her last breath that there was no longer any thing in the nation deserving of attachment, and no longer any thing worth clinging for to this life, by naming the child *Ichabod*, or *no glory*, saying, “The glory is departed from Israel.” What delight can a pious mind take in any earthly possessions, if deprived of God's word and

ordinances, the assurances of his presence and the light of his countenance? "Farewell all in this world," thought the wife of Phinehas—"the sight of children, and the chance of some remaining enjoyments, if the depository of Jehovah's testimonies and Jehovah's pledges of regard be no longer accessible," and, therefore, she said a second time with a last and dying effort, "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken." What a complication of calamities, and what a terrible fulfilment of Jehovah's threatened judgments! Two brothers slain in the blood-stained field, the father and the daughter-in-law dying of a broken heart, and the most precious token of the Divine favour taken away,—all on the same disastrous day, and all the sad consequences of obstinacy in sin and the neglect of repeated warnings. Oh! let men in every age and country take heed to the awful lesson. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

1. Among other lessons taught us by this tragical story, we have set before us the progressively increasing rashness and presumption of irreclaimable wickedness. The sons of Eli, having dared to pollute the altar and the tabernacle by rapacity and profligacy, and having refused to be reformed by the serious though too mild remonstrances of their father, proceeded to a direct violation of God's revealed will respecting the most sacred symbol of his presence

with his people. Though the ark moved from place to place necessarily during the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, yet it was distinctly commanded that, when they were settled in the land of Canaan it was to remain in the place which the Lord should choose to put his name there<sup>7</sup>. When therefore the corrupt Israelites, with Hophni and Phinehas at their head, took the ark to the field of battle, they entirely overlooked or audaciously disregarded a distinct and positive injunction. The consequence was defeat, disgrace, and incurable ruin. Beware then of the increasingly blinding nature of indulged profligacy and profaneness, hardening the heart, blunting the conscience, leading on to open acts of desecration and disobedience, and ending in sudden and irremediable perdition.

2. This subject teaches you, in the second place, the vanity and folly of trusting to any outward and visible sign, when separated from the inward and spiritual grace. The Israelites thought, that by taking the ark into the field they would infallibly carry thither the divine power, whose presence was symbolised by the luminous cloud which rested on the mercy-seat between the cherubim. When Moses and Joshua had the ark conveyed from place to place, they, being his faithful servants, well knew that Jehovah's special favour accompanied the

<sup>7</sup> Deut. xii. 5. 11.



sacred treasure, and they could say with the confidence of perfect truth, when they ordered it to be moved, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered." But their present degenerate descendants had by their sins caused that favour to be withdrawn, and consequently the most striking symbols of God's presence became powerless as an empty name. See you not here illustrated the utter worthlessness of all outward rites and ceremonies, apart from inward holiness and earnest piety? How condemnatory of papistical mummeries is the transaction now under consideration! Can the host or consecrated bread carried from place to place ensure among a besotted and sinful people the blessing and favour of the High and the Holy One who has promised to be with two or three that should be truly gathered together in his name, in however simple a dwelling, and He will ever be present with his true church, though assembled on the bleak mountain or the lonely desert, even as He preceded the ark in the desolate wilderness, like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; but He will never vouchsafe his presence to the most dignified priests in the most gorgeous temple, whose hearts are not right with God. A church is no better than a private habitation—a priest is no better than a layman—a sacramental symbol is no better than the natural production of the earth, without a converted heart and a renewed

spirit in the immortal souls concerned with them. Let this truth remain impressed upon your minds as an antidote to the poison of formalism and priestcraft, which threaten to pervade the land. Remember the answer to the woman of Samaria, when curiously inquiring about the proper place where worship should be offered,—and the answer explanatory of the truly spiritual and universal nature of his most holy religion ought to have prevented all disputes among us as to mere outward rites and edifices and dresses and ceremonies: “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

3. Learn hence the bounden duty of every parent to restrain by a seasonable exercise of his authority the lawless conduct of his children. The neglect of that duty in Eli proved the ruin of himself and all his house. We believe him to have been himself personally pious, but he was chargeable with a great and culpable weakness in regard to his profane and profligate sons. How dreadful was the ultimate effect of that weakness on himself and all his family! The disregard of the bringing up of children in the fear of God is the ruin of individuals, the ruin of households, the ruin of nations, and the ruin

of "Beware of it, parents. Do not by a foolish and mistaken tenderness neglect that wise and seasonable restraint of your children, which the word of God prescribes. Remember that "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it away." While ye are not by undue severity to "provoke your children to wrath," ye are bound by the most solemn and momentous considerations to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

4. Lastly, observe how even in the history of this signal vengeance we discover ample proofs of the long-suffering of a gracious God. Great as were the sins of the sons of Eli, and urgently as they cried to heaven for punishment, yet He would not execute judgment without giving them repeated warnings. A messenger was sent to Eli on purpose to set the iniquities of his sons in order before his eyes, and to announce the determination of heaven to take vengeance, if they continued in their evil course. But the message, with the paternal remonstrance by which it was enforced, was unheeded by those graceless sons. A second message to the same purport, and confirmatory of all the first, was sent by the instrumentality of Samuel. But it also was set at nought. Truly God spake once, yea twice, but man regarded it not. Then followed a fulfilment of the awful menace in an accumulation of national, family, and

individual calamities, realising the Psalmist's words, "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword. He hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death." The returning penitent may indeed take comfort from the narrative, for if God was long-suffering, and not willing, without repeated warnings, to punish the profane and profligate sons of Eli, what mercy and goodness will He not readily extend to every one who strives and prays to lead a new life. But let the pertinaciously disobedient and unbelieving—the breaker of the law, the neglecter of the Gospel, the desecrator of God's ordinances, and the habitual violator of God's holy will and commandments—let them take warning by the awful lesson, and make haste to flee from the wrath to come, for the obstinately "wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

## SERMON VII.

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MICHAL.

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1 Sam. xviii. 20, 21.

“And Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved David : and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law in the *one of the twain* <sup>1</sup>.”

MICHAL was the first wife of David, and the daughter of Saul, the first king of Israel. She lived about eighty years after the events narrated in our last discourse, and in the eleventh century before our Saviour’s birth. On the death of Eli, Samuel succeeded to the office of chief magistrate of the people, and he judged Israel for many years with great ability and success. But, as in the case of his predecessor, his sons, with whom he shared his authority, as he grew old, departed from the integrity and piety of their father. Their corrupt proceed-

<sup>1</sup> See Note V.



ings spread discontent among the people, and caused them to wish for a different kind of government, and to desire a king such as ruled over the surrounding nations. God commanded Samuel to hearken to their voice, and to anoint Saul, the son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, to be the sovereign of all the tribes of Israel. For a time that monarch conducted himself with great propriety and apparent piety. He displayed great modesty on being proposed for the throne, and seemed reluctant, from a deep sense of unworthiness, to occupy so exalted a position. He ascribed the success he soon after obtained over his enemies, the children of Ammon, not to his own arm, but to the Almighty interposition of Jehovah; and when it was proposed to him, after he was established in power, to punish those who had treated his pretensions to the kingdom with contempt, he refused to act on such a suggestion, and exhibited a laudable spirit of clemency and forbearance, giving a noble example of conformity to the Divine will, as enumerated by the apostle, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; for vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." And yet, such is the corrupting influence of prosperity, when not counteracted by Divine grace, after he had been some years on the throne, he gave way to those jealous and vindictive feelings, the repression of which, at the commencement of his reign, places his

character in so amiable and magnanimous a light. It is in connexion with the indulgence of such unhappy feelings of the father, that his daughter Michal is first introduced into the records of the inspired narrative, according to the words of the text; "And Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. 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."

We have no reason to believe that the daughter was any more than the father under the influence of Divine grace; and the one in hating, and the other in loving David, appear to have been alike actuated by considerations of an earthly nature. David, though of a family that was then comparatively obscure, had already acquired considerable distinction and renown. To the attractions of his outward appearance, he added mental qualities of the highest order, as a poet and a musician. As an enterprising and successful warrior he had excited the admiration and gratitude of his country. He had delivered Israel from the insults and terrors of the Philistines, by slaying in single combat their champion Goliath, of Gath, and he had been greeted by acclamations which ascribed unto him more glory than to his royal master, for "the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath

slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." These circumstances, while they filled the father with envy and hatred against the youthful hero, fired the daughter with an attachment to his person, and an ambition to share his honours. Saul had repeatedly promised one of his daughters to David for his wife, but had hitherto refused to keep his word. He had made that promise by public proclamation to any one that should kill Goliath, of Gath. But when the glorious exploit was achieved the reward was dishonourably withheld. He had subsequently made a voluntary promise to David of the hand of his eldest daughter Merab in particular. But it was done only with the sinister design of luring him to expose his life to peril by further conflicts with the Philistines. When the specified time of marriage arrived, the promise was basely broken, and Merab<sup>2</sup> "was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife." This insulting treatment is supposed to have been persisted in by Saul towards David, to tempt him to resentment and rebellion, and to furnish himself with a pretence for legally putting to death an obnoxious person, who was too gallant a soldier to be slain by an open enemy in war. But David exhibited the most exemplary meekness on the occasion, even as he had already declared him-

<sup>2</sup> See Note V.

self, his exploits, and his family, altogether unworthy of so great an honour, as to be allied to a king's daughter. It appears, however, as already intimated, that another daughter of Saul, Michal, the subject of our present discourse, was smitten with admiration of either the person or renown of David. Saul was pleased with the intelligence, and caused it to be communicated to David, with an intimation that the king would approve of the union, his real purpose being the same as before, namely, to take him out of the way by a violent and premature death. "I will give him her," said he, "that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." True to this diabolical purpose, he expressed to David his willing consent to such a marriage, and replied to his alleged inability from poverty to furnish the dowry required in such a case, by saying, that he should require no other dowry than the slaughter of one hundred Philistines<sup>3</sup>. Thus he hoped in more than one way to make the marriage of his daughter auxiliary to the execution of his murderous intentions. He thought that, perhaps, after the marriage, she might be induced to forward the father's designs against the life of the husband, or if he was not very sanguine in that expecta-

<sup>3</sup> In those days the dowry was paid for and not received with the wife. See the lives of Jacob's wives and daughter.

tion, he considered the apparently disinterested<sup>4</sup> but most hard conditions of the alliance would almost inevitably ensure his destruction. But how vain are the machinations of the wicked against those who are shielded by the protecting arm of the Almighty! David went forth against the Philistines, and as if he would not suspect the king of intending to expose him to unnecessary danger, he generously hazarded his life to a greater extent than the royal conditions required. Not content with slaying a hundred, he persevered against the Philistines until he had laid two hundred of them dead at his feet; and he not only escaped the plot laid for his destruction, but acquired, together with a right to the princess's hand, a great augmentation of popularity and renown. Truly God can make all things to work together for good to them that love Him. Fret not thyself, therefore, because of the ungodly. Return not evil for evil, but rather overcome evil with good. Be slow, like David, to harbour suspicions of evil, but rather, like him, confound the evil-minded by forbearance, meekness, and generosity. Boldly persevering in the path of duty, "commit thy way unto the Lord; and in due time he shall bring forth thy righteous-

<sup>4</sup> Saul professed that he was actuated only by the patriotic motive of chastising a national enemy, by requiring the lives of one hundred Philistines.



ness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.”

The next transaction in the biography of Michal is the artifice by which she saved her husband's life. Her father continued to pursue his malicious designs against David as before. He sent one night a number of men to watch at the door of his house, with orders to assassinate him as he came forth in the morning. Michal, having received secret intelligence of the plot, immediately communicated it to her husband, and represented to him the urgent necessity of making his escape during the hours of darkness. It was on this occasion, it is supposed, and probably while making preparation for his escape, that he penned the fifty-ninth Psalm, in which he earnestly prays for the protection of God against the malicious vigilance of his insidious foes, saying, “Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me.” David was not accustomed to flee before his enemies; and his temper and disposition would have doubtless inclined him to encounter them face to face, or to force his way through them sword in hand. But Michal rightly judged it altogether imprudent in him to meet a danger, from which, without a miracle, he could scarcely have hoped to escape, and she had recourse to a stratagem

for his deliverance. As Rahab let out the spies, she secretly let him down through a window; and he went and fled and escaped. When it was discovered that he was not forthcoming in the morning, Saul, imagining him to be still in the house, sent messengers to apprehend him. In the meantime, Michal had placed an image in David's bed to counterfeit his person, and answered to her father's message, that he was sick and incapable of making his appearance in the presence of the king. The object of that artifice was to lull the immediate suspicion of her father's officers, and to afford her husband longer time for effecting his escape. Her contrivance was attended with complete success. The king sent a second time men to David's house, with strict orders to bring him in the bed, sick as he was, that he might slay him while in that helpless state. But the bed, upon examination, was found to contain nothing but a dead image, clothed and laid so as to resemble a human being; and David had, by this time, been able to place himself beyond the reach of his enemies. His escape was a bitter disappointment to the king, and the more mortifying from its having been effected by the aid of her whom he had given him in marriage, with no other purpose than to ensnare him into destruction. He, therefore, sharply rebuked her for the part she had acted, and charged her with practising on him a deception in favour of

his worst enemy. Michal, probably terrified by her father's frowns, had recourse again to deceit in her own defence, and shifted the blame from her own shoulders, by laying it on the alleged threatening demeanour of her husband, who she declared had said unto her, "Let me go: why should I kill thee?"

Saul having been unable to get David's person into his power, determined to take all the revenge he was able upon him during his absence. He took Michal, who had been instrumental in aiding his escape, and gave her in marriage to another, probably intending thereby not only to insult her husband, but also to punish herself for the part she had taken in facilitating his escape. With Phalti or Phaltiel, the son of Laish, which was of Gallum, the person to whom she was transferred, she is supposed to have lived about fifteen years. At the expiration of that period, Abner took offence with Ishbosheth, who had succeeded to a portion of his father's Saul's dominions, and to whose party he had hitherto adhered, and offered to transfer his allegiance and influence to the side of David, who ruled the remainder of the kingdom. David, on receiving the overtures of Abner, made it a condition of admitting him into his service, that he should bring him back his wife Michal, who was living with Phalti, in the country which was under the sway of Ishbosheth. Abner, who was a very

able and successful soldier, and who appears to have possessed almost sovereign power under the nominal sceptre of the weak son of Saul, expressed his readiness to comply with the demand, and being also seconded by a direct message on the subject from David to Ishbosheth, he took Michal from the house of Phalti, in order to restore her to her first and lawful husband. Phalti, though compelled to part with her, manifested much reluctance and grief on the occasion. He accompanied her a considerable part of the way with tears and lamentations, and it required a peremptory command from Abner, who was charged with her conveyance, to induce him to separate himself from her, and to return to his home. But the separation was just, however painful. He had been guilty of a wrong to an individual, and of a transgression of the divine law, in sharing her father's injustice, and taking to himself one who was the lawful wife of another. It is just that usurpers and dishonest gainers should be compelled to restore what they had never a right to, though the restoration after years of possession be attended with grievous inconveniences and distressing sensations to themselves and their relatives. We often now behold the robber, the plunderer, and the dishonest trafficker reduced to a similar predicament of affliction by the operation of human laws, the restoration of the property acquired

by fraud or violence, and the punishment connected with it, terminating in sorrow and weeping, and the desolation of families. And this consequence is but a shadow of what must follow through the ultimate operation of the Divine laws, in the case of all who set their affections on forbidden possessions and pleasures. When the King, of whom David was a type, shall call you to account, and compel you to separate by death from the objects which you have clung to with an attachment that was unlawful and reprobated in the word of God—"there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." Then, my brethren, take warning in time. Voluntarily restore your unjust acquisitions, of whatever nature they may be, without delay. Strive to sever your hearts from every possession and every enjoyment which are contrary to the testimonies of conscience and Scripture. Pray for grace to resist the temptations and allurements of a sinful world, that when ye are separated from visible things, ye may resign them with joy and not with grief, and exchange a corruptible inheritance for that which fadeth not away.

We proceed to the last recorded transaction in the life of Michal. It was on the grand occasion of bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem. You will remember that the capture of that sacred symbol of the Divine presence formed a considerable part of our last discourse.



The Philistines took it from the field of battle, and placed it in the house of Dagon, their god, at Ashdod. But the judgment of Jehovah came upon the people, and his wrath was manifested against them by the repeated overthrow of their idol, and by fatal inflictions on themselves. The inhabitants, on ascertaining that the cause of their calamities was the detention of the ark, consulted together as to the measures to be adopted under the alarming circumstances, and decided upon sending it away to Gath. The Divine displeasure came upon the inhabitants of that city in a similar terrible manner, and they sent it away to another city, the city of Ekron, where the like distressing and fatal calamities took place. These visitations seem to have continued for the whole space of seven months, during which it remained in Philistia. The consequence was, that consternation spread throughout the population of the country on account of the presence among them of the ark of God; and they called together their priests and divines to consider what they should do with the awful treasure. They determined to restore it to the Israelites, and to accompany its return with many valuable presents as a trespass offering to Jehovah. It was sent back accordingly, and the Divine judgment ceased to afflict the Philistines. It was conveyed first to Bethshemesh, a town within the borders of the promised land, at which town the inhabi-

tants, instigated by an unhallowed curiosity, presumed to look into it—a thing forbidden even to the high priest, who was only allowed to look upon it once a year, on the great day of atonement, and they were destroyed for their profaneness, to the number of more than fifty thousand men. The Bethshemites, terrified by the tremendous visitation, sent messengers to Kirjath-jearim with a request that it might be fetched thither, with a view probably that it might be forwarded to Shiloh, its residence in the time of Eli, Kirjath-jearim being a town lying in the road between Bethshemesh and Shiloh. There it remained all the time of Samuel and Saul. It was never forwarded and restored to Shiloh, from whence it had been taken by Hophni and Phinehas, probably in consequence of a Divine command to the contrary, on account of the desecrations and abominations which had taken place there in the days of Eli. Thus a people who despise or disregard the gospel, of which the ark was a type, have reason to fear that the sacred treasure may be taken from them never to return. When David was established on the throne of Israel, he turned his attention to the ark of God, and determined to bring it into his own city, even to mount Zion in Jerusalem. There he knew it was the will of God, that a glorious temple should be built for his worship, and he was directed doubtless by a divine communication to transfer thither the

ark, as being destined one day to occupy the holiest part of that magnificent edifice. Being deeply imbued with the spirit of religion, he undertook the enterprise with great solemnity and devotion. He held a council of the chief men in the nation,—the elders of Israel, and the officers of the army, and proposed the measure for their serious consideration. It was resolved to assemble the priests and Levites, and a vast multitude of people, to form a grand procession on the occasion. The king went forth from his capital attended by thirty thousand men, among whom were found the most distinguished in the land. Having reached Kirjath-jearim, and brought the ark out of the house of Abinadab at that place, they accompanied it towards Jerusalem, “playing before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.” After some interruption, occasioned by the judgment of God upon Uzzah, who was smitten with death for improperly handling the holy symbol—an event, which delayed it three months on the road—the solemn work of bringing it into the city of David was resumed. The king built many altars and offered many sacrifices along the road between the house of Obed-Edom, where it had rested during the three months, and the gates of Jerusalem. He was transported with joy on the occasion, delighted at

the thought of having within the city of his own royal residence the most significant index of the immediate presence of the King of kings. He gave expression to the ecstatic raptures of his soul by dancing before the Lord with all his might. He manifested his feelings of humility, reverence, and gratitude, by exchanging the imperial purple for a linen ephod—the robe of royalty for the garment of a priest—the badge of earthly dominion for the habit of one who served at the altar of the Ruler of all. He and the magnificent procession at last entered the holy city, with the sound of the trumpet and loud exclamations of thanksgiving and praise. They finally placed the sacred treasure in the midst of the new tabernacle, which had been recently prepared for its reception<sup>6</sup>, the tabernacle of Moses, through the wear of many centuries, being no longer fit for the purpose, and David, having accomplished the solemn and delightful enterprise, again “offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.” He concluded the whole of the important ceremony, by pronouncing a solemn benediction on the people, and by a liberal distribution of provisions among every class of the congregated multitude. “It was a day of holy rejoicing before the Lord of hosts.”

David, having dismissed the people with blessings and with gifts, returned to bless his

<sup>6</sup> See Note IV.

own household. Perhaps there never was a time when he entered his house in the enjoyment of more real happiness. It was the happiness of one filled with the peace which passeth all understanding. It was the happiness of one transported with joy unspeakable and full of glory, that is in believing. He had brought the ark of God into his own city. He had thereby secured to himself the peculiar presence of Jehovah. His subjects, among whom a great revival of religion had taken place, had willingly joined him in the blessed work, had greatly rejoiced on the glorious occasion, and had exhibited most auspicious signs of attachment to himself, to his family, and to the pure and solemn worship of Jehovah. When he entered his home, he doubtless expected to meet with still more lively emotions of personal regard, of sympathetic excitement, and of rejoicing gratitude for the marvellous loving-kindness of the Lord. But Michal his wife manifested a totally different temper and disposition. She received him with taunts of derision and scorn. She had beheld him in the procession, while entering the city, robed, not in the imperial purple of state like a monarch, but in an ephod, the comparatively lowly garb of a priest, and giving expression to the transports of his religious zeal and joy, by leaping and dancing before the Lord, like one of the Lord's humblest and most unaffected servants. For



this conduct, which she espied through a window, she had despised him in her heart, and, when he entered his home, she accosted him in the most insulting and contemptuous manner, saying, "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 shamelessly uncovereth himself! There is no reason to suppose that David had been guilty of indecorum, as the strong expression "uncovereth himself," which she used, would seem to indicate. He had but taken off his royal robe and substituted a religious garb in honour of the Lord. Her own father, though a king like her husband, had on one occasion acted in a similar manner, when he was seized with a transient fit of religious fervour. But Michal could sympathise in no such feelings: her heart had never been touched by Divine grace: her affections had never been moved by the grateful love of God. Her pride was hurt at the thought of being united to such an enthusiast in religion, and regardless of her husband's attachment to herself, who had made her restoration a condition of receiving into his service a most powerful chief, and thus proved that he had valued her as much as a great part of his kingdom,—regardless of his known devotion, his superior understanding, his tender conscience and warm feelings, she had the folly and the hard heartedness of receiving him with

sarcastic and insolent remarks on the fervour of his religious zeal, and the earnestness of his religious observances. The king was affected with a just indignation at so unexpected and unreasonable a reception. He replied, that if he had lowered himself, it had been before the Lord and in honour of the Lord, who had chosen him to be king of Israel, in preference to her own father, and to any member of her father's family; and "therefore," added he, "I will play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight." As though he had said, Perhaps religion was unfashionable in thy father's court, and dishonoured by him and most of his family: but He, who setteth up and bringeth down kings, hath judged me, who honour religion and intend to bring it into fashion, wiser and fitter to rule than thy earthly-minded relatives. I am now the fountain of honour, and can influence by God's blessing the opinions of the high and the great in favour of religion. I wish to set them an example of devotion and thanksgiving by playing before the Lord, *i.e.* by taking a part personally and publicly in the exercises of religion, and so to bring into high repute those too long and shamefully neglected duties; and, if thus to humble myself before the High God, my creator, preserver, and redeemer, be thought vile and base, I am content to bear the imputation, and

I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight. David added, "Of the maid servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour." And "therefore," concludes the sacred historian, "Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child until the day of her death." The probable meaning of these two last sentences is, that she was discarded from being the wife of a king, and reduced to the condition of a subject and a widow, and that one of those religious women, who joined in the devout exercises of David, and of whom she spoke with contempt, was elevated to her place. And thus, regarding the man after God's own heart, we have, in the degradation of the one, and the advancement of the other, a figurative illustration of the truth, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

1. This subject may teach both parents and children the wickedness and the futility of seeking matrimonial alliances from mere worldly, selfish, and interested motives. By the great and overruling Providence of God such alliances, as in the case before us, invariably prove disappointing and mortifying to their projectors and promoters. Saul sought, by uniting his daughter to David, to lay a snare for his life, but she proved, in the event, the most effective instrument of David's preservation from the

effects of his murderous machinations. Michal strove, by gaining the affections of the youthful hero, and the popular chieftain, to retain or elevate her station in the world; but, her attachment to him being grounded entirely on earthly considerations, she disagreed with him on the most momentous subjects, and ended her life in obscurity and disgrace. Marriage is honourable in all; but if parents would have their children contract happy marriages, and if sons and daughters would be happy in that state, let it be their first and most anxious inquiry, whether the motive which brings the parties together be free from sinister views, and whether they understand each other on the all-important points of principle and religion. Countless are the unhappy marriages which have resulted from overlooking these momentous considerations. Remember that nothing can compensate the want of sympathy on religious matters. On the other hand, a communion of feeling in this respect will mitigate a world of sufferings, and overcome mountains of difficulties; and it may truly be said in reference to this as well as to many other subjects of human anxiety, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all things necessary to your welfare will be added unto you."

2. Let the married learn from this subject the sin and the punishment of those who oppose their partners in efforts for the glory of

God. A wife may approve and admire her husband while he is pursuing a career that will advance him in the world and reflecting upon herself the light of his prosperity or renown; but if he turn his attention seriously to religion, and prefer spiritual and eternal to earthly and evanescent interests—except she too be under the influence of Divine grace,—she will despise him in her heart, damp his zeal, discourage his labours, and treat his conduct with insolent derision and contempt. It is a tremendous responsibility that either partner, whether husband or wife, incurs, who thus thwarts the piety of the other. A separation, final and irremediable, must ultimately take place between persons who are so unequally yoked together. While the one shall rise to a dignity which was but faintly shadowed forth by David's regal splendour, the other shall sink into a disgrace, of which Michal's degradation was but a figure or a type, even everlasting shame and contempt, and eternal banishment from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power.



## SERMON VIII.

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### ABIGAIL.

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1 SAM. XXV. 32.

“And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me.”

THESE words refer to the time when David first saw Abigail, who became his second wife. The occurrence took place during the interval between his escape from his house referred to in our last discourse, and his accession to the throne on the death of his persecutor, and about 1060 years before *Christ's* incarnation. The causes and consequences of that interview are full of practical instruction, and all the circumstances connected with it, to which we now propose to refer, set forth in a striking light the mighty influence that may be exercised for the prevention of evil by a prudent, discreet, and pious woman.

Compelled to flee for his life from the pertinacious malice and vindictiveness of his royal father-in-law, David sought refuge in distant

places, in the strongholds of the mountain, and the lonely recesses of the desert, and was forced to lead the life of an exile and an outlaw. Many were the sharp privations and dangers which he sustained during that desolate period. On one occasion he was reduced to the necessity of requiring from Ahimelech, the priest at Nob, the bread that had been consecrated before the Lord, to relieve the pressing wants of himself and his companions; and was doomed to hear, soon after, the distressing intelligence that that transaction had exposed that priest and all the inhabitants of that city to the wrath of Saul, who charged them with treason against himself, and a partiality to the son of Jesse, and ordered them to be destroyed with the edge of the sword, "both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen and asses and sheep." On another, he was obliged to venture his person in the country of the Philistines, whose hatred he had provoked by his daring and successful warlike enterprises against them in defence of that king who now sought his life, and of that country from which he was now banished as an evil-doer; and at the court of Achish, king of Gath, the renowned and gigantic champion of which place had fallen by his hand, he was driven to the humiliating artifice of feigning himself mad, to escape the fatal vengeance of the national enemy. On another, he was distressed by the thought that the effects

of his misfortune, in having incurred the royal displeasure, had extended to his father and his mother, and found it necessary to remove them for their personal safety to the court of the heathen king of Moab. On another, he was cut to the heart by the base ingratitude and treachery of the inhabitants of Keilah, whose town he and his men had just saved from an invasion of the Philistines, and whom, notwithstanding the important service he had rendered them, he discovered to be harbouring the design of betraying him into the hands of Saul. On these, and similar occasions, he was often brought very low in spirit, and plunged into deep grief; and the fifty-seventh and the hundred and forty-second Psalms, which he composed about this time in the cave of Adullam, show how pathetically he lamented his desolate lot, and how greatly he felt the want of consolation and support. A friend at such a period of need would have been a friend indeed.

Such a friend he hoped to find, and had reason to hope for in Nabal, the husband of Abigail. He had conferred obligations upon him at a former period by protecting his property and servants from the violence of the Philistines; and he now applied to him in his need for such help as he would vouchsafe to grant. He made the application at a time usually considered most favourable to success, and on an occasion which commonly expands the hearts

of the rich to kindness and liberality; for Nabal was shearing his sheep, of which he possessed three thousand, as well as a thousand goats, and it was customary in Canaan at sheep-shearings to give feasts, and entertainments, and gifts, to relatives and friends, as we may gather from the invitation of Absalom, who said unto his father<sup>1</sup>, "Behold now thy servant hath sheep-shearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant." The application was also made with much courtesy and respect; and the messengers were ordered to say to the rich man, "Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast." It was accompanied by a true but unassuming representation, that when David and his military followers were quartered in the neighbourhood of the land occupied by Nabal's shepherds, they had abstained from all depredation upon his property, which was no small forbearance for men in their needy and difficult circumstances. The truth was, as appeared afterwards, and as we have already stated, that they had not only not injured his property, but had even saved it from the predatory violence of others. The application, moreover, was exceedingly deferential in its tone, and by no means dictatorial or exorbitant in its demands, it being a request that he would confer upon the messengers, who called

<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. xiii. 24.

themselves his servants, and upon David, whom they were instructed to call his son, out of respect to him, not royal dainties, or costly luxuries, but whatever he might condescend to give towards their necessary support. It proceeded too from one who was brave in war, and surrounded by a band of warriors, and who was powerful enough to send an imperative demand, and yet it was delivered with all the meekness and humility of one who had no power to enforce his wishes. It also came from one who had been beforehand with Nabal in granting favours, and who had already laid him under unquestionable obligations, and yet it prescribed no specific return, but simply asked for what he could conveniently afford to persons who were in need and necessity. In short, the application was attended with so many considerations calculated to excite kindness, and to disarm resistance, that with men of ordinary sense and gratitude, it could not have failed of success. Combine together the previous services of David, his present power, his modest and unassuming demeanour, and you might well expect that Nabal would have felt disposed with the utmost readiness and liberality to comply with his request. But the result was totally different, as will appear in the sequel.

The servants of David, on delivering to Nabal their master's reasonable and courteous



message, were surprised and confounded by a most unexpected and repulsive answer: "Who is David?" said he, "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 water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" It is difficult to imagine a more offensive refusal. Not content with a denial of the request, he gives way to violence of temper, and employs abusive language. It is not an uncommon thing at the present day for selfish and avaricious men to find fault with those who ask their charitable aid by way of excusing their own hardheartedness. Nabal went beyond most of his class in churlishness and insolence, and gratuitously insulted David, by affecting to consider him an obscure individual, whom nobody had heard of before, and by plainly intimating, that he must be some unprincipled vagrant, who, like a runaway slave, had deserted his master's service. There was manifest untruth in such a pretence of ignorance; for who in Israel could have been unacquainted with the fame of the conqueror of Goliath, and the scourge of the Philistines? There was evident injustice in the insinuation, that he had wilfully absented himself from his duty to his royal master, for he had been compelled, by the repeated and notorious attempts

upon his life, to tear himself away from the court and the camp of Saul, in spite of his strong attachment to Michal, his wife, and his unequalled friendship for Jonathan, her brother. Then what impious arrogance to speak of the property, part of which he was respectfully requested to give to the needy, as his own exclusive and inalienable possession, without the least reference to the good providence of God, who had so munificently blessed him! "Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" His churlish answer was a tissue of insolence, selfishness, ingratitude, and irreligion; most insulting to the petitioner, and, doubtless, most displeasing to the Giver of all his wealth; and we cannot wonder at the melancholy judgment by which he speedily closed his unprofitable career. Let men be warned by his fate against giving way to a worldly-minded, hard-hearted, and violent temper, and bear in mind, that while godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of, there is a sorrow of the world, often inflicted on the wicked, which worketh death.

The servants of David, upon hearing this abusive speech of Nabal, appear to have made no reply, but to have retired silently and speedily from his presence, shocked and amazed at their unexpected reception. When they re-

turned and reported to their master all that had taken place, he was fired with indignation at the insult, and formed a hasty determination to take vengeance upon Nabal and all his family. He quickly girded on his sword, and put himself at the head of four hundred armed followers, and immediately marched in the direction of Mount Carmel; and it is impossible to say what blood would have been shed, and what terrible havoc would have followed, had it not been for the timely interference of Abigail, who became instrumental in the hands of Providence to avert the impending calamity. One of Nabal's servants, who witnessed the contumelious treatment of David's message, felt instant alarm for the consequences, and knowing it to be useless to remonstrate with such a son of Belial as his master, he anxiously communicated the matter to his mistress. He represented to her the utter unreasonableness of such conduct towards David and his men, who had not only sacredly abstained from Nabal's property, but had protected his shepherds safely against the violence of others, and had been a wall of defence to them by night and by day. He had gathered from the manner or the language of the messengers, and from his own knowledge of David's power, that his master's ungrateful and unprovoked conduct must bring upon him and his household fearful, and, possibly, fatal evils, and urged her, without

delay, to consider whether she could adopt any step to prevent them. Abigail fully comprehended the imminence and peril of the coming storm, and with admirable presence of mind immediately proceeded to do what she could to avert it. She pursued a line of conduct the very reverse of that by which her foolish husband had given cause for the apprehended evil. Nabal had grudged David a moderate supply of provisions. She determined to present him with a very ample and liberal portion, and ordered to be got ready many asses' loads of bread, and corn, and wine, and figs, and raisins. Nabal had refused him the mere necessaries of bread and water. She added the luxuries of wine and fruit. Nabal would not exercise common civility towards his messengers. She undertook the labour of a journey to appear before him in person to conciliate his regard. We are not, therefore, surprised that she planned and executed her enterprise without acquainting her husband with her intention. Had she communicated with him on the subject, he would doubtless have opposed and frustrated her wise and pious purpose. Knowing his temper and disposition, she was perfectly justified in acting secretly on an emergency, which his folly and wickedness had occasioned, and which his obstinacy in wrong might have aggravated into a wide-spreading and irremediable calamity. Her enlightened

and pious mind saw that minor duties must give way to greater duties; and clearly perceiving and conscientiously feeling it to be a far more important object to save many from a violent death, than to consult the will of a rash and unwise husband, she wisely took upon herself the undivided responsibility of the undertaking, and the course she adopted may safely be followed by all who may be placed under a similar necessity. If husbands or parents, or any who in general have a right to command, act in defiance of the will of Heaven, their authority is no longer to be regarded, or their opinion consulted, since it is clearly laid down by inspiration as an invariable rule, that we "ought to obey God rather than man."

Behold Abigail then embarked on a momentous enterprise against an armed force of excited soldiers and an indignant chief, with no other resources to depend upon, than those of her own mind, with a trusting reliance on the merciful goodness of a gracious Providence. Proceeding on her journey, as she descended with her cavalcade towards the foot of Mount Carmel, she beheld David and his men coming down the opposite declivity of Mount Paran, and they were about to meet in the valley between, whereupon "she lighted off the beast on which she rode<sup>2</sup>, and fell before David on her face and bowed herself to the ground." Here

<sup>2</sup> See first Sermon on Rebekah. p. 158.



again she presented a striking contrast to the rude deportment of her husband. Studying to shew David every mark of respect and deference, she fell down at his feet, and addressed him with the greatest humility and reverence, repeatedly calling him lord. She entreated him to give ear to what she had to say on the deplorable business which brought her to his presence. She begged him to consider, that the transaction was attributable to her husband's want of common judgment and understanding, and that, son of Belial as he was, his wickedness was exceeded by his folly, saying, "Nabal or fool is his name, and folly is with him." She assured him that she was utterly ignorant of the arrival of the messengers, the nature of their application, or the manner of their reception, until they were gone, and intimated her utter reprobation of the churlish treatment which they had experienced. Then perceiving the effect which her representation had produced in softening the wrath of David, she pressed him to accept the presents of provisions which she had brought, and as though *she* had been the sole guilty party, and as one who was willing to take upon her own head the responsibility of her husband's trespass, she besought him to grant unto her a pardon for the deep offence that had been committed. To fix his determination in favour of her humble suit, she unfolded to him, perhaps by prophetic inspira-

tion, the noble and royal destiny which awaited him and his eventual triumph over all his enemies, whether stupidly insulting like Nabal, or violently persecuting like Saul, and she set before him how much more worthy of one intended for so exalted a station, and so manifestly favoured of Heaven, it was, generously to overlook a despicable affront, than to visit it with severity of punishment. She further represented to him how at a future period it would save him, in the retrospect of the past, the painful regret which must necessarily arise from the revengeful shedding of blood, and like one confident of his ultimate success and supremacy, she concluded her supplication with a hope that he would, when arrived at his approaching elevation, remember her as one whose instrumentality Providence had employed to divert him from inflicting a lasting disquietude on his conscience and a dishonouring blot on his fair fame. The effect of this appeal was such as might have been expected on one of David's character. He was a man of warm feelings, and he had allowed himself for the moment to be excited into vindictiveness at the insult he had received. But he was open to conviction, and of a tender conscience, and when he was calmly and judiciously reasoned with, he not only according to Abigail's request forbore to punish Nabal, but blessed the Lord God of Israel, who had put it into her

heart to come and meet him, and so saved him from shedding blood under the influence of revengeful feelings. He had made a solemn vow to destroy Nabal and every male in his household. But it was a rash and a sinful vow. While the making of such vows entails much guilt, the keeping of them entails still greater guilt. David became fully sensible of this. He repented of his temerity, and he most devoutly thanked God for having interposed to restrain his impetuous fury, and earnestly blessed Abigail, whose discreet address had been the happy means employed to divert him from his purpose. He readily consented to accept of her gifts, declared himself willing to comply in all respects with her wishes, and sent her back to her home in peace. Oh happy result of well-directed efforts for good! What countless and unknown evils were prevented by this timely exercise of prudence, faith, and prayer on the part of Abigail! what guilt averted from the conscience of David! what suffering and ruin from the house of Nabal! "Truly the tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; and a word spoken in season, how good is it!"

Abigail having happily succeeded in her enterprise returns to Nabal, and finds the man who had refused to help the necessitous grudging no expense for the gratification of his own vanity and carnal appetites. He was entertaining his friends on a scale of regal splendour,

and indulging to excess in hilarity and wine. "He held a feast in his house like the feast of a king, and his heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken." And do we not see many in the present day, who are most niggardly in their contributions for the purposes of charity and piety, often extravagant and profuse in their expenditure for the purposes of ostentation and sensuality? Let such consider the words of the prophet Isaiah, and be afraid: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore, hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory and their multitude and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it." The uncharitable and selfish, yet luxurious rich are treading on the brink of a dreadful precipice, like Nabal, who was exposed to a most terrible, though little suspected danger, while in the midst of revelry and dissipation. While he said unto himself, Peace, peace, sudden destruction was menacing his house; while he was enjoying ease and pleasure, the sword of David was rapidly approaching his habitation, and would have overwhelmed both it, and its owner, and his company, with desolation and

death, but for the timely interference of his discreet and pious wife. In the morning she acquainted him with all this, and set before him, doubtless with a view to his reformation, the fearful danger which his folly and selfishness had created. The madness of intoxication had passed away; the hour of reflection had returned; a depression of spirits corresponding with their elation in the season of revelry had followed: these circumstances, combined with the dreadful nature of the danger his conduct had caused, as described in his wife's recital, produced such an effect upon his mind that he never recovered the shock. "His heart died within him and he became as a stone." Like the handwriting on the wall of the palace of Babylon, which caused "the king's countenance to be changed, and his thoughts to be troubled, so that the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another," the melancholy tale of the consequences that had so nearly followed from his excessive thoughtlessness and wickedness threw him into a fit of affright and despair, which speedily brought his useless life to a close. "And it came to pass about ten days after that the Lord smote Nabal that he died." It is intimated in these last words that he died by the judgment of God. It was doubtless the case with him as well as with Belshazzar. Natural causes indeed were in operation



in both cases, but they might have been turned aside by the mercy, as they were rendered fatal by the judgment of God. O then let men beware of blindness of heart, of hateful tempers, of uncharitableness, and of selfish sensuality. Against such the judgment of God lingereth not, and their damnation doth not slumber. The Bible gives repeated warnings against following their evil ways. In addition to the examples in the Old Testament here referred to, we have the awful admonitions of the New. "There was a certain rich man," observed our Saviour, on one occasion, "who said unto his soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." "There was a certain rich man," said He, on another occasion, "which was clothed in purple and fine linen; and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Laza-

rus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now, he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Oh, then, I say again, let men beware of the deceitfulness of riches, the snares of sensuality, and the peril of ungoverned passions, which harden the heart, and drown men in destruction and perdition. Be afraid of trusting in uncertain riches rather than in the living God. Be on your guard against being lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Bear in mind that ye are but stewards of the good things with which God hath blessed you, and that it is required by Him of stewards that they be found faithful. Set not your affections, therefore, on things on the earth, but set your affection on things above, where *God* sitteth on the right hand of God; and make to yourselves true friends of the Mammon of righteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

David, upon hearing the intelligence of Nabal's death, while he recognised in the sudden visitation the just judgment of the Almighty, poured forth his heart in gratitude to God for having kept him from inflicting the punishment

with his own hand, and for having restrained him from the guilt of blood. He also remembered the singular messenger, by whose instrumentality he had been saved from so great a misfortune. Abigail was a woman of great and varied attractions, so that in all things she most favourably contrasted with her departed husband,—a circumstance directly calculated to impress David with a deep and lively interest in her destiny. We are distinctly told that she was a woman of a beautiful countenance, and of a good understanding. Her good understanding might have been inferred from the prudence and address she displayed in the hour of imminent peril, even if the sacred writer had not positively declared it. The declaration concerning her external charms was, doubtless, equally true. These graces of person, and more valuable graces of the mind and heart, combined with the affecting circumstances under which she was first presented to his notice, and under which she had been reduced to the condition of a widow, strongly recommended her to his judgment, his pity, and his warm affection; and he determined to unite her to himself in marriage. Upon his sending a message to her with that proposal, though he was then but an exile and an outlaw, she humbly and gratefully gave her consent. She knew that although he was then unfortunate, yet he was a good and enlightened man, and that, although he was

then destitute and persecuted, yet he was destined, one day, to triumph over all his foes, and to command the wealth of a kingdom. And, therefore, on the appearance of his messengers, and on learning the purport of their errand, she arose and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, "Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord. And she hastened and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife."

To conclude with a brief application of the subject. I have often had occasion to observe how wonderfully instructive is every part of the Word of God, and how it exhibits both men and women in almost every relation of life, and under the most various and interesting circumstances; so that they serve either as warnings or examples for the guidance of the children of frail humanity under every Divine dispensation, and in every age of the world. Thus, in the biographies contained in the present and the last discourse, we behold, as in a clear mirror, the great disadvantage, on the one hand, of thoughtlessness and irreligion, and the incalculable value, on the other, of discretion and piety in a woman and a wife. Michal, thoughtless, irreligious, and proud, tried to set her husband's mind against his highest duties. Abigail, discreet, pious, and meek, succeeded in turning

aside the consequences of her husband's infatuated wickedness. The influence of Michal, if not counteracted by the intellect and zeal of David, would, by causing the neglect of Divine worship, have brought a curse upon her husband and his family. The influence of Abigail accomplished the deliverance of her house from a terrible calamity, which the stupidity and recklessness of Nabal, her husband, had provoked. Michal used the gift of speech for the derision of that which was good. Abigail employed the most moving eloquence in deploring that which was evil, and in preventing its direful consequences. Michal was degraded for her conduct from the royal station she occupied. Abigail was elevated for hers to the ultimate enjoyment of higher honours than she possessed before. Let wives hence learn the great duty of exercising their influence aright, and consider how much the piety or impiety, the happiness or misery of families depend upon them, and how unspeakably momentous the consequences of their conduct to themselves. The degradation of Michal marks out the everlasting shame and contempt of the foolish wife, and the elevation of Abigail, the honour, glory, and immortality of the wise one. God give you grace in time to choose the better part.

But the subject is susceptible of a more general application. See, as exhibited here,



what an odious thing in the sight of God and man, is a selfish, grasping, and unfeeling demeanour. It is directly opposed to the inspired command, "Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." Let those, who, in their daily life, disregard that command, tremble for themselves, and dread the fate of Nabal. See, again, how watchful even pious men ought to be against being transported into passion, and making rash vows of revenge when smarting under a sense of insult or injury. David, being off his guard on such an occasion, would, had not God providentially interposed to restrain him, have given way to a violence, of which, according to Abigail's opinion, and according to his own confession, he must have bitterly repented, and been deeply ashamed to the end of his days. And how many have been disgraced and made miserable all their lifetime, and even been brought to a premature death, by a resolution formed, or an act done in the heat of angry excitement! In this view, how significant is that beatitude of the Saviour, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." See, moreover, how much evil and suffering may be prevented by a calm, discreet, and religious remonstrance. Nabal's grievous words had stirred up a terrible strife, but Abigail's soft answer turned away the wrath of David, and her earnest intercession put a stop

to incalculable evils. "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."

But we learn from this subject, as indeed what part of Scripture does not teach us, David was in many ways a *type*. How terrible was David's wrath when kindled against his foolish and wicked enemy! But it was a shadow only of the wrath of David's Son, when it shall burst forth against the finally impenitent. Brethren, if you will, like Abigail, go unto Him in time, that wrath may be turned away from you, and you shall rejoice in His reconciled presence. Oh then go unto Him: prostrate yourselves in the dust before Him: bow down with deep humility, and yet with faith, at His feet, and He will give ear to your cry, and listen to the voice of your supplication. But no time is to be lost. His vengeance is moving on towards the habitation of the ungodly like an army of irresistible power. Oh, then, delay not to seek His favour, and His peace. "Oh, kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled, yea, but a little. Blessed are all they," and only they, "who put their trust in Him."

Finally, Abigail's acceptance of the invitation of David, typifies the believer's acceptance of the invitation. She willingly consented to become the wife of David, and that

at a time when he was in adversity and under persecution. But she had seen and heard enough of him to regard him as the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and she foresaw with the eye of faith, that he would triumph over all his enemies, and arrive at supreme dominion, and, therefore, she willingly and gratefully accepted the invitation by the mouth of his messengers. Brethren, the ambassadors of *Christ*, who is the great antitype of David, bring unto you an offer from their Lord and Master, and ask you to consent to a blessed union with Him. The proposal is made to-night to those of you who have hitherto been aliens from his family. Are you willing to accede to it, my dear friends? Are you disposed to close with it, though it may subject you to self-denial? You have, I trust, already learnt something of his unequalled excellence. Be not discouraged then by the present aspect of his fortunes in this world. Look forward with the vision of faith. He is destined to make all his enemies his footstool, and to establish a universal dominion in heaven and earth. Come to Him now. Join his family now, and ye shall presently share his unspeakable honours and riches, drink of his pleasures, sit upon his throne, and be glorified with his glory through ages that never end.

## SERMON IX.

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### WITCH OF ENDOR.

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I SAM. xxviii. 7.

“Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.”

IN these discourses on the female characters of Holy Writ, it has not been our purpose to limit our attention to those women who have set in their conduct an example worthy of imitation, but to notice as equally profitable for instruction, the irreligious and unprincipled, whose lives are recorded, to serve as a warning against the error of their ways. Those of you who have regularly attended this course of our Sunday evening's meditations, and all of you who are intimately acquainted with Scripture, will remember that the former class, the good and the exemplary, have far outnumbered the latter class, the wicked and the condemnable. Whence you may infer that the great majority of the

eminent and influential females among the peculiar people of God, were virtuously and piously disposed; and also that the intellectual, moral, and religious state of the mothers, wives, and daughters of a land has a very close bearing upon the temporal and spiritual condition of its people. There were, however, some, and when we consider the corruption of human nature, we are surprised that there were so few, among the conspicuous female characters of Israel, who perverted the influence of their station or talents to the purposes of worldliness, irreligion, and rebellious opposition to the true God; but as God has thought wise to place their lives in the records of inspiration, we can entertain no doubt of their being intended for careful meditation and practical application in every age of the world; and, therefore, while we have discoursed upon the many honourable and holy women, according as they presented themselves in the order of the sacred narrative, as upon Sarah, and Deborah, and Hannah, and Ruth, we have thought it an equally imperative duty to set before you, for caution and warning, the histories presented in the order of the same sacred narrative, of the few, who were neither honourable nor holy, as Lot's wife, Michal the wife of David, and the person so prominently connected with the circumstances now to be submitted to your attention, who is known by the name of the Witch of Endor.



Endor was the name of a town situated in the valley of Jezreel, at the foot of mount Gilboa, near the borders of the adjoining districts of Manasseh and Issachar. It was, therefore, not many miles from the spot where Saul, king of Israel, happened to be encamped with his army, in expectation of being attacked by the formidable hosts of the Philistines. That monarch had not only declined from the promises of his youth, which excited hopes of his proving an unambitious, meek, forgiving, and pious sovereign, but he had run into the very extremity of the opposite vices. He had disregarded the plain command of Jehovah relative to the execution of his judgment on the Amalekites. He had presumed to offer sacrifice in an unauthorized manner. He had made a rash oath, which involved the life of his brave son, Jonathan, and would have put him to death, if he had not been rescued by the people. He, in a fit of violent passion, cast a javelin to smite that excellent man for his attachment to the persecuted David. Against David himself, though he had rendered him and his kingdom most important services, and had been married to his own daughter, he had harboured the deepest malice, and indulged the most fierce resentment. He had attempted to thrust him through with a javelin while securely seated in his presence, and enjoying his hospitality. He had lured him to expose his person to the

greatest peril in unequal conflicts with the Philistines, by false promises of a matrimonial alliance with the family. He had, subsequently, given one of his daughters to him in actual marriage, with the diabolical design of effecting his destruction. When disappointed in that scheme, he had, contrary to the laws of God and man, taken the same daughter, in the absence of her husband, whom he had compelled to flee away for his life, and married her to another. He had pursued him from place to place with the most unrelenting hatred, and executed the most unscrupulous violence against all who had appeared to favour him by relieving his pressing necessities. He had rashly put to death the priests and all the inhabitants of Nob, without distinction of age or sex, because David and his men had found in that city the means of satisfying the importunate cravings of hunger. He had continued his mad rage against David, though, during that persecution, on two occasions, he was indebted for the preservation of his life to David's generosity and forbearance. He had, finally, compelled that near relative of his family, that faithful officer of his army, that heroic champion of his country, to seek refuge from destruction in the land of the Philistines, the most formidable enemies of Israel. His iniquity was at length full, and cried to Heaven for judgment. And, as is most frequently the case with criminals, the very course which he

pursued to preserve his rank and power, led to the loss of his kingdom and his life. The separation of David, the conqueror of Goliath, from the interests of Saul, and the residence of that renowned warrior among the Philistines, which led them to expect that he would transfer to them the weight of his valour and his fame, encouraged that people to make head against Israel, and to invade their country. They appear never to have been so bold as at this juncture, owing doubtless to the extraordinary folly and rashness of the king, and consequent manifest weakness of his kingdom. They penetrated to the very heart of the land of Canaan, and must have spread terror and devastation throughout the nation,—Shunem, the place where they had now pitched, being in the tribe of Issachar, in the northern part of the country, while their own territories lay at its southern extremity. Saul, who, in his rage against David, had neglected the defence of the kingdom, sacrificing the national welfare to private and individual spite, was at length roused to a sense of the peril which his folly and wickedness had created. He gathered all Israel together, that is, we suppose, all the military forces of Israel, and took up a position on the mountains of Gilboa, not far from the encampment of the Philistines at Shunem, in the adjoining plains. Being in a situation to behold the extent of the hostile army, he was amazed and terrified at its num-

ber and strength, and concluded that his unequal forces could not meet such a formidable host with any hope of success, and that without supernatural aid and counsel, he must inevitably be overpowered and cut off.

In this distress and perplexity, he sought to inquire of the Lord. Samuel, his faithful counsellor, was dead, and he could no longer, through him, obtain help and advice, as heretofore, in his time of need. There were, however, three ways by which Jehovah could yet be legitimately consulted, by dreams, by Urim, and by prophets. 1. The consultation by dreams was performed by praying that God would reveal his will to the supplicant, and make that revelation during the season of sleep. We have frequent instances of Heaven's will being thus communicated to man under the patriarchal and Levitical dispensations, according to the words of Job, who represents God as often speaking to his rational creatures "in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed." God came to Abimelech in a dream to inform him that Sarah was the wife of Abraham. The angel of God spake to Jacob in a dream. The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. Daniel received in a dream a knowledge of far distant future events. Joseph was encouraged in a dream to take unto him his wife; and was warned in a dream to fly with the child



into Egypt from the murderous designs of Herod.

2. The mode of consulting God by Urim and Thummim has not been so clearly ascertained. The words Urim and Thummim are interpreted by some to mean light and perfection; by others, doctrine and judgment; and by others, truth and manifestation. There is, in reality, but little difference between these several meanings, and they appear all to imply a knowledge beyond the unassisted capacity of man. It is agreed generally among critics and divines, that these words or things were in some way connected with the pectoral, or the breastplate of the high priest, which was a piece of embroidery set with twelve precious stones containing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some suppose that the words Urim and Thummim were inscribed on this breastplate, to indicate the clear and perfect knowledge which Jehovah would, by its means, impart to the high priest, and, through him, to the people of Israel; others, that the Urim and Thummim were a distinct appendage, perhaps one or two precious stones larger than any of the others, and perhaps as valuable as all the rest put together, or even more valuable. It was not lawful to consult God by Urim and Thummim, except in cases of national importance, or at the request of persons in very high authority. The mode of consulting by



Urim and Thummim was, according to the most generally received opinion, by the high priest's putting on his ephod, and upon that the pectoral or breastplate just described, and taking his station, not in the holy of holies, for that he was to enter only on the great day of atonement once a year, but in the holy place just outside the separating veil, and opposite the ark of the covenant, with the mercy seat, the cherubim, and the Shechinah within. There, so habited, he proposed the question on which information was needed, and an answer was communicated, it is generally maintained, by a rising up of the letters on the breastplate, so as to form a legible and intelligible word or sentence, or by such a disposal of the rays of light on the brilliant ornaments of the pectoral, as to produce the same or an equally satisfactory effect. The high priest would thus perceive the Divine will on the subject of consultation, and report it for the national benefit.

3. The mode of consulting God by prophets, was by proposing the question to a holy man, who was known, like Abraham and Samuel, to be favoured with celestial intercourse. It was probably done also in later times, and after the establishment of the schools of the prophets, by bringing the matter requiring elucidation before the company or college of those who at such institutions had dedicated themselves to the service of God, who were fully instructed

in divine knowledge, and who were prepared by prayer and meditation to be the most suitable vehicles of Jehovah's instructions to his creatures.

But none of these three methods of intercourse with Heaven availed the wretched king of Israel. "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." And we cannot wonder at the refusal, for<sup>1</sup> he had forfeited the benefit of all these methods of inquiry. How could he, who had disregarded Samuel and persecuted David, who were both prophets, expect to be answered by prophets? Or he that had slain the high priest, to be answered by Urim? Or he that had sinned away the Spirit of grace, to be answered by dreams, like the distinguished servants of God? "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her and inquire of her." Impious and inconsistent conduct! Impious, to suppose that he could derive benefit from a creature, when the Creator had repelled and frowned upon him! Inconsistent, to seek aid from arts, the dealers in which he himself had, in execution of the Divine law, actively striven to exterminate from the land! Daring defiance of God's distinct and menacing prohibition, which said,

<sup>1</sup> See Matth. Henry's Comment.

“ The soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go awhoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people ” !

Now the question, what is meant by a woman having a familiar spirit, or a woman that is a witch, is one which is surrounded with very considerable difficulties, and one which appears to have received different solutions in different ages of the world, and in different regions of the globe. There are those who maintain that all pretensions to intercourse with supernatural evil agency, were, and are, entire impostures, without the slightest foundation in truth. Others assert, that mankind have held, and may still hold, such intercourse ; and they allege in favour of their opinion the almost unanimous consent of all antiquity, the literal meaning of the Scripture phrases upon the subject, and the impossibility of explaining many recorded phenomena on any other supposition. I have no doubt that imposture has had to do with most of the operations and revelations which have been ascribed to immaterial agency. For I find, that as mankind have progressed in knowledge, and become better acquainted with the laws of nature, the belief in the existence of persons able to command the service of Satanic interference has declined and faded away. With regard to the phraseology of Scripture on the subject, it may

be answered, that the diction employed was accommodated to the prevailing notions of the time, without any reference to their truth or falsehood, as the most convenient and intelligible form of speech, as we now say the sun rises and the sun sets, although, literally speaking, we know he neither rises nor sets, but remains fixed, and is revolved around by the earth on which we stand. And as for antiquity, it is well known that most of the ancient world was overspread with the shades of ignorance and idolatry, and open to all kinds of deceivableness of unrighteousness. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that history, both sacred and profane, both ancient and modern, presents us with difficulties upon the subject, which cannot, I think, in the mind of any fair and candid reasoner, be solved by the supposition of sheer deceit and imposture. Though I cannot stop to instance them, works appear to me to have been done, knowledge imparted, sights seen, in connexion with sorcerers and sorceresses, for which deceit and imposture cannot account. We may add, that confessions of personal familiarity with evil spirits have been made by such, when on the point of being executed for their crime. It is true, that these confessions might be often extorted by the fear of torture, and the terror of a more lingering and painful death, than that by the gibbet or the stake, but they have been made when no such overwhelm-



ing necessity existed, and yet at a time when a person may be expected, if ever, to speak the truth. Upon the whole, then, after carefully considering the subject, comparing Scripture with Scripture, ancient with modern testimonies, dark with enlightened ages, heathen and idolatrous countries with the lands of pure religion and holy worship, my opinion is, and I believe it to be an opinion that will meet all the difficulties of the case, first, that the vast majority of those who in all countries and ages have professed to have the power of commanding the service of evil spirits, or of compelling any spirits, whether good or evil, to make their appearance, have been impostors and deceivers, and their works deceits and impostures, without the slightest foundation in truth, or a conviction of their truth on their own part. Hence the decrease of their number as light increases. *Secondly*, that there have been persons, who have imagined themselves to have intercourse with the invisible world, simply from being in a state of mental derangement, though perhaps it might scarcely be perceptible to others, or in a state of overwrought excitement, amounting to a transient or permanent insanity, and have sincerely believed concerning themselves what in reality had no existence. Hence the confessions of sorcery or witchcraft under solemn circumstances. *Thirdly*, that while we are slow to believe, though we



do not absolutely deny, that any man or woman is now permitted or has ever been permitted to command the service of evil spirits, or to recall from their dread abode the souls of the departed, the Almighty God, who ruleth in heaven and earth, and under the earth, has without any expectation or influence on the part of the dealer in lies, interfered on such occasions to baffle the deceiver, to reprove the wicked, or to accomplish some other wise and momentous purpose. Hence the occurrence of events in connexion with pretended sorcery, which cannot be explained without reference to supernatural agency. Nor let it be thought incredible, that the Almighty should so interpose. He interposed to baffle the schemes of the false prophet Balaam. He interposed to punish the falsehood of Ananias and Sapphira. And since sorcery is a deliberate falsehood or deceit, and, therefore, emphatically a work of the devil, who was a liar from the beginning—and if it be more than a deliberate falsehood or deceit, it is still more emphatically a work of the devil,—and since the dupe of sorcery is appealing for knowledge or aid to a quarter which the Almighty has thought wise to veil from human eyes, and is therefore guilty of a daring and presumptuous disregard of his interdict, there is a complication and peculiarity of wickedness perpetrated, which may well call for the extraordinary interference of the Ruler of the visible

and invisible world, and the Judge of quick and dead. Let men beware then of what He has so plainly forbidden, or expect his sudden and awful judgment.

Now Saul, with a perfect knowledge of Jehovah's prohibition against the practice of witchcraft, and against the consulting of those who practised it, determined to go to the witch of Endor to seek advice in the season of adversity. "He disguised himself, and put on other raiment," on undertaking this strange enterprise. For the disguise there might be more reasons than one. He who had been active in expelling all witches from his dominions, might well be ashamed of consulting a witch himself, and therefore he did it secretly. He would also naturally infer that the witch would not grant him an interview, or perform her incantations for him, and so acknowledge herself to be a practiser of the prohibited art, if he appeared before her as the king who had so rigorously put the law in force against the class to which she belonged, and therefore he came to her in the guise of a less conspicuous character. In this disguise, and attended by two servants, he sets out by night from the Israelitish camp on Mount Gilboa, and descending to the adjacent valley, arrives at the town of Endor, and entering the habitation of the witch, addressed her in these words: "I pray thee divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me up

whom I shall name unto thee." Fearing lest he might have come to lay a snare for her, to discover the reality of her reported character, and to inform against her with a view to her punishment, or perhaps suspecting, perhaps knowing him to be the king, though, with the characteristic craft of her class, she would pretend to be ignorant of him, she charged him with a treacherous design upon her life, and intimated her unwillingness to comply with his request. But upon his declaring with a solemn oath that no harm should happen unto her, she consented, and "then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: And the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid; for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel; and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself. And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by pro-

phets nor by dreams : therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do. Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee and become thine enemy? And the Lord hath done to him," or, as some read, "to thee, as he spake by me : for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David, because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek : therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines : and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."

Now let us inquire what was the true nature of this transaction? We have already stated our opinion on witchcraft in general. Let us now endeavour to ascertain what was the exact character of the proceedings which took place in the presence of the witch of Endor, and the royal applicant for her counsel. Did a supernatural being appear and speak to the king? and if so, who was that supernatural being? With regard to the question, whether any supernatural being did appear and speak to the king, some are of opinion that the whole scene was a delusion practised by the woman on the excited and distracted monarch, and that no spiritual agency whatever intervened. "It is no

where said," observe the defenders of this opinion, "that Saul saw Samuel on the occasion, but only that the woman saw him. She had probably known the person and dress of Samuel, or had heard a sufficiently minute account of him to give a correct description of his appearance; and while she in a separate apartment, or in a distant part of the same apartment, pretended to behold his person and to hear his voice, no visible object was really present, and the words were uttered by herself in an imitative tone, effected by the powers of ventriloquism, or by another human being, who was her accomplice in the imposture. And with regard to her sudden recognition of the king, as though suggested by the apparition, that was merely the effect of her cunning art, to confirm the king's delusion with regard to her supernatural knowledge. She might have already possessed, although she concealed that she possessed, an acquaintance with his person, or she might have inferred from the nature of his consultation, the majesty of his stature, the dignity of his mien, and the solemn oath he had made to bear her harmless from all punishment for complying with his request, that it was no other than the monarch of Israel. And as to the communication she delivered in the assumed voice of Samuel, relative to his approaching death and that of his sons, and the devolution of his kingdom on David his neighbour—a com-



munication which proved eventually true—it was founded on the well-known rivalry then existing between him and that successful chief, the formidable host of enemies arranged against him, the knowledge of his own courage and that of his sons, not apt to fly from the field of battle, and the consequent high probability of his being cut off, with his brave children, by an overwhelming hostile force, and of his being naturally succeeded by the anointed of Samuel and the favourite of the people. It is added, that she had peculiar facilities for the acquisition of the knowledge contained in such an answer by the proximity of Endor to the position of the adverse armies, that town being probably situated between the encampment of the Israelites, on the mountain of Gilboa, and the encampment of the Philistines in the adjacent valley of Jezreel. On these grounds, it is by some strenuously maintained, that the supposition of any supernatural agency is unnecessary, and that the whole scene was nothing but the effect of craft and imposture.

This opinion, I confess I have once been inclined to adopt; but on a more mature consideration of the subject, I think there are opposed to it insurmountable objections. 1. There is, *first*, the primary and plain sense of the words which describe the transaction, and which at first convey to an unsophisticated mind no other meaning than that it was of a

supernatural character, and that a messenger from the invisible world was present. 2. There is, *secondly*, the expression, "Saul perceived that it was Samuel," which some scholars will have to imply personally, "seeing so as to recognize." 3. There is, *thirdly*, the sudden exclamation of the woman, immediately after the naming of Samuel by Saul, and before she had any time to perform her incantations. 4. Then, there is the very strong objection, which I consider fatal to the soundness of the opinion we have stated, arising from the singularly ominous nature of the answer which the king received, and the overpowering effect it produced upon him, causing him to fall all along on the earth, totally unmanned by terror and distress of mind. Would the false woman, whose object was gain, and who must have desired to conciliate the king's favour, and to dispose him to liberality, have uttered of her own accord, words most grating to his ears, and communicated information most unwelcome and repulsive to his heart? Would she not rather have soothed him with encouraging promises, and deluded him with hopes of success? Would she not, had she spoken from her own mind, at least have clothed her responses in ambiguous language, like the heathen oracles of antiquity, so that her words might bear the appearance of truth, whatever the event might be? That she was really desirous to please and comfort him

evidently appears, from the efforts she made to restore him from his deep depression of spirits, to rouse him from his stupor of melancholy, to provide an entertainment suitable to the occasion, and to induce him to partake of refreshment necessary to the recruiting of his failing strength, and to the enabling him to perform the journey back to his camp. Would a woman, thus desirous to please him, have returned an answer so bitter to his feelings and so disappointing to his hopes? On these grounds we think, that there was the interference of a supernatural agent, and that the occurrence, so far from being an imposition practised by the woman, was by her totally unexpected, and caused her no small consternation and alarm.

If then there was a supernatural agent, the next question is, who that supernatural agent was. Some are of opinion that it was an evil spirit, who counterfeited the person and voice of Samuel; others, that it was no other than the soul of the departed prophet himself. Those who contend for the former opinion, namely, that it was an evil spirit disguised as Samuel, ground their opinion on the supposed great incredibility, that an impostor and deceiver, and, according to some, a more abandoned character still, like the witch of Endor, should have had the power to disturb the repose of those who have died in the Lord. How can they be said to rest from their labours, if they

are liable to be so disquieted? What a contradiction, say they, to suppose that the practiser of delusive or infernal arts should exercise an influence on the inhabitants of that celestial habitation, into which "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever committeth abomination or maketh a lie?" How dishonourable to the character of God as Almighty, all knowing, and ever faithful to his word, who has all power in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, whose eyes are ever over the righteous, and who hath pronounced that no one shall ever pluck them out of his hands, to suppose that the most eminent of his saints could be brought back from heaven to earth at the bidding of one of the most abandoned of sinners? But that Satan himself, or one of the Satanic host should present himself, on such an occasion, transformed, as the Scripture assures us he often is, into an angel of light, and disguised in the form of a departed righteous man for the purpose of forwarding the unfruitful works of darkness, is consistent with all we know, or can imagine, concerning the powers of darkness. And with regard to the prediction he delivered, which proved true, though it be fully conceded, that all the secrets of futurity are known only to the Omniscient God himself; yet if it be contended by those, who deny all supernatural intervention, whether good or evil, in the case, that the woman herself, from the

situation of her abode, and from her knowledge of current affairs, was capable of the sagacity requisite for such an accurate revelation, much more probable is it, that the subtle spirit, who walketh up and down and cometh to and fro unseen, should venture on such a bold and circumstantial representation of the future. Such are in brief the chief considerations on which is rested the opinion of those, who, while they admit the presence of an unearthly visitant, believe that he was not the departed spirit of Samuel himself, but a spirit of hell in the form of Samuel.

But to this opinion the objections appear to me as strong as to the opinion already noticed, that there was no supernatural agency of any kind concerned; while the arguments in its support seem far outweighed by those in support of the opinion, that the being seen and heard by the witch, and, probably, also both seen and heard by Saul, was the identical soul or spirit which once animated the body of Samuel, and had, since his body's dissolution, rested in the bosom of Abraham. 1. In the first place, there is not the slightest reference in the description of the proceeding to an evil spirit of any kind, nor the least intimation given that any other being than Samuel might be present. Such a supposition is obviously contrary to the primary and plain meaning of the words which the sacred writer employs. If you adopt any



opinion founded on such a latitudinarian interpretation of language, then the opinion that the whole transaction was a juggle, altogether unconnected with spiritual intercourse, appears far more probable, than the opinion that the devil is meant, when a saint is named.

2. Secondly, it is utterly inconsistent with the notion suggested to us by Scripture, of the character of Satan, to suppose that he would reprove and threaten the king on account of his disobedience to the command of the Lord concerning Amalek, and his other acts of wickedness, and so become divided against himself, by discouraging, at one time, the practice of evil, which, at another, he employs his subtlety and malice to promote.

3. Thirdly, the minute, clear, and circumstantial account of what should take place on the following day, not only of Saul's own death, but of the death of his two sons on the same bloody field, appears to exceed the foresight of any creature, whether human or infernal, and to have come only from Him, or from one commissioned by Him, who knoweth the end from the beginning, who is not far from every one of us, who is acquainted with all our ways, and who determines the bounds of our habitation.

4. Fourthly, it is plainly declared by the wise son of Sirach, who is admitted to be a most able and competent interpreter of Scripture, being far more ancient than the fathers of the

and more likely to understand thoroughly the Hebrew original, and the exact meaning it was intended to convey, than any commentator, whether of the present time, or of former ages, it is plainly declared by him, that it was the spirit of Samuel himself who appeared and spoke. "And after his death," says he, "*Samuel* prophesied, and showed the king his end; and lifted up his voice from the earth in prophecy, to blot out the wickedness of the people." As to the difficulty, and even incredibility of the supposition that the practiser of forbidden arts should have power to bring down the souls of the blessed to this scene of mortality, and by so doing, practically overthrow the declarations of Scripture, concerning their security and uninterrupted happiness, such a supposition is not at all necessary to the truth of this opinion. The woman had no such power over good spirits; and I am slow to believe that she had any power over evil spirits. She only pretended to have such power. But the Holy and the Just, the Almighty and the Omniscient One, overruled the occasion for the condemnation of the monarch's audacious and desperate conduct, and, perhaps, also for the conversion of his attendants, and the reproof of the cunning impostor. The woman did not bring up Samuel, but, while she was preparing her operations for such an unhallowed pretence, God judicially

interposed to the surprise and consternation of all the evil-doers. And we can have no difficulty whatever in believing, that in obedience to the will of the Most High, Samuel, like the angels who delight to do his bidding, felt even an increase of happiness in being employed by Him on an especial errand, though it was a mission from the elysium of bliss to a vale of tears. Obedience to God was the highest happiness of Adam in the earthly paradise. Obedience to God is the highest happiness of the cherub and the seraph in the heavenly. Obedience to God, we may be sure too, is the highest happiness of the spirits of just men made perfect, who have, through grace, found entrance into the same glorious mansions. To obey Him, therefore, cannot abate one jot of their felicity, whether He commands them to regions of light or regions of darkness, to the empyrean heights of celestial glory, to the uttermost parts of the deep sea, or to the many-coloured scenes of the terraqueous globe we inhabit, whether to comfort a David in his persecution and exile, or whether to reprove a Saul in his presumption and profaneness. Lazarus, for aught we know to the contrary, would have been sent, at the request of Dives, though not to hell with a drop of water to cool his own burning tongue, yet to earth for the benefit of his five brethren, had it not been certain that the hardihood which could disbelieve Moses and the

prophets, would have rendered such a mission vain. Moses and Elias did actually come down from their abodes of bliss to the mount of transfiguration, to attend upon Him whom all the angels of God were commanded to worship; and many of the buried saints, on the great occasion of his resurrection from the dead, went into the holy city and appeared unto many. There is nothing, then, inconsistent with the Scriptural account of the departed, nor with the continuance of the enjoyments of the blessed, in the notion of their being sent to reappear on this our earthly dwelling. With regard to the expression of Samuel to Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up"—perhaps the circumstance most opposed to this view of the subject, we may, I think, very safely regard that language as an accommodation to the prevailing notions of the day, and a mere form of introducing the conversation with the king, without attaching to it any precise meaning as indicative of either the nature of the spirit's condition, or the quarter from which he had come. Nor are we to regard that other expression, "To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me," as indicating any more than that they should die, and depart into the invisible world as he had done, their destined abode in that invisible world being left altogether unnoticed. These expressions we can have no difficulty in considering as language accommodated to the

then prevailing notions, or employed to convey general and undefined ideas ; remembering always, that to use an occasional expression in adaptation to popular modes of thinking, like the expression, "The sun rises or the sun sets," already quoted, is a very different thing from constructing an entire narrative of events with words to be understood only in a figurative signification, which would be the case on the supposition that no supernatural being interfered in the scene at Endor, or that the being who did interfere, was not the spirit of Samuel, but an evil spirit personating Samuel.

Samuel himself then, we verily believe, appeared on this awful occasion. His spirit, though divested of its earthly habiliments, clothed itself with an aerial or some other material garb that would be visible to earthly eyes, and uttered sounds that would be cognizable by earthly ears. And if you should think it strange that he should come, we mean not at the bidding of a desperate man, or a wicked woman, for it was, as I have already affirmed, at the bidding of God, and not at their bidding that he came ; but that he should come by Heaven's direction to hold converse with a man of unholy life and rebellious heart, we answer, that it is by no means more strange, than the interference of Jehovah with the false prophet of the east. He interfered by his angel with Balaam, though engaged in an unholy enter-



prise, and afterwards caused him to see, and Balak, who heard him, to hear things concerning Israel, which were as gall and wormwood to their hearts. He, in like manner, now interfered by his prophet with the Witch of Endor, and the king of Israel, to turn the counsel of the wicked into foolishness, and to pronounce an awful judgment on final impenitence and irreclaimable iniquity. God, remember, comes in judgment, even in this world, to those who have long despised his mercy and goodness. He may, at last, by his servants, utter words that shall drive to despair those who have trifled with every valuable religious privilege, and disregarded every precious opportunity of repentance and salvation. The words of *Y* to Judas, who had trampled underfoot every blessing, and every feeling calculated to dissuade from crime, appear to have struck his heart with the madness of desperation, and to have accelerated his awful doom; and the words of Samuel to Saul seem to have been attended with somewhat similar effect. With each of them the day of reformation was past. The amount of their iniquity was full. Warning had already failed—advice and reproof had already failed—the persuasive voice of goodness, mercy, long-suffering, kindness, and love had already failed to melt their hearts; and now that the Spirit of grace had finally ceased to strive with them, any words, whether from

heaven or earth, did but harden those hearts into adamantine hardness, and hasten the event, which sealed their hopeless ruin. There is a power in long indulged criminality, which, at length, entirely overmasters a man's mind, involving him in inextricable meshes, and blinding him to the plainest but most fearful consequences. We see it illustrated, I think, in atrocious criminals of the present day, of whom we have recently had many shocking instances. Men, who are given over to the power of evil, will commit horrible crimes with scarcely any provocation, and pursue a path, as though their eyes were shut, which directly and inevitably leads to their speedy and utter ruin. Oh, let men beware of trifling with their Creator. Let them tremble at the thought of proceeding from sin to sin, and slighting warning after warning. "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

This subject is very full of instruction on many interesting points, which I have but just time to glance at before concluding. 1. Learn, first, that sorcery, witchcraft, or necromancy, or any intercourse, whether real or pretended, and by whatever name known, with the invisible world, has been ever prohibited by the true God, and held utterly inconsistent with true religion. Supposing it to be nothing more than imposture—and if it is more it is still worse—but

supposing it to be nothing more than imposture, it is more injurious to man and more offensive to God than ordinary deceit or falsehood. Besides imposing on the understanding, it entangles the heart in the snares of idolatry, by causing it to look in the spiritual world for direction and support from other sources, than from the only Fountain of wisdom, consolation, and strength. It was, therefore, most solemnly prohibited by the law of Moses, whose grand object was to extirpate idolatry under every shape. Death was the punishment for those, who were convicted of its practice<sup>2</sup>. The judgment of God was threatened against all who resorted for consultation to those who did practise it<sup>3</sup>; and the folly and wickedness of Saul in so doing are reckoned among the chief causes of his defeat and death<sup>4</sup>. All pagan countries have abounded and still abound with it. But in proportion as true religion has prevailed, it has been discountenanced and diminished. Its existence in Canaan after the occupation of the country by the Israelites, was but the remains of pagan idolatry, which had never been entirely extirpated. Its existence in christian countries for many ages is attributable to the very same source, and, like many of the absurdities of popery, is to be traced to the pagan and idolatrous notions and customs which cling to the people after they had nomi-

<sup>2</sup> Lev. xx. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. xx. 6.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Chron. x. 13, 14.

nally embraced a more enlightened faith. It is entirely opposed to the religion of the Gentiles as well as the religion of Moses. And as it was punished with natural death under the Jewish dispensation, it is reckoned among the works of the flesh, which exclude from spiritual and eternal life under the New Testament: of the which works, says the Apostle to the Galatians, "I tell you before as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

2. This subject teaches the separate existence of the immaterial spirit after the dissolution of the body. Whatever views you take of the transaction we have been considering, it proves that in the time of Saul a belief in that doctrine generally prevailed; and, if we are right in supposing that the spirit of Samuel appeared and spoke, it is placed beyond the possibility of a doubt, independently of all the other arguments in its support. It is a solemn and yet a very delightful contemplation—solemn and awful to those who are unprepared for death—elevating and delightful to those whose affections are set on things above! O may we all have grace to be ready for our coming great change!

3. Lastly, the subject warns you, that continued transgression may before your life is ended, raise an impassable barrier between you and God. Jehovah at last refused to answer

Saul for his relief and direction by dreams, by Urim, or by prophets; and when He spoke to him by an extraordinary messenger, He spoke to him in wrath. O let men beware of persisting in sin and impiety, and be afraid of the dreadful menace pronounced against the obstinately impenitent and hardened heart, "Because I have called," &c. Prov. i. 24—29.



## SERMON X.

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### BATHSHEBA.

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2 SAMUEL xi. 3.

“And David sent and inquired after the woman, and one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”

IN the histories already set before you of Michal and Abigail, the first two wives of David, his character, with the exception of a temporary resentment at the churlish conduct of Nabal, has appeared worthy of all imitation and admiration, and if the history of his wife Bathsheba had been excluded from the sacred record, he would have descended into the grave with scarcely a blot upon his celebrated name. Had the Bible been a fiction, and the religion it inculcates false, doubtless this passage in the life of one who is reckoned among the saints of Jehovah, would have been artfully glossed over or entirely suppressed. But the revelation which comes from the God of truth, and which was dictated by the Holy Spirit, the guide into

all truth, records without reserve the failings as well as the virtues, the vices and crimes as well as the graces and excellences of those individuals, who are in general spoken of with approbation, and recommended as examples; and this impartial fidelity of representation is justly regarded as one of the strong proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures. If then we would carefully follow the guidance of that Spirit, faithfully interpret that revelation, and rightly divide the word of truth, we must not in these meditations on the sacred narrative stop at those biographies connected with the distinguished king and sweet singer of Israel, which exhibit the fair side of his character, but include those also, which expose its shadows, blemishes, and deformities. We must not limit our notices to those of his wives whose histories illustrate his fidelity to his engagements, his patience in tribulation, his forbearance under persecution, his forgiveness of unprovoked affronts and injuries, his deep piety and fervent zeal in the service of God, but extend our attention to her, whose history has transmitted to all posterity the record of his treachery, his impiety, his cruelty, his inexcusable wickedness, and atrocious criminality, even to Bathsheba, the widow of the injured and murdered Uriah the Hittite.

Uriah the Hittite, the first husband of Bathsheba, was so called, according to some, because he originally belonged to the heathen Hittite

nation, but had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion; according to others, because he had distinguished himself in war against that nation, as the celebrated Roman generals received such additional names as Parthicus, Hispanicus, and Africanus, on account of their successful exploits against the inhabitants of the countries to which those titles respectively refer. He was a brave and able officer, and engaged in fighting the battles of his country at the time when the name of his wife Bathsheba is first introduced to our notice. A war had broken out between Israel and the children of Ammon, on account of the shameful treatment of David's ambassadors by the ill-advised king of that people. In that war David's arms were attended with their usual success. The Syrians, who had come to assist the children of Ammon, were defeated and put to flight by Joab his general; and the Ammonites themselves were discomfited by another of his generals, Abishai, Joab's brother, and compelled to take refuge within the fortifications of Rabbah, the metropolis of their kingdom. In the following year, which was about the twenty-first of David's reign over Judah, the fourteenth of his reign over all the tribes of Israel, and the one thousand and thirty-fifth before our Saviour's birth, it was determined to renew the war against these unprovoked aggressors, and to complete their humiliation by the siege and capture of their capital

city. Among the officers engaged in that arduous enterprise was Uriah the Hittite, who had left his wife and his home in the city of Jerusalem to join the distant expedition against the enemies of his king and country. For reasons not specified, probably from motives of indolence and self-indulgence, the noxious growth of security and prosperity, the king, contrary to his former habits of activity and vigilance, declined to take a personal part in the campaign, but remained to enjoy the tranquillity and ease of his palace within the walls of his metropolis. During one of these days of inactive existence, "it came to pass," says the sacred historian, "in an eventide, that David arose from off his bed," or his couch, where he had reclined during the heat of the day, "and walked upon the roof of the king's house or palace: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself: and the woman was very beautiful to look upon." In his adversity, when persecuted by Saul, and hunted as a partridge on the mountains, he had been wont to pray at morning, at evening, and at noon-day. But now in his prosperity, he appears to have omitted his watchfulness and supplication, or to have greatly relaxed in the earnest performance of that duty, and to have continued it only in a spirit of lukewarmness and formality. Whether in the morning or noon of that day he had lifted up his heart to God in prayer, we

cannot tell. At eventide we are assured that his heart was far from God, for it harboured thoughts and feelings most repugnant to God's holiness. Upon seeing his neighbour's wife in the manner we have described, he looked upon the woman with a sinful eye and coveted her; and daringly violated a plain and positive commandment of Jehovah. Melancholy consequence of neglecting to watch and pray! Sad effects of idle and luxurious indulgence! Dreadful danger of encouraging in the bosom the first insinuations of iniquity! How important the wise man's caution, "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life!"

David, having committed this great sin, endeavoured by the most cunning artifice to conceal it from the eyes of the world. Men will often seek to hide from the knowledge of men, what they have scrupled not to do in the all-seeing presence of God. When he was informed that Bathsheba was with child in consequence of their adulterous intercourse, he despatched an order to Joab, the commander of his army at the siege of Rabbah, that he should send him Uriah the Hittite, apparently on pretence of wishing to receive from his mouth an accurate account of the progress of the military operations. Upon Uriah's arrival the king received him with great ostentation of anxiety about the public affairs, and asked him



“how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.” Seeming to be well pleased with the account he heard, he recommended Uriah to retire to his house for rest and refreshment, and presently sent after him a mess of meat for his luxurious entertainment. But Uriah’s thoughts were intent upon the critical state of the army, the sufferings of his fellow-soldiers, and the imperilled honour of the Lord of hosts: and under these circumstances he thought, that as one who feared God, and sympathized with his fellow-creatures, and felt for the public weal, he ought not to indulge the tranquil enjoyments of domestic life, and instead of going down to his house, he slept at the door of the king’s house, with all the servants of his lord. Baffled in his first attempt to provide for the concealment of his guilt, David proceeded to another, and scrupled not to expose his faithful and pious servant to the temptation of excess in wine, for the purpose of hiding his own previous iniquity. He invited him to a feast in his house, and made him drunk, in hopes that in the forgetfulness of intoxication, he would break his resolution of keeping away from his wife and home. But the wicked contrivance entirely failed, and Uriah slept again “with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.” Then David, entangled in the meshes of guilt, meditated a yet greater crime, in the vain hope of

securing secrecy for the crime he had already committed. He wrote a letter to Joab, saying, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." He basely availed himself of his servant's known courageous readiness to encounter the public enemy for the accomplishment of his destruction, doubting not that he would, when ordered, advance to the forefront of the hottest battle. He treacherously and ungenerously took advantage of his servant's scrupulous honour, to transmit his murderous orders; for he sent them by Uriah's own hand, being well assured that he would deliver them with inviolable fidelity and security. Uriah, returning without suspicion to the siege of Rabbah, and delivering the fatal letter into the hands of Joab, that general wickedly responded to the wishes of the king, and soon found an opportunity of carrying them into effect. "He assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were," *i. e.* to a post of great peril, which the bravest alone would be disposed to encounter, and there, deserted doubtless through the secret orders of Joab, according to the royal commands, "fell some of the people of the servants of David, and Uriah the Hittite died also."

It would appear, that in this engagement the Israelites suffered a severe loss, and Joab seems to have apprehended the imputation of rash-

ness, in having exposed his men to so unequal and perilous a conflict, and to have dreaded the king's displeasure on account of the disastrous result. But he possessed a talisman, by which he well knew he could easily appease the royal mind. He instructed the messenger who was charged with conveying to the king intelligence of the defeat and slaughter that had taken place, to add to a general account of the conflict, a particular mention of the death of Uriah the Hittite. David, on receiving that news, overlooked, as Joab had anticipated, any faults his general might have committed in the conduct of the siege, being, with the characteristic selfishness of conscious guilt, more intent upon hiding his own shame by the death of an individual whom he had injured, than upon advancing the national renown, and consulting the interests of his subjects; and, adding hypocrisy to treachery, he ascribed the loss of all the lives, Uriah's among the rest, to the chances of war, which make no distinction between the good and the bad, the fearful and the brave; and he sent back the messenger to Joab with words of comfort and encouragement, saying, "Thus shalt thou say to Joab, Let not this thing displease thee; for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city and overthrow it."

What were the feelings of Bathsheba, on

hearing of the death of her brave and pious husband, we are not informed. She mourned indeed for her husband, in appearance, according to the usual manner, and during the customary time. But the outward habiliments of woe are sometimes put on when there is no real regret, as the garments of joy are often worn to conceal a heart ill at ease, and a spirit full of heaviness. It is probable, that the prospect of worldly elevation, the attractions of a throne, the affections of a king, and especially her anxiety, like David's, to hide from the eyes of men their shameful violation of God's law, had previously made her participate in the guilty wish for her husband's removal by death. In that case, her assumed sorrow was a mere formal compliance with the manners of the age and country. The sacred narrative, without reference to her sincerity or insincerity, her willingness or reluctance, simply adds, that "when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife and bare him a son." Thus the king and his accomplices seemed at first entirely successful in their atrocious schemes—David in issuing his murderous orders, Joab in executing them, and Bathsheba in consenting to a speedy marriage. No human eye saw—no human ear heard—possibly, no human mind suspected, ought of the deeds of darkness and guilt, save those of the three, who were more or less

directly concerned ; and there was every prospect of the secret being securely kept from the knowledge of all the rest of mankind. "But," says the inspired writer, and what a different conclusion that exceptive circumstance gives to the designs of evil-doers, "but the thing that David did displeased the Lord." His eyes are on the ways of man, how secret soever they may be, and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from Him, whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, and to whom the darkness and the light are both alike." And He not only beholds every iniquity, but will infallibly bring it to judgment. Yea, He will not merely bring it before his own dread tribunal at the great day of universal assize, and if its guilt be not previously obliterated by the all-atoning stream, visit it with a bitterness of punishment, compared to which the pleasure of its enjoyment cannot be named, but will often, by mysterious and unexpected ways, discover it to human notice, and cause it to be condemned by human judges, and avenged by human hands. He can cause a dream of the night to make known a deed of supposed impenetrable mystery. He can cause a dumb and irrational animal to give eloquent indications of a scene of dark atrocity, and to point with infallible certainty at its guilty perpe-



trator. He can cause the criminal's nearest connexions and relatives, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to become the instruments of his detection and conviction. He can turn the wicked's own cunning counsel into foolishness, and make the very plans and language which they purposely employed to ward off suspicion, the very snares whereby they are caught and brought to justice. We have had, in our own age and country, actual instances of these surprising and wonderful workings of Divine Providence, for the exposure and punishment of crime, which else perhaps had remained unnoticed by man. A man may go on in sin for a time undetected—he may proceed from one degree of guilt to another in fancied security from discovery—he may commit crime after crime, and hope at last, by some masterpiece of criminality, to veil his enormities in impenetrable secrecy, and to enjoy their fruits in peace and safety. “But,” as in the case of David, “the thing that he hath done hath displeased the Lord.” His eye of fire hath been fixed upon all his misdeeds, and has tracked him through all his crafty windings, and He will sooner or later make his guilt clear as the light, and evident as the noon-day. Oh! let the remembrance of that ceaseless Presence deter you from the thoughts of evil; and whenever you are tempted to sin in the hope of secrecy, and the enemy of souls may suggest the improbability or even

impossibility of its being discovered by the ken of man, bear in mind the solemn exception, "But the thing will displease the Lord," and He can find a thousand unexpected ways of causing its exposure and bringing it to punishment.

Let us now proceed to consider how the displeasure of the Lord at the guilt of David and his accomplices was manifested. The Lord sent Nathan unto David. It is not altogether improbable that suspicions of the truth might have been excited in the public mind by the circumstance of the hasty marriage, and by the inference which a sagacious messenger might have drawn from Joab's singular instruction, respecting the announcement to the king of Uriah's death, and that the circumstance might have come to the knowledge of the prophet through the channel of human instrumentality. It is certainly not said that God directly communicated it to Nathan, but merely that he sent him to David on an errand connected with it. And if it did reach his ears through the operation of natural causes, namely, the suspicions excited by the hasty union of David and Bathsheba, and the charge of Joab to the messenger respecting a particular individual's death, we have here a proof of what we have already intimated, that the counsels of the guilty, the schemes they devise, and the instruments they employ, to prevent the discovery of their guilt, are often converted by the retributive vigilance

of a righteous providence into the very means of their more speedy and certain exposure. But whether Nathan received his information through human instrumentality, or by prophetic inspiration, we are distinctly told that he received his commission to speak to the king upon the subject from God himself. Nathan was a true-hearted and faithful prophet. He had already given David honest counsel in matters of religion; and he was now prepared to administer to him the requisite reproof for his backsliding and wickedness. But although he was not afraid to speak in a monarch's ear the language of truth, he did not neglect the use of caution and discretion in his mode of delivering the Divine message, well knowing that the effect of the best meant advice and admonition is often marred by the manner of communicating them. He did not directly charge the king with his crimes, but brought him to acknowledge his guilt, and to pronounce his own condemnation by this ingenious and appropriate parable: "There were two men," said he, "in one city; the one rich, and the other poor: The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought, and nourished up: and it grew up together with him and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there

came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed *it* for the man that was come unto him." And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die. And he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." And Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man: 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 wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto 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 taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house; I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." And David said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said unto David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.

Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

In this parable we have a faithful and a striking representation of the completeness of a sinner's conviction before God, of his punishment by Divine judgment, and yet of the efficacy of seasonable repentance in preventing his future and eternal misery. 1. How complete every sinner's conviction before God will ultimately be, is clearly represented in the conviction of David. Before Nathan had finished the parallel between the oppressive conduct of the supposed rich man and his own, David pronounced it altogether unjustifiable, and declared it to be worthy of death. The prophet had not proceeded to say that he had murdered his poor neighbour as well as deprived him of his ewe lamb, but before he came to that shocking aggravation of the injury, the king interrupted him by a solemn oath, that rapacity so tyrannical, and robbery so unprovoked and inexcusable, should be punished with the uttermost severity of the law. How much more deserving of a fatal retribution then was he who not only had, in addition to his many wives, taken to his bosom that of a meritorious officer and faithful servant, but had aggravated the grievous wrong by his base and treacherous murder! He had not a word to offer in de-



fence or palliation of his conduct ; nor will any sinner be able to open his mouth when his iniquities are set in order before his eyes, and even before the greatest enormities of his life are mentioned, he will feel compelled to plead his guilt before God, and to every one of the finally impenitent, at the bar of everlasting judgment, the Judge of quick and dead will most justly exclaim, "Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, O thou wicked servant."

2. The Divine judgments threatened against David were not slow in overtaking him. They first made their appearance in the death of the child born to him of Bathsheba. He fasted and wept, and prayed long and earnestly in that child's behalf ; and he interceded the more anxiously, and with the more bitter tears for its life and recovery, because it was revealed to him from heaven, that the sickness under which it was labouring, and the early death with which it was threatened, were judicially inflicted in punishment of his own sins. He was made to feel, by painful experience, the truth of the menace, "I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." O, bitter ingredient in the cup of sorrow for the past, to think that the effects of our evil deeds may extend to unborn generations ! Even David's deep humiliation and sorrowful supplication, to which Bathsheba's were, doubtless,

joined, availed not to avert the impending retribution, and the child was taken away, as if to bring home to their minds the sad connexion which existed still, as at the beginning, between sin and death. But this, after all, was comparatively a slight calamity, when set by the side of the other dreadful evils which were included in the denunciation of the prophet: "The sword shall never depart from thine house. I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." Shocking and terrible were the evils raised against him out of his own house—evils of the same vile and atrocious nature as those which he himself had perpetrated; yea, viler and more atrocious still, such as the sin of his son Amnon against his daughter Tamar, which was enough to humble and disgrace a family for ever; the bloody and fatal avenging of that dishonour on Amnon's head, by the treacherous and violent hand of Absalom; the exile of Absalom to avoid the consequences of Amnon's assassination; the most ungrateful rebellion of Absalom against his father, who had consented to recall him from banishment, and to overlook his brother's death; his unexampled aggravation of that rebellion, by his treatment of his father's wives at the instigation of Ahithophel, so as to heap disgrace on his father's head before the eyes of all Israel, and his subsequent discomfiture and

fierce destruction, in spite of his father's wish that his life might be spared, by the sword of that very Joab, who had been employed to effect the death of Uriah. Oh, just retribution! the instrument of his cruelty against one whom he had wished to put out of the way, become the destroyer of his own son, whom spite of his rebellion he would have given his own life to save from so awful and unprepared a death! Nor was this all the punishment reserved for David, from which Bathsheba also doubtless grievously suffered. On his death-bed his mind was disturbed by the dissension between his sons, Adonijah aspiring to succeed him on the throne, and making a strong party, consisting of the cruel Joab and other disaffected persons, against the claims of Solomon, who was destined for the sovereignty by his father's will and Heaven's appointment; and after his death, the retributive evil threatened by the prophet continued, Solomon suspecting Adonijah to have still designs upon the kingdom, in consequence of his asking for Abishag to wife, and ordering him to be put to death for his presumption and supposed covert ambition, though the request was made through the intercession of Solomon's own mother Bathsheba herself. How many sad afflictions had both she and David to lament, in connexion with their family and with the inauspicious circumstances which brought them together! How literally

and completely were the threatened judgments carried into effect! "The sword shall never depart from thine house,—behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. For" although "thou didst it secretly, I will do this thing before Israel and before the sun."

3. But while, in the history of this transaction and its consequences, we behold a great, and wilful, and deliberate sin punished by grievous temporal judgments — judgments which bear a melancholy correspondence with the nature of the transgression, and which seem to have embittered all the after-life of the guilty parties, we have also a plain intimation of the efficiency of seasonable repentance in turning aside future and eternal misery. Upon David's confessing to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord, Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." As though he had said, "Thy sin hath given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." These enemies of the Lord, if Uriah, according to one reason assigned for his cognomen, was originally a foreigner and idolater, and had been induced to embrace the true religion, and to adopt the land of Canaan for his country, might be the heathens, who would exclaim, "Is that the fruit of the boasted holier religion of Jehovah? Shall any one, with the fate of Uriah before his eyes, exchange the land of his birth, and the worship of his fore-



fathers, heathen though they be contemptuously called, for the service of a king so atrociously tyrannical, and the adoration of a God, whose holiness is so miserably illustrated?" Or if Uriah was a native Israelite, and called a Hittite from a warlike exploit, or from the name of a place in Canaan, these enemies of the Lord would be the careless and the mere nominal Israelites, who, like Michal, David's wife, were in the habit of deriding his over-strict attention to religion, and who would now exclaim, "Here is your serious and God-fearing monarch. Of what value is a profession which can result in such abominations and atrocities as these? Of what use are his examples in dancing before the ark, and his boasted intentions to build a temple to Jehovah, if he can be so vile and cruel as this?"—"Thy sin," would the prophet therefore say, "hath given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and therefore it must be punished publicly and severely, to vindicate the ways of the true God to shortsighted man. Nevertheless, inasmuch as thou hast readily acknowledged, and with evident sincerity repented, of thy wickedness, thou shalt not personally pay the penalty of an instant or speedy death: thou shalt be continued in a state of probation, and shalt have time to foster and nurture the seed of penitence within thy broken heart, which by Divine grace shall sprout and spring up, and, turning



aside the future and eternal misery doomed for the obstinately wicked, bring forth fruit unto everlasting life. David's repentance, in which we have reason to believe Bathsheba fully participated, had every mark of genuineness and truth. Witness his unreserved confession and most anxious and earnest supplication, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." Witness his meek submission to persecution and insult, which, as in the case of Nabal, he would have been inclined at a former period of life instantly to resent, but which from thenceforward he acknowledged to be no more than the sufferings due from a righteous Providence to his notorious and inexcusable wickedness. When he was compelled in deep distress of mind to flee for his life from his capital city, and from the sword of his rebellious son Absalom, Shimei, the son of Gera, a man of the family of the house of Saul, appeared on a hill-side as he

passed by, and insulted him by the most opprobrious language and the most contemptuous conduct, throwing stones at him and saying, "Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and behold thou art taken in thy mischief, thou bloody man." This was grievous for the ears of a king; and there was even untruth mingled with harshness and abuse, for David had done no wrong to the house of Saul, and it was not on that account that he was affected. But although he was guiltless in that matter, yet he was conscious of having committed still greater sins than the charge of Shimei amounted to, and deserving of far greater punishment than Shimei's insulting address and behaviour, and therefore, when Abishai, one of his attendants, offered to go in pursuit of him and punish him with death, he answered in meek submission to the highly deserved retributive judgment of God, "No: so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" He was humbled in the dust before his offended God. His language, his demeanour, his every act were those of a broken heart and contrite spirit under the grievous remembrance and intolerable burden of his sins; and therefore a

gracious and merciful Father, who willeth not the death of a sinner, and despiseth not a broken heart and contrite spirit, put away his sin, so that he should not die and suffer for it in a future and eternal world. We are elsewhere assured, that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to repenting men, so as not to be remembered against them in the last day. Even those who crucified the Lord of glory himself, were not excluded from the hopes of salvation, if they repented and turned unto God, Simon Peter proclaiming aloud on the day of Pentecost to those of them who were pricked in their hearts for their great criminality, "Repent and be converted every one of you, and ye shall receive remission of your sins; repent and be converted, and your sins shall be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

The only remaining notices we have of Bathsheba are on the two occasions already referred to; the occasion of Adonijah aspiring to the crown, when by the advice of Nathan she entered the sick-chamber of David and interceded with him, and succeeded in obtaining from him a declaration and an order in favour of her own son Solomon, who was in consequence established as successor to his father on the throne; and the occasion of Adonijah's wishing to obtain Abishag for his wife, when at his request she consented to make application to

that effect in his behalf to her son Solomon, then king, who jealous of Adonijah's ambitious views, not only refused his petition, but commanded him to be put to instant death. It is not recorded how she bore this mournful issue of her disinterested and, doubtless, well-intended suit. It argued well for her benevolence and generosity, that she was disposed to do a kindness to one who had been her own son's rival as candidate for the throne, and whose succession she had been assured would have endangered her life. Upon the whole, we are inclined to draw very favourable conclusions concerning the character of Bathsheba. The Holy Spirit does not inform us to what extent she was to blame in the matter of Uriah. That she was altogether guiltless we cannot believe; and yet we can scarcely tell to what degrees the peculiar temptations and singular circumstances, with which she was surrounded, might extenuate her guilt—the attractions of the royal favour, the commands of a powerful king, and perhaps the dreaded fatal consequences of resisting his will. Bearing these things in mind, and remembering also, that no direct censure is any where recorded against her by the inspired writer, we cannot for a moment compare her guilt with David's. But whatever might be the extent of her criminality before God, there is every reason to believe that she, like David, was doomed grievously to suffer for it, and that she like him found her

throne to which she had been elevated but a bed of thorns. She had to sympathize in David's grief at the loss of their first-born. She shared her husband's affliction at the disgraceful conduct and the violent deaths of Amnon and Absalom: she must have been tormented with anxiety on his account, when driven from his palace and metropolis by the rebellion of his own son, and exposed to the insults and persecutions of the scornful. She must have had her trembling apprehensions and sad misgivings, when David was on his deathbed, and Adonijah aspired to the throne, and she found it necessary to take an active and perilous part, and to exercise the utmost promptitude and discretion in order to secure the crown for her own son Solomon, the rightful heir. She must, finally, have felt the deepest anguish of heart and shed tears of peculiar bitterness, when her benevolence was so miserably disappointed, and her generosity so terribly thwarted by that son, whom she had helped to establish on the throne, and when he, in whose behalf she had interceded, was not only refused his petition, but put to a speedy death for making it by her mouth. She must, therefore, have had no small share of mental suffering and grief; and we have little doubt—and our favourable opinion of her is confirmed by Solomon's tender and affectionate allusion to her memory in the fourth chapter of the Proverbs, when his experience had taught him



more clearly to appreciate her excellence, and by the prudent, virtuous and pious advice she gave him when he was young, supposed to be that contained in the last chapter of the same book,—we have little doubt that her many trials were sanctified, like David's, to her spiritual and eternal good, producing, not the sorrow of the world, which worketh death, but that godly sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of, and which leads to pardon and peace, whatever the past may have been; that she could say like him, from varied and deep experience, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted: before I was afflicted I went wrong, but now have I learnt to keep the statutes of the Lord;" that she could feel her troubles, though often painful and long continued, to be trivial evils, compared with the sins she had committed, yea, positive benefits, as preparing her for the blessed region, where they shall sin and weep no more; and that she was able, like the apostle, at last with a thankful heart to exclaim, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

I will now only detain you with two or three sentences, just to point out the heads of the practical instruction with which the subject abounds. From Nathan's mode of admonishing David, let preachers learn to be discreet as well as honest in communicating the truth.

From David's fall, let all learn the danger of indolent and luxurious habits, and of admitting into their minds wandering thoughts and desires, which thoughts and desires are aptly indicated in the parable by the traveller who came to the rich man, and led to the taking away of the poor man's ewe lamb. From his attempts to hide his shame by proceeding to other acts of wickedness, leading on at last to the enormous crime of murder, learn the awful danger of seeking to conceal one sin by the commission of another. From his sudden descent from a high reputation for piety, to the perpetration of complicated iniquity, learn the shocking depravity of human nature, and the importance of watching and praying lest ye enter into temptation. From the sore afflictions with which both he and Bathsheba were afterwards visited, learn the inevitable connexion between sin and suffering. And from their forgiveness as regards the future life and their final salvation, learn the wonderful efficacy of seasonable and heartfelt repentance, and the inexhaustible riches of divine grace. Oh, what a practical comment have we here on the prophet's words: "Come now," ye that truly repent and believe, "and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

## SERMON XI.

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### TWO WISE WOMEN.

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2 SAM. xiv. 4. xx. 16.

“And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king.”

“Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear ; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.”

WE propose to set before you, in this evening's discourse, the characters of the wise woman of Tekoah, and of the wise woman of Abel, as illustrating both the injurious and the beneficial influence of the female intellect, according to its exercise and direction for evil or for good. Both these women are called “wise women ;” by which term we are not to understand, according to the peculiar meaning attached to it sometimes in modern phraseology, persons supposed to have familiar spirits, like the witch of Endor. The word “wise,” is seldom, if ever used in that

sense by the sacred writers. By them, wisdom is sometimes employed according to its present signification, to indicate the most valuable combination of moral and intellectual qualities, as knowledge, benevolence, sagacity, and discretion; sometimes to express a profound acquaintance with the arts and sciences, as it is said of Moses, that he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; sometimes to imply true piety, or the fear of God, as by the Psalmist, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Sometimes it is used for ingenuity and skill, as we read of Bezaleel and Ahaliah, that they were filled with wisdom, &c., to invent and perform several sorts of works for completing the tabernacle; and sometimes for cunning and stratagem, according to the words of Pharaoh, "Come, let us deal wisely with the Israelites;" and according to the words of Job, "God taketh the wise in their own craftiness." It is in the first and last mentioned of these senses that the word appears to be employed in the two passages before us. The woman of Tekoah was wise in the sense of possessing a capacity for stratagem and intrigue. The woman of Abel was wise in the sense of combining the most exalted qualities of head and heart. The circumstances connected with their histories, to which we are now to direct your attention, indicate the very different influences exercised by such different

female characters on individuals, and families, and communities.

*I. The woman of Tekoah.*

Tekoah was a town in the tribe of Judah, about twelve miles to the south of Jerusalem; and it is supposed that a woman of that place was fixed upon by Joab to accomplish his purpose in respect to Absalom, rather than an inhabitant of Jerusalem, to prevent the possibility of testing the truth of her tale by immediate inquiries of her neighbours and acquaintances. She might also have been pointed out to his notice on account of her remarkable acuteness and sagacity, as intimated by the term wise, and, subsequently, illustrated by the successful issue of her mission. The occasion on which she was employed to address the king has been slightly alluded to in our last discourse, namely, the recall of Absalom from the exile to which he had betaken himself on the murder of his brother Amnon. Over-indulgence to his children appears to have been a great failing in the character of David, as well as in those of Eli and Samuel. His eldest son, Amnon, had committed an abominable crime against Tamar, his half-sister. Though both as a father and a king, David was bound by duty, no less than he was enabled by the power and authority of his station, to punish it with severity, he appears to have manifested his displeasure no further



than by expressions of regret, anger, and reproof. Absalom, therefore, who was own-brother to the shamefully ill-treated maiden, took the matter into his own hands,—a consequence that must ever follow from the refusal of justice in the proper quarter. When rulers and parents neglect their duties in the punishment of wrong, private revenge becomes the resource of the aggrieved; and offences against person or property are retaliated by more heinous transgressions. Absalom disguised his deep resentment, in order the more effectually to accomplish his vindictive design. For two years he concealed it within the recesses of his bosom, and, by long patience and deliberation, concerted a scheme for the successful and complete gratification of his wounded and revengeful feelings. At the expiration of that period, he invited his father and his brothers to a feast of sheep-shearing at Baal-hazor, which was beside Ephraim, and a considerable distance from Jerusalem. He could not prevail upon his father to go; but, after some importunity, obtained his consent to let his brothers, Amnon among the rest, partake of his hospitality. He then commanded his servants, saying, “Mark ye now, when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous and be valiant.” Too faithfully did these servants execute his murderous orders. Amnon was assassinated in

the house of feasting, and sent from the midst of a scene of revelry to the bar of eternal judgment. Fearful retribution for his abominable wickedness! News of the tragical catastrophe quickly flew to Jerusalem, and reached the king and father's ears. The first report was that all the king's sons had fallen by the hand of Absalom. But although that was an exaggeration, part of the rumour was but too true. The surviving brothers soon made their appearance, and, confirming the account of Amnon's death, "lifted up their voice and wept, and the king also, and all his servants wept very sore." Absalom, the author of this lamentation and woe, durst not encounter his father's presence, or even abide within the limits of his dominions. He fled immediately after the perpetration of the bloody deed, and sought asylum at the court of Talmai, the king of Gesher, who was his grandfather by the mother's side. Thus was David, in realization of the threat, that for his sin in the matter of Uriah, evil should spring up against him out of his own house, visited with the calamity deprecated in regard to her two sons by the conscience-stricken and terrified Rebekah, "Why should I be deprived of you both in one day?"

When Absalom had been three years an exile, his father's grief and resentment for the death of Amnon were, in a measure, worn away, and he began to long for the return of the banished one, who, though he had deeply

offended, was still exceedingly dear to his heart. He would have been glad of any plausible excuse for his recall and forgiveness. And yet, how could he allow him to come home, consistently with the demands of the law, banishment being but a mild punishment for the bloody deed which he had caused to be committed? These perplexities and wishes of the monarch soon became known to those around him. They perceived that a struggle was going on within him between duty and inclination—between affection for his son and the obligation to punish him. Joab, the most unprincipled of his courtiers and generals, probably from a secret partiality for Absalom, as well as to obtain for himself greater favour with David, devised a plausible scheme for terminating the conflict in the royal mind, for reconciling the king's duty with his inclination, for removing the scruples of the father, and for restoring the longed-for though guilty son to his home and rank in the kingdom. His plan was to fetch from Tekoah a woman well known for ability and address, who was to petition the king's interposition and assistance under very distressing circumstances. She entered his presence in mourning apparel, and with a sorrowful countenance fell down before him on her face to the ground, and earnestly entreated his protection, saying, "Help, O king." And upon his inquiring into the nature of her grievance, she answered, "I am

indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other and slew him. And behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him for the life of his brother which he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they will quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth." To understand the expression "quench my coal that is left," employed by the woman, it is to be observed that lamps, lights, and living coals are used by ancient writers both sacred and profane for children, descendants and survivors, because by them the vital flame of the human race is perpetuated on the earth. "To quench her coal that was left" was therefore a figurative mode of saying, that they would put her only son to death, and thereby cut off the possibility of transmitting her deceased husband's name to posterity. To this distressing representation, David replied that he would take the matter into his favourable consideration, and give directions concerning her suit, and recommended her to return home without any further anxiety. But this did not satisfy her, and as if afraid that inquiries into the particulars of the occurrence, and a calm consideration of what was

due to the law of God and the country, might alter the king's purpose, she proceeded and said, "My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me and on my father's house: and the king and the throne be guiltless:" that is "if the impunity should by any be supposed to reflect on the administration of justice in the land, let me and my family take all the shame and abide by the consequences of the guilt, if shame and guilt there be in such clemency. The request is made by one to whom the slain was as nearly related as the living, and the king and his throne, which cannot feel more concerned for the death of the departed than the parent, may well escape censure for consenting at that parent's request to spare the life of the survivor." The king then more directly encouraged her to hope for his protection, and said, "Whosoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me and he shal not touch thee any more." But neither would this satisfy her, but as if dreading lest delay might prove fatal, or a mere verbal assurance, though that of a king, might not be a sufficient guarantee for her son's safety, she ventured to request a promise to that effect confirmed by the solemnity of an oath, and added, "I pray thee, let the king remember the Lord thy God," *i. e.* swear by Jehovah, "that thou wilt not suffer the avengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son." Some interpret the words "remember the Lord thy God"



so as not to mean "Swear by the Lord thy God," but simply, "Consider and imitate the conduct of Jehovah, who when requested to shew mercy complies in the promptest manner; and does not delay the boon until the case is hopeless and the remedy useless. The danger to which my son is exposed is imminent, and if the king do not vouchsafe to interfere in his behalf instantly, it may be too late to save his life." But whichever interpretation you adopt, whether the woman directly asked for the security of an oath, or whether she merely persisted in her importunity, and in the use of persuasive arguments, with a view to gain that security, the ultimate result was the same. She succeeded in obtaining from the king a most solemn promise of ample protection, who at last declared unto her, saying, "As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth."

The woman of Tekoah having got the king to swear that her son should not suffer for the slaughter of his brother, proceeded to apply that concession to the case of Absalom, and said, "Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? *i. e.* Why dost thou persist in a resentment which is injurious to the whole nation, for all its hopes are built on Absalom as thy successor on the throne? Why continue such a one in alienation and exile, on the pretence of justice for the murder of his

brother, when thy solemn promise of protection to my son shows that pardon may be extended to such an offender." "For the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home his banished." As though she had said. "Is this consistent and blameless conduct? Thou art willing to pardon the meanest of thy subjects for a brother's death at the instance of a poor widow; and yet thou art not willing to pardon thy own son, whose restoration to favour is the desire of the whole people. Is such a mode of acting agreeable to equity and truth?" To this remonstrance she added, "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again: neither doth God respect any person, yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him;" or, as the latter part of the verse may be more correctly rendered, "because God hath not taken away his life, he hath also devised means that his banished be not expelled," *i. e.* irrevocably<sup>1</sup>. As though she had urged, "Death is the common lot of all. Amnon was destined to die, and he would have died in some other way if he had not fallen by the hand of Absalom. The death of Absalom can no more recall him to life, than water spilt on the ground can be gathered up again. What is done is done and it were an extreme severity of justice to go on

<sup>1</sup> See Adam Clarke.

sacrificing life after life in consequence of the first transgression, and to accelerate that death which will very soon overtake us all. . It would seem," she would add, "as if God intended him to be recalled, by preserving his life so long after the unfortunate occurrence in which he was involved. We know," she would continue, "that in a spiritual sense He devises means whereby those who were banished from him by sin, instead of being irrevocably and eternally expelled his presence, may be brought back unto a participation of his clemency and the enjoyment of his kingdom. Do thou imitate that mercy. Restore thou this banished son, and thou shalt act in a manner consistent with thy promise to me, agreeable to the will of God, and acceptable to all thy subjects."

To this she added a few remarks of an ambiguous nature, calculated to sustain the impression, that the case she had first represented, though applicable to that of the king, was really true with regard to herself, and to intimate, that unless the king would consent to the pardon of Absalom, she could have no confidence in his promise of safety for her own son. David, although he suspected, before the conclusion of her speech, and fully discovered the artifice of Joab in the whole transaction, would fain think himself bound by consistency with the solemn promise he had made to the woman to permit the return of Absalom, and the proposal being most agreeable to his heart's secret wishes, he

was glad of any pretence for giving it his assent. The brother's murderer was allowed to come back to Jerusalem, and after two years of a more retired life and exclusion from the court, as a slight manifestation of the king's displeasure, for the sake as it would seem of saving appearances, he was fully, by the further intercession of Joab, permitted to enter his father's presence, and restored to all his former possessions and honours. But his conduct presently demonstrated the folly of the lenity, and the mischievousness of the stratagem, which had led to his pardon and restoration. He soon began to deal in plots of treason and actings of rebellion. He sought by every art to win over to himself the affection of the people, in prejudice of his father and sovereign. He gathered around him a band of traitors and conspirators, against the settled order of affairs. He succeeded for a time, drove his father from his palace and his capital, disgraced him in the eyes of all Israel, and finally perished in his rebellion by the hand of that very Joab, who had been the chief instrument in effecting his recall from banishment.

## *II. The woman of Abel.*

Such was the deplorable consequence which followed from the craft and the art of the woman of Tekoah. Pass we on now to contemplate the far different and more blessed effects of the

real wisdom which was exercised by the wise woman of Abel. Abel was a town situated in another and distant part of the land of Canaan, on the confines of Syria, and probably in the district inhabited by the tribe of Naphtali. It was besieged by David's army, under the command of Joab, and threatened with destruction, when its deliverance was effected by the wisdom of a woman. The circumstances were these. After the defeat and death of Absalom, the tribe of Judah, without consulting with the other tribes, sent word to king David, who was either at Mahanaim, whither he had fled before Absalom, or near the wood of Ephraim, where that rebellious son met his death, both places beyond Jordan, and encouraged him to return to Jerusalem, his capital, as a place now no longer disaffected to his government, but disposed to receive him with loyalty and affection. They also went over the river to meet him, and, without waiting for the advice or co-operation of the nation at large, took upon themselves the honourable labour of conducting back the exiled monarch to his palace and his throne. The other tribes were mortified by the little notice that was taken of them on so important an occasion, probably regarding it as a tacit imputation on the sincerity of their allegiance; and they came, doubtless, by a deputation of elders or officers, and said unto the king, "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen thee



away, and have brought the king and his household, and all David's men with him over Jordan?" The men of Judah answered to the effect that the king was more nearly related to them, being of their tribe, than to the rest of the nation, that, therefore, they had a right to take a prominent part in the ceremony of his restoration, and that their attention to him had been of the most disinterested character, having neither eaten at his cost, nor received gifts at his hands. Other provoking language followed on both sides, and interrupting the unanimous attachment to the king, which the circumstances just preceding had seemed to promise, divided the people into adverse factions. Sheba, the son of Bichri, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, and, probably, of the family of Saul, took a traitorous advantage of this unfortunate division, and sounding a trumpet, put himself at the head of the malcontents of Israel, and said, "We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel. So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba, the son of Bichri." When David came to Jerusalem, he ordered Amasa, now placed at the head of his army instead of Joab, who had displeased him by killing Absalom, and by other offences, to collect troops for the purpose of putting down the revolt. Amasa, who had until recently been himself a rebel against the

king, having belonged to the party of his rebellious son, appears to have been either unable or unwilling to collect the requisite force by the time appointed. David, therefore, apprehensive of the evil consequences of delay, felt compelled to order Abishai to hasten with what troops were at hand against the army of the disaffected. Joab, no longer invested with the chief command, appears to have joined this expedition, headed by his brother, Abishai, either in an inferior office, or in a private capacity; but having, under the influence of hate and jealousy, treacherously assassinated Amasa, who had replaced him at the head of the main army, and who had fallen in with Abishai's detachment at Gibeon, on the road, he ultimately obtained, either through his superiority over his brother's mind, or through orders afterwards extorted from the king, by the perilous circumstances of the kingdom, the supreme direction of the enterprise against Sheba, the son of Bichri. Joab, though guilty of many heinous crimes, was firmly attached to the house of David, and consummately skilled in the art of war. He, therefore, proceeded against the rebel with vigour and despatch, and his military operations were attended with their usual success. He pursued him "through all the tribes of Israel, drove him out of the whole country, and compelled him, with what troops remained faithful to his standard, to seek refuge

within the walls of Abel, or Abela, a town situated at the extreme northern boundary of the land. The skilful and formidable Joab no sooner reached that fortified place, than he invested it with troops, threw up a trench, and brought battering engines against it, and took such other steps as would evidently result in its speedy capture by storm. We can scarcely imagine the calamities which such an event would have produced. None but they who have taken part in the most distressing scenes of war can realize its horrors. Hunger and thirst had perhaps already spread havoc through the town, and reduced the number of its inhabitants. Perhaps disease, the plague and pestilence, had followed in the train of starvation, and aggravated the increasing misery. Perhaps the women and the children were filling the streets with wailings of woe, and shrieks of agony; here the child sinking through exhaustion before the eyes of the mother, unable to relieve its cravings; and there the mother snatched away by sudden and fatal sickness from her helpless and piteously crying child; and there the father wounded and slain by the missile weapons of the besiegers. Perhaps a still more violent and terrible scene was every moment expected by the distressed and distracted population—that of the successful assailants bursting through the shattered and battered walls into the streets of the doomed city, consigning father, mother,

and child to indiscriminate slaughter, and their houses to the flames, and turning their once happy homes into desolate places uninhabitable. Oh, sad and pitiable picture! Is there no counsellor among the elders of the city to suggest a remedy? Is there no arm among the soldiers who had defied the royal power to bring relief? All resources had utterly failed; and we may suppose the inhabitants giving up all hopes of succour, and resigning themselves into the arms of despair.

But what neither the counsel of the elders, nor the valour of the soldiers could effect, was brought about by the wisdom of a discreet and courageous woman. A mother in Israel, like Deborah before her, by her sagacity, piety, and prudent management, brought help in time of need, and accomplished the deliverance of her people. She ventured upon the wall, caused her voice to be heard by the besieging army, and requested a parley with its general. Upon Joab presenting himself within sight and within hearing according to her proposal, she said, "They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter." There is considerable obscurity in this speech, perhaps a studied obscurity, like that of the woman of Tekoah's tale, the matter in hand requiring much caution and delicacy of management. Some regard her words as a then well-known proverb relating

to the besieged place, and suppose it to have originated from its established reputation for wisdom, which had formerly at least been so high, that parties who had disputes were wont to appeal to the opinion of its inhabitants, and then to receive their judgment as a final decision. "Surely then," she would have Joab to infer, "you ought to have some respect for a place so eminent for its wisdom, and you ought to have considered, instead of proceeding immediately to the employment of brute force, that a town so celebrated for the peaceable adjustment of differences between others, would be disposed to listen to any reasonable demands and offers of accommodation in its own case." Others regard the passage not as a proverb, but as a remonstrance against Joab's unusual proceedings, and translate it thus: "They plainly spake in the beginning, saying, Surely they will ask of Abel, and so make an end;" that is, they the inhabitants of the town, when they heard of the approach of your army, said, as a matter of course, they will observe the ordinary rules of war, more especially in regard to a town in Israel, and to a place of such importance as Abel, and make their wishes known in a peaceable manner, before they have recourse to the work of bloodshed and devastation. According to this rendering and interpretation, she would seem to intimate that Joab had in this case



neglected the law of Moses<sup>2</sup>, which required that before the siege was laid, even to a foreign city, peace should be offered if the citizens would submit, much more to an important city in Israel, and an "inheritance of the Lord" of hosts. According to either sense, the folly of mankind in giving way to violent and bloody conflicts is surely placed in most disparaging contrast with the wisdom of terminating their contests by peaceable means, as the calm and considerate management of the wise woman puts to shame the rash proceedings of the besiegers, and the hasty conclusions of the besieged. Joab seems to have taken it for granted, that the generality of the inhabitants were firmly attached to the interests of Sheba, and without making inquiries, had deemed it useless to propose to them terms of peace on condition of their delivering up his person. The citizens on their part appear to have concluded from Joab's sudden and unexplained assault, that there was no hope of safety for them except in resistance to the last extremity. The fatal and calamitous effects which would have resulted from this misunderstanding, were prevented by the timely interposition of a good, a courageous, a discreet, or, to express all her excellent qualities by one comprehensive epithet, a "wise" woman. Some commentators

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xx. 10—18.

suppose that in the words "I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel, thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel," there is a personification of the city, and that the reference is to the authoritative and maternal station held by Abel in regard to smaller towns and the surrounding country. Others think, that by the mother in Israel is meant the wise woman herself, and thence infer, that she occupied the position of governor or principal person of influence in the place. But whichever was the fact, there is no question that like Deborah she was well entitled to the distinguished name of a "mother in Israel." She performed in the ablest manner, and with the most salutary effect the part of a mother to the community, that had the happiness of her beneficial presence and intercession, and like Deborah she delivered her people from a situation of sore distress, and from the peril of more calamitous evils. Joab listened to her remonstrance, informed her that he had no further object in view than to seize and punish the man who had headed a rebellion against his master, and on condition of his being delivered up or executed for his treason, consented to spare the city, and immediately to discontinue the siege. "Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom." She exercised the same influence of wisdom with the inhabitants of Abel as she had done with its besiegers. She set before them the truth of the

case, without partiality and without hypocrisy. She convinced them of the guilt of Sheba the son of Bichri, in rebelling against the Lord's anointed, persuaded them to divest themselves of all feelings of anger that might have been excited by the precipitation of the king's general, and prevailed on them to act, not according to the suggestions of an irritated temper, but according to the dictates of calm reason and plain duty, and to deliver up the offender into the hands of justice. Her counsel was attended to by her fellow-citizens, as it had been by the besieging general. "They cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king." Thus was a deplorable ruin averted, and a great deliverance effected, by the seasonable interposition of a really wise woman.

As we said at the beginning, the histories of these two women illustrate in a striking manner both the injurious and the beneficial influence of the female intellect, according to its exercise and direction for evil or for good. They were both according to the customary phraseology of the time, called wise. They were both endowed, doubtless with an acuteness of intellect, superior to the generality of their sex. But, how differently were their talents employed and how different the effects which resulted from the wisdom

they possessed! The wisdom of the one was allied to the wisdom of the serpent, which beguiled Eve and plunged the human family in sin and sorrow. The wisdom of the other, was allied to that of the Seed of the woman, who is emphatically called the Wisdom of God, and who wrought the deliverance of our race, from irremediable desolation and woe.

1. The woman of Tekoah lent herself to the purpose of misrepresentation and deceit. She was probably bribed by Joab. She felt pretty sure that she was consulting the inclinations of David. She doubted not that her stratagem would conduce to her own temporal interests, and she, therefore, scrupled not to employ her talents to make falsehood appear like truth. Even supposing her tale to have been true, there was no proper similitude between the case of her sons and that of David's. The death of one of her sons by the hand of the other was the result of a sudden quarrel. The death of Amnon by the hand of Absalom, was the deliberate act of two years' premeditation. The death of her son was unwitnessed by a third person, and might be attended by circumstances greatly mitigating the guilt of his brother. The death of Amnon was effected in the presence of numbers, and no doubt could by any be entertained of the criminal intention of Absalom. Neither was there any just comparison, between the remission of future punish-

ment by the King of kings, and the remission of temporal punishment by an earthly monarch. The law of God had distinctly and in various ways declared, "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed;" David had therefore no right to pardon and recall Absalom, and irrevocable exile would have been but a mild punishment for the murder of his brother. But, although all this must have been clear to the mind of the woman, and the mind of David, she employed her talent to dress up the case in false colours, and the misrepresentation corresponding with the king's secret wishes, induced him to yield to her request. Thus falsehood prevailed over truth, stratagem over fair dealing, and parental partiality and weakness over parental duty and justice, and we know the disgraceful, ruinous, and fatal consequences. It was like the subtlety of the devil against our first mother, who suited his falsehood to the most vulnerable part of her nature, and succeeded in tempting her to transgression, whereby were "brought death into the world and all our woe."

2. The woman of Abel, on the contrary, employed the faculties with which God had blessed her to the noblest and best of purposes, even to the deliverance of her people from the perilous effects of the woman of Tekoah's artifice. The evils that menaced her city would never have existed had it not been for the rebellion of Ab-



salom. Absalom would have had no opportunity to rebel had he not been restored. Consequently, we may trace the siege of Abel to the cunning of the woman of Tekoah. Accordingly, the true wisdom of the one averted great calamities, which may truly be said to have been occasioned by the false wisdom of the other, even as he who is emphatically called the Wisdom of God has destroyed the cunning works of the devil, and repaired the ruins of the fall. Which of us, then, shall not strive and pray to imitate the example of the one, and to shun the example of the other? Remember that the mental endowments, with which ye are gifted, are talents committed unto you as unto stewards, to be employed, not for crooked views and selfish ends, but for the interests of truth, for the benefit of your fellow-creatures, and for the glory of your Saviour and your God; and that "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful."

## SERMON XII.

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### RIZPAH.

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2 SAM. xxi. 10.

“And Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.”

It is difficult to find in the whole of Scripture a more truly affecting passage than this. Rizpah, though connected with royalty, appears, like Naomi, to have drunk, in no ordinary degree, of the bitter waters of affliction. The notices of her life in the sacred narrative refer to two distinct periods of time, separated from one another by an interval of about thirty years. 1. She is first introduced to our notice in connexion with the quarrel between Abner and Ishbosheth, the son of Saul. She was, originally, the wife of Saul, in the second degree, as Hagar was that of Abraham, and bare him two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth. After the death of that first monarch of Israel, Abner adhered

to the party of Ishbosheth, and mainly contributed, by his powerful influence and great military skill, to maintain that feeble sovereign's reign over Israel in defiance of David, whose sway was, consequently, for years limited to Judah. But in process of time, Abner became enamoured of Rizpah, who lived at, or near the court of Ishbosheth, and formed a union with her, whether as a concubine or a wife, whether as a partner in the first or second degree, the Scripture does not specify. Ishbosheth entirely disapproved of this alliance, possibly for two reasons, both as derogatory to the dignity of his family, and as savouring of treason against himself. He might think it a degradation to his family that a subject should marry one of his father's widows. He might suspect the man who aspired to an alliance with his father's widow, of a design to possess his father's throne, just as Adonijah was accused of treasonable views by Solomon, when he asked for Abishag, who had cherished David in his last illness. Under the influence of one or other, or perhaps both of these feelings, Ishbosheth remonstrated with Abner, apparently with considerable asperity, saying unto him, "Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?" This speech filled Abner with unbounded resentment. He retorted upon the king by upbraiding him with ingratitude, in grudging the alliance with Rizpah to a person who, like

him, had rendered such important services to the family of his father, and who was the main supporter of himself on the throne in defiance of the power of David. And he concluded with an oath, that he would no longer continue that support, but transfer his allegiance to the rival king, and help to establish that rival in the possession of universal sway from Dan even to Beersheba. This solemn threat he presently carried into execution; and by this revolt he so weakened the power of Ishbosheth, as to bring both his kingdom and his life to a speedy termination. The step proved doubly fatal, fatal to Abner himself as well as to Ishbosheth his master. Abner, almost immediately after his reconciliation and interview with David, perished by the treacherous hand of Joab, who professed to suspect the sincerity of his adherence, but who most probably was in reality jealous of his ability and interest with David, and who also, together with Abishai, thirsted for his blood, in revenge for the death of their brother, Asahel, slain some years before by Abner at Gibeon. How empty and ill-founded are the purposes of vain man! He who promised to bring with him a kingdom, cannot make sure of one hour of life to himself! Ishbosheth, in consequence of Abner's defection and death, became so evidently feeble, that Israel despaired of his cause, and gave it up for lost. Two of his captains, with a view of making a merit of

necessity, and of ingratiating themselves with his ascendant rival, basely assassinated him while reposing on his couch in his house during the heat of the day, and carried his head unto David—a deed of enormous iniquity and aggravated guilt; and so far from being approved of by David, that, as in the case of the Amalekite, who declared he had slain Saul, he ordered its perpetrators to be instantly put to death, and their heads and their feet to be cut off and hanged up for public exposure; while he commanded the head of the murdered king to be honoured with a burial in the sepulchre of Abner. But what must have been the grief of Rizpah on hearing of these melancholy tragedies, with which she was so nearly, though innocently connected! Bitter must have been her lot before, and most sorely must her heart have been penetrated with sorrow when she heard the news of the disastrous scenes of Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan had perished by the sword, and she was left a widowed mother by the violent death of a first husband. And now she was doomed to see Abner's attachment to her, whom she might regard as a second husband, issue in a complication of dreadful evils, in a separation of interests between him and her first husband's son, and in the speedy destruction of the power and life of both. Few of us are altogether exempt from domestic troubles in this vale of sin and sorrow. But it sel-



dom happens that we are called to encounter such terrible evils as these! Let wives and widows, who mourn the loss of dear departed ones, and recall with deep sorrow the distressing scenes they have passed, bear in mind the far sorer trials which many of their sisters have been compelled to endure, and learn to be patient and resigned, yea, grateful under the far milder afflictions with which God hath visited them. Oh, when you think of the sad and unmitigated woes which some of the daughters of Eve have been called to suffer, shall not every feeling of impatience be suppressed, and every sound of murmuring be hushed? and shall you not rather break forth into the thanksgiving song, and say, "What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?"

2. But other and bitterer sufferings were in store for the afflicted daughter of Aiah, as appears from the *second* reference to her name in the sacred record, to which we shall now request your attention. Nearly thirty years had passed away from the melancholy death of Abner and Ishbosheth. When and how she passed that long interval of time we are not informed. It was, we are sure, embittered by many and frequent recollections of those noble and brave ones so dear to her heart, who had been so violently snatched away, and whom no tears or prayers could bring back. But at the

expiration of that period, the fountains of her grief were opened afresh, and her sorrows for Saul and Jonathan, for Abner and Ishbosheth, were more than renewed by the public execution of her two sons, along with other five sons of Saul. The circumstances were these: A famine had visited the land, and continued, probably with great severity, for three years. Upon David's inquiring of the Lord as to the cause of it, he was answered, "It is for Saul and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." Now to understand the nature of the sin which had brought down so heavy a judgment upon the whole land, we must consider, first, who the Gibeonites were, and, secondly, on what occasion they were slain by King Saul.

1. "The Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel," we read in the chapter containing the text, "but of the remnant of the Amorites," who inhabited Canaan before its conquest by the children of Israel. In the book of Joshua, it is said that they were Hivites. But the inconsistency is removed by the consideration that the word Amorites, probably on account of the vast superiority of that nation in power and number, is sometimes used in Scripture for all the original inhabitants of Canaan. The Gibeonites, then, though in a looser sense they might be called Amorites, properly speaking belonged to that one of the seven nations of Canaan, distinguished by the

name of Hivites. They inhabited the cities of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim, and were afterwards designated by the general name of Gibeonites, probably because Gibeon was the principal of those cities which joined together for the adoption of a remarkable scheme of self-preservation. Upon the crossing of the Jordan by Joshua and the children of Israel, their capture of Jericho and Ai, and their victorious progress through the land, the inhabitants of these four cities became alarmed for their existence; and deeming it vain to oppose force to such formidable arms, resolved to consult their safety by guile. They sent ambassadors to Joshua, who were to represent themselves as coming from a distant country, desirous of entering into an engagement of peace and amity with him; and to give a colour to their assumed character, they were directed to "take old sacks upon their asses, and wine-bottles, old and rent, and bound up, and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy." In this plight they came to the camp at Gilgal, and being introduced to Joshua, they told him that they had come from a very distant country, that the fame of the miracles which God had wrought for Israel in Egypt, and of the wonderful success with which he had subsequently blessed their arms against every opposing power, had

reached even their far-off native land, and that their rulers and countrymen had resolved to send ambassadors for the purpose of obtaining the favour and alliance of a people so renowned throughout the world, and so peculiarly honoured by the God of heaven. And by way of removing all suspicion of their belonging to the land of Canaan, the inhabitants of which they probably knew were irrevocably doomed to destruction by the command of God, they pointed to their clothes and provisions, and solemnly declared that they were all perfectly new when they commenced their journey, whence all might infer, without further proof, how very remote their homes must be.

This plausible story, and these delusive appearances imposed upon Joshua and the Israelites, who were persuaded to enter into a league with the Gibeonites, and to confirm that league by the solemnity of an oath. The rashness of this alliance is indicated by the words, "the men" of Israel "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord;" which words are interpreted to mean, "they did not on the occasion consult Jehovah by Urim and Thummim, as they ought to have done, since it was a state transaction, in which his interests and honour as their King, no less than their God, were immediately concerned. The sincerity and inviolability of the engagement are set

forth by the expressions<sup>1</sup>, “the men” of Israel “took of their victuals; and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.” By taking of their victuals is most probably meant a conformity to the usual mode of making an inviolable engagement, *eating together* being considered in the East, from time immemorial, a token of unalterable friendship; and those who ate even *salt* together, feeling themselves bound thereby in a perpetual covenant. And this outward proof of mutual good-will was confirmed by the additional sanction of an oath by the heads of the Israelitish nation, which is the obvious meaning of the other expression, “and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.” Although the imposture was discovered in a few days, and they who had pretended to have come from a far country were found in fact to be the inhabitants of neighbouring cities, and to form part of the Canaanitish tribes which Jehovah had commanded to be entirely extirpated—although the people, upon making that discovery, murmured against their princes, censured their hasty and inconsiderate management, and clamoured against the propriety and the validity of the alliance into which

<sup>1</sup> Some read, “they received the men by reason of their victuals,” which may imply that the mouldy state of their victuals was a convincing argument with the Israelites of their having come from a great distance.



they had been entrapped, yet because of the oath sworn by the Lord God of Israel, the compact was held to be sacred and inviolable. Those same elders or princes, who had allowed themselves to be overreached by the Gibeonites, did indeed determine to reduce them to a condition of servitude, and to make them "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the benefit of the nation, and the use of the tabernacle; and Joshua sharply reproved them for their disingenuous conduct, and communicated to them in severe language the resolution which had been adopted, to treat them as a degraded class of citizens, and to require of them the performance of the meanest and most laborious offices; yet their lives might not be touched, being under the protection of a solemn promise confirmed by an irrevocable oath, and they were consequently permitted to dwell among the children of Israel.

2. This compact appears to have been rigidly respected for many generations, and the Gibeonites continued safe under the national guarantee of protection, until the time of Saul, the first king of Israel, who, it is said, "sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah." Some commentators suppose that Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites was on the occasion of his destroying the priests at Nob, on account of the supposed attachment of that city to the interests of David. You

will remember that David, when persecuted by Saul, did in his great need go to Ahimelech at Nob, and receive from him hallowed bread for the immediate sustenance of himself and followers, and also the sword of Goliath, of Gath, which happened to be deposited there as a trophy, and that Saul, upon being informed of the circumstance, became so enraged at the service thereby rendered to the obnoxious son of Jesse, that he ordered to be put to the sword all the inhabitants of the place, not only Ahimelech himself, and the rest of the priests, amounting to "fourscore and five persons," but all the "men and women, children, and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep." As Nob was a sacerdotal city, abounding more than ordinary cities in priests and Levites, the Gibeonites, whose especial business was to perform the mean and laborious offices connected with the celebration of worship, would there be unusually numerous, and would consequently share to a large extent the cruel calamity inflicted upon it by the vindictive king. But although they might largely, yet they did not exclusively, suffer by that visitation, and, therefore, it could scarcely be said to be a cruelty especially inflicted on the Gibeonites, as a distinct race, in violation of the solemn compact made between Joshua and their ancestors. Nor could that be regarded as a national sin calling down a national judg-

ment like a three years' famine, since it was the individual act of an enraged and tyrannical monarch. Neither is that opinion consistent with the language already quoted, in which the culpable conduct of Saul against the Gibeonites is described. "He sought to slay them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah." Nor is it consistent with the language in which the complaints and demands of the Gibeonites are expressed, "The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel." The inference from this language is, that he was in the habit of persecuting them perhaps for years, and that he extirpated them, not from one place, like Nob, but from many places, and that he, not on one, but on many occasions, caused numbers of them to be put to death. The probability is, that the Gibeonites, being the descendants of the Canaanites, were a disliked, as well as a despised, class of people, and that Saul, to ingratiate himself with the nation, and to increase his popularity with Israel and Judah, exercised all manner of oppression and cruelty against them, so as to greatly aggravate their misery and shorten their lives. But this was, on many grounds, shameful, wicked, and unjustifiable. It was barbarous to oppress and injure a quiet and inoffensive class of people, as the Gibeonites appear to have been, simply because they were aliens

in blood and degraded in station. It was cowardly to slay them under the pretence of extirpating the Canaanitish remnants, because they were poor or weak, and incapable of defence, while the Amalekites and other Canaanites continued unexterminated, because they were wealthy, or strong, and difficult to conquer. But, above all, such conduct was a flagrant violation of the sacred engagement and solemn oath, by which the whole nation had, through its princes, in the time of Joshua, bound itself, and which continued to be inviolably binding upon it to the latest posterity, to spare the lives of the Gibeonites, and to allow their residence in the land. It was, therefore, a grievous, a complicated, and a national sin, entailing guilt upon both king and people, and demanding a severe and exemplary retribution; and it was accordingly punished by the infliction upon the whole country of a grievous famine of several years' continuance.

Three years had passed away, and we know not how much longer the judgment would have been continued, if David had not inquired of the Lord to ascertain its cause. He was informed from heaven, that the cause was the slaughter of the Gibeonites, and was, we have reason to believe, directed from the same source, to give that injured people such satisfaction for their wrongs as they chose to demand. "Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What

shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord?" And the Gibeonites said unto him, that their complaint was not against the nation at large, but against Saul, who had been their chief persecutor. They would not allow any man in Israel to be killed on their account, though probably many of Israel were guilty of their blood, but of that man, who had so cruelly ministered at their expense to Israel's and Judah's prejudices, they demanded, and we have reason to think, were directed by Heaven to demand, an atonement of the same nature as the evils he had inflicted. His own person no human punishment could reach, since he was gone to his eternal account. The silver and the gold which had belonged to him, and might now be possessed by his family, they would have nothing to do with; probably regarding the many dear lives of friends, and relatives, and benefactors, which had been so inhumanly sacrificed far too valuable to be compensated for by any amount of earthly treasures. They demanded, as the only satisfactory and now possible atonement, that seven men of the sons of Saul be delivered unto them, "to be hanged up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul." The king assented to their demands, and caused to be apprehended for the purpose "five sons of Merab," here called five sons of Michal, "the daughter of Saul,"



the name of the one daughter, according to some, being by mistake substituted in the text for the name of the other—according to others, the one daughter having adopted and brought up the children of the other<sup>2</sup>, “and together with these five grandsons, two sons of Saul by Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, the subject of our present discourse. And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest”—a mournful illustration of the warning, “I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” and break my commandments!

Whereas it is said, “We will hang them in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose;” that was to make the punishment appear more distinctly retributive upon Saul and his connexions, Gibeah being the city where he lived both before and after God had chosen him to be king. And whereas it is added, that “they there hanged them in the hill before the Lord;” the probable meaning is, that they were put to death on an eminence for the purpose of publicity and exposure, and under the character

<sup>2</sup> Merab was the wife of Adriel. Michal was the wife, first of David, then of Phaltiel, and afterwards restored to David by the instrumentality of Abner. See Serm. on Michal.

of expiatory victims, to appease the Divine wrath enkindled by the wrongs of the Gibeonites. And they were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest, to indicate that they were sacrificed to appease the wrath which had withheld from the nation the fruit of the earth, and visited it with the judgment of famine. "The evident intention of God," says Dr. Chandler, "in ordering the death of so many of Saul's family, was to give a public attestation of His abhorrence of Saul's perfidy and cruelty, and to strike into the hearts of his successors on the throne a salutary dread of committing similar offences. The death of these seven persons, therefore, is not to be regarded as a punishment inflicted upon them for personal offences, even though they might have had a share in their father's persecution of the Gibeonites, but an act commanded by God in virtue of His sovereign right over the lives of all men, to teach princes moderation and equity, and to prevent the perpetration of enormous crimes, which are inconsistent with the welfare of all civil government, as well as incompatible with the principles of true religion. Accordingly, God may be said to have dealt with these persons exactly as if in the course of His providential dispensations He had cut them off by a natural death; and that children are very frequently called to suffer and to die for the

sins of their parents, in which they have not participated, is evident from the records of secular history, and from the observation and experience of all ages and nations, as well as from the distinct declarations of the inspired word." If, in the present instance, the punishment seems partial and severe, let us bear in mind that we are not able fully to comprehend the evil of any *sin*; and the sin committed in this case might have been of a very enormous nature, and that, consequently, we are very unfit to judge of the measure of the Divine Government. The whole transaction is a very solemn admonition to us to take heed to ourselves, since it sets before us in an awful manner, that our families and connexions, our children and descendants, may be doomed to grievous sufferings, in consequence of our wanton folly and wilful wickedness. Who, then, shall not make haste to forsake sin? Who shall not be afraid to persist in impenitence and hardness of heart? Who shall not mourn before God on account of his past iniquities, and pray that they may be blotted out during life, and not be visited after death on our surviving families, or on our own immortal souls? Oh, let men repent, and believe, and entreat the pardon of their sins, and the change of their hearts in time, for our God is a consuming fire, and will by no means clear the guilty.

We return now to the affecting passage with

which we commenced. "And Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night." There is a passage in the book of Deuteronomy which prohibits the leaving of the bodies of malefactors to remain even one night upon the ignominious tree, and positively commands that they should be buried on the very day on which they were executed. But that statute is supposed to refer only to transgressions against human laws, or to mean only those who were sentenced to death by human judges. A different arrangement was deemed necessary, and doubtless divinely commanded in the case of those who were put to death by God's direct appointment, in atonement for the sin of a monarch and a nation. Their bodies were to remain publicly exposed until a manifest sign was given, that the justice of Heaven was satisfied, and the wrath of Heaven appeased. They accordingly were left, some say for many weeks, certainly for many days and nights, as is evident from the inspired penman's words, "from the beginning of barley harvest," which was usually a dry season, "until water dropped upon them from heaven," *i. e.* until the descending rain, the emblem and agent of fertility, demon-

strated that the Almighty had ceased to be angry on account of the Gibeonites, and would make the land fruitful again, and put a stop to the famine by which its inhabitants were afflicted. But, during that waiting time, the bodies of the seven victims might be defaced, mangled, or devoured by the ravens, or the vultures, or the lions, or the wolves, or other fowls and animals of prey, numerous in that country,—a circumstance which would have precluded their decent interment, when the term of their exposure was ended. In modern times it would be a very great aggravation of our distress at the death of dear relatives, to see their corpses deprived of the customary rites of sepulture. Among the ancients, both Jews and Heathens, the thought of such a deprivation was regarded with peculiar horror, and its occurrence avoided and deprecated as the greatest calamity. Among the Heathens it was supposed to interfere with the repose of the departed spirit, and it is not improbable that some such notion prevailed also among the Jews—that the non-interment, or the imperfect interment of the remains of the dead, would injure the happiness of the soul, or at least impair the completeness of the body's resurrection. Even we, who are, by a more enlightened faith, exempted from such fears, are anxious that the remains of our beloved ones should be consigned unmutilated to the safe repose of an undisturbed tomb. How much



more anxious must they have been, with whose heart's affections and yearnings upon the subject, mingled thoughts and apprehensions, which extended to the spiritual and eternal world! But what was to be done on the present melancholy occasion? The seven bodies that were hung at Gibeah must remain, no man could foretell how long, how many days and nights, how many weeks or even months, and might during that period become the prey of a thousand accidents. A mourning mother's deep love and untiring patience of affection found a resource for the sad emergency. Rizpah, who was the mother of two of the victims, and doubtless felt much of a mother's concern for the rest, though she had been unable to save their lives, determined by her own personal vigilance and self-denying exertion to preserve their bodies from injury. She "took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock near the place where the bodies were exposed, and remaining there during the whole time, from the beginning of the harvest until rain descended from heaven, she suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night." Some say that the "sackcloth spread on the rock" was a tent pitched in the place, and that Rizpah dwelt there during the melancholy period, attended by servants. That would have been an act requiring much self-denial and painful exertion in one who like her had

occupied the delicate and luxurious station of a king's wife, and shewed the strength of her maternal affection, which would trust no delegated hand to watch the dear remains of her own and her husband's children. In either case, especially in the former, which according to the literal acceptation of the description, supposes that she lay alone and on the ground, with nothing but a sackcloth for her couch and her covering, and so continued for many weary days and sleepless nights, how painful must have been her lot, how wonderful her patient endurance, how deep and exhaustless her maternal love! When her conduct was reported to king David, he appears to have been deeply affected, and he sought to do all in his power to soothe her wounded spirit and to bind up her broken heart. He ordered the bodies of the seven victims to be taken down from the cursed trees for the purpose of being decently interred. He also sent for the bones of Saul and Jonathan, which had remained at Jabesh Gilead since the battle of Gilboa, and ordered the remains of the nine together to be honourably buried in the sepulchre of Kish, the father of Saul,—a result ascribed apparently to the humility, the attention, the pitiable condition, the persevering solicitude and enduring love of Rizpah.

Her case is not without applicability to some of us, and is capable of imparting much practical instruction at the present day. 1. As we have

already observed, the spectacle of such various and distressing affliction endured by this daughter of Eve should change our discontent into gratitude, when we are apt to repine at the comparatively trifling evils of our lot. You may have bereavements to regret. But what are they to those of Rizpah?—a first husband perishing in despair; a second bringing about, through the effect of his love to her, the destruction both of himself and of her first husband's son; and when thirty years had been passed in desolate widowhood, to have to undergo far bitterer grief than she had endured before; to see her two sons, her last hope in the world, with five near relatives taken away by a public execution, and to perform, for weary days and sleepless nights, the anxious task of guarding their dead bodies from the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, with a view to their interment at some distant and undefined period! Compare your deepest sorrows, the most afflicted among you, with those of this afflicted one, and shall you not have reason to say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Surely the Lord hath dealt mercifully, graciously, and bountifully with thee."

2. Rizpah's example of patient resignation under her great calamities is very admirable, and worthy of imitation. She refrained from all violent and illegal methods of gaining her object.

She used no force or stratagem to secure for her beloved ones a safe and decent burial; but waited watchfully, meekly, and humbly for the time appointed by the Lord. Neither did she give way to despondency, and quit the melancholy scene in wild despair; but did what she could to alleviate the dreadful evil. Though her heart was broken and her grief too bitter for utterance, she still hoped in God, still looked for his merciful interposition, and waited day after day and night after night, until the rain of heaven came down and released the bodies of her beloved ones. David pitied, loved, and succoured such a case. And the Son of David, be assured, brethren, will pity, love, and succour all that will bear their sorrows with such patience, meekness, and faith. He was anointed to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort them that mourn. Whatever be your troubles, wait ye patiently upon the Lord, and He will give you the desire of your hearts.

3. Rizpah's example of maternal attachment is also very admirable, and worthy of imitation. She deeply thought of her sons and relatives in death, and after death. Let mothers carefully mark this, and learn an important lesson from this. Let them, in the management of their children, and in all the notions they instil into them, keep in mind the time when those dear ones shall be called to their last account, and summoned to enter the unseen and eternal

world. What will it profit them then that they have been accomplished, successful, respected, or renowned in this fleeting sphere, if they are unprepared for that which shall endure for ever? Oh, let all parents impress upon their children the Saviour's memorable advice, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all" other needful "things shall be added unto you." The only true consolation for the bereaved is the sure and certain hope, with regard to their lost ones, of the resurrection unto eternal life. Let them be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—let them by faith be brought unto Jesus—let them become true members of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven—and, die when they may, we shall be able to take up concerning them the hopeful, confident, and consoling exclamation, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."



## SERMON XIII.

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### TWO WOMEN AT THE JUDGMENT-SEAT OF SOLOMON.

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1 KINGS iii. 22.

“And the other woman said, Nay, but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No, but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king.”

THE time when this occurrence took place was the first year of the reign of Solomon, who ascended the throne of Israel about the age of twenty; and the judgment which so young a man and monarch pronounced on the occasion, is justly regarded as a remarkable proof of sagacity and decision. But we are at no loss to account for his superior mental endowments, which often supply the place of long experience, if we consider the advice and care bestowed upon him by his parents, and his own diligent application in the pursuit of knowledge; and, above all, his earnest prayer for Divine help and counsel in the arduous station he had been ap-

pointed to fill. That his education was an object of much parental anxiety, is repeatedly evidenced in Scripture. "I was my father's son," says he himself, in the book of Proverbs, "tender, and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore, get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her." His mother also, who is supposed to be the same as the mother of king Lemuel, mentioned in the 31st chapter of the same book, manifested the greatest solicitude for the right direction of his mind, saying unto him, "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?" As though she had said, "Where shall I begin, and what terms shall I employ to point out the various duties you will have to perform, and to guard thee against the many perils which beset thy path in life?" His father's dying words to him were, "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself." He endeavoured to improve the advantages of his

education, and to fulfil the wishes and intentions of his parents by extraordinary personal application, according to his own account, in that passage of Ecclesiastes, "I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out, by wisdom, concerning all things that are done under heaven." But, above all, he had the penetration to see, in early youth, that human means, however well employed, and human aid, however excellent and abundant, were insufficient of themselves to impart true and consummate wisdom, and he had, therefore, recourse to God, by earnest supplication for Divine help and illumination, saying, "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able," *i. e.* who, of himself, and without Divine assistance, "is able to judge this thy so great a people?" And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself; nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment: Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." Bearing all this in mind,

we shall cease to wonder at the remarkable sagacity he exhibited, and the satisfactory decision he pronounced in the transaction now to be considered, which is known by the name of the Judgment of Solomon.

“Then came there,” says the sacred narrative, “two women that were harlots unto the king and stood before him.” The word here translated “harlots” is by the Chaldee paraphrast rendered tavern-keepers, and we are inclined to think that, as in the case of Rahab, that expression more correctly designates their character and station. As we observed in the discourse on her life, there is reason to believe that houses of public entertainment were generally kept by women, among the ancients, among the Greeks, among the Egyptians, among the Philistines, among the Canaanites, and most probably among the Israelites. The existence of loose and abandoned females was prohibited in Israel by a positive law<sup>1</sup>, and it is, consequently, exceedingly unlikely that such characters would have dared to appear before king Solomon, and to undergo his strict and unerring administration of justice. We, therefore, infer that they were persons whose occupation was to maintain places of public entertainment, and that they were joined together in the same business, and for that purpose were dwelling in the same house. The fact of their

<sup>1</sup> Deut. ii. 3—17.

husbands not being mentioned may be accounted for by supposing them to be both widows, or that their husbands were then both absent from home, and that, the point being of a nature which required immediate decision, they deemed it right to bring it forward in their own names, on their own responsibility, and before their partners could have time to return. When they stood before the king, the one woman charged the other in this manner, "O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house. And this woman's child died in the night because she overlaid it. And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaiden slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I arose in the morning to give my child suck, behold it was dead; but when I had considered it in the morning, behold it was not my son which I did bear."

This representation may appear, at first, to have been grounded upon nothing but suspicion and conjecture. Part of it, unquestionably, was conjectural; for how could the woman that was asleep, ascertain either the exact mode of the child's death, that its mother had overlaid



it, *i. e.* accidentally stifled it, or the exact time of substituting the one child for the other, that she arose at *midnight* and took her son from beside her? But although some particulars of her account must have been seen to rest only upon inference and suspicion, yet of the substantial part of the accusation, of the surreptitious exchange, she might possess proofs, which to her own mind were altogether convincing and conclusive. Dwelling in the same house as her adversary, she might have had ample opportunities of comparing the respective children, each of which might possess distinctive marks not to be mistaken. The proofs, however, were exclusively confined to the knowledge of the two mothers, and were not within the cognizance of any third person; and it was equally open to the one to deny, and to the other to assert their validity. The accused availed herself of this absence of independent evidence, and solemnly answered, "Nay: but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son." "No," replied the complainant; "but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king."

As there were no witnesses in the transaction, and both parties were alike strenuous and positive in their declarations, the cause became extremely difficult and perplexing. It had, probably, been tried already before an inferior judge; had, for want of evidence on either side,

baffled his sagacity ; and was now, by way of a last resource, brought before the notice of the supreme magistrate, as before the court of highest wisdom and final appeal. But what could the chief magistrate do in such a case? What clue was there to guide his decision? Family resemblance there might be none. The infants, being so nearly of the same age, might be much more like one another than like their respective mothers. Though others might have seen them at their birth, yet they had not marked them with the minuteness of a mother's eye, and the affectionate interest of a mother's heart; and in a few days all recollection of their persons, or at least of any difference between their persons, would be utterly effaced from every witness's mind. Neither was there any thing perhaps in the appearance and demeanour of the mothers to indicate the truth. They were both sorrowful—both excited—both bathed in tears, the one for the loss of her child by death, and the other for the temporary loss of her child, and the fear of its final loss by deceit and robbery. They were both equally peremptory and importunate in the assertion of their claims, and seeing that falsehood was found, as it is now, often as clamorous and confident as truth, the vehemency of their challenges could guide to no decision. The one said, that her child was taken away in the night. The other maintained, that it had

died in her bosom. The one said, that while she was asleep a dead child had been substituted for her own child, which she saw still alive. The other shewed the impossibility of her knowing what she asserted regarding such removal and exchange at a time when her senses were locked up, and she could neither feel, nor see, nor hear. The entire absence of direct proof gives confidence to the guilty, and therefore, when the true mother said, "Nay; but the living is my son and the dead is thy son," the false mother retorted, "No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son."

After hearing for some time, we know not how long, this fruitless debate, the king determined on bringing it to a conclusion. But how is he to do it in a manner satisfactory to justice, to his own conscience, and to the minds of the bystanders? In some countries, such doubtful cases have been decided by lot. But although the use of the lot in some transactions is sanctioned by Scripture, there was probably a reason which rendered it inapplicable to the present controversy. In after ages, and with shame be it spoken, in *Caucasus* and *Spain*, such points have been decided by duels or single combats, between the individuals, or friends of the individuals principally concerned. Hence the origin of those conflicts in modern times, which are called affairs of honour, but which deserve to be called affairs of disgrace, since

they serve the purposes neither of justice nor of truth, often issuing in the success of the slanderer and wrong-doer, and the destruction of the calumniated and injured, and spreading sorrow and suffering among innocent families and communities. In many countries since that period, a practice has prevailed, of torturing the parties concerned to make them discover the required information—a practice equally barbarous with the former, and not more conducive to the real interests of truth and justice, since the innocent frequently confessed themselves to be guilty, and submitted to misrepresentation and wrong, in order to escape from their intolerable torments. Such attempts at ascertaining the truth are not only inconsistent with true religion: they are inconsistent with right reason and sound judgment: they are the miserable resources of tyrannic power, seeking to make up by brute violence for the lack of mental ability. Solomon, who was possessed of great natural capacity, cultivated by education, improved by study, and enlarged and sanctified by Divine assistance, adopted a very different course, and thereby shewed the incalculable superiority of mind over matter, of reason over force, and of the real value of a truly wise and understanding heart. His penetration and sagacity directed him to appeal to the natural affection of the contending mothers before him. He exclaimed, in the midst of the controversy, “Bring me a

sword.” How perplexed and surprised the audience must have been at such an order! “What,” they would exclaim “does the young monarch intend by this? Is he going after all to employ brute force instead of that wisdom of which he has given so much promise? Is he going to end this strange controversy by putting both disputants to death?” He appeared at first to intend a still more absurd and cruel measure. When the sword was brought and he opened his lips again, he said to one of his officers that stood by, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.”

What a sensation of surprise, and pity, and terror must have followed this extraordinary and most unexpected command! All the audience doubtless partook more or less of such feelings. But there was one present, whose heart the sword had virtually already passed through. The real mother heard the words “Divide the child” like a sentence of death passed upon all her hopes and prospects in this trying state. “Woe is me,” she would think, “what have I done? I came to claim my son, and my anxiety to have him again brings about his early and violent death. Oh, that I had never opened my lips upon the subject, and suppressed the grief of my bereaved heart in everlasting silence! Better far to have seen him in the undisputed possession of another, than to have



him mangled and slaughtered before my eyes. Yea; happier thought far, that he had been overlaid or stifled in my unconscious bosom, than that he should through my blind and rash vindication die this bloody death. How can I endure the ghastly spectacle! How shall I prevent the dreadful deed! What can I do to turn aside the melancholy sentence? Oh, I am indeed in a great strait! I see that I must part with my beautiful and dear one. Let me then part with him alive, rather than part with him thus put to death. I cannot bear such a destruction of my babe. But the only mode of preventing his destruction, is to relinquish my claim to him. It is indeed a melancholy alternative. But I must adopt it. It is hard to resign him to another. But it is better than to see him thus die. There is a hope connected with his life, however faint. There is dark and heartbreaking despair in the thought of having caused his early and bloody death. Oh, then, let me immediately resolve to give him up. "And she spake unto the king (for her bowels yearned upon her son), and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it."

This exclamation of itself was enough to show to which of the two women the child really belonged. Any one might almost be sure that it was hers who exhibited such trepidation and alarm at the thought of its death. But when the other woman expressed her opinion

upon the proposal, all doubt vanished from the king's mind, and we question not that the mind of every one of the audience also was immediately impressed with conviction, "She said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." It seems difficult at first to reconcile this shocking answer with her former eagerness to obtain possession of the living child. It is by some supposed, that in that eagerness she might be influenced by the fear of reproach or punishment, on the suspicion of having wilfully or through great negligence occasioned the death of her child, and that to prevent that suspicion and its dreaded consequences, she had resolved secretly to substitute it for that of the other woman, and to persist in claiming it as her own, but that when she found that danger to be over, she cared not to be burdened by the maintenance of a child that was not her own; and the exasperation which during the progress of the dispute had sprung up in her mind against her rival, might induce her to agree to the king's proposal, for the purpose of revenge. Or, in claiming the living child, she might be only actuated by the well-known very strong desire, which peculiarly marked the women of ancient Israel, for having children to survive them, and to hand down their lineage to posterity. This wish would operate more strongly in both these women, if, according to one of the opinions we have expressed as to their condition, they were

widows, since with the death of their children, their departed husbands' names would be more likely to perish from the earth<sup>2</sup>. Connected with this wish in the mind of the false mother, might be a feeling of envy against the other mother, who possessed the much coveted treasure of a living son, while she was in the deprecated state of a childless woman. When, however, she found that even supposing she took the child and brought it up for her own, an opinion of its spuriousness would still prevail in the minds of her neighbours, and that under such circumstances, instead of being more honoured as being a mother in Israel, she would more probably be reproached as a disgraced character, who had continued a pretended parent at the expense of the tender love of the true one, she became indifferent to its possession. But to gratify her malignity and vindictiveness against the woman who, first by her stout resistance, and afterwards by her voluntary resignation, had baffled her attempts and defeated her plans, and, probably, also, in the hope of gaining favour with the king, by a ready acquiescence in his decree, she returned the cruel answer, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it."

But the determination to which the king now came was different from what either woman

<sup>2</sup> Not *certain* to perish, since they might have male relations of their husbands, who by the law of Moses were required to marry the widows and to raise seed to their brethren.

had expected a moment before. The sword, which he had sent for, was not employed to divide the child. But it had served the purpose he had had in view, which was to draw out the maternal affection of the real mother, and to expose the callous heart of the false one. "Oh, Divine oracle of justice!" says Bishop Hall, "commanding that which it would not have done, that it might find out that which could not be discovered. Neither God nor his deputies may be so taken at their words, as if they always intended their commands for action, and not sometimes for probation." Solomon could no longer doubt to whom to assign the child. Could a woman so forget her sucking child—could she have so entirely dried up her compassion for the son of her womb, as to consent to the ruthless tragedy? God himself, by the prophet, intimates that such a thing is scarcely possible; and Solomon, the Saviour's type, and the next to Him in wisdom, concluded that she was either no real mother, or a monster of a mother. Even if she could have been the mother, she deserved to be deprived of her child for her inhuman acquiescence, as the other was worthy of its possession on account of her anxious tender-heartedness. But the footsteps of love and pity pointed, we think, unerringly to the truth, while malignity and barbarity unmistakably exposed the falsehood. Not more kindly than

justly, therefore, did he adjudge the infant to the woman that was terrified and heart-rent at his peril; and we wonder not that his decision gave universal satisfaction, when he answered, and said, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof<sup>3</sup>."

1. From this subject we infer the value to a nation of enlightened and pious magistrates and judges. Under such administrators justice and humanity go hand in hand. Falsehood is detected, fraud is exposed, malignity is defeated, wrong is redressed, right asserted, truth upheld, and innocence protected. Peace and security, domestic comfort, individual happiness, and national prosperity universally flourish and prevail. A state of things is induced on the earth, typical of and approaching to that which shall arise under the universal reign of Him who shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with equity. Let the matter, then, engage our earnest prayer, and let us heartily join in our supplications, "that it may please God to rule our sovereign's heart in his faith, fear and love; to endue the lords of the council and all the nobility with grace, wisdom, and understanding; to direct and prosper all the consultations of the High Court of Parliament, under our most religious Queen, at this time assembled; and to bless and keep the

<sup>3</sup> See Note VI.



magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice, and to maintain truth.”

2. From this subject we infer, secondly, the connexion between wisdom and humanity. In dark ages, and among ignorant legislators, and magistrates, the most cruel methods were resorted to, on such occasions, in order to ascertain the truth. Bloody combats between individuals, ordeals by fire, tortures by the scourge and the rack were made the barbarous *criteria* of justice and veracity—tests which, with all their torments, led to no certainty, and often issued in the triumph of falsehood and the discomfiture of innocence. As pure religion, and its handmaid intellectual cultivation, have gained ground, these barbarities have decreased and disappeared like the ill-omened birds of night before the cheering beams of the orient sun. And the wisest of the children of men has proved, by the judgment before us, that an enlightened mind, cultivated by study, strengthened by piety, and furnished, as such a mind will inevitably be, with a correct knowledge of human nature, can penetrate secrets, and arrive at conclusions which may be expected in vain from the operation of violence and cruelty. It is also clear that mental and moral appliances are just as conducive to the interests of justice as of humanity. The enlightened and humane regulations of our own king Alfred produced, throughout his realm, an unprecedented sense

of the sacred inviolability of persons and property, while under more ignorant and fiercer occupants of his throne, countless robberies and murders have disgraced the land. And of Solomon, we read, that when "all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged," so remarkable for its union of sagacity and real mildness, "they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment."

3. In this transaction we find exhibited the power of maternal affection. It is one of the strongest feelings known to the human heart, probably the very strongest of all, as intimated by the already quoted question of Isaiah, "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" It was implanted there thus vigorously by God, as the most efficacious instrument for preserving the tender and the helpless amid the many perils and infirmities to which they are liable; and, notwithstanding the ceaseless troubles, and anxieties, and fatigues which they occasion, it operated so mightily in the bosom of the mother arraigned before Solomon, that it brought her to consent to any suffering, any self-denial, to the transference of her child to a malignant adversary, a melancholy trial to a mother's hopes, rather than agree to the sacrifice of his life. And yet there are too often found in our own country women who have extinguished that feeling, and have murdered their own infants.

We scarcely read an instance of such unnaturalness among the ancient Israelites. In the extremity of famine, indeed, when the senses were bewildered by exhaustion, and death was expected by all, such a sacrifice might, in a rare instance, be consented to: yet, even on such an overwhelming emergency, we have an instance of maternal affection operating so strongly as to refuse the sacrifice after it had been most solemnly, and under the most binding obligations promised<sup>4</sup>. But we have not in the whole Bible a single intimation of a mother being instrumental or accessory to the slaughter of her child, from motives of shame or the mere dread of destitution. To think that in our age and country such considerations have predominated over maternal love, and caused a mother often to forget her newly born or sucking child, so that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb, is matter for the deepest humiliation at the depravity of our race, and surely deserving the most anxious investigation of a Christian people, and a Christian legislature. Oh, there must be something wrong in the constitution of society, or there must be something wrong in the laws of the land, to render such a result possible, as that a woman in spite of the strongest feelings of nature, implanted by God for the wisest purposes, and in

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings vi. 29.

spite of the characteristically mild spirit of the dispensation, and of the whole tenour of God's inspired word from Genesis to Revelation, should have so little compassion on the son of her womb as to extinguish his innocent life by a violent death. Oh, let us consider our ways as a nation and as individuals. Let us inquire into the origin, and the cause, and the cure of so portentous and unnatural a crime. Let us humble ourselves in penitence for our own and our country's sins, and supplicate the Father of mercies, the friend of little children, to pardon the thoughtlessness, the iniquity, and the depravity which have involved us in such guilt, and beseech Him to wipe away so foul and disgraceful a blot from our land and age.

4. But we recommend the conduct of the real mother at Solomon's judgment-seat to mothers in general for more reasons than one. We trust there are none here who require to be warned and cautioned with regard to the safety of their children's natural lives. Maternal affection, we hope, is strong enough in you all to render such an admonition superfluous. But have you a feeling equally strong regarding the salvation of their immortal souls? Do you seek to save them from spiritual and eternal death, with the same solicitude and terror, as you would preserve them from temporal death? Do you adopt, with reference to your children's spiritual welfare, similar sentiments, and a similar course

of conduct, if necessary, to those adopted by her with reference to her child's bodily welfare? Are you ready to say, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child," *i. e.* do you strive with a holy violence, and at any sacrifice, to pluck your children's souls as brands from the burning, and to rescue them from everlasting destruction? Is this feeling manifested in your habitual walk and conversation—in your instruction, in your advice, and in your example? Do you study to bring them up more carefully with a view to their happiness in eternity, than with a view to their advancement in the world? Do you sincerely and honestly endeavour to impress upon their minds the Saviour's blessed advice, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you?" Oh, let none suppose that they do their full duty by their children, or hope to have much comfort from them, unless they diligently bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

5. "But to accommodate" the other part of "this transaction to the purpose of spiritual instruction, may we not observe that many professors of the *Christian religion* (like the pretended mother, who consented to have the child divided) would mutilate the sacred Scriptures, and leave out those parts which oppose their prejudices, their vanity, their covetousness,



their ambition, their pride, or their lusts. Yea, they would fain divide their hearts between God and Mammon. But the true believer loves the whole Scripture, holds fast every part of it, and values its doctrines, its precepts, its facts, its promises, and its warnings, as equally necessary to its completeness and perfection. This cordial affection for the inspired volume, proves the entire of it to be, and to be felt as, the believer's own, who wishes to give his heart unto the Lord without reserve, and to seek his happiness from Him alone. Oh, let us all strive after this singleness of purpose, and pray, that with simplicity and godly sincerity we may have our conversation in the world. Soon our Solomon will come and decide between the false and true professor. See ye to it, that your title to heaven be clear, for in Him is the wisdom of God to do judgment, and He cannot be imposed upon by subterfuges or evasions; seeing He searcheth the hearts of the children of men, and all things are naked and open before Him with whom we have to do <sup>5</sup>."

<sup>5</sup> Scott's Comment.

## SERMON XIV.

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### THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

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2 CHRON. ix. 1.

“And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones : and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.”

THE word Sheba is in Scripture used in three different senses. 1. It is used in four places for the name of a man, as in the tenth chapter of Genesis, we read of a Sheba, a grandson of Ham ; in the twenty-fifth of the same book, we read of a Sheba, a grandson of Abraham ; in the second book of Samuel<sup>1</sup>, of a Sheba, the son of Bichri, who headed a revolt against David ; and in the first book of the Chronicles<sup>2</sup>, we read of a Sheba, the son of Abihail, of the tribe of Gad, who dwelt in the country

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xx. 1, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. v. 11. 13, 14.

of Bashan. 2. It is used in Joshua<sup>3</sup> for the name of a city; as we read of the Simeonites, that they had in their inheritance Beersheba, Sheba, and Moladah. 3. It is generally considered to be the name of a country in the passage we have just read—"And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon." But what country that was is a question which has given rise to various opinions. According to some, it was a part of Arabia Felix, towards the southern extremity of the Red Sea. In support of this opinion, we have, first, the general consent of historians and geographers, that that region was inhabited by a people called Sabæans, a name very nearly allied in sound and orthography to the Sheba of the inspired record, and supposed by many to be the descendants of Sheba, a grandson of Abraham<sup>4</sup>, by his second wife Keturah; secondly, the peculiar gifts which its queen presented to King Solomon, "spices, and gold, and precious stones," productions in which that country abounded; thirdly, the admitted fact that the Sabæans had queens for their sovereigns; fourthly, a tradition still existing among them, that their queen paid a visit to the renowned king of Israel; and, fifthly, the position of their country, at the extremity of the Arabian pe-

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xv. 26, and chap. xix. 2; in the former of these places, *Shema* seems written for *Sheba*.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. xxv. 3.

ninsula, corresponding with the words applied to it by our Saviour, "The uttermost parts of the earth." According to others, Sheba was a part of the African continent, now known by the name of Abyssinia. In support of this opinion are brought forward, first, the Scripture record<sup>5</sup>, that there was another Sheba, a grandson of Ham, whose descendants became the inhabitants of Africa; secondly, the fact that the gifts of "spices, and gold, and precious stones," referred to, are produced in Abyssinia, as well as in Arabia; thirdly, the equal, nay, the greater applicability of the description, "Uttermost parts of the earth," to Abyssinia, than to the southern extremity of Arabia, since a region more distant from Jerusalem than Arabia was in our Saviour's time known to the civilized world, while Abyssinia was reported to be the actual boundary of the habitable globe; fourthly, and chiefly, the striking and remarkable circumstances, that when Christianity first penetrated into that country, the inhabitants of it were found to profess the Jewish religion, which, according to a very ancient tradition among them, supported by the testimony of all the neighbouring nations, was introduced among their ancestors by their queen, after her visit to the king of Israel. The weight of arguments appears to prepon-

<sup>5</sup> Gen. x. 7.

derate in favour of the latter opinion, and I am much inclined to think with a modern celebrated traveller, who has visited that country, that she was queen of Abyssinia.

To this celebrated queen no name is given, either in the Old or in the New Testament. By the Arabians, she is called Balkes, by the Abyssinians, Maqueda, by Josephus, Candaule, by our Saviour she is simply called the queen of the South, and some think that the original word, which we translate "Sheba," is merely an appellative, signifying the south country, which may apply equally to the one or to the other of the countries we have named, and, therefore, decides nothing as to the specific region from whence she came, though, as we have already intimated, the words, "Uttermost parts of the earth," which follow, would seem to indicate a more distant region than the extremity of the Arabian peninsula, and point rather to the farthest part of the then habitable globe.

In this remote region she heard of the fame of Solomon, and she determined to gratify her eyes and ears with the sight and speech of a man so renowned throughout the world. The report of his wealth, and power, and magnificence had, doubtless, made a great impression upon her mind, as they afterwards contributed, when she beheld them, to excite in her mind an unutterable and overpowering admiration.



But it is clear, both from the Old and the New Testament, that these were not the principal attractions which drew her from her distant home to the court of the Israelitish monarch. Our Saviour says, that her motive in coming was to hear the wisdom of Solomon. The inspired author of the books of Chronicles says, that she came to Solomon because she had heard of his fame concerning the name of the Lord. He had exhibited incomparable wisdom, and he had erected an unrivalled temple in honour of Jehovah, and it was these wonderful instances of intellectual wealth, and deep and fervent piety, which had so strongly attracted her attention, and roused her to enterprise. It was not to gratify an idle curiosity, or to acquire worldly riches, or to form high connexions, or to make a vain ostentation of the pomp, and splendour, and riches, which already belonged to her, by exhibiting "a very great train, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold and precious stones,"—it was not motives of this nature, but a motive connected with the highest and most substantial interests of man in time and in eternity which dictated her arduous undertaking. It was not, as appears from the distinct statements, both of the inspired penman and of ~~Christ~~ himself, merely because she had heard of his princely power, his extensive dominions, his magnificent metropolis, but it was chiefly for the purpose of

being enlightened by his instruction, and to be edified by his piety—it was because she had heard of his wisdom, and heard of his fame concerning the name of the Lord—it was “to prove him with hard questions relative to these matters of solemn concernment,” and “to commune with him of all that was in her heart,” that she came from her far-off realm to Canaan and to Jerusalem.

It is highly probable that she possessed some previous knowledge of Jehovah, derived from her forefathers, or from the intercourse which had already taken place between her subjects and those of the King of Israel, whose navies had touched on the borders of all known lands, and carried on commercial transactions with almost all nations, that she had become uneasy and perplexed on religious subjects, and that she anxiously desired to become better acquainted with the true God. To satisfy her mind, and to tranquillize her conscience on these matters of highest import, she thinks no trouble too great to endure, and no labour too toilsome to undergo. The anxieties of her public station were not sufficient to divert her attention from the one thing needful. The vast distance of her residence could not deter her from seeking the place where heavenly truth was to be ascertained. The loyalty and attachment of her own people, the endearing connexions of her native land, and the danger

of sacrificing them all, could not restrain her from resorting to one, who, she trusted, would guide her steps to the region of undying love, and immortal friendship and communion. She cheerfully expended her worldly wealth in order to obtain the pearl of great price. She readily quitted her own metropolis in order to acquire a knowledge of the city which hath eternal foundations. She willingly came from the uttermost parts of the earth, in order to become acquainted with a better and enduring country. She came not with the selfishness of a grudging heart and an empty hand to the sanctuary of Jehovah, but "with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones;" and when she came to the king in Zion, she remained, not in any reserve, through pride, or vanity, or unbelief, but "she communed with him of all that was in her heart." We doubt not that she asked his advice about the best method of governing and improving her people. Rulers, when they meet together, should not spend their time in mere pomp and parade, in the reception of flattery, and in the expression of mutual congratulations, but should remember that the welfare of millions is committed to their keeping by One who will call them to account, and should diligently study, like careful fathers and nursing mothers, what they can do for the best interests of their subjects. We doubt not that the Queen

of Sheba inquired of the great oracle she came to consult, what were the best modes of civil government, what were the arts and the sciences, the cultivation of which would best promote the prosperity of her people, how knowledge was to be diffused, industry promoted, virtue cultivated, vice discouraged, violence restrained, weakness supported, poverty relieved, the young educated, the old respected, and all ranks of her people made comfortable and happy. These are the matters that should hold a prominent place in the minds of sovereigns when they meet face to face, and not, as has been too often the case, the questions how they shall subdue some obnoxious kingdom, or enslave some neighbouring people, or enlarge the bounds of their dominion, or overthrow and destroy each other. We are sure, from the commendation bestowed upon her by our Saviour, that the queen of Sheba came with no such sinister views, and with no such pernicious intentions; and while we are left safely to infer her anxiety to learn what might conduce to the temporal well-being of those committed to her charge, we are not permitted to doubt, that her solicitude extended to high and heavenly things, and to matters of spiritual and eternal moment. What hard questions she would propose concerning the creation of all things, the government of the world, and the existence of a Supreme Being! What

mighty problems she would bring forward concerning the origin of evil, the corruption of man, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the judgment to come, and the way of salvation! What interesting inquiries she would make concerning the modes of faith, the forms of worship, and the habits of life, most acceptable to the true and only God! And how her heart would thrill with satisfaction, and leap for joy, as the wise monarch would unroll to her the volume of Jehovah's mysteries, and tell her the history of man's fall and degeneracy—the calling of Abraham and his descendants out of the midst of idolaters, to preserve the knowledge of the true God in the world; the promise of the Messiah that should destroy the works of the devil, and bring back an apostate race to the obedience and the favour of a reconciled Creator! All her doubts were resolved, all her perplexities were unravelled, all her difficulties removed, for "Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king which he told her not."

These things were written for our learning, and herein is an encouragement to all to come unto Him, of whom Solomon was a type. If you are dark and perplexed with regard to your immortal concerns, come unto Him, and He will make your path of faith and duty clear as the light and bright as the noon-day. In



temporal difficulties and sufferings, if you will cast your burden upon the Lord, He will sustain you. He will guide you in darkness, comfort you in sorrow, support you in bereavement and destitution, and bring you by ways that you know not, and by paths that you little dream of, into regions of light and peace. In spiritual trials and temptations He is a never-failing friend in time of need. If your conscience is uneasy, come unto *Jesus*, and He will turn the troubled waters into a clear fountain, and the tumultuous waves which rage horribly, and disturb your rest, and frighten your hearts, into the sweet and calm repose of heavenly hope and assured confidence. If your mind is obscured by the clouds of unbelief, of infirmity, of temptation, or if it be distressed by the assaults of scepticism, infidelity or error—if you are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before you, distracted by the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, borne down by sorrow, doubt, or gloomy apprehensions, come unto *Jesus*, listen to His voice, open your heart unto Him in free communion, cast your burden upon His shoulders, and He will dissipate the shadows which rest upon you, surround you with a clear and wholesome atmosphere, make smooth paths for your feet, guide you out of the labyrinths of sin and sorrow, bring you unto a large and wealthy place, and displaying to your spiritual

vision a picture of the heavenly Jerusalem, will comfort your souls with a prospect of the glories and the pleasures which are at His right hand, to be enjoyed by his chosen for evermore.

The Queen of Sheba, after receiving from Solomon satisfaction of mind on matters connected with the highest wisdom and piety, proceeded to view the wonders of his metropolis, the arrangements of his court, the decorations of his palace, and the munificence of his oblations in the service of the Almighty; and when she “had seen all Solomon’s wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers”—all remarkable for number, order, regularity, and elegance—“and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord”—which “ascent” some would have to imply, the acclivity, adorned with unrivalled beauty of architecture, by which they entered from the city into the temple; others, to mean the solemn gravity, seriousness, and devotion of the Israelitish monarch, when he went to pay homage to the Monarch of the universe; others, (and this is the most probable translation,) to signify the burnt-offerings which, at vast expense, he offered in the house of the Lord—when she had seen all these things, especially his wisdom and piety, which, observe, are placed first and last, and most promi-

ment in the catalogue of the wonders which affected her senses and feelings—she became so overwhelmed with admiration and amazement that she fainted away, the probable meaning of the expression “there was no more spirit in her,” or at least that, unable to give utterance to the overpowering impressions she had received, she remained for a considerable time in mute astonishment. But, recovering herself, she said unto the king, “It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts, and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and behold the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame that I heard.”

And it is with feelings like these that every one who will really come to Him that is greater than Solomon, will contemplate his unsearchable riches. Many a man hears of Him, and, like the Queen of Sheba, does not sincerely and heartily believe the report concerning Him. He does not realize to his mind the truth of his servants' declarations. He does not even dream how good and gracious the Lord is, how rich in wisdom, how magnificent in power, how astonishing in kindness, love, and truth; how opulent and boundless in all the elements of happiness. But when, at last, He actually arises and comes from the strange land of darkness and sin to ascertain the reality of the good re-

port, he discovers with feelings of deep wonder that what he had heard was more than true; that the representation, though true so far as it went, had not done justice to the reality; that the half was not told him of the peace of mind, the satisfaction of conscience, the wealth of happiness, temporal and spiritual, which He will impart to those who seek his presence and approach his throne of grace, and “commune with him of all that is in their heart.” He had heard, for example, of pardon before, but he never imagined that the sense which he now entertains of it could give him half the holy joy he feels. He has heard before of peace to the troubled in spirit; but it had never entered into his heart to conceive that it was a peace which so far passeth all understanding. He had often heard the invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest:” but it was only when he accepted the invitation, and actually came to the Saviour, held spiritual communion with Him, and, by faith, tasted how precious the Lord is, that he found the rest he had promised so far transcending all earthly repose, that it may well be regarded as a foretaste of that heavenly rest, which remaineth for the people of God. And if it be true that in this world the presence of       diffuses so much of light and life, and imparts so much of joyous sensation, what will it be when we shall enter into his more immediate—

into his visible presence in the world of glory! Will not the recompense of reward that we shall then receive, cause us to forget all the toils and all the pains of our weary pilgrimage? Shall we not bless the hour when God first put it into our hearts to set forth on our journey to ~~the east~~ in spite of the worldly pleasures, and worldly interests, and worldly society, which tempted us to remain in the land of aliens and foreigners? Oh, yes, we shall recall with gratitude the time we heard of the fame of this King of kings with the ear of faith, and were induced to listen to the glad tidings of his salvation, and to go to his Zion and his sanctuary. But when we shall see Him as He is, our expectation will not only be fully realized, but far more than realized. We shall even wonder at the faintness of the representation of Him that had reached our ears. We shall be astonished that his heralds, and ministers, and servants spread throughout all lands, had not proclaimed more effectually, and given the world a more faithful picture of his unsearchable riches and his boundless resources of wisdom, power, goodness, and love. And when we shall find speech to express our feelings, we shall cry out in a rapture of admiration and amazement, "It was a true report," O King eternal, "that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and behold the half



was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.”

The Queen of Sheba, after the memorable declaration she made in these words of the report she had heard, and the belief she had entertained, as compared to the scenes which now presented themselves to her eyes, and the truths which now arrested and charmed her ears, breaks forth into strains of blessing and praise at the marvels before her, saying, “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighteth in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel, therefore made He thee king to do judgment and justice.” She then made presents to the king. “She gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices a very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.” And she received gifts probably more precious far in her eyes than those she bestowed, “for king Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty.” This is the last account we have of her, except that the inspired penman winds up her history with the words “so she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.” Behold herein

a type of the believer on earth and in heaven. Like the Queen of Sheba, filled with admiration and gratitude at the wisdom and loving-kindness of the Lord, he offers Him gifts according to the extent of his possessions. Having first given Him his heart, he gives Him of his worldly substance to promote his glory, and to advance his interests in the world. When the wise men of the east came to the infant Messiah, "they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh;" and there is not one true comer to the *Christ* who is not ready to open his treasures to do Him honour, and willing to give according to his ability of the perishable wealth to enlarge the boundaries of his dominion, to strengthen the sway of his sceptre, to help the poor of his flock, to feed the lambs of his fold, to bring back the sheep that are going astray to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, and to make his name known in all the earth, his saving health among all nations. Like the Queen of Sheba, too, he offers the Lord the free-will offering of blessing and praise. He ascribes all the riches of wisdom and goodness presented to the hearts of men by the Prince of Peace to the distinguished *love of God for his chosen people, the spiritual Israel*. He endeavours, even in this vale of sin and sorrow, to lift up his heart in gratitude, and to utter strains of praise for the marvellous loving-kindness of the Lord, and he shall praise Him worthily when he enters the Zion that is above,

and joins the multitude that no man can number of them who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and who shall cause the vaults of eternity to ring with Hosannahs to the Son of David. He shall lift up a voice worthy of the theme, when among the spirits of just men made perfect he shall “sing the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.” And lastly, like the Queen of Sheba, he shall receive from the greater than Solomon “all his desire, whatsoever he asketh for.” In this world he shall receive, as on this day<sup>6</sup> the first fruits were received, the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, concerning which the Saviour emphatically declares, Ask and ye shall receive; and along with that gift all that a fallen, fearful, and sorrowful creature can desire, the pardon of sin, the hope of glory, the assurance of bliss beyond the grave, rest to a troubled spirit and consolation to a broken heart, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness;” and in the world to come, he shall receive of the King of heaven’s royal bounty far more than he ever desired or ever thought of asking for, since “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of

man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Blessed are they now, unspeakably and eternally blessed *shall* they be, who wait upon the King of Zion. Happy are the people who are in such a case; yea, happy are the people whose God is the Lord."

Our blessed Saviour made a memorable use of the visit of Sheba's queen to Solomon, by way of reproof to the Jews for their insensibility to his heavenly teaching. From the fact of her having undertaken a long journey, faced difficulties, encountered perils, submitted to inconvenience and self-denial to learn of the king of Israel, he inferred the guilt of those who turned away from Him who brought instruction to their very doors, and who was far more capable of communicating what it concerned man to know. "The queen of the south," said He, "shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here." And I pray you carefully to observe that that inference is just as applicable to us, to whom the Wisdom of God, is preached, as to the people among whom He was personally present. How many, then, of this generation will the conduct of the Queen of Sheba condemn! The inhabitants of this country not only hear of the fame of *him*, but are continually invited to listen to the wisdom of *him*. They are not

only told again and again of his wealth and goodness and truth, but they are incessantly urged to come and see how gracious the Lord is. And yet they seem as men who hear but do not understand, or rather as men who receive an invitation, but do not appreciate it, and they go away one to his farm and another to his merchandise. How different was the conduct of the Queen of Sheba! There did but a vague report of Solomon's wisdom, and piety, and opulence reach her ears; no ambassador came from his court to give her an invitation; no assurance had been communicated to her that she would meet with a welcome reception. And yet, though unsolicited, uninvited, and ignorant of the light in which her visit would be looked upon by the king and his subjects, she came in pursuit of heavenly wisdom. Ye of this generation, who hear but do not obey the call to repentance, do ye not see that the Queen of Sheba will rise up in the judgment and condemn you, because she came uninvited to hear the wisdom of Solomon, "and behold a greater than Solomon is here?"

But some of you may say, it is not always convenient to attend to religious matters. We have difficulties to encounter that you know not of, impediments at home, impediments abroad, impediments in our families, impediments in our connexions. The scoffs of our friends and companions, the ridicule and calumny of our



enemies, the required self-denial, so hard to flesh and blood, discourage us from undertaking the journey to *Jerusalem*. All these things are against us, and prevent us from going to the throne of grace, to sit at the footstool of *Christ*, and to listen to his heavenly wisdom. And do you think these excuses will be accepted at the judgment? How trifling are your obstacles compared with those of the queen of the south! nay, how great your facilities in the prosecution of a heavenly journey! The word of God is nigh unto you. The Bible is put into your hands; the gospel is preached close to your homes; the ordinances of religion are easily accessible; and the quickly recurring sabbaths give you frequent opportunities for their participation. And if you avail not yourselves of privileges so exceedingly great, and suffer yourselves to be deterred from duty by inconveniences so insignificantly trifling, the Queen of Sheba will most assuredly rise up in judgment and condemn you, because she thought no difficulties too great to encounter, no labour too arduous to undertake, no journey too distant to perform, but "came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here."

Others of you may say the cares of this life, the occupations of our worldly calling, the anxieties to provide for our children, engross our minds and hinder us from giving that at-

tention to heavenly things, which, if disengaged from these obstacles, we should be willing to bestow. But are these impediments greater than, are they so great as, those with which the Queen of Sheba was surrounded? She might have most plausibly pleaded, "The concerns of my government are so numerous and so complicated that I cannot leave my kingdom and go to a distant land." She might have urged, that during her absence on so long a journey every thing would go wrong at home. Her subjects might be exposed to oppression or tempted to rebellion. Her country might be invaded and conquered, and her very crown might be plucked from her brow or denuded of its lustre, and she might have said, "All these things are against my going so far in quest even of heavenly wisdom." Can you adduce any excuses so plausible as these for inattention to divine instruction? Are all the cares and all the anxieties with which you are entangled, however multitudinous and complicated, equal or even comparable to hers? Can you, then, bring them forward as reasons for not coming unto One that is greater than Solomon? Oh, should not obstacles even greater than stood in her way, be in your imagination trifles light as air when they oppose your approach to so far superior a teacher? Should you not make any sacrifice, submit to any self-denial, forego any gratification, and incur any expense, in order to attend to the

wisdom of the only begotten Son of God, to listen to the oracles of immutable truth, and to seek the things which so indisputably belong to your everlasting peace? And if you refuse, will not the Queen of Sheba rise up with you in the judgment and condemn you, "because," notwithstanding her many worldly responsibilities and many worldly avocations, "she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here?"

How dreadful and desperate at the day of judgment will be the case of the man who has lived and died a Christian, but a Christian only in name! Every heathen among the millions assembled on that awful occasion will stand before the Searcher of hearts less guilty than he. Pagan nations may then ask for mercy on grounds which in his case will be altogether untenable. "The Egyptian may come from regions in which he worshipped mystic deities—the Greek may rise from the tomb on which heathen orators may have poured their panegyric—the Roman may rise from the ruins of some fane devoted to an imaginary divinity—the Hindoo may rise from the scene of wild rites performed in honour of wilder gods, and the poor Indian of the western world may come from the place where he poured forth his supplications to one whom he worshipped under the name of the great Spirit, and all

may come and kneel at the throne of judgment and ask for mercy with greater reason than the nominal Christian. They may plead that, if they lived and died in sin, it was because they lived and died in ignorance; that if the disease of their souls was never cured, it was not because they had rejected a physician, for they had never seen or known one; and that if there was great guilt on their heads, they had not the guilt of rejecting salvation, for they had never heard its joyful sound. Such may be their pleas for pardon and peace. But what excuse can be made by the nominal Christian? When the record of his transgressions is recited, what can he say in his defence? When his opportunities of salvation are set before him, what can he offer by way of excuse? He must instantly appear indefensible. He must stand altogether inexcusable. He must confess that he knew his master's will and would not do it. He must acknowledge that he wore the garb of holiness, and vowed the vows of piety, and possessed the privileges of a Christian, but that all was hollow, all was false, all was hypocritical, or all was formal. He promised obedience, and was sinful; he knew his duties, and forsook them; he was led to the feet of the Saviour and deserted him; and so he lived and died a Christian—but only in name—an alien in reality from the Father, who was willing to adopt

him, a traitor to the Son, who died for him, and unsanctified by the Holy Spirit, whose gifts were promised for his aid<sup>7</sup>.”

Beware, then, my Christian brethren, lest any of you be found at the judgment in this predicament. Let not the cares of this world keep you from the fountain of heavenly wisdom. Let no difficulties, or temptations, or avocations, or enjoyments, prevent you from coming to the King of Zion. Come and enrol yourselves among those who obediently listen to his teaching, and hold intimate communion with his spirit, and He will solve all your doubts, satisfy all your scruples, and chase away your every misgiving and despondency. Become not almost, but altogether, acquiesce entirely in his revelations, and abide without deviation in his precepts, and you will receive a light into your minds, such as never visited you before, and you will find rest for your souls, such as nothing earthly can bestow or take away. Like the Queen of Sheba, you will discover, that the report concerning Him, even by His most zealous and able servants, fell far short of the reality of his excellence. In the Zion that is below, in the militant here on earth, you shall be cheered by the rays of His pre-eminent wisdom, and when that wisdom shall have conducted you to the

<sup>7</sup> Altered and abridged from a Sermon, by the Rev. F. E. Thompson.



Zion that is above, you will adopt more heartily than ever the admiring language of Sheba's queen, "Behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame that I heard."

## SERMON XV.

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### WIDOW OF SAREPTA.

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1 KINGS xvii. 9.

„Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

WE advance this evening above eighty years in the course of the sacred history from the period to which our last discourse adverted, that of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. During that interval, scarcely a female character is noticed, except the wife of Jeroboam, whom that monarch sends to consult the prophet Ahijah, about the recovery of their son from sickness, and Maachah, the mother of Aza, who was by her son dethroned, degraded, or banished, on account of her idolatry, and both of whose histories are confined to those respective transactions, without any reference to their thoughts or feelings on the occasions, or to the general conduct of their lives. Passing, therefore, over them, as not particularized in a man-

ner sufficiently characteristic to furnish peculiar lessons, we come down to the reign of Ahab king of Israel, when we find two females presented to our notice, with circumstances suggestive of marked instruction,—the widow of Sarepta, the announced subject of our present discourse, and Jezebel, the wicked queen of Israel, whose life we propose to consider in our next.

On the death of Solomon, his kingdom became divided into two parts, of which one clave to Rehoboam, his son, and the other to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. While the successors of the former on the throne of Judah were some of them good, and others of them wicked kings, those of the latter on the throne of Israel were without exception idolatrous or impious characters. Too faithfully did they tread in the steps of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made the nation to sin, and the eighty years which followed from the commencement of his reign, appear to have been years of progressive degeneracy from the religion and morality of their forefathers. At last, there succeeded Ahab, who did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. He married Jezebel, the daughter of a heathen king, who was not only educated in idolatry, but bigotedly attached to the worship of false gods, and determinedly hostile to the worship of

Jehovah. Their sins cried aloud to heaven for vengeance, and a prophet suddenly appears to announce it in these words: "And Elijah, the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." To account for this apparently abrupt introduction into the sacred narrative of the prophet's appearance and address to the king, the Jewish commentators, with much plausibility, consider the circumstance as closely connected with the fact recorded at the conclusion of the preceding chapter. There we read of Hiel, a man of power and influence in the land, and probably a relative or friend of Ahab, rebuilding Jericho, and incurring in consequence the curse pronounced by Joshua five hundred years before, who, after destroying that city, had said: "Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city of Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born; and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates thereof." By the penalty thus threatened and realized in Hiel the Bethelite, is most probably meant, that when he laid the foundation of that city, his eldest son died by the judgment of God; that during the progress of the work, others of his children died in succession; and that when it was on the eve of completion, his last and youngest was taken

away ; so that, instead of securing for himself a name by the attempt, he effected and hastened the extinction of his family<sup>1</sup>. Ahab is supposed to have been deeply concerned for Hiel's affliction, and when assured by Elijah, whose counsel and warning he had probably often heard before, though they are not recorded, that it was an exact fulfilment of the threatened judgment of God, he is thought to have manifested his incredulity upon the subject, and to have answered with audacious impiety, "Is it likely that the curse of Joshua, the son of Nun, who was only the servant of Moses, should be fulfilled," and the curse of Moses himself, our pretended great prophet and lawgiver, should not be fulfilled, who said, "If ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them, then the Lord's wrath shall be kindled against you ; and he will shut up the heaven that there be no rain." Now, see how false is that denunciation, "All the Israelites serve other gods, and yet the rain is not withheld." While this daring defiance of Jehovah, like the presumptuous boast of Nebuchadnezzar, was scarce gone out of his mouth, Elijah replied, that the predicted judgment was at that moment on the eve of execution, and as one who, like Moses himself, was commissioned to make God's will known unto man, he assured the king, with

<sup>1</sup> See Note VII.



great solemnity, of the speedily coming wo, saying unto Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

After delivering this declaration, it became necessary for the prophet to seek personal safety by flight and concealment. God, knowing that on the first appearance of the impending drought, his life would be in peril from the resentment of Ahab, commanded him to direct his steps towards the east, and hide himself in the valley, through which flowed the brook Cherith, and promised that he should be sustained by the water of that stream, and by food miraculously supplied him, saying, "It shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee<sup>2</sup>." There he appears to have lived in seclusion and solitude for above a year, at the end of which space, the brook dried up by reason of the excessive and continued drought. Although the food miraculously supplied failed not, the water supplied by nature entirely ceased, which reminds you that heaven is far better and richer than earth. Worldly comforts, like the brook Cherith, may vanish when we stand most in need of them; but there is a stream which is never exhausted, the river of spiritual blessing which

<sup>2</sup> See Note VIII.

maketh glad the city of God, the well of living water which springeth up into everlasting life. God grant that we may all taste of that celestial element which the Saviour giveth his chosen to drink!

Elijah, upon the drying up of the brook, is directed, by the word of the Lord, to go to Zarephath or Sarepta, a town situated between the cities of Tyre and Sidon. There a widow woman was commanded to sustain him. This was a heathen country; and there were wise reasons for Elijah's going hither. He was persecuted by his own king, and, perhaps, rejected by his own nation, and, therefore, like the apostles afterwards, he is sent to bless the Gentiles. This was the very country from which his greatest enemy, Jezebel, had come and imported her idolatrous abominations, and he is sent thither for refuge, to expose the impotence of her malice against the protected of Jehovah, and, perhaps, also to encounter and reprove at its source the evil which had overspread and threatened to ruin his own country. It was the region whence the Syrophœnician or woman of Canaan came, who so perseveringly supplicated the mercy of Jesus for her diseased daughter, and, at last, received from him the gratifying and applauding answer, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And Elijah might be ordered thither to presignify our Saviour's reception of the woman of

Canaan, who, perhaps, was lineally descended from the widow of Sarepta, and thereby to indicate the future breaking down of the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and the admission of all nations into the church of the Redeemer, and the formation out of all kindreds and tongues and people of one fold under one shepherd, &c. He was ordered thither, moreover, partly, to show that God dispenses his blessings in the manner, in the places, and to the persons He pleases, without giving any account of his matters, and partly to warn those who disregard valuable privileges, that they shall be punished for their neglect and abuse of them by deprivation and destitution, according to the intimation of Jesus; and the inference drawn by the Jews from his allusion, as recorded in those words of the Evangelist, "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow; and all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath."

As Elijah, in obedience to the Divine command, approached the city of Zarephath or Sarepta, he beheld, near the gate, a woman engaged in the humble occupation of gathering a

few sticks for fuel. Doubtless he immediately recognized in her the widow appointed to sustain him. The drought, which had visited Canaan, had extended to the neighbourhood of Sarepta; and the prophet was parched by thirst, and exhausted by the fatigue of his long journey from the brook Cherith. Accordingly, he no sooner came within hearing of the person whom he had been directed to seek, than he said, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." There was, probably, something very venerable in the aspect of the prophet; or she had received a pre-intimation from heaven, which convinced her that he was a servant of the most High. She, therefore, hesitated not to comply with his request, though compliance with such a request under the pressure of the severe drought must have been a matter of difficulty and self-denial. Inasmuch as it was not impossible, however hard, she willingly prepared to perform the service, and to do what she could for God and his servant, and thus manifested a disposition that is most acceptable in his sight, and ensured his invaluable blessing. "If," says the Apostle, "there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not." "He," says our Lord, "that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the

name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward."

The poor Sareptan was hastening away on her mission of kindness, and showing her willing heart by going to fetch the water, when the prophet called her back and requested that she would add unto it the boon of a morsel of bread, since he was hungry as well as thirsty. But, alas! this additional request she thought she could not grant without exposing herself and her son to immediate death by famine. Every drop of water had become precious; but every crumb of bread had become invaluable and essential to the preservation of her own and her only child's life. Nay, she had no bread at all in her possession. All her store of provisions consisted of but a handful of meal and a little oil, which was only enough to alleviate or to stave off, for a few hours longer, the lingering tortures of starvation. She was able to spare that share of her small pittance which consisted of a cup of water, but she could not give away *all* that she had, and rashly precipitate into ruin. She had, indeed, a willing heart, and she probably yearned over the distress of the man of God; and to convince him that if she did not satisfy his hunger as well as his thirst,



it was entirely from want of ability so to do, without imminent risk to herself and her dearest on earth, she called the Omniscient to witness her sincerity, and very solemnly said, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

What a dreadful state of things had the sins of Israel and its rulers brought upon the land! Let us be thankful that we are spared notwithstanding our iniquities and idolatries as a nation and as individuals. Did we consider how much better we are dealt with than we deserve, and how many are destitute of the necessaries of life, not only should we not hanker after luxuries and superfluities, but having food and raiment we should be well content, and our heart would overflow with gratitude to Him whose goodness we see over all his works, and whose mercy to us endureth for ever.

Elijah, upon hearing the solemn and evidently sincere declaration of the poor widow, might have been expected to turn to some other quarter for relief. An ordinary traveller would have despaired of obtaining aid from such destitution, and would have been disposed to regard any previous intimation to that effect as a delusive and mistaken notion. But being a prophet of God, like Abraham, he staggered not at his

promise through unbelief, but was bold in faith, and replied unto the woman, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." Oh, what a trial of faith was this to a poor woman that was a heathen, or at most a proselyte to the religion of Israel! To be required to give to a stranger a share of what was barely sufficient for herself and son, in the hope of a miraculous increase! To part with what she had actually in hand, and what was immediately necessary, on the promise of a future and supernatural supply! To risk the loss of life by the diminution of its necessary sustenance, on the bare assurance that the sustenance would not fail and that life would remain unhurt. "Presumptuous and unfeeling man," some in such a predicament would have answered, "there is no reason in thy request. Wert thou a friend, a relative, or even a brother, you could scarcely expect from me that which is absolutely necessary to myself and my child. But for a stranger to ask of me in this dying extremity to make a provision for him, rather than for my own flesh and blood, how preposterous a demand! and with regard to the promise, that the meal

shall not waste and that the oil shall not fail, how shall I believe it? If thou hast power with God to obtain such a continuance of the means of subsistence, how is it that thou thyself now standest in need? Do for thy individual self what thou undertakest to do for thee and me and mine together. Or do beforehand what thou promisest to perform hereafter. Secure a present supply if thou art so confident of future assistance. It will be vain to claim the fulfilment of thy promise, when all my store is gone, and nothing remains to supply its place, and I and my child shall be dying. Presumptuous and unfeeling man, miserable comforter art thou in this my hour of need."

But that was not her language. It would have been the language of an unbeliever. She was not of that number. She knew that she was addressing a prophet of the true God, whose word would not return to Him void, a servant of the Creator of the heaven and the earth, who could cause the wilderness to yield food and the desert to send forth rivers for his chosen people. She had learnt something of the might and goodness of Jehovah, her heart was touched with love and reverence for his holy name, and like the woman of Canaan in after times, great was her faith in his ever-during mercy and his inexhaustible bounty. She, therefore, took Him at his word as delivered by the prophet, and "went and did according to the

saying of Elijah." Though not descended from Abraham according to the flesh, she was a true daughter of that pattern of believers, who when he received the command, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of," proceeded without hesitation to sacrifice him, "of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Hard are the commands sometimes laid on the people of God—arduous the task they are sometimes called upon to perform—severe the self-denials and afflictions they are sometimes compelled to undergo. But wonderful is the power of faith, wonderful the fortitude of faith, wonderful the daring of faith, wonderful the achievements of faith. "Faith," saith the Apostle, "hath subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword,—wherefore seeing we have so great a cloud of witnesses to the efficacy of a living faith—let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

The widow of Sarepta believed the word of God, and believing obeyed, obedience being the invariable result of a living faith, and the only fruit by which the children of God are certainly

known. Let us now consider the result which followed from her faith and obedience. "She and the prophet and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spake to Elijah." She who gave at the divine command received a hundred-fold. She who would have presently lost her life by famine, if she had sought to save it without reference to God's will, did by risking the loss of it at his word abundantly find it. She who would have perished perhaps on the morrow, had she possessed a selfish and grudging and distrusting heart, did by the workings of a liberal faith and self-denying charity, live in abundance and happiness for many days. While the rest of the Sareptans, and the Tyrians, and Sidonians, and the Israelites were fainting, and grieving, and dying by the sore judgment which afflicted the land, she and hers, like Noah and his family in the ark, were safe amid the cries of distress and the shrieks of agony. Happy thought for her and hers, that she resolved to open her hands to the hungry and famished prophet! How she would bless the hour when he appeared at the city gates! How she would thank the God of Israel for having brought her from her desolate home at that particular moment, and for having put it into her heart to offer his servant the willing cup of water, and for having given her strength to do far more than she could



ever have thought herself able to perform—to share with him the very last morsel of her worldly subsistence in the midst of pressing want. How amply was she now repaid! How she would rejoice in the presence of the man of God, and how delightedly she would listen to his lessons of heavenly wisdom! With what fond affection and grateful upliftings of the heart to God for his goodness, she would contemplate that only son, alive, and well, and happy, with whom awhile before she had thought in wretchedness to die! Oh, seasonable and wonderful deliverance! What shall she render unto the Lord for his marvellous loving-kindness? With what fitness she could anticipate the admiring and devout exclamation,

“How blest are all thy servants, Lord,  
How great thy grace to me.”

Seek ye to be possessed of the like precious faith and to do the like precious work, and ye shall inherit a blessing that is but faintly symbolized by her temporal prosperity; peace in the midst of an anxious world, hope in the midst of discouraging circumstances, comfort in tribulation, joy in sorrow; and when this short life is ended, glory and bliss unspeakable at God's right hand for evermore.

“To patient faith the prize is sure,  
And all that to the end endure  
The cross, shall wear the crown.”

But that crown, the crown of perfect enjoyment, is not to be looked for on this side the

grave. We may have peace, we may have hope, we may have joy in believing, but the peace is often ruffled, the hope is often mixed with fear, and the joy is often alloyed with grief in this vale of tears. When we have escaped from one evil, we are not unfrequently surprised by another. When we think ourselves safe from harm, we are then sometimes on the brink of a dreadful calamity. It was precisely so with the widow of Sarepta. Famine had come on the land, and reduced both her and her only son to death's door. Elijah seasonably appeared at the city gates, and by his residence in her house saved her household from the impending ruin, and changed its want into abundance and its misery into happiness. But, alas! behold the widow's heart, which after a recent weight of sorrow had been made to sing for joy, weighed down with a new load of grief. Her only son, to whom she had so touchingly alluded in her conversation with the prophet, is overtaken by disease. What the nature of his ailment was, the sacred narrator has not specified. It might be a lingering illness, which required the mother's careful watching and tender attention for weary days and sleepless nights. How many hopes and fears would in that case alternate in her trembling bosom! To-day she would hope the best. To-morrow she would fear the worst. Now his brightening countenance would light up her own with returning

smiles. Now his languid looks would stream her eyes with tears. Now the hectic flush of his cheeks would hold forth a delusive prospect of renovated vigour. Now his pallid and sinking aspect would indicate the last stage of debility. Now his encouraging and animating words would bid her not despond. Anon his failing strength and quivering frame would cause her heart to vibrate with anguish, as her lips pronounced the words "There is no hope." O ye mothers who have thus watched your dear ones, you can tell, and you alone can tell the arrows of grief which the while pierced her breaking heart. Or perhaps it was, and we are inclined to think that it was, an acute disease—a sudden and overwhelming attack, which, in a few hours, reduced the strong and the sprightly youth or infant into a spectacle of pitiable weakness and wretchedness. Perhaps the plague or the pestilence seized for its prey the child that had been rescued from the ravages of the famine, and suddenly turned the widow's home into a scene of darkness and wo, and brought her down at once from the highest pinnacle of happiness to the lowest pit of misery, dashing to the ground with one fell swoop all her edifice of serenity and joy. Whichever was the case, the issue was disastrous, fatal. Physicians, if there were any, proved of no avail. A prophet's presence appeared vain. A mother's anxious care and flowing tears could not stop the progress of the

fell disease. "His sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him." The last looks had been exchanged, the last groan was uttered, the last sigh was heaved, the last struggle was over, and all was still.

All was still. But the stillness was presently succeeded by the heart-rending cries of the now childless mother. The blow fell with dreadful force on the bereaved widow, and threw her into a paroxysm of bitter grief. She went in her distress and distraction to the prophet, and passionately exclaimed, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? Is this, after all, the purpose of thy mission? Is this the fruit of my readiness to do thee a kindness? Whereas I took thee for a messenger of good, when thou savedst me and mine from famine, is it the fact that thou art come unto me for severe judgment, to call my sin to remembrance, and to punish me for mine iniquities by the death of my only son?" But why should she impute his death to the prophet? Why should she think that *he* had saved him from famine to kill him by disease? And why should she charge the prophet with calling her sins to remembrance, as if God visited for wickedness only when pointed out and denounced by his servants? It would appear that Ahab and Jezebel had some such idea when they persecuted

the prophet, as if he had been the author of the drought which afflicted the kingdom. Thus men are now often made miserable by the denunciations of God's ministers, and charge them with harshness and severity when they lay bare the guilt and danger of the wicked, and warn them in unsparing terms to flee from the wrath to come: whereas, not the exposure, but the existence of sin, not the denunciation, but the cause of wrath, are the things to be deprecated and avoided. The delusion is attributable to inconsideration. The people do not *know* better, because they do not stop to *consider*, even as the Sareptan, transported with grief, had had yet no time for reflection, and therefore addressed the prophet with the impatient interrogation, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

This was a wrongful insinuation, and might have provoked a sharp reproof in answer. But Elijah, though in general apparently hasty in his temper as he was fervid in his zeal, refrained from a word of censure. Grace subdued him into a condescending sympathy with the bereaved one before him, though she spoke in ignorance and in haste. Like a greater than He, who, when told by the sisters of Lazarus that if He had been present their brother would not have died, and thus upbraided indirectly



with a neglect of duty to his friend, did not aggravate their distress by reprimanding their unjust imputation, but mingled his tears with theirs, and wept, and tenderly asked, "Where have ye laid him?"—like him, the prophet received the desolate mourner's expostulation without retorting, and doubtless wept like Him at the wo occasioned to families by the ravages of death, the sad entail of man's transgression, and having, we little question, like Him, soothed the heart-broken mother with looks of kindness, and words of comfort, he put an end to the distressing scene by saying, "Give me thy son." For what purpose was such a request? What availed it to transfer the lifeless corpse from arm to arm, and from bosom to bosom? But God has remedies in store, when man despairs of a cure. God has resources at his command when human means are exhausted. The Sareptan who had witnessed the increase of the meal and the oil began to consider this. Her faith, which burnt so bright before, which led her to hope almost against hope in reliance on the prophet's words before—that faith had only been obscured or weakened, not extinguished by the flood of affliction which had just betided her. It revived when the first shock was passed, and gradually resumed its former brightness, and led her to believe that He who had saved her son from perishing by famine, would be able to recover him from the arms of death; and, upon

his saying, "Give me thy son," she allowed him, without gainsaying, to take him out of her bosom. Whereupon the prophet carried him into his own apartment, and laid him upon his own bed, and then lifted up his heart and voice in earnest supplication to the Lord and giver of life. Every word of his brief prayer is full of weighty meaning. He pleads his interest in the Most High, as one who had borne witness for him in Israel, as one who had suffered for his sake, as one who, at all risks, had preferred him to Baal, and such false divinities, addressing him with "O Lord my God." He pleads the peculiarly desolate condition of the sufferer, and her very important services to himself, the Lord's prophet, saying, "Hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn?" He pleads the extreme severity of the stroke that had been inflicted upon her, "slaying her son," her only son, her only comfort in the wide world, her only staff of support in the pilgrimage of life, her anchor in the floods of adversity, her joy in the sunshine of prosperity, the solace of her declining years, and the prop of her old age. To bring on such a woman, under such circumstances, such an evil as to slay her only son would, the prophet might fear, be made a ground of reflection on both himself and the true God, whom he served. He, therefore, pleads it with God in prayer, and entreats that it might be reversed,

so that glory and not dishonour should redound to his great name. "He stretched himself upon the child three times," denoting by the action the earnestness of his wish, the heartiness of his desire, the agony of his prayer for his recovery, and wishing, as it were, to aid his reanimation by communicating warmth from his own person, "and he cried unto the Lord again, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come unto him again." And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

And now how the scene changes again in the Sareptan's home, as it changed once before from mourning to gladness, from darkness to light, from despair to happiness! How the spirit of the prophet himself revives! How his heart leaps within him at this wonderful proof of God's power over the dead, of mercy to the widow, of kindness and favour to himself! How gratefully and joyfully would he take up again in his arms the child so marvellously revived, deliver the recovered treasure to his wo-worn mother, and utter the welcome sound, "See, thy son liveth!" And who can describe that mother's feelings now? To see that face blooming again, which has assumed the paleness of death—to behold those eyes beam upon her again which she thought had closed for ever—to feel that flesh warm again which in

her imagination had become cold as the clod of the valley, and fitted only for the damp and dark sepulchre! Oh, what a blessed change; communicating almost as much of life to the mother as to the son! All things became new with her on the joyous occasion. New blood flowed through her veins, new spirits animated her frame, new lustre sparkled in her eye, new bloom suffused her countenance, new hope came, and her faith was renovated and become stronger far than before the mournful visitation, and she could speak henceforth by faith, with the confidence of visible reality and absolute certainty, for she said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." She believed it once before, but her faith was imperfect, and it received a shock by the mournful visitation. It was impossible altogether to divest herself of such an opinion before, when she saw the meal and the oil feeding a whole family for weeks, and months, and years, and remaining unconsumed, according to the prophet's words. But now she had the strongest proof of his veracity and divine inspiration, that could possibly be exhibited—the same as our Saviour's greatest miracles—the raising of the dead to life, and, therefore, she could now say, not only *I believe*, but "*I know* that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

1. We hence learn the uses of affliction. It gives strength to our faith, depth to our repentance, and steadfastness to our profession. The Sareptan believed in Jehovah on the first appearance of the prophet, yea, believed probably before his appearance, and she was disposed to listen to his advice, to relieve his need, and to give him a share of her all. Her belief grew as she conversed more with him and perceived day by day the marvellous fulfilment of his prediction. But there were flaws in her faith.—There were sins, as appears from her subsequent doubts and impatient misgivings regarding the prophet's visit. There were sins of which she had not cordially repented, as appears by her question, "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?" She must, therefore, pass through another furnace of affliction in order to be purified from remaining corruptions, and to be made complete in heavenly graces, and steadfast and immovable in the works of the Lord. Before she was sore afflicted she went wrong: but after the fiery ordeals she learnt to keep the statutes of the Lord.

2. We hence learn, secondly, the blessings which attend the footsteps of those "who are merciful after their power, who, if they have much, give plenteously, if they have little do their diligence to give of that little, and what good rewards they gather for themselves in the day of necessity." How small were the pos-



sessions of the Sareptan widow! and yet out of that pittance she gave a share to him who was zealous for God's honour and suffering in God's cause, and manifested thereby her readiness to mitigate human want and to advance the divine glory; and how rich were the rewards of her charity and self-denial! she and her household enjoying plenty, while all around were pining in want! she and her household edified by the converse of the prophet of the most High, while all around were overshadowed with heathen darkness! her intervening temporary affliction replaced by permanent happiness, her dead son restored to life, her conversion thereby completed, her mind enlightened, her faith matured, her repentance perfected, her profession made more steadfast, and her soul made more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light! So be ye merciful and kind to the needy for your Saviour's sake, and you shall be rewarded a hundredfold both here and hereafter. So make ye to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, and you shall be received into everlasting habitations.

3. The lesson, which our Saviour deduced from Elijah's visit to the woman of Sarepta, to reprove and convince the Jews, is a lesson not inapplicable to us, and one which we shall do well to ponder. There were many widows in Israel, who needed Elijah's miraculous aid, and who would doubtless have been during the sore

famine most glad of an undiminished handful of meal and unexhausted cruse of oil. But that people with their king had disregarded his admonitions, undervalued his counsel, and compelled him to flee for his life. No wonder then that he should turn to the Gentiles, and take up his abode where his instructions would be acceptable, his services available, his person revered, and his God glorified. Does not the fact, as applied by our Saviour, show unto us the peril of despising religious privileges, and of undervaluing the divine word and ordinances? If we appreciate them not, they will ultimately be taken away from us as a nation, they will assuredly be missed and regretted by us as individuals, when distress and anguish come upon us. Learn ye then to know the day of your visitation. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near."

## SERMON XVI.

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### JEZEBEL.

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1 KINGS xxi. 25.

“ But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”

IN the female characters of Scripture, to which we have directed your attention, we have contemplated the influence of woman in a variety of scenes and stations of life. In general we have beheld her exercising her power beneficially. In some few instances we have seen her spend her talents injudiciously. But the subject of our present discourse stands forth on the canvass of inspiration with a prominence of immoral influence such as is not exceeded, if equalled, in the annals of the world. In the words of the text we have the most emphatic description that can be easily imagined of an odiously mischievous character: “There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.” Although there was not one of the bad kings of Israel so un-

principled as Ahab, we are assured that to this unequalled profligacy and profaneness he was stimulated by the advice and the example of one who should have drawn him by the cords of love to walk in the paths of righteousness. O sad perversion of opportunities of good to the purposes of evil!

Her history is deserving of our most careful attention for warning, for correction, and for reproof; and as we proceed to consider the different parts of her history, we shall see to what evils she influenced or stirred up her husband. 1. We shall see *first* that she influenced him to *idolatry*. This might have been expected from one of her country and lineage. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, or as the profane writers call him Ithobalus, the eighth king of Tyre and Sidon, two cities of great note, and probably having each the honour of a royal residence, and commanding the allegiance of an extensive surrounding territory. The name Ethbaal<sup>1</sup> implies a near connexion with Baal, an object of oriental idolatrous worship, considered generally to be the same as the sun; and as the offices of high priest and supreme ruler were, in ancient times, and eastern countries, frequently united, it is supposed that the father of Jezebel was both chief minister of Baal, and chief ruler of the Sidonians and Tyrians. With the worship of Baal,

<sup>1</sup> See Stackhouse.

or the sun, was intimately connected the worship of Astarte, the grove or sylvan goddess, supposed, by some, to be the same as the moon, or Diana; by others, to be the same as Venus; and by others, to be the same as Priapus, the protector of gardens and orchards. Jezebel, being the daughter of a man who was at once the high priest of such a religion, and the sovereign of the people among whom such a religion prevailed, was, by country, by education, and by relationship, predisposed in favour of idolatry. Ahab was most culpable in forming a matrimonial alliance with the inhabitants of such a country, and the daughter of such a parent; and his espousal of her is markedly pointed out as an extraordinary and excessive offence against Jehovah the true God. "As if it had been a light thing," says the sacred historian, "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." Such a union produced, as might have been expected, the most melancholy effects among the children of Israel. The monarch had already gone so far in apostasy as to patronize and encourage the worship of the calves of Jeroboam; but the heathen woman, whom, in disregard of God's command by Moses<sup>2</sup>, he brought into his kingdom, and family, led away his heart farther than ever from the religion of Jehovah. She

<sup>2</sup> Deut. vii. 3, 4.



not only made the worship of the false gods we have mentioned fashionable at the court, and strove, by every encouragement, to establish it through the length and breadth of the land, but sought, by every means, to supersede and extirpate the true religion, persecuted its priests and prophets without mercy; and had it not been for the humane and pious interference of Obadiah, a righteous man connected with her household, and placed in a situation to counteract her murderous designs, who hid a hundred of Jehovah's ministers in a cave, she would have left scarcely one remaining in the whole kingdom. Who can imagine the sufferings and the woes occasioned by such unrelenting fury? What miseries must have been endured by individuals and by families, by fathers, mothers, and helpless children! How sad the condition of the remaining people of God!

But perhaps it will be said that this idolatrous and persecuting queen acted in ignorance, and, like Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, thought that she was promoting the cause of truth, while she was serving the interests of Satan. We shall now discover, as we proceed with her history, that, if she once laboured under a delusion, she must, afterwards, have resisted conviction, and persisted in evil, despite of demonstration. When, through her influence, idolatry had almost overspread the entire land, and the prophets and priests of Jehovah had

been well-nigh extirpated, a man of undaunted spirit, and charged with a divine commission, comes from a distant part of the kingdom, and presenting himself before the king, remonstrates with him on the abominable idolatries and cruelties which, under his sanction, prevailed. Elijah, the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead beyond Jordan, an apt ty of t. . . st, who severely reprov'd his contemporaries as a generation of vipers, and warn'd them to flee from the wrath to come, armed with supernatural boldness and intrepidity, charged the king to his face with the iniquities of his house and kingdom, and menaced him with the impending vengeance of Heaven. Ahab, under the influence of Jezebel, probably treated his denunciations as idle and groundless; and when Elijah, as the rabbins with great appearance of truth suppose, pointed to the execution of a Divine curse upon the re-builder of Jericho<sup>3</sup>, as a proof of the inspiration of the Bible, and of the divinity of the Mosaic religion, it is imagin'd that the king answer'd with incredulous scorn, and alleg'd an existing fact in confutation of the prophet's theory, the present prevalence of foreign worship; the abettors of which, if Moses' words were true, could not be permitted to exist. "Then," repli'd Elijah, "if you have no faith in Joshua, or in Moses' words, witness this prediction of mine,

<sup>3</sup> See Sermon on the Widow of Sarepta.

which shall be fulfilled speedily, and in the lifetime of thee and me.” “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” In six months the truth of this prediction began to appear, and for three years such a drought came upon the land as reduced both man and beast to the last extremity of suffering, and compelled even the king himself to pass from place to place throughout the kingdom in search of “all fountains of water, and all brooks, and grass to save the horses and mules alive, and to prevent the utter destruction of all the beasts.” But, notwithstanding this verification of Elijah’s words, and the punishment thus evidently inflicted by Jehovah, on account of the idolatries introduced, Jezebel refused to be reformed. She persisted in the exercise of an evil influence upon her husband’s mind, and continued to stir him up to the maintenance of the false religion, and to the discouragement and suppression of the true. Ahab, evidently at her instigation, sent to all the surrounding nations in pursuit of Elijah, with a view to his destruction; and she herself, probably, at the very time when the predicted judgment was raging, ordered to execution all the prophets of the true God remaining in the country, that she could get into her power. She, therefore, persisted in idolatry, and influenced her husband to persist in idolatry against

conviction, and disregarded the undeniable judgment of God.

We shall next see that she persisted in the sin in disregard of conviction produced by the *mercy* of God. When the drought, and the accompanying famine had continued three years, and Samaria was reduced to the uttermost distress by the want of food and water, Elijah is commanded by God to return from Sarepta to his afflicted country, and propose to the king its conditional relief. He is commissioned to declare that rain would descend again upon the land, if the worship of the true God were restored, and the ministers of idolatry exterminated. For that purpose he first presents himself to good Obadiah, who had saved some of the prophets of the Lord from the ruthless hand of Jezebel, and to him makes known his willingness to meet the king on the subject of the pressing calamity. The interview takes place. The king, at first, charges the prophet with being the cause of the prevailing tribulation, saying, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" The prophet sharply retorts the accusation, and unhesitatingly ascribes the whole mischief to the iniquity and idolatry of the king and his house. Ahab, withdrawn for a time from the influence of Jezebel, appears to have been staggered and softened by the penetrating speech of Elijah, and to have expressed his willingness to support the true worship, upon receiving another and

unequivocal proof of Jehovah's supremacy. Elijah answered that he was ready to furnish that proof. He proposed that the ministers of idolatry and he should meet on mount Carmel, and put their respective pretensions to a public trial. The proposal seemed to Ahab unobjectionably fair, and he appears to have readily acceded to it. The prophets of Baal are ordered to repair to the appointed place. Elijah single-handed meets his numerous antagonists, amounting to no fewer than four hundred and fifty. The scene of contest is surrounded by a countless multitude of spectators, drawn together probably by the intensest curiosity and interest from every part of the country. The issue was a matter of life or death to the contending parties, for according to the law of Moses, those who should be demonstrated to be the abettors of a false religion must suffer capital punishment as traitors against the theocracy of Israel. Elijah stood up and said to the assembled throng, who might be regarded as the representatives of the whole nation, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." He then proposed that the contending parties should respectively offer sacrifices, the prophets of Baal to their god, and he to his God, and that the god who should answer by fire, that is send down fire from heaven to consume the victims on the altars, should be acknowledged and wor-



shipped as the true God. The people unani-  
mously approved of the proposal. The contest  
was proceeded with, and the issue was not  
doubtful. The ministers of idolatry cried to  
their idol in vain from morning even until noon;  
“but there was no voice, nor any that answered.”  
But when the servant of Jehovah lifted up his  
prayer “the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed  
the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones,  
and the dust, and licked up the water that was  
in the trench. And when all the people saw it  
they fell on their faces and exclaimed, The  
Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.”  
The prophets of Baal being proved to the  
satisfaction of all to be impostors and deceivers,  
were put to death according to the law, and  
the land being thereby cleared of the supporters  
of idolatry, the cause of the judgment was  
removed, and an abundance of gracious rain  
was vouchsafed from heaven by the mercy of a  
reconciled God. All hearts seemed now con-  
vinced. The open discomfiture of the priests  
of Baal, together with the blessed change which  
immediately followed their destruction, would  
appear to leave no doubt in the most incred-  
ulous mind as to the proper object of worship.  
Even Ahab appears to have been convinced and  
softened by the indisputable testimony of what  
he had seen, and heard, and felt. He returns to  
his home. He relates the wonderful scene to  
Jezebel, hoping perhaps that now she would no

longer continue idolatrous, but would become a willing convert to the religion of Jehovah, and an obedient and grateful disciple to the eminently gifted Elijah. But neither prophecy, nor miracle, nor judgment, nor mercy will avail with the hardened heart, that is untouched by divine grace. So far from being converted to the true God, she burst into passionate exclamations of rage at the loss of the priests of the false one, vowed vengeance against Elijah, who had brought about their execution, and could not refrain from instantly sending him a furious message to that effect, saying, "So let the gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." How dreadful is the power of evil! How it can change the softness of a woman into the cruelty of a monster, and the kindness of a woman into the revenge of a demon! Neither scourges nor favour, neither severity nor goodness, can prevail with the daughters any more than with the sons of men, whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil.

2. We come now to exhibit the evil influence of Jezebel in stirring up her husband to *crime*. We have seen that she stirred him up to idolatry, and opposed his better mind, when the scene of Mount Carmel and the consequent return of rain had convinced and softened his heart; and inclined him probably to resume and re-establish the religion of his forefathers. We shall now

see how she stirred him up to crimes which otherwise he would not have dared to commit. There lived at Jezreel a righteous man of the name of Naboth, whose vineyard bordered on the grounds belonging to the royal palace. Ahab, in disregard of the tenth commandment, coveted this possession of his neighbour, and wished to annex it to his own property, it being conveniently situated for the extension of his park or gardens. He therefore communicated with him upon the subject. He was not so unjust as to expect it without an equivalent price. He offered to give a better vineyard in exchange for it, or to pay its full value in money. But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." To understand the apparent abruptness and seemingly unnecessary solemnity of this answer, we must call to mind a law of Moses concerning inheritances, and we shall find that compliance with such a request would have been an illegal and impious act. God had distinctly forbidden that any one in Israel should finally alienate his patrimony. It might be sold or mortgaged for a time, when circumstances rendered it necessary, but it must invariably return at the Jubilee, if not redeemed before, to the possession of the original owner. Now Ahab most evidently wished Naboth to part with his vineyard irrevocably,—a request that could not be complied with consistently with

law and religion. It was a disregard of the divine will in Ahab to express or even to entertain such a desire, and a proof that his heart had been depraved and perverted by the transference of his allegiance and worship from the true to false gods. It would have been wicked and impious in Naboth to have gratified such a desire by making such a bargain. It was not vanity or pride, or even ancestral associations alone; as a pious man and loyal subject he might have subdued such feelings in deference to the wishes of his royal master. Nor was it the fear of a temporal disadvantage; it would most probably have been a considerable advantage to him in a temporal view, for he was offered a better vineyard in exchange, or its full worth, perhaps more than its worth in money. It was chiefly a veneration for the sacredness of the law, and a fear to offend its Author, which prompted his peremptory refusal. When requested to part with his vineyard, which had descended to him from his ancestors, he was asked to "do a great evil and sin against God." He therefore, as a man of righteousness and holiness, received the proposal with horror, and unhesitatingly answered, "The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

Ahab, who had sinfully set his heart upon this property, was greatly chagrined and disappointed at Naboth's refusal. But dis-

pleased as he was, and despotic as he was, he durst not by force seize upon another's inheritance, as it would have been a flagrant breach of the constitution of the country, and, perhaps, by creating a universal panic respecting the security of property, would have endangered the stability of his throne. Neither could he alter the law upon the point, the Israelitish kings having no authority to alter, annul, or enact a single statute of the realm, the code of Moses being the alpha and omega of the national legislation. Under these circumstances, the evil passion of covetousness, and his inability to gratify it, caused him excessive annoyance, embittered all his enjoyments, and appear to have seriously affected his health. "He laid him down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." What sources of misery are capricious appetites and ill-regulated desires! Here is a man, already lord of ten-twelfths of the country, the king of Israel, and the recent conqueror of Syria, made wretched, because he could not obtain possession of a poor man's vineyard. What a proof of the vanity of worldly things, and their inability to "minister to a mind diseased!" How true it is that happiness depends not on outward circumstances, but on the healthy condition of the heart! The poor man, who has the peace of God dwelling within him, is happy with his scanty fare. The rich man, who is a stranger



to faith and holiness, is wretched in the midst of luxury and abundance. Oh, let us cease to hanker after the things which perish in the using, and bear daily in mind that one thing is needful; and pray for grace to choose and cherish that good part, which cannot be taken away!

Jezebel, upon observing the dejection of her husband, and learning its cause, instead of performing the duty of a discreet and pious wife, and remonstrating with him on the unreasonableness and wickedness of yielding to an unhallowed passion, instantly undertook to gratify his humour by violence and wrong. "What," said she, "dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." A foreigner by birth, and the daughter, probably, of a despotic sovereign, she had no idea of being trammelled by laws in the accomplishment of a favourite object; and she dared, what her husband educated in Israel, though he was extremely vicious, had not dared to do,—to act like the most arbitrary of sovereigns, who acknowledged no law but their own will, and to seize another's property by the destruction of its owner. She adopted a most nefarious scheme for the purpose—a scheme the more abominable in the sight of God and upright men, from its combining with robbery and murder the odious vices of hypocrisy and per-

jury. She wrote letters, in Ahab's name, to the elders and nobles of Jezreel, and commanded them to procure two men, sons of Belial, *i. e.* two men who were unprincipled enough to take a false oath, and for a bribe to swear away the life of a fellow-creature. She ordered that Naboth should be charged with treason and blasphemy, the penalty for which, according to the Mosaic law<sup>4</sup>, was death by stoning. She ordered a fast to be proclaimed in the place, to intimate the deprecation of a great calamity impending over the nation for its toleration of such a crying evil as the existence of such a traitor and blasphemer within the city. From the adoption of such a mode of proceeding, it would appear that even Jezebel was not bold enough to order his arrest and execution without assigning a reason for it to the public, there being yet a semblance of civil liberty, and the outward forms of justice in Israel, notwithstanding the general corruption and degeneracy. But when the principles of a nation are corrupted by the overflowings of idolatry, there are ways of compassing the destruction of the innocent without departing from the letter of the law, and the ceremonials of justice and religion. Justice and religion are themselves made the pretexts for perpetrating the most atrocious crimes. The very seat of justice is corrupted, and the very sanctuary of religion

<sup>4</sup> Lev. xxiv. 14.

polluted. The handmaids of virtue become the abettors of vice, and the daughters of Heaven are changed into ministers of hell, the angels of light into the emissaries of Satan. Under such circumstances, the decay of moral and religious principles is rapid beyond calculation. Profligacy, treachery, fear, and sycophancy bear uncontrolled sway. It was precisely so on the present occasion. There was not among all the magistrates and counsellors of Jezreel so much of regard for righteousness and purity as in the single breast of the God-fearing Naboth. There was not found in the whole body courage enough to disobey the atrocious orders which they received from a cruelly tyrannical queen. Naboth nobly disregarded the wishes of a king, when they were found opposed to the will of God; and he appears to have been the only faithful among the many faithless. They were so regardless of the claims of law and religion, and so afraid of the resentment of the queen against themselves, who, they knew, had a thousand ways of punishing their disobedience, that instead of imitating his noble courage and faithfulness, they consented to gratify her by his sacrifice. They proclaimed a fast, set Naboth on high among the people, that is, brought him to a public trial, and suborned two men, children of Belial, or two men capable of lying and bearing false testimony, two witnesses being by the law required

in such a case, who swore, saying, "Naboth did blaspheme God and the king." That is, according to their evidence, he was an atheist and a rebel, having spoken words injurious to the perfections and nature of God, and hostile to the crown and dignity of the king. Some think the charge should be translated "Naboth did bless the false gods and Moloch<sup>5</sup>;" in which case Jezebel seems to have been wicked enough to avail herself of the law<sup>6</sup> of Moses, which awarded death for idolatry; and to destroy Naboth on the false accusation of being attached to the heathen divinities, though she herself was an abominable idolatress, and had set that law at defiance. It is impossible to imagine a blacker transaction than a careful consideration of the whole account brings to view. We do not hear that the innocent accused attempted a word of defence. Her charge against him was similar to that against Him who, "as a lamb brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers, was dumb and opened not his mouth." In the one case as in the other, all defence was useless. The power of evil, under the auspices of Jezebel, was triumphant, as it triumphed at the instigation of those who cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" and, like Naboth was overwhelmed by the force of injustice and malig-

<sup>5</sup> See Parkhurst's Heb. Lexicon.

<sup>6</sup> Deut. xii. 6 ; xviii. 2—7.

nity, and consigned to execution. "They carried him forth out of the city and stoned him with stones that he died." And when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, she said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." It is considered highly probable that, together with Naboth, the whole of his family, as being involved in his guilt, was destroyed, though its head only for brevity's sake is mentioned, for we read in the second book of Kings' of the "blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons," calling for vengeance, and that there being consequently no heirs at law to the coveted vineyard surviving, the property became confiscated or escheated to the king as a matter of course. "Accordingly it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it." Thus Jezebel stirred up her husband to the blackest crime, as well as to the basest idolatry. Ahab, though wickedly disposed, was not himself daring enough in wickedness to command the unjust condemnation and execution of an innocent man, but he consented, at the instigation of Jezebel, to lend her his name and his seal to facilitate the perpetration of the iniquity. Though covetously disposed, he was not suffi-

<sup>7</sup> Chap. ix. 26.



ciently unscrupulous in the pursuit of acquisitions, as by force to eject and extirpate a rightful proprietor, but he went at the instigation of Jezebel, when the deed was done, to reap its fruits. Unhappy princes and unhappy husbands they, who are encouraged and incited to evil by the wives of their bosoms and the dearest friends of their hearts !

“Strange,” some faithful Israelite might exclaim, “that such a woman should be permitted to live and to go on from evil to evil, from idolatry to persecution, from persecution to injustice, subornation, hypocrisy, and bloodshed, apparently without a check ! Strange that God does not instantly interfere, by means of his strong arm, and rid the earth of such a monster. Where was his justice ? Where was his care of his people ?” And the abounding of such iniquity, and the uncontrolled sway of such a queen, might for a moment cast into many a heavy heart dark thoughts about the omniscience and omnipotence of the God of Israel, or inspire doubts of His equity as a Ruler, seeing that He did not punish such crying evils. But this would have been a far over-hasty conclusion. He was already preparing the instruments of vengeance. While this tragedy was proceeding, or probably before this consummation of iniquity, He was paving the way for the signal punishment of its contrivers. In the wilderness, whither Elijah fled for fear

of Jezebel, He gave him commission to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel, who should be the destruction of Jezebel and the whole house of Ahab. Soon after the death of Naboth, He sent the same prophet to Ahab to reprove him to his face in the very vineyard which he had acquired, for the barbarity by which it had come into his possession. How short are the triumphs of the wicked, and how vain the attempt to increase our enjoyments by crime! In the very scene where Ahab expected an augmentation of happiness, there was presented to him the greatest source of mental disquietude and suffering. There Elijah told him from the Lord that ample vengeance would be taken upon him, his wife, and family, for the atrocity connected with that vineyard—that he himself should die a violent death, and that the dogs should lick his blood as they had licked the blood of Naboth—that Jezebel should die a violent death, and that the dogs should eat her up, so as to deprive her of the honour of a burial—and that his whole family should be extinguished, and no posterity left him in the land. All this terrible judgment, though part of it was delayed on account of Ahab's humiliation under the reproof, so that it was not fulfilled in his lifetime, was ultimately brought to pass to the uttermost extent of its meaning. Ahab died in consequence of a wound received in battle, and they

washed his chariot and his armour in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, according to the word of the Lord. His son Ahaziah, who succeeded him on the throne, came to a premature end by an accident, which by the judgment of God proved fatal on account of his persistence in idolatry. His son Jehoram, the next in succession, fell by the hand of Jehu, and his bleeding body was cast into that very vineyard, which his father and mother had criminally taken from Naboth. But Jezebel closed her wicked life more miserably and ignominiously than all. The formidable Jehu, whom God, by Elijah, commissioned to punish the house of Ahab, after slaying Jehoram, proceeds to Jezreel with his victorious adherents. Jezebel, hearing of his arrival, instead of repenting in dust and ashes of the idolatries and crimes which she had committed, and by which she had brought ruin upon her family, seeks by insidious arts and fictitious charms, to conciliate the regards of the conqueror. "She painted her face and tired her head, and looked out at a window, and saluted the subverter of the throne with the words, Had Zimri peace who slew his master?" Or, as it is by some, we think, better translated, "Zimri had peace, though he slew his master;" by others, "Long live the memory of Zimri, who slew his master." By which salutation, it is probable, that she meant to welcome and

praise Jehu, who had climbed to power by similar means, though the means were fatal to her own family. Nothing could be meaner and baser than such an attempt to gain favour, and it is often found that they who are proud and hard-hearted in prosperity, are capable of the most abject conduct in adversity. But the artifice was of no avail. Her days were numbered, and her last hour was come. As she had shown no mercy, she found none in her hour of need. "Ye who are on my side," cried the victorious soldier, "throw her down." And her own servants, perhaps too glad to get rid of a mistress whom they had served more from fear than from affection, hesitated not to obey the command, and heeding not her threats, her prayers, or her tears, "they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses, and Jehu trode her under foot." What a terrible death! She was, by the fall, almost dashed to pieces, and then her already mangled body was trampled under the horses' feet. After awhile, Jehu, who had retired into a house to refresh himself, remembering Jezebel's rank, though her life had been infamous, gave orders for her funeral, and said to his attendants, "Go, see now this cursed woman and bury her: for she is a king's daughter." She was a woman of very high lineage, daughter of the king of Tyre, wife of Ahab king of Israel, mother of Jehoram king

of Israel, mother-in-law of Jehoram king of Judah, and grand-mother to Ahaziah king of Judah. But, though so great a woman by her birth, connexions, and alliances, she had not the honour of a burial. For, when her body was sought for, with a view to do her that honour, they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Jehu, upon learning the fact, was struck with the exact fulfilment of prophecy, and exclaimed, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant, Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel." There was not even a solitary stone to say, Here lies Jezebel! Not even a mound of earth to designate the place of her sepulchre. "Judgment is God's strange work; but when He contends, how terrible are his judgments! And when He ariseth to execute his judgment, who shall stay his hand? How deep are his counsels, and how terrible are his workings<sup>8</sup>!"

So wicked was Jezebel, and so terrible her end, that her name has passed into a byword to indicate the worst combination of qualities, and her end may be regarded as a symbol of the final judgment of God upon irreclaimable

<sup>8</sup> Adam Clarke.



transgressors. Her history is accommodated to that use by *Josephus* in *Antiquities*, who recapitulating the principal features of her life, intimates that they were intended for the warning of the vicious, the hypocrite, and the impenitent. The Alpha and the Omega reproves the angel of the *Apocalypse* of Thyatira "for suffering a woman," whom he calls Jezebel, to proceed unchecked in the exercise of an evil influence.

We have space but to indicate the principal and most prominent lessons taught us by this awfully instructive history. 1. Learn the great evil of forming matrimonial alliances with the idolatrous and the wicked. How baneful was the influence of a heathen and profligate princess on the heart and life of an Israelitish king! She arrested his convictions, and prevented his complete repentance, when the manifestations of Jehovah's power and truth seemed to have brought him to seriousness and reflection. She instigated him to crime, which otherwise he had not had the boldness to perpetrate, and which led to the destruction of himself and his whole family. Beware of being yoked together with the children of disobedience, on whom cometh the wrath of God.

2. Learn the vast importance to human welfare of the gift of Divine revelation. The worst female character recorded in the sacred history

is the one whom we have now contemplated, and she by birth and education belonged to a people who were unacquainted with the true God, and wholly given to idolatrous worship. She is pointed out by her peculiarly wicked life, and her peculiarly awful end, by which she is distinguished from all other women in the Bible, as the character the most exactly adapted symbolically to represent the conduct and fall of the most idolatrous and abandoned of communities or individuals. That, it is supposed, is the sense in which her name is introduced in the charge to the angel of the church of Thyatira. No Jewish or nominally Christian woman ever presented such a personification of female depravity, and such an apt type of all that is to be avoided and abhorred. Oh, then, let us be thankful for the blessings of a true religion, and for the wonderful testimonies of God!

3. From the incorrigibleness of Jezebel, under both the severity and goodness of God, we learn that there is a power of wickedness in the unbelieving human heart, to resist the most striking lessons of Providence. And let the thought teach us to be watchful over ourselves, and to pray for the indispensable gift of converting and sanctifying grace. From the miserable end of herself and her family let us infer with fear the terrible wrath which cometh on every child of disobedience, and from her

ignominious death, the everlasting shame and contempt which await all the workers of iniquity. "He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

## SERMON XVII.

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### THE PROPHET'S WIDOW.

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2 KINGS iv. 7.

“Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.”

THE woman referred to in this passage, the proposed subject of our present discourse, is a distinct person both from the widow of Sarepta and the woman of Shunem. It is necessary to point out this difference, since, without a careful and attentive perusal of their several histories, these three persons are very apt to be confounded together in the mind. This confusion arises from the great resemblance between the miracles wrought for their benefit, and the prophets with whom they had the happiness of being acquainted, and from their proximity to one another in the records of sacred biography. Let it be carefully impressed in the memory then, that of those persons the widow of

Sarepta, already discoursed on, and alluded to by our Saviour, was the person who entertained Elijah in the reign of Ahab, and during the famine brought by the judgment of God on the land on account of its idolatries and iniquities. She was not an Israelite, but a heathen, marvellously brought to a knowledge of the true God, like the woman of Canaan in after times. For her benefit, two miracles were performed.

1. The preservation of the barrel of meal from wasting, and the cruse of oil from failing, so as to furnish to her and her family, and to Elijah, who sojourned in her house, a sufficiency of sustenance for about the space of two years.
2. The restoration of her son from death to life.

The other two women referred to in the chapter containing the text, were benefited by the instrumentality of Elisha, the successor of Elijah, in the reign of Jehoram, the son and successor of Ahab. These two women were not heathens, but Israelites. The first-mentioned of these had her measure of oil, not prevented from wasting to save her from famine, like the Sareptan, but increased for the purpose of paying a pressing debt, and of supplying her with subsequent subsistence. The second, the woman of Shunem, who entertained Elisha, had both a son given her, and some years after raised from the dead, at that prophet's intercession. Thus, although on account of the great similarity between the two miracles wrought by



Elijah in favour of the Sareptan alone, and the two miracles wrought by Elisha in favour of the subject of our present discourse, and of the Shunammite respectively, confusion is apt to arise in the mind from an occasional or careless perusal of their several histories, a closer attention to the inspired narrative will discover them to be three persons, differing materially in the circumstances of their lives, and the features of their characters, and presenting distinct lessons of practical instruction.

Of the person to whom our attention is now particularly directed, we have neither the name nor the residence recorded. She is designated simply as a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets. By the sons of the prophets are meant disciples of the prophets, or men instructed and trained to the prophetic office by an eminent person of that order. It is supposed that there were, in Israel, educational institutions or colleges, superintended by such a person, at which, those who intended to become the moral and spiritual guides of the nation, spent many years of their lives in study and meditation and prayer. These are the sort of establishments supposed to be meant by the schools of the prophets. There were, probably, taught at these seminaries divinity, history, philosophy, and such other arts and sciences as were calculated, under the Divine blessing, to be useful in the instruction of the

people. But they were by no means places of luxurious indulgence or worldly attraction. Their inmates are supposed to have supported themselves to a certain extent by the labour of their own hands; and while a certain measure of secular knowledge was communicated at them, it would appear that their predominating character was unusual religious strictness, and devotion to heavenly things. We have, accordingly, reason to think that they furnished no attraction for the idle, the covetous, the ambitious, or the sensual; and that none were induced to join them but those who set no value upon earth in comparison with heaven, and who, disregarding the things that are seen and temporal, had determined to dedicate their lives to the prosecution of the things that are unseen and eternal. It is not clear how these sons, or disciples of the prophets, obtained their livelihood in after life; probably from the same sources as during the period of their preparation—partly from the labour of their own hands, and partly from the voluntary offerings of the people. Relying on such a provision, it is probable that few of them were possessed of riches, that many were in straitened circumstances, and that some left their families, at death, in embarrassment and destitution. It was the case of him, whose widow's history we are now contemplating. She cried unto Elisha, saying, "Thy servant, my husband, is dead; and thou

knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."

It was a distressing case. It will appear still more distressing, and more calculated to move the prophet's sympathy and compassion, if the opinion of the Rabbinical writers be true as to who the departed prophet and the unsparing creditor were, and if we consider the penalty with which the widow's sons were menaced. The Rabbinical writers are of opinion that the widow's deceased husband was Obadiah, the steward of Ahab's household, who hid fifty of the Lord's prophets in a cave, and so rescued their lives from the murderous hands of Jezebel. They also think that the creditor was Jehoram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, and brother of Ahaziah, and the successor of both those kings on the throne of Israel. Obadiah, they further suppose, had borrowed money of Jehoram for the purpose of maintaining, in secrecy, the prophets of the Lord; and Jehoram, who had now become king, and who was, to a certain extent, though apparently not to the same extent as his father and mother, an abettor of idolatry, upon discovering what use had been made of his loan, was resolved, no less from avarice and cupidity than from revenge against the faithful servant of Jehovah, to exact from his widow the uttermost farthing of his claim, and in default of pay-

ment, to take her two sons to be slaves or bondmen.

The right to enslave a person in default of the payment of a debt, appears to have been inferred from, rather than sanctioned by, the law of Moses, which referred to a thief that was unable to make restitution. "If such an one have nothing wherewith to satisfy such a demand," says the law, "then he shall be sold for his theft." From hence it became a custom in Israel to treat, in a similar manner, a debtor unable to return what he had borrowed, as appears from a parable of our Saviour, wherein we read of "a certain king who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents. But, forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." The creditor of the departed prophet took advantage of this custom. Finding that the prophet's effects were not sufficient to satisfy his demand, he determined to take possession of the persons of the prophet's two sons, and to repay himself by their labours as slaves on his own property, or by their sale into the service of others. It was a desolate day for the poor woman. She had already lost her husband, who had left her in destitute circumstances; and now she was about to lose her two

sons, her last hope in this world's wilderness. Perhaps her husband's death had been hastened by the weight of his embarrassment,—an embarrassment probably incurred through an anxious concern for the glory of God, and the lives of his servants; and now the same load of debt was taking away her sons into a condition more dreaded often than death. What is to be done to avert this additional and aggravated calamity? Is there no friend or neighbour to help in time of need? Is there no charitable rich man to set aside the direful necessity? Alas! it too often happens, as the wise man says, that “all the brethren of the poor do hate him, much more do his friends go far from him: he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.” Perhaps she had been compelled often before to pursue her wealthy neighbours with words of importunate supplication. Perhaps she had done so with many tears and lamentations before her husband's death; and when she saw that his embarrassed circumstances were preying upon his mind, and bringing him down to the place where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest, she had not been able to obtain human aid to turn aside that dreadful blow;—and shall he try the same resource again? No: she will no longer trust to an arm of flesh. She will cast her burden upon the Lord. She will make her case known to the prophet of Jehovah. She will remind him of her dear



husband's piety, and, perhaps, of the sacrifices he had made of comfort, yea, of health and of life, for the sake of Jehovah and his servants. She will open to him the deep and unutterable distress of her heart at the prospect of her two sons, her only sources of support and consolation, being taken away from her, perhaps never to be seen again, and reduced into the toilsome, suffering, and wretched condition of slavery. She, therefore, brought her tale of terror and wo to Elisha, and said, "Thy servant, my husband, is dead: and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord. And the creditor is come to take my two sons to be bondmen."

There were two considerations which induced her to apply to Elisha, and encouraged her to think that her suit would be successful; Elisha's reputation, and Elisha's acquaintance with her husband. Elisha was the servant and successor of that most eminent prophet, who had saved from death, by famine, the widow of Sarepta, and her family, and restored her son from death unto life. Elisha had been greeted by the sons of the prophets at Jericho, among whom, perhaps, was the widow's departed husband, as one upon whom had descended the spirit of Elijah. Yea, it may most truly be said, if you judge by the relative number of their miracles, that a double portion of Elijah's spirit had descended upon Elisha, according to his request, at parting with his master. Elisha had already

made the country, far and wide, ring with the fame of his miraculous works. He had divided the waters of the Jordan by the application of the mantle of his master. He had healed the waters of Jericho, and converted its barren vicinity into a green and fruitful land. He had moved God to judgment against the children who mocked and reviled him. He had procured water for the timely relief of three kings, who, with their armies, were in imminent danger of perishing by thirst, and gave them an easy conquest over the formidable hosts of Moab. Elisha was not only thus known to her as one who had power with God, and prevailed, but also as one who was acquainted with the piety of her deceased husband, and, probably, with important services rendered by him to the prophets of Jehovah in the time of the persecuted and revered Elijah. On these grounds she felt she could adopt no better course than to appeal to Elisha, and she confidently solicited his interposition in her time of grievous need and necessity. It is a blessed thought, and a great encouragement to run with patience the race that is set before us, to reflect that the odour of our sanctity will remain when our place on earth shall know us no more; and that the memory of our piety will strengthen the hearts of dear ones, whom we may leave behind in this vale of tears, and engage, in their behalf, the prayers and the services of men able to mini-

ster to their consolation and relief. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days."

The desolate widow's appeal went directly to the heart of the prophet. He is touched by the picture of her distress. He is moved by the recollection of her pious husband. He made no objections to her suit, but expressed his willingness to relieve her trouble by immediately asking the question, "What shall I do for thee? I am ready to do what I can for thy relief, if thou wilt point out the way." But, alas! she had no resource of counsel any more than of wealth, and she stood dumb before the prophet in a bewilderment of perplexity and helplessness. Then said the prophet, "What hast thou in thy house? Hast thou no kind of property remaining, no species of commodity in thy possession, no substance within thy dwelling which may be converted into money, to meet the emergency? Come, let us take a calm and discreet view of the matter. Perhaps thou art not so utterly poor, as thou hast been made to fancy thyself by this surprising and urgent demand. And if that be the case, thou mayest be able to find means of deliverance without the aid of my liberality or co-operation. We must not have recourse to charity, still less to the asking for supernatural interposition, so long as by a prudent management and well-directed exertion we can help ourselves. Tell

me all thy circumstances. If thou hast no possessions elsewhere, what hast thou in thy house?" She answered with simplicity and truth, "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." This oil, we may well suppose, was not in the possession of so poor a widow for the anointing or perfuming the person, though the custom was more common with all ranks in those times and countries than in our age and clime. A species of oil was used for nourishment, such as that in the cruse of the Sareptan, and this was probably the species of oil contained in her pot. Oil was, also, considered essential to the due honouring of the dead, and the decent performance of funeral rites. When a woman, having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, poured it on the head of Jesus, he acknowledged the service as a proof of her love manifested in conferring upon him by anticipation funeral honours, and said unto the disciples who complained of the waste, "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good, a respectful work upon me, and in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial." Oil intended for this purpose, and considered essential to decent burial, we may well suppose the very poorest would strive to possess, in some small measure; and it would be the very last property they would be induced, under the direst necessity, to part with,

even as the humblest in the present day, when the superstition connected with the disposal of the corpse is much diminished and qualified, wish that they and theirs should be committed to the ground in the usual manner. If such was the destination of the widow's pot of oil, the only property she had in the house, there cannot be a stronger proof of her having been already reduced to the very verge of utter destitution. She had sold all she possessed, and reserved only what seemed necessary for the peaceful departure of her and hers out of this miserable world into another and a happier; and with the despondency of one weary of life, there would mingle the solemnity of one preparing for death in her manner, as she returned the answer, "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil."

Elisha, upon hearing this declaration, replied, "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels, borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full." If she had possessed any other valuables, he would have commanded her to sell them and discharge her debt with the produce, since it is not honest to surround ourselves with comforts as long as the just claims of creditors are not satisfied. But, inasmuch as she had nothing



but a pot of oil, the last property retained in those climes and regions by the most destitute, he will pray for the Divine interposition in her behalf; and even in the working of a miracle he will make use of the means in her possession. He will not pray that a heap of silver or gold should be produced on the occasion. But he will turn into use the pittance of oil in her house, and make it capable of producing the requisite sum of money, and so teach us the importance of economising what we have, and of acting according to the best of our abilities under the circumstances, in which Providence may place us. The prophet's command that she should borrow vessels abroad of all her neighbours, shows his conviction of her honest and upright character, though she was reduced to poverty. She could not have succeeded in her request, had she not maintained a fair reputation in the neighbourhood. God, at the prayer of the prophet, would doubtless have created vessels for the purpose, had they been procurable in no other way. But the widow is directed to borrow them of her neighbours, not only to illustrate the invariable Divine rule of not working a miracle without absolute necessity, but to inculcate the duty of maintaining an unblemished and amiable reputation among our fellow-creatures, and of cultivating mutual kindness and good-will among neighbours and acquaintances. But why is she, after the vessels

are brought into her house, to shut the door upon herself and her sons? Why not call in her neighbours to witness the distinguished Divine favour conferred upon her? Why not call in the ruthless creditor, to show him that she had a friend able to meet his uttermost demand, and to defeat his malice against her family, and exult over his mortification? She is to shut the door upon herself and her sons, to prevent interruption from without during the Divine operation that was about to take place in her humble dwelling, to indicate the duty of shutting out the world with its friendships and enmities alike, when we enter into solemn communion with our God. She is to shut out her neighbours from the sight of the heavenly favour she received, to teach us that spiritual blessings are not matters for ostentation and boasting, but matters for heartfelt gratitude to Him who seeth in secret. She is to shut out the creditor, her enemy, from the spectacle of her celestial wealth, to show that the indulgence of vain, self-righteous, and exulting feelings is incompatible with the meekness of the people of God. So full of instruction is every part of the Holy Scriptures written for our learning.

She carefully followed the directions of the prophet, borrowed vessels, not a few, of all her neighbours, shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her, and

she poured out. "By her sons bringing the vessels to her," is probably meant, that they brought the vessels in succession from one part of the room or the house to the spot where she took her station for the purpose of pouring into them from the pot of oil, and conveyed them away, when filled, for the convenience of room and order. Under this arrangement they brought her vessel after vessel, and she poured into vessel after vessel from the apparently inexhaustible pot of oil. How her heart must have been filled with wonder, as vessel after vessel was filled with oil! How her feelings of gratitude and joy must have overflowed in expressions of thankfulness and tears of joy, as she beheld the constantly flowing river of heavenly bountifulness! The stream of miraculous increase welled forth so copiously and abundantly, as to fill all the vessels that were in the house; and it never ceased to flow while the vessels continued to receive it. It was only when she was obliged to ask one of her sons "to bring her yet a vessel," and she received for an answer, "There is not a vessel more," that the oil stayed. This wonderful oil, brethren, is the symbol of Divine grace. We are never straitened in God. His power is unlimited. His bounty is inexhaustible. He gives above what we ask. He grants more than we expect. He pours forth his Spirit without measure. The straitness is in us. The failure

is in our faith. The defect is in our importunity and earnestness of supplication. The oil was not at all exhausted, while there were vessels to be filled; and the golden oil which flows from the rich fatness of the good olive shall never fail while there are lamps ready to be supplied. In the fountain of living water there is enough for all and for each. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him?"

When the widow found all the vessels filled, she "came and told the man of God." Transported, as she must have been, with joy at her sudden opulence, she did not allow her feeling to betray her into vanity or ostentation, or forgetfulness of God. She did not call her neighbours together, to wonder at her good fortune. She went to the man of God. But why apply to him again? She wanted not his counsel any more. Her own reason and judgment might have sufficiently suggested what to do with the commodity, which had been so wonderfully supplied. Why not sell it at once and pay off her debt, without reference to the prophet's advice? We answer, 1. She went to him for direction. She, who had been so recently perplexed by adversity, was now perplexed by prosperity. Her change of circum-

stances was so sudden and so great, that she was afraid to take a step without his guidance. So ought we to do in all situations; especially on occasions of passing from one condition to another, from one calling to another, and from one grade of society or rank of life to another; we ought carefully to attend to the oracles of Heaven; and if we would walk safely, we must never make a move or do an action without the warranty and approbation of the word of God.

2. She went to the prophet from a feeling of gratitude. She did not, as too many are apt to do, forget, in the season of deliverance, the hand that brought her out of great tribulation. Her gratitude now was as fervent as her affliction had been bitter before. And we may suppose that, as she thought of Jehovah's goodness and Jehovah's minister, who was the instrument of manifesting that goodness to her desolate heart, she would participate in the feelings of her who loved our Saviour so deeply for his marvellous loving-kindness, that she washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. 3. She went to the prophet in accordance with the conduct of every true child of God. His spurious children act differently. Many, when brought low by any plague or trouble, by poverty, by bereavement, by sickness, will seek the consolation of religion; but will disregard and forget God and his ministers when restored to health and worldly comfort. "Their



goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away." The ministers of Christ are compelled to witness many instances of this apparent or evanescent piety in the course of their attendance on beds of sickness. But this is not the case with those who have believed with the heart unto salvation. They follow their Divine Master, observe his ordinance, and attend to his ministers through good report and through evil report, in health as in sickness, in prosperity as in adversity, in the prospect and enjoyment of worldly advantages as in the hour of distress, in the season of tribulation, and in the apprehension of approaching death. Gratefully, therefore, as became one who had been greatly benefited, humbly as became one whose own resources had been unavailing in the hour of need, and consistently with the character of one who had laboured under great perplexity, and felt the presence of a higher power in effecting a solution of her difficulties; the widow, upon seeing the issue of the Divine interposition, and finding that all her vessels were full, "came and told the man of God."

Elisha, upon receiving her account of the miraculous transaction, replied, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." It appears, from Ezekiel, that oil was one of the commodities which Israel traded in, and exported to foreign lands;

and this having been produced by a miracle, like the wine created at Cana, would, doubtless, be of the best quality, fetch the highest price, and meet with a ready sale. The gift was, therefore, on every account, of the most seasonable and valuable kind. And now that she had obtained wealth, she was to make the most honest and discreet use of it. She was not immediately to spend it upon the gratification of appetite or vanity, as too many, even of our poor, are apt to do. She was not first to employ any part of it to surround herself and sons with ordinary comforts. She was, first of all, to pay her debt. The creditor might have been clamorous, insolent, and cruel in exacting so rigorously the uttermost farthing from so poor a widow. But that was an affair between him and God. It was no reason for her delaying or grudging a payment which could be enforced by law, now that she had the means in her possession. We must be just, whether we have to deal with the grasping and the hard-hearted, or with the considerate and kind. Not only must we be just before we are generous; not only must we be just before we are self-indulgent; we must be just towards those whose harsh demands border very closely upon extortion. We do not commend those who are extreme and hard-hearted in claiming even their just rights. We have great fears for the violent and unpitying exactors of what may be legally their dues.

We know the judgment of God against the man who, after he had been himself forgiven ten thousand talents, went and took his fellow-servant by the throat and cast him into prison, though he owed him but a hundred pence. But these are considerations for those who may too rigorously claim, not for those who owe the debt. Nothing is more clearly laid down in the *Scriptures*, as well as in the Law, than that we should endeavour most rigidly to fulfil our pecuniary responsibilities, and our obligations, as members of civil society. "Render to all their dues," says the Apostle to the Romans, "and owe no man any thing, but to love one another." And the prophet wrought a miracle when no other means existed, to satisfy a just, though a very rigorously exacted, demand; and the first direction he gave the poor widow, on learning the increase of her store, was, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt."

But when the debt was paid she and her sons were to live of the rest. Although the truly honest and really religious will seek, not from constraint but willingly, not for wrath or the fear of suffering, but for conscience sake, to give every body their own, though they leave ever so little for themselves; and although they cannot, with peace and pleasure, eat their daily bread, except it be the bread of their own possession, yet is it no virtue whatever in the sight of God to deny ourselves the necessaries, or

even the ordinary comforts of life. The prophet not only provided for the widow's debt, but supplied her and her sons with the means of subsistence for the time to come. The overplus was not to be laid up, nor even to be dedicated to a sacred purpose: it was to be employed to gain an honest livelihood, to supply the wants of the body, and by prudent management to prevent the future recurrence of temporal destitution and wretchedness. "Go first, and pay thy debt; and then live thou and thy children of the rest."

1. We learn from this subject that the righteous are not exempt from grievous worldly difficulties. It is dishonest to contract debts through prodigality, luxury, or extravagance. But they that fear God, like the departed son of the prophet, the best and the most religious men, may, through losses, mismanagement, ignorance of the world, or over-confidence in others, the children of light being not so wise in their generation as the children of darkness, fall into embarrassment, die insolvent, and leave their wives and children in destitution and danger. Such cases we ought not harshly to condemn, but be ready, like the prophet, to assist and relieve.

2. Let us learn, from this subject, to place our trust in a gracious Providence under the pressure of affliction. We cannot expect, nowadays, the working of a miracle in our behalf.

But if we look for help unto the Lord by patient faith and earnest prayer, He will in his own good time make for us a way of escape. "Cast thy burthen upon the Lord," is the command; and "He will sustain thee," is the promise. "They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and faint not."

3. Let us hence learn to make a right use of wealth and power. Let us, like the widow, first discharge our obligations to others, and then provide for our own comfortable subsistence; and let us, like Elisha, compassionate those in distress, save the fatherless from ruin, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy.

4. Lastly, let all, of every rank and station, hence learn the inexhaustible nature of Divine grace. It is a fountain that ceaseth not to send forth its refreshing streams wherever there are vessels ready to receive it. It is a river that ever floweth on until it comes to the ocean of eternity; and none of you need lack spiritual refreshment, if you will draw nigh and taste of its healing draughts. "Ho! then every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without price."



## SERMON XVIII.

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### WOMAN OF SHUNEM.

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2 KINGS iv. 8.

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.”

SHUNEM, the residence of the woman whose life we are now to notice, is first mentioned in the book of Joshua<sup>1</sup> in connexion with the allotment of the land of Canaan to the children of Israel. It occurs next in the history of king Saul<sup>2</sup>, as the place where the Philistines were encamped, when that monarch had assembled his troops against them on mount Gilboa, and when he went to consult the witch of Endor in his perplexing fears of that formidable enemy. From the former of these passages we learn that it was in the borders of the tribe of Issachar, and from the latter we infer that it could not be far from Endor and Gilboa. It is next

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xix. 18.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. xxviii. 4.

referred to as the birthplace of that damsel who ministered to king David in his old age and last illness. And some of the rabbins are of opinion, that the subject of our present discourse was sister to that damsel; though the distance of about eighty years between the period of the transactions, with which their names are respectively connected, would appear strongly to militate against such an opinion. Through this town it appears that the prophet Elisha was in the habit of passing, probably from mount Carmel to some school or schools of the prophets, for the purpose of imparting instruction and counsel. He attracted the attention and reverence of a resident there, who is designated in our version of the Bible 'a great woman,' in the Chaldee 'a woman fearing sin,' in the Arabic 'a woman eminent for piety before God.' She was probably both a wealthy and a godly person; and while vast multitudes of her countrymen and countrywomen had apostatized from Jehovah, after the example and under the influence of Ahab and Jezebel, and their son Jehoram, the then reigning monarch of Israel, she clave to his service, and desired to minister to the support and comfort of his prophet; and she constrained him to turn into her house, and to partake of rest and refreshment on his journey. She went further, and used her influence with her husband to fit up in their dwelling a convenient room for his accommo-

dation. "Let us make," said she, "a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither." She felt that the tumult of a large family was unfit for the meditations of a prophet, and while she made no ostentation of her wealth by erecting and furnishing a magnificent and luxurious apartment for his reception, she was careful to secure for him a place where he might rest and pursue his high and heavenly contemplations without distraction or disturbance. She had experienced inestimable benefit from his edifying conversation; she had conceived a high veneration for his exalted mission; she had observed, perhaps, that while he toiled for the spiritual good of others, he was left himself but scantily provided with temporal comforts; and she was constrained by gratitude, by veneration, and by charity, to do what she could to smooth his arduous path of duty. The truly pious and devout are found ever ready to open their hands to the cause of God, and most glad to repay with their earthly possessions the unsearchable riches of . . .

The prophet, touched by her sedulous attention to his comfort, sends his servant Gehazi to request her attendance, with a view to make some proposal for requiting the kindness. The humility of the man of God was herein very

conspicuous. Although he might have said with St. Paul, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your worldly things?" he presumed not upon his services, but, regarding himself as only fulfilling his duty to Him that sent him, he was solicitous to confer upon her some temporal benefit, in return for her liberal and delicate hospitality. When, therefore, she appeared before him in answer to the message sent by his servant, he desired to know whether she would be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host; *i. e.* whether he should procure for her or her family some royal favour, or obtain for her husband or relations a post in the army? The prophet had recently saved the king and his army and allies from destruction, by supplying them with water in a time of great drought, and rendered them successful over a formidable enemy; and he had consequently no doubt that both the sovereign and the general would attend to his application. He had not indeed been able, even by that miracle, to effect that religious reformation in the kingdom, which he had so much at heart, and which was the grand object of his master Elijah's and his own mission, and to induce an entire renunciation of idolatry on the part of Jehoram and his subjects. But he had extorted their respect, and excited their gratitude by the marvellous deliverance, which, as the ser-

vant of Jehovah, he had worked in their behalf. Even the wicked pay a silent homage to the pious, although they may be too strongly attached to sin to follow godly admonitions, and to reform their own lives. They are often constrained to exclaim, like Balaam, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" although they love the wages of unrighteousness, and the pleasures of sin too deeply to cast in their lot among the people of God. The prophet had made an impression upon the king, and the great people of the land; and while he deplored the stubbornness of the human heart, which prevented his efforts for God from being completely successful, he did not, because he could not do all the good he wished, impatiently discontinue his connexion, but maintained his influence with them, that he might employ it to plead for the oppressed, to defend the helpless, to raise the low, to reward the deserving, and to win greatness to the protection of innocence. We are not, because our labours for the welfare of others appear not to be followed by commensurate effects, to withdraw in despair from the field of ~~our~~ usefulness, but to continue under every discouragement and difficulty stedfast and immovable in the works of the Lord; for in due time we shall reap, if we faint not.

The woman of Shunem, on hearing the well-intended proposal of the prophet, made answer,



which sets a noble example to both sexes, and reflects immortal honour on her truly noble and pious mind: "I dwell," said she, "among mine own people." As if she had said, "Thy offer is generous; thy design is most gracious, and calls for my grateful acknowledgment. But, blessed be God, I need not thy kind interposition; I labour under no oppression; I require no deliverance; I aim at no elevation; I desire no change. I am perfectly contented with my lot in life. I have no ambition to share the glories of a court, or the dignities of a higher station. I covet not the possession of greater wealth, or the enjoyment of richer luxuries; neither do I suffer from injustice or oppression. My neighbours are my friends; my friends are my protectors; and if I should be subjected to injury, they would not hesitate to defend my cause. The favour you propose is for those who are discontented or distressed. I am free from both predicaments. I love my neighbours; my neighbours love me. I cannot improve my society, and no change in outward circumstances can increase my happiness; for I dwell among those whom on every account I can call my own people." Happy Shunammite, placed at equal distance from penury and from excess, from affliction and from ambition, from indigence and from avarice, and enjoying a calm freedom of mind, a serene tranquillity of heart, and a sweet contentment with her allotted habi-

tation and connexions! Who can contemplate thy lot, and hear thy answer, without exclaiming, "Why am I not thus?" How few are there like thee in this sphere of earthly engrossment! Who is so satisfied with his present possessions as not to desire more? Who is not dazzled with the prospect of riches and honours? Who would not wish to be recommended to the notice of his sovereign, or to see himself and relatives advanced to a situation of eminence and emolument? Yea, how few are there that will not sacrifice domestic comfort, peace of mind, and a clear conscience, for money, pleasure, grandeur, and parade! But how foolish is the choice, and how fatal the issue! "for what will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man adequately give in exchange for his soul?" Be content, then, with such things as ye have, remembering that but one thing is needful,—that all are equal in the grave, and that to all there is but one Judge, one Saviour, one acquittal, one condemnation.

The woman of Shunem, having delivered her answer, appears to have retired from the presence of the prophet, who thereupon asked his servant Gehazi, "What shall be done for her?" as though he had said, "She is indeed a lovely pattern of piety. She possesses 'godliness with contentment,' which truly is to possess 'great gain,' and she needs not an increase of

acquisitions. Nevertheless, I should like to bestow upon her some token of my gratitude and esteem. What shall be done for her?" Gehazi observed, that with all her means and endowments, there was one possession of which she was destitute, which was universally desired by the wives of Israel, and which, doubtless, she would be glad to receive. She was childless, and thereby debarred from the chance of the greatest honour among the daughters of the chosen race,—that of being the mother, near or remote, of the Desire of all nations, as well as of leaving her husband's name and husband's inheritance to children and to children's children. The prophet, on being reminded of her barrenness, immediately ordered her to be recalled, and announced to her the same glad tidings as the angel of old had announced unto Sarah, saying, "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." The news appeared unto her, as unto Sarah, too good to be true. She did not indeed, like that mother of Israel, treat the intelligence with incredulous levity; but she could scarcely receive it at first with full assurance of faith, or without much anxiety about its fulfilment, and "she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid," *i. e.* do not deceive thine handmaid with a vain and delusive hope. It is a hope that I did for years cherish as the dearest wish of my heart, but

seeing that God's will did not correspond with my own, I prayed for grace to submit to his all-wise arrangement, and strove to be resigned and contented in my childless state. To revive such a hope in my breast, without the certainty of its being realized, were a mockery which a man of God will surely never practise. I therefore trust, that thou dost not deceive me by this delightful promise, and that thy words will prove indeed true; or, as the rabbins interpret her answer, "Do not mock me by giving me a son that shall soon be removed by death; but, if I have a son, let me have one that shall live, and grow up, and survive his parents." Promises are fulfilled, not by repetition or strong asseveration, but by actual effects. The prophet, therefore, in whose mouth the word of God was yea and amen, added not a word, but left her to look forward to the event for a demonstration of the truth. She bare a son at the predicted time, who passed unscathed through the perils of infancy, and reached the promising season of boyhood, and arrived at an age in which he was able to find his father in the field among the reapers. Who can tell the joy of that mother, who had at last obtained every wish of her heart! She was contented before, and she felt that, surrounded with prosperous circumstances and dear connexions as she was, she ought not to complain or express a desire for more than God had

been pleased to grant. But this unexpected gift of a son thrilled her heart with joy unutterable; and many a time would she look up to Heaven with inexpressible gratitude, and say, "What shall I render unto the Lord for his marvellous loving-kindness?" And the father too, now well stricken in years, would grow young again at the sight of this blooming plant, and rejoice more in this scion of his family than in all the crops of his harvest.

But, alas! how unstable often are these domestic joys! The doting mother was soon called to experience the bitterest trial to a fond parental heart. While in the harvest-field the hot beams of the sun beat upon that tender head, which in Eastern climes soon produce fatal consequences, and the child cried to his father, "My head, my head." The father, busied with his occupations, and probably not anticipating any serious result from the child's complaint, committed the care of him to one of his servants, with an order that he should be conveyed home to his mother. That mother received him into her arms, and laid him on those knees which often had formed his easiest couch. It appears to have been in an early part of the day when she received her ailing, but precious burden. Little did she think that so great a calamity was so soon to betide her household, and blight her comfort. But all the mother's tenderness cannot restore him to



health, or prolong his life. On the noon of that same day he died upon her knees. Well in the morning, and a corpse at noon! How precarious is our earthly existence! A child of promise, and given in love, yet suddenly taken away! How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out! But observe the conduct of the bereaved mother. She has lost her son for awhile, but she has not lost her faith. She does not give way to despairing lamentations, but flies for refuge to Divine counsel and assistance. In the depths of mental anguish and heart-breaking wo, she does not forget the discretion that becometh a woman professing godliness. She utters no passionate exclamation. She manifests no sign of distraction. She lays the dead child on the prophet's bed, locks the door on the precious treasure, conceals the sad misfortune from all eyes, hides her grief within her own bosom, and determines to have recourse to the aid of Heaven. She calls to her husband; and not willing to distress his heart with the sorrowful truth, or fearing to meet a well-meant opposition to what he might regard as a fruitless enterprise, she, without revealing the purpose of her errand, acquaints him with her desire to see the man of God. On the feasts of the Lord, she had been accustomed to go to the assemblies in which Elisha presided, and to join with other believers in hearing the word of

God, and in offering up the sacrifice of prayer and praise. But her husband, knowing that there were then no feasts of the Lord, asked her, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? it is neither new moon nor Sabbath." She answered, "It shall be well, *i. e.* Ask no more questions at present; place thy wonted confidence in me: my journey arises from a good motive, and thou shalt be satisfied by the event, that all has been done well." Convinced of her upright intentions, and of her discreet piety, he proposed no further curious inquiry, furnished her with the required equipment, and sent her away. Dismissed by her confiding husband, she "said to her servant, Drive, and go forward: slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee." It is customary in the East for an attendant to walk alongside, or drive the beast his master or mistress rides on, and to this custom probably the Wise Man alludes when he says, "I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking as servants on the earth," or the ground. In this manner she posts to Mount Carmel, where the prophet then resided. The man of God espies and recognises her at a distance, and, animated with a tender solicitude for the welfare of one who was so faithful a disciple of Jehovah, and from whom he had received so much of kind hospitality, sends his servant hastily to meet her, and to inquire concerning the health of herself, her husband,

and her child. She returned the messenger a general answer, saying, "It is well." How strong was her faith in God! How entire her submission to his will! how complete her confidence in his support! Though the heaviest family affliction that could befall her house had taken place; yet, believing that it was a dispensation of Providence that was, in itself, neither unwise nor unkind, she said, "It is well with me, with my husband, and with my child." All well; and yet the child dead in the house! Yes; all is well that is done by God. When He takes away the desire of our eyes with a stroke, it becomes us to say, "It is well:" it is well with them that are gone, if they are gone to Heaven; and it is well with us who are left behind, if we are brought by the affliction to run, with patience, the same race of trial, and to inherit the same eternal weight of glory.

But her errand was not to Gehazi the servant. It was to Elisha the master; and no ear shall hear her complaint but his who had already been the instrument of doing such marvellous things in her behalf. She speeds on to his presence, falls down before him, and, forgetting her habitual reserve in the intensity of her feelings, she lays hold of his feet; and pours her heart before him in an agony of earnest supplication. Gehazi, regarding such a posture and situation as indecorous or irreverent towards his venerated Master, came near to thrust

her away. But, if excess of sorrow has overcome the modest diffidence of her sex, and her delicate reverence for the minister of God, the considerate and kind Elisha makes allowance for her conduct by ascribing it to some extraordinary cause, with which he had not been made acquainted, and bids that she should not be interrupted in her proceedings, and allowed, without restraint, to make known her complaint and petition. "Let her alone," said he; "for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." From which words it appears, that, on this occasion, he had not the *discernment of spirits*,—that, as well as the *gift of prophecy*, being a spiritual influence, or a supernatural faculty, which God gave or suspended according to the dictates of his own infinite discretion. God discovered things to the prophets as He saw fit, and, according to the necessity of circumstances, not always according to their desire,—seldom, if ever, when the required information might be communicated by ordinary means,—to teach us that none, however favoured, are infinite in knowledge, save He, the Omniscient one himself, and that He does not capriciously and without cause depart from the established laws of nature. In this case, the secret is soon enough revealed by the petitioner herself, and therefore there was no occasion for its supernatural communication. Encouraged to speak, she at once unburdens



her soul before him, and plunges into the midst of her distressing theme, by the abrupt and pithy questions, "Did I desire a son of my Lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" This short and expressive appeal to the past opened the eyes of the prophet to the whole of the distressing truth, and instantly conveyed into his mind a volume of sorrowful thoughts and earnest expostulations. He instantly felt as if she had said, "Didst thou not find me dwelling among my own people, contented with my circumstances? Did I express a wish for change or advancement? Was I not resigned to God's will, even when debarred from the honour most desired by the wives of Israel? Did I desire the miraculous interposition of my Lord to procure me even the much coveted blessing of a son? And when thou didst promise me such a precious gift, did I not say, Do not deceive me?" And in this connexion the rabbinical interpretation of the words already referred to, certainly appears the most probable, which would have them to signify, "Do not mock me with a son that shall continue with me long enough to be engaging and attractive, and then rend my heart by being cut off in his young days, and not permitted to survive his parents, and inherit their possessions." Had I importunately asked for what a wise Providence had thought good to withhold, there might have been reason to fear that



my request would be complied with in anger, and the boon afterwards withdrawn for the severe punishment of my discontent. But the favour was of thy own proposing, and didst thou propose it with a view to make me wretched? How much easier would it have been to submit to barrenness than to resign myself to this sad bereavement! O man of God, let me not have to complain of a cruel kindness. Let those prayers of thine, which gave me a son, restore him to my arms alive." Great was her faith in the efficacy of the fervent prayer of a righteous man; and the event proved that she believed not in vain.

The prophet deeply sympathized in the bereaved mother's distress, and, wasting not a moment in words of consolation, became immediately absorbed in the mute but earnest consideration of an effectual remedy. He appears to have deemed it possible that it might be a case only of suspended animation; and he sent his servant Gehazi, who, probably, was able to travel more rapidly than himself, with orders to gird up his loins, to salute no man on the way, and to answer not the salutation of any, *i. e.* to avoid all delays, and to go with the utmost speed, and to lay the prophet's staff on the mouth of the dead child; probably thinking that it might act as a stimulus to excite the animal motions, and considering it right to adopt the readiest natural means that suggested them-

selves for the restoration of life. But the mother was convinced that her son was really dead, and that such means would prove altogether ineffectual; and therefore to Elisha, who seems to have, at first, intended waiting until Gehazi's return for intelligence of the result, and to have expected that she would depart homewards, satisfied for the present with the steps already taken, she solemnly said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." It is well to use means. But when means are ascertained to be useless, our highest wisdom is to rely only on the mighty power of God. Her earnest petition is attended with success. The man of God arises and follows the heart-broken mother to that city and home, which, during his absence, had been changed from the dwelling-place of cheerful content into a scene of sorrow and a house of death. He is met on the road by his servant, who had applied the prescribed means in vain, and had come to announce that though he had laid the staff on the face of the corpse, "there had been neither voice nor hearing, and that the child was not awaked." He proceeds into the house, finds that chamber, which had so often formed his quiet and cheerful place of retirement, occupied by a pale corpse, and sees that the mother's opinion was but too well founded, that the child was really dead, that the immaterial spirit had been actually separated from its

earthly tabernacle. He is convinced that no earthly power is able to effect a cure. He, therefore, closes the chamber-door, and lifts up his heart in prayer to his Heavenly Father, who seeth in secret. But even when he had become fully sensible of the necessity of Divine aid, he did not neglect the use of human means, an excellent example to be carefully noticed and followed by all in every age. "He went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands ; and he stretched himself upon the child," endeavouring thus to convey a portion of his own natural warmth to the body of the child, and, probably, by introducing his own breath into the torpid frame, to inflate the lungs, and restore respiration. He thus mingled his own efforts with reliance on Heaven's assistance, seeking by the fervour of his soul to bring back the departed spirit, and by the heat of his body to warm the cold corpse. He was encouraged by an omen of success. "The flesh of the child waxed warm. Then," continues the inspired penman, "the prophet returned, and walked in the house to and fro." This he did, "no doubt," says Adam Clarke, "in order that he might recover that natural warmth which was absorbed by the cold body of the child ; that he might again, by taking it in his arms, communicate more warmth. Caloric, or natural heat, when accumulated in any parti-

cular part, will diffuse itself to all bodies with which it comes in contact, till their temperature be equal, even as water invariably finds its level. Thus the warm body of the prophet gave out its caloric or natural heat to the cold body of the child until both became of equal temperature. But the process reduced the prophet into such a state of coldness, that he could endure the contact at present no longer. He therefore covered up the child, rose up, and walked smartly to and fro, in order that, by violent exercise, he might increase the circulation of the blood, and strengthen and quicken the organs of respiration, and be able to communicate an additional portion of his natural heat to the object of his anxiety." This explains the prophet's action, as described in the words, "Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro." After recovering his warmth, "he went up" again, "and stretched himself upon the child." He felt deeply for the bereaved mother: he desired earnestly the restoration of her son to life; and he demonstrated the sincerity and intensity of his feelings by active and persevering exertion. It is thus that they who would communicate spiritual life to souls that are dead in trespasses and sins, should identify themselves with their sad condition, commiserate their unhappy case, and manifest an untiring sympathy for spiritual wretchedness, by the assiduous and reiterated application of the



means adapted for its relief. And that we may be encouraged to such perseverance in behalf of the spiritually dead, observe the eventual success of the prophet, and behold therein a type and earnest of our own, if we imitate his energy and supplication. The child began to show signs of reanimation. Vitality appeared again to pervade the once motionless frame. The blood recommenced its flow through the once frozen veins and arteries. The nervous influence beginning to act on the muscular system before the circulation could in every part be restored, produced the natural effect of sternutation or sneezing, "and the child sneezed seven times," or very abundantly, which would be conducive, and perhaps essential, to the removal of the obstructions in the head and its vessels, occasioned by the disorder of which he had died. He at last proved beyond a doubt the return of life, by exhibiting the light of its brightest lamps. He opened again those eyes which had been sealed by the signet of death. Oh, wonderful spectacle! How it must have thrilled through the anxious prophet's heart! With what unspeakable satisfaction of mind he would call Gehazi, and say unto him, "Call this Shunammite!" And when she was come in, with what accents of mingled thanksgiving to Heaven, and congratulation to the mother, would he say unto her, "Take up thy son!" And, as for the mother's feelings on the occasion,



they are more specifically indicated by her demeanour. They were those of deep humility at the thought of her unworthiness to receive so great a favour, of gratitude too deep for utterance, and of joy which none but the women of old, who by faith received their dead raised to life, could feel. "She went in, and fell at the prophet's feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out." "Oh, strong faith of the Shunammite," says Bishop Hall<sup>3</sup>, "that could not be discouraged with the seizure and continuance of death; raising up her heart still in an expectation of that life, which to the eyes of nature had been impossible, irrevocable! Oh, infinite goodness of the Almighty, that would not suffer such faith to be frustrated; that would rather reverse the laws of nature, in returning a guest from heaven, and raising a corpse from death, than disappoint the confidence of a believing heart." "If ye believe, all things are possible to them that believe. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

But we have not yet done with the woman of Shunem, nor with the benefit she derived from her kindness to the man of God. It appears, that soon after the restoration of her son to life, a famine visited the land. Elisha,

<sup>3</sup> To the "Contemplations" of this pious bishop, the author is much indebted for assistance in other parts of this discourse.

foreseeing this visitation, gave her timely notice of it, and advised her to remove with her family to another country <sup>4</sup>. After so many proofs of fidelity, she cannot distrust his word, and therefore she did not wait for the event to be convinced of its truth, but went at once with her household, and sojourned in the land of Philistia <sup>5</sup>, the same country to which Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac, and Rebekah, had repaired under similar circumstances. And well it was for her that she had, for the second time, a prophet for her friend. The famine was very sore, and lasted for the space of seven long years; but she and her family, by the effect of the prophet's counsel, were saved from its dreadful ravages. Happy the souls that on all occasions consult with God's seers! They shall be freed from the plagues by which the careless, the wilful, and the spiritually blind, are overtaken and destroyed.

When the famine was over, she returned from the land of the Philistines to her former home at Shunem. She expected, on her arrival there, to take possession of her house and land as before, and to enjoy her wonted prosperity in her beloved neighbourhood. But, alas! she was cruelly disappointed in that hope, and she was now doomed to find, by bitter experience, the vanity of trusting in man. 'The party to

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings, chap. viii. 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Discourses on Sarah and Rebekah in First Series.

whom she had confided the care of her estate during her absence, refused to give it up; and she, who had been probably the wealthiest and the most influential inhabitant of the place, saw herself menaced with destitution and obscurity. Little did she apprehend such injurious conduct from her kinsfolk or acquaintances, when she declined the prophet's first proposal with the answer, "I dwell among mine own people." Had she anticipated such wrong and oppression, she might more truly have said, "I dwell among robbers and extortioners." But they perhaps appeared very friendly then who are selfish and cruel now. It often happens that men are forward with their good offices to a person in prosperity, but will scarcely grant him common justice, and will enrich themselves at his expense, when reduced to adversity. While "the rich hath many friends, the poor is hated, even of his own neighbour." What is she to do under this sad and unlooked-for reverse of circumstances? The only remedy appears to have been, to bring her complaint before the sovereign authority of the land. Time was when she dwelt so securely among her own people, that she declined the offer of being spoken for to the king. But, such is the great uncertainty of human affairs, she would now be very glad to have a friend at court. And where is Elisha now? Alas! he is far away in a foreign land—at Damascus, the capital of

Syria, and she knows not when to look for his return. She is, therefore, left to her own unaided resources, and she determines to make application to the king in person. It was so ordered by a wise and merciful Providence, that when she arrived for the purpose, the monarch was conversing with Gehazi, the now leprous, disgraced, and discarded servant of Elisha, concerning the miracles of that wonderful servant of God. The king had himself witnessed one instance of his power with God in the seasonable relief of himself and his allies with their armies, when distressed for want of water. He had heard of other works equally extraordinary, and he seems to have sought out Gehazi in his affliction and retirement, to receive an account of them from his mouth. One miracle especially, as it was witnessed by his own eyes, ought indeed to have convinced him of the superiority of the prophet's God, and converted him from idolatry; but such is the power of the love of sin in the human heart, that that clear manifestation of Divine agency had failed to work his reformation. It seems, however, that his mind had been disquieted by the fact. His curiosity, if not his anxiety, had been excited by the circumstance, and increased by the rumours of other astounding operations which had filled the land. He therefore came to Gehazi for correct information upon the subject. It would

appear that there was still some remaining good in both these very indifferent characters. Jehoram, though idolatrous, seems not to have abandoned himself entirely to falsehood, but to have felt some inclination to know the truth, by having recourse to the prophet's servant. And now that that servant had incurred his master's displeasure for his deceit and avarice in the matter of Naaman the Syrian, there was the less probability that he would ascribe to Elisha any power or excellence greater than he really possessed. Gehazi, on his part, though separated from his master, and grievously punished through his malediction for the sin he had committed, did not, as it should seem, plunge into deeper guilt by vindictively depreciating and misrepresenting the prophet's endowments and operations. He seems to have spoken of him to the king with truth, with respect, with admiration. He detailed the marvellous things which he had wrought; and, among the rest, the restoration to life of a dead child at the city of Shunem. At the moment that he was relating the particulars of this marvellous circumstance, the very mother of that child, accompanied by that reanimated child, makes her appearance before the king, and presents her petition for her house and for her land. Gehazi, surprised at the coincidence, and delighted to have such an indubitable confirmation of his narrative, exclaimed, "My Lord, O King, this is the



woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." The coincidence was most providential for the success of her suit. The king was astonished to find, from her own lips, and the lips of her son, a corroboration of the truth he had just been listening to. He became, in consequence, readily disposed to grant her request; for who could refuse a favour to one whom Heaven had so wonderfully favoured? And who would withhold support from a life which had been given once and again by a miracle? "So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field, since the day that she left the land, even until now."

While this subject teaches the instability of earthly possessions, and the evanescence of earthly friendships, what a beautiful picture it exhibits of contented piety, of the efficacy of faith, of the fruit of perseverance, and of the advantage of being connected with the people of God! In prosperity, this pious woman was not ambitious or avaricious. In adversity, she did not allow herself to be overwhelmed with sorrow and despair. When allured by the attractions of advancement, she answered with meek satisfaction of mind, "I dwell among mine own people." When she lost her child, she believed that the prophet's God was able to raise him up, and she persevered in her efforts till he was restored to her arms. When

she was robbed of her property, instead of sinking into helpless despondency, she prudently adopted the best steps for its recovery; and she persisted in her exertions until they were crowned with success. Having, in affluence, employed her wealth to support God's cause and his servants, she found, in distress, her godly liberality repaid by an ample recompense of reward—her dead raised to life—herself and family saved from destruction by famine—and her house and land restored to her possession—her prosperity re-established, as at the first, and her peace, as at the beginning, yea, her happiness, by the birth, resuscitation and revival of a son, increased a hundred-fold—a type of the unspeakable bliss that remaineth in realms above for all who are partakers of like precious faith, hope, and charity. May the Holy Spirit endow us all with these blessed graces, that we may come, at last, to the “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away !”

## SERMON XIX.

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### NAAMAN'S LITTLE MAID.

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2 KINGS v. 2.

“And the Syrians went out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife.”

IN commencing this course of sermons on the Female Characters of Holy Writ, I observed that the Scriptures would be found to exhibit the powerful influence of woman in almost every rank and grade of life. Often have we already contemplated her in the more elevated and eminent stations of society, as the parent of our universal race; as the partner of distinguished believers; as the queen of mighty nations; as the comforter and deliverer of an oppressed people; as the terrible avenger of a nation's woes; sometimes, indeed, the authoress of injury, but most frequently the worker of benefit to her family, her country, and her kind. We have now to draw your attention to her influence when

reduced to an humble condition, and employed in a servile capacity; and the history we are about to set before you, strikingly illustrates the important effect of her piety in the lowest walk of life. Some of the circumstances connected with that history are exceedingly instructive also, as showing to masters the value of God-fearing and faithful servants, and the injurious influence of wicked and faithless ones, and to servants the evil and the peril of dealing deceitfully and dishonestly towards their masters.

The person whose life we are now to contemplate, was a little maid, or a young damsel. She was a daughter of the chosen race, and, perhaps, born to wealth and honours. But she was violently carried away from her home in early youth, and reduced to the condition of a slave. She was removed from her country, as well as from her parents, and compelled to dwell in the land of the stranger, the heathen, and the idolater. The Syrians, who were often at open hostility with Israel, had gone out by companies or in marauding parties, crossed the border of the neighbouring country of Canaan, and among the spoils of grain, and cattle, and human beings destined for slavery, they brought home the little maid, now under consideration. We have no record of her father, or mother, or early home. We have no account of the havoc caused by the fire and sword of the invaders;

of the violent death of her resisting or flying parents; or of their tears and lamentations over a daughter forcibly torn away into captivity, and reduced into a condition often more dreaded than an early grave. But we are left to infer that they were religious parents; that they had trained up their child in the fear of the God of Israel; and that that home, which the enemy turned into a desert, was once the tranquil abode of peace, and the sacred temple of piety. And well was it for their child that they had brought her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord: for when the season of affliction came, she had a friend that would never leave her nor forsake her. And, doubtless, it would be some consolation to themselves, if they survived the sad bereavement, to reflect that she, who was torn from the embraces of her parents, had already chosen that good part which could not be taken away. That is the best inheritance for children. It is better than a mine of wealth. It is more valuable than the fairest estate. It is more to be desired than the most glittering mental endowments, or the most fascinating personal attractions. It is a treasure that will remain in the season of adversity. It is an anchor of hope in the hour of despondency. It is a rock of safety amid the billows of sorrow, and the storms of misfortune. Let parents, then, be more anxious to secure the pearl of Divine grace for their children than all worldly



possessions. Let them seek first for them the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and doubt not that all other needful things will be added unto them.

When this maid was carried away from her home and country into Syria, she became either by purchase, or as part of his allotted share in the division of the spoil, the property of Naaman, who was the commander of the Syrian forces, and a special favourite with the Syrian king, "and she waited on Naaman's wife." The reason assigned by the inspired penman why that soldier and general "was a great man with his master, and honourable," is, "because by him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria." The rabbins say, that he was the man who drew a bow at a venture in the battle of Ramoth Gilead, and slew Ahab the king of Israel, and thereby obtained, over that monarch's forces and those of his ally Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, a great victory for the Syrians. Probably on this account, and perhaps by reason of other great achievements performed in behalf of his country, he was held in very high esteem by his master, the king. "He was also a mighty man of valour," *i. e.* he had not only been successful on one occasion, but was possessed of great physical strength, personal courage, and military skill, was endowed with all the qualifications of a brave soldier and an able general, and was valued accordingly as one

of the stoutest permanent defenders of the nation and the throne. He had achieved great exploits ; he had acquired great glory ; he had eclipsed rival conquerors ; he had discomfited formidable foes ; he had called forth the applauding shouts of admiring thousands ; he had gained the highest esteem of his sovereign. Almost the very top of ambition's ladder had been reached, and scarcely aught remained for vanity or covetousness to aim at, and yet he was not happy. He was afflicted with a malady which would have caused the poorest and lowest of his countrymen to reject the offer of an exchange of conditions with him. Though he was as great nearly as worldly prosperity could make him, he was reduced, by the visitation of a sore disease, to a condition as wretched as any of his master's subjects. He was a general, a patriot, a courtier, and a hero, but he was a leper. How few are there in this world without some drawback to their eminence, some cloud to their sunshine, some alloy to their grandeur, some damper to their joy ! Here the bitter is mingled with the sweet, the gall with the honey, the dark with the light, the painful with the pleasurable. And why ? To remind us that this is not our rest, and to point our attention to regions of unmingled enjoyment beyond the skies. How vain to expect happiness from worldly wealth, elevation, or celebrity ! How unfounded are their notions,

who imagine, that if they could obtain great possessions, and rise to high dignities in the world, nothing would be wanting to their complete felicity! How short-sighted are they who seek the dazzling prizes at the sacrifice of principle, conscience, and their duty to God, forgetting that He whom they so thoughtlessly and wickedly disregard can, in the twinkling of an eye, blast their fairest prospects, and make wretched their most promising condition. Nebuchadnezzar was boasting of his power, and vauntingly exclaiming, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" but the next moment the kingdom was departed from him. Belshazzar was rioting in splendour and luxury; but in the midst of his costly feast he received the sentence of degradation and death. The rich man was saying to his soul, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry:" but that night his soul was taken from him, and he was reduced to hopeless destitution. Naaman, the Syrian, had attained unto the highest rank among his master's subjects, but all his happiness was marred, and his whole existence was rendered wretched by the presence of a loathsome disease, for "he was a leper." Oh, let men cease to aim at worldly gain or glory, as though such acquisitions alone had power to satisfy every want, and to secure perfect bliss. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory

in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, saith the Lord.”

No disease was more dreaded and detested, than that which afflicted Naaman the Syrian. It was disgusting to the sight; it was repulsive to the touch; it was painful to the patient himself; it was offensive to the senses of others. In Israel, and probably in the adjoining countries, it was often regarded as the direct effect of a Divine judgment, and considered as capable of being removed only by supernatural agency. The person visited with it was, according to the law of Moses, held to be polluted in the sight of God and man, and excluded from fellowship with his neighbours, and it is possible that a similar inconvenience and degradation attended it among the people of Syria. How wretched then was the condition of Naaman! What availed his military renown, his elevated rank, his country's gratitude, his monarch's favour? He had become a burden to himself and an object of pity to his humblest menials. What a source of bitter grief and vexation of spirit he had become to her, who had once gloried in her celebrated lord! His whole house was overcast with gloom, and moved with compassion at his miserable case. Is there no eye that can effectually pity, no hand that can ex-



tend relief? Is there no physician in that proud court of skill enough to recover the royal favourite? no resource in that delivered country to sooth the sorrows and alleviate the pains of its brave preserver? These feelings of sympathy would have pervaded his household in vain, and these anxious inquiries would have occupied its attention to no purpose, had it not been for the presence there of the little maid, who had been brought away captive out of the land of Israel. As became a good and faithful servant, she felt for her master's affliction, and earnestly desired his restoration to health. She reflected that, though his malady might be incurable by human means, it was not beyond the healing power exercised by Jehovah in answer to fervent prayer. She called to mind his wonderful works of old. She had heard how, at the intercession of Moses, his sister Miriam had been cured of her leprosy. She had listened with reverence to the account of miracles, apparently still more difficult and extraordinary, wrought by Elisha, who was then a living blessing to her country,—multitudes saved from death, and the dead restored to life. Why should he not cure her master's malady, if requested in a proper spirit so to do? She is persuaded that Jehovah will, by his instrumentality, effect the required deliverance, if approached for the purpose with humility and faith; and, determined to make known



her conviction upon the subject, she said to her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

The faintest glimpse of hope is eagerly caught at by the afflicted and miserable. The suggestion of a servant is not disregarded by a wife anxious for the recovery of her diseased lord. She communicates the information to Naaman. Naaman, glad to hear of a prospect of deliverance, though the prospect might be dim, and have no other foundation than the assurance of a young slave, and though the deliverance was to be brought by the prophet of a foreign and disliked nation, forwards the intelligence to the king his master. The King of Syria instantly approves of the proposal to seek out the far-famed servant of Jehovah, and sends the leper with a letter of recommendation to the King of Israel, whose subject the prophet was, with a view to facilitate the success of the undertaking. Naaman sets out for Samaria with a great retinue of servants and attendants, with the interests, as he thought, of two kings, and with costly presents of gold, and silver, and raiment, to conciliate the good-will of the worker of miracles. The King of Syria had imagined that the King of Israel could command whatever services any of his subjects was able to perform, and, perhaps, was not aware that the extraordinary powers exerted by Elisha were of

divine origin, possibly supposing him to be a physician of very eminent, but not of more than human skill, and therefore couched his letter in these words: "Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." The King of Israel, who is supposed to have been Jehoram, on receiving such a message, considered its language to be blasphemy against God, and a provocation to himself—blasphemy against God, because it implied that he who was but a man could wield the power of the Almighty, by whom alone the plague of leprosy could be healed; a provocation to himself, because it conveyed a request with which it was impossible for him to comply, and which seemed to be made only for the purpose of grounding on its refusal a pretext for complaints and open hostilities. "He rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, how he seeketh a quarrel against me." Jehoram and his subjects were, probably, kept in great awe of the Syrians ever since his father, Ahab, was slain by them in battle, and the confederate forces of Israel and Judah discomfited: and he was terrified by the expectation of no other result from this strange and unheard-of message, than an immediate declaration of war, and an attempted invasion

of his kingdom. Elisha, hearing of his distress and its cause, sends him an intimation that there was no ground for suspicion or apprehension, and adds, concerning the leper, "Let him come unto me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." They that would be cleansed of their spiritual leprosy must wait at wisdom's gate, and watch at the posts of her doors. Let all who would be delivered from the plague of sin, and obtain the blessing of salvation, hence learn to give diligent heed to the ministration of God's word and ordinances by his appointed servants. And let those who forsake the assembling of themselves together in the place where prayer is wont to be made, and the Gospel is wont to be preached, fear an utter exclusion from the healing influences of the great Physician, and dread the peril of an incurable malady, and the misery of an eternal death.

Elisha, on perceiving the arrival of the Syrian captain, sent a messenger unto him, saying, "Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damas-

cus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" The famous general came, indeed, to the door of Elisha, but it appears not in a proper spirit of humility and faith. It is thus that many come to the house of God, encumbered with pride and self-righteousness. He seems to have imagined that the honour he was thereby doing to Jehovah and his prophet, was equal to the benefit he was expecting at their hands. The prophet, perceiving his error, would convince him of it, and teach him the important lesson, that before the great God whom he worshipped, all were equally weak, and powerless, and that in His presence all distinctions vanished, but those of holy and unholy, faithful and faithless, obedient and disobedient. He would, with a view of conveying that instruction to his unconverted heart, uphold in his own demeanour the dignity of his Heavenly master, and communicate with the pompous applicant only through the medium of a simple and peremptory message. The soul of the proud conqueror, as yet untouched by Divine grace, was fired with indignation at this unceremonious treatment. He had imagined that the prophet would think it an honour to wait upon him in person, and would utter many solemn prayers, and perform many grave ceremonies in his presence. A reception so utterly at variance with his preconceptions threw him into a tumult of fretfulness



and impatience ; as though he had felt, “ Am I come so far to be treated with indignity and derision ? What else can be the design of such a dealing and such a message ? Had he meant me a kindness, why should he not grant me an interview ? Why not touch me with his hand, and bless me with his prayers, and cure me with his blessing ? Who could have anticipated any other mode of miraculous healing ? What is it but to mock my misery to talk of washing in Jordan seven times ? Who ever heard of water curing such a disease ? And if water be of use, why is that of Jordan prescribed ? Is that superior, nay, is it not inferior to the beautiful streams of my native land ? And why wash therein seven times ? Can there be any remedial virtue in that specific number ? What is such an unceremonious conduct, and such an unmeaning direction, better than trifling with my feelings, and laughing at my sufferings ? ” “ And so he turned and went away in a rage. ” It is thus that reasoning pride will often object to the simplicity of the Gospel, its sacraments, and ordinances, and cause men to despise the foolishness of preaching, to deny the efficacy of faith, to keep away from the appointed means of grace and salvation, and, consequently, to remain under the power of a spiritual malady which renders them odious in the sight of God, separates them from his people below, excludes them from his saints above, and is bringing them



inevitably to the blackness of darkness for ever.

But, happily for the Syrian leper, he had those about him who were able and willing to give him good advice. And oh that the spiritual lepers, who take offence at God's prophets, when speaking for their good, were surrounded by similar discreet well-wishers! This renowned patient was remarkably blessed in the members of his household, especially in his servants. A little servant maid it was who first advised him to undertake this journey to the prophet, and when its design was nearly marred by his hastiness, incredulity, and pride, his servants offered a remonstrance, which had the effect of bringing him to a better mind; and led to a successful termination of his anxious enterprise. They approached him, and reasoned with him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?" O most faithful servants, and worthy of all imitation! They address him by the name of *Father*, a title of the highest respect and affection; showing us that servants ought to honour, and obey, and love their master, and to have a tender and anxious regard for their truest interest; and teaching the more general lesson that in giving counsel or reproof we must make it appear not as the dictate of a supercilious or censorious

temper, but of pure love and esteem for the object of our attention, and that our design is not to deal reproach or cause uneasiness, but to produce a real reformation or a permanent advantage. They also, most judiciously, appeal to his reason and to his inclinations, to the usual soundness of his judgment, and to the indubitable earnestness of his desire for deliverance from his afflictive malady. "If the prophet," said they, "had bid thee do some great thing, some arduous deed, or some expensive service, wouldest thou not have done it? Wouldest thou not undertake a difficult enterprise, or expend a rich estate, to procure such a boon as the recovery of thy health? We had inferred, from the trouble you have already taken, that you would be willing to do any thing within the verge of possibility to accomplish so desirable an object. How much rather then do so simple a thing, at the prophet's command, as bathe in the stream of the Jordan? 'How much rather, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?'" To a heart open to conviction, the force of this affectionate reasoning was irresistible. The proud captain, though transported into a momentary passion by the apparent disappointment of his expectations, and the mortification of his vanity, listened and reflected, changed his mind and obeyed. "He went down and dipped himself in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God," and realized

the unspeakably precious blessing he was in quest of, "and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." From that moment he became an altered man in soul as well as in body. He returned to the prophet in a spirit of profound humility and inexpressible gratitude, so different from that in which he had just approached his door. He pressed him to accept a precious offering in acknowledgment of the inestimable benefit he had derived from his counsel. He declared himself a convert to the religion of Jehovah, and expressed a fixed determination for the future "to worship him and him only," saying, "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." Happy Naaman! cured at once of the leprosy of the body, and the leprosy of the soul, his disease changed into health, his loathsomeness into beauty, his pain into pleasure, his pride into humility, his arrogance into gratitude, his scepticism into faith, his idolatry into true religion, now admitted into the presence of that prophet from which he was before debarred, dismissed by him with a blessing, and going on his way rejoicing, guided by the light of heavenly wisdom, "whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace."

Here we might conclude the history, since we have arrived at the grand result produced by the influence of the little Israelitish maid,

who is the principal subject of our discourse. But since we have had particularly to notice the conduct of good and pious servants—not only of the principal subject of our present discourse, but of others in a similar capacity belonging to the Syrian's household—it seems necessary to the completeness of the instruction designed by the Holy Ghost upon that head, that we should briefly advert to the conduct of a wicked and unfaithful servant, connected with the same transaction. When Naaman returned to Elisha, he offered him costly presents in token of gratitude for his wonderful recovery. The prophet declined the offer ; and though repeatedly pressed to accept it, he positively and solemnly persisted in his refusal. And why? Not because he thought Gentile wealth impure. His master Elijah had partaken of the scanty store of the Syrophœnician Gentile. Not because a prophet should decline the gifts of the grateful or the charitable. He himself had accepted benefits from the pious Shunammite. Not because he abounded in riches and needed no addition. He appears to have been poor, and scantily provided with the comforts of this life. Or, if his own personal wants required no increase of possessions, he was surrounded by objects that would be greatly benefited by such aid, the sons of the prophets, the schools of the prophets, and probably other persons and institutions that looked to his influence and liberality



for support. To no one would an augmentation of property be in some respects of greater service; and by none could silver or gold be more beneficially and judiciously employed. But he declined the offer of it on the present occasion, to effect a more important purpose than any that he could accomplish by the distribution of wealth in his own country. He wished to give a proof of the disinterested piety of the true servants of the true God, as distinguished from the lying priests of heathenism who ministered only for filthy lucre's sake. He designed to set forth the free mercy of Jehovah, whose gifts were not granted in consideration of riches to be given to him or his servant. He intended to teach, that the miraculous powers with which he was endowed, as they were not purchasable by worldly wealth, were neither to be employed for worldly gain. He desired to exhibit the immeasurable superiority of the favour and grace of God over perishable riches, and to intimate that all the glittering treasures of earth are contemptible in comparison with the unfading inheritance of his chosen people. By such a manifestation of the transcendent nature of the religion of Jehovah, and of the pure motives of his faithful servants, he hoped to strengthen the Gentile's determination against the lying vanities of paganism, to detach him for ever from a worship that could not profit, to win over his



heart into a riveted and indissoluble attachment to the service of the God of Israel, and to make him the instrument of maintaining the honour and spreading the knowledge of the Holy and the True One through the dark regions of falsehood and iniquity. But the prophet's noble design was interfered with by the cupidity of an unfaithful servant. He secretly went after the Syrian captain, and under the pretence of the unexpected arrival of two sons of the prophets, who required assistance, he requested in his master's name, and obtained, a gift of clothes and money, and appropriated it to his own purposes. This was in itself an inexcusable act of deceit and iniquity. Under the circumstances, it was an act of peculiar and aggravated guilt, calculated to defeat most holy intentions, and to produce we know not what unhappy consequences. We wonder not, therefore, to find that it should be particularly revealed to the prophet, and punished with a severe judgment. The moment he appeared in his presence, Elisha sternly asked him where he had been, and upon receiving the false answer, that he had gone no whither, showed him that he was acquainted with the secrets of his heart, and severely and indignantly remonstrated with him on the great wickedness he had committed. "Is it," said he, "a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen,

and men-servants, and maid-servants?" *i. e.* is this an opportunity of enriching thyself? Dost thou take advantage of my disinterested piety, and of my zeal for God's honour, to acquire worldly wealth? That very occasion of refusing presents, which I intended for the credit of our holy profession, the furtherance of the divine glory, and the confirmation of a new convert, hast thou profanely perverted to selfish ends, and thereby thwarted the dearest wish of my heart for the honour of God and his Church? Is not this complication of unfaithfulness, deceit, covetousness, and desecration, a most grievous offence against God and thy master? Grievous, therefore, shall thy punishment be. The disease of him whose riches thou hast longed after, and dishonestly gained, shall be thine. "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and to thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." How illustrative is this memorable case of the corrupting influence and the fearful end of avarice and ambition. To gratify these sinful cravings, Gehazi scrupled not to be guilty of dishonesty, for he imposed upon Naaman; of falsehood, for he lied unto him and also to his master; of what may be regarded as simony, for he received money in consideration of a divine gift; of a profane disregard of the interests of true religion, for his conduct served to frustrate the holy views

in that regard of the disinterested prophet of God. And what was the result of this unprincipled and profane conduct? Instead of obtaining the wealth and happiness he schemed to possess himself of, he fell into a condition worse than the poorest and the most destitute in the land. He contracted the very disease, for the cure of which Naaman would have parted with all his wealth and glory. Like the Syrian, when he first approached the prophet's house "Gehazi went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." How true are the words of the apostle, "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

1. Among the many important lessons taught by this history, we learn the value of an early religious education. The little Israelitish maid had been taught to fear the true God, and to admire the wonderful works wrought by the instrumentality of his prophet. The knowledge and the faith she imbibed in her native home, supported her under the affliction of slavery in a distant land, enabled her to confer an inestimable benefit upon her master and his family, and we doubt not led to her own liberty and restoration to Canaan, if she expressed such a desire. Parents, if you would promote your children's truest interests, if you would make them instruments of good in their day

and generation, if you would furnish them with an armour of defence, and supply them with the materials of consolation and hope in the season of adversity, when, perhaps, they are far out of the reach of your helping hand, or when your own heads are laid in the dust of death; oh, teach them diligently to "remember their Creator in the days of their youth."

2. We learn from this subject the great advantage derived to a family from pious and faithful servants; and the sad influence exercised by those of an opposite character. Naaman's little maid, by her confident recommendation of Jehovah's prophet, induced her master to undertake a journey, which resulted in the cure of his bodily disease, and, we have reason to believe, in the salvation of his immortal soul. The example of her piety appears to have produced a salutary effect upon her fellow-servants, perhaps converted them to the true God, for they gave their master, at a very critical time, advice nearly as valuable as her own; when, under the influence of mortified pride, he was tempted to return home unrecovered, prevailed upon him to reconsider his determination, and to follow the prophet's directions. Their fidelity and discretion, thus seconding her original suggestion, led to a most happy consequence, brought about the recovery of the Syrian captain from a distressing sickness to perfect health, and terminated in his conversion;

and, probably, that of his whole house, from the darkness of idolatry to the light of true religion, and, finally, in their admission to the realms of eternal day and bliss. The deceitful and wicked conduct of Gehazi, on the contrary, was calculated to mar the holy designs of a most pious master, occasioned that master much pain of mind, and brought upon himself immediate wretchedness, and, perhaps, issued in everlasting misery and despair. Let us, then, earnestly strive and pray that every member of our household, servants as well as children, may be imbued with the fear of God, and led to keep his holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of their life.

3. Let servants hence learn their responsibility to God for their conduct to those who are their masters, according to the flesh. Let the irreligious among them, who perversely thwart the efforts made in the family to promote the interest of morality and religion, who deceitfully and dishonestly pursue their own selfish ends, without caring for the extensive injury their conduct may occasion to others, remember Gehazi, and dread a disease, of which his leprosy, which excluded him from fellowship with his neighbours, was but a type, even the indelible stain of guilt which unfits men for heaven, and necessitates their everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power; and let those servants,



who have been trained up in the knowledge and fear of God, gather from the conduct of Naaman's servant the duty of employing the opportunities of their position, and the advantages of their religious light, for the temporal and spiritual good of the family to which they belong.

4. Finally, let masters and mistresses learn hence not to despise godly counsel, though it come from a man-servant or a maid-servant. They may have been sent into your house as instruments to save your souls. Blessed are those families, all whose members, both high and low, young and old, are bound together by the silken cord of one holy faith, and one heavenly hope. A little while, and they shall meet in their Father's house above, where, with one heart, and one mind, they shall harmoniously sing the praises of their Saviour and their God for ever and ever. Amen.

## SERMON XX.

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### ATHALIAH AND JEHOSEBA.

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2 KINGS xi. 1, 2.

“And when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash, the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain ; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bed-chamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain.”

IN our last discourse we beheld a striking contrast between persons in the grade of servants. This passage presents a striking contrast between two females of royal rank. When the agents of the evil one are hatching their schemes of mischief, God raises up instruments of good to reprove their wicked conduct, or to counteract their pernicious designs, and He leaves not himself without a witness in any walk of life. If Elisha had an unfaithful and impious servant, Naaman's exhibited a fidelity and a piety which condemned him, by showing that

his misdeeds were not excusable by the circumstances of his station. If Queen Athaliah was unprincipled and cruel, Jehosheba, who was also of the blood royal, was conscientious and humane, and condemned her by a practical exhibition of the most blessed qualities, in the most elevated circle of society. In no grade or rank, in no age or nation, however degenerate or corrupt, are there not found some who bear testimony in favour of Jehovah's cause, and against the workers of iniquity, and abettors of idolatry. There was a Noah among the almost universally corrupt inhabitants of the antediluvian world. There was a Lot among the irreclaimable population of the cities of the plain. There was a Moses at the court of Pharaoh. There was a Micaiah among the false counsellors of Ahab. There was a Shadrach, a Meshach, and an Abednego, to protest against the worship of the golden image on the plain of Dura. There was a Daniel to vindicate the honour of the true God amid the king-worshippers of Persia. And there was a princess Jehosheba ready, at the peril of her life, to exercise the tenderness of womanly affection towards helpless infancy, and do an important service to her Church and her country, and thereby to shame the unfeminine hard-heartedness, and to defeat the impiously ambitious schemes, of the murderous queen, Athaliah.

Athaliah was the wife of Jehoram, king of

Judah, and the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel, and, probably, of the heathen and idolatrous Jezebel. She is, both in the books of the Kings and the books of the Chronicles, called the daughter of Omri. But since, in the same passages, as well as in the words of our text, she is said to be the mother of Ahaziah; and since, in the second book of the Kings, we read that Jehoram, Ahaziah's father, and predecessor on the throne of Judah, had, for his wife, the daughter of Ahab; and since it is not uncommon in Scripture to express a nearer by a remoter degree of consanguinity, it is evident that, by the term daughter, we are to understand grand-daughter of Omri, who was the father of Ahab. It should be carefully noted also, to prevent a confusion of ideas in the contemplation of this portion of the sacred history, that about this same time—the time of Athaliah—two successive kings of Israel and Judah respectively bore the same names, though in the respective kingdoms the names did not occur in the same, but in the contrary order of succession. Ahab, king of Israel, was succeeded first by his son Ahaziah, and then by his son Jehoram, a younger brother of Ahaziah. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who was partly contemporary with Ahab, was succeeded first by his son Jehoram, and then by his grandson Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, so that there succeeded on the one throne an Ahaziah and a Jehoram, two

brothers; and on the other throne, a Jehoram and an Ahaziah, father and son. Now Athaliah was sister to the brothers Ahaziah and Jehoram, who succeeded one another on the throne of Israel, and she bore the relation of wife and mother to Jehoram and Ahaziah, father and son, who succeeded one another on the throne of Judah. This identity of names was not altogether accidental, but was, we may well suppose, in part attributable to the affinity established between the two kingdoms in the time of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, when Athaliah, the daughter of the former, was married to Jehoram, the son of the latter. This matrimonial alliance was the source of incalculable evils to the kingdom of Judah. Athaliah was a true daughter of Jezebel. She inherited her ambitious and cruel temper, and if she was not systematically educated in paganism like that superstitious and persecuting Sidonian, as the mother's influence on the minds of children in matters of religion is often stronger than that of the father, even when he is correct in his notions, she had most probably imbibed all her heathenish predilections and idolatrous attachments. She was accordingly the cause of great mischief in Judah, as her mother had been the cause of great mischief in Israel. The one rivalled the other in inciting her husband to mischief. As it is said of Ahab, that "there was none like unto him, which did sell himself



to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up," so it is said of Jehoram, that "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab, and wrought that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," because "he had the daughter of Ahab to wife." At her instigation, doubtless, it was, that he introduced idolatry into Judah and Jerusalem, in defiance of the positive commands of God by Moses. At her instigation, most probably, it was, that "he slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Judah." She abetted false worship, and encouraged oppression and bloodshed, notwithstanding the signal judgments which those abominations and cruelties had brought down on her father's kingdom and her father's house. She remembered, or heard of, the sore famine in Samaria, the violent death of Ahab her father, the bloody end of Jezebel her mother, the execution of her seventy brothers in Samaria, the dreadful disease which destroyed her husband, all declared to be inflicted by Heaven in vengeance for the sinfulness and criminality of her family, and yet she refused to be reformed, but proceeded to the perpetration of even greater atrocities than had ever stained the character of her worst relations. As Belshazzar took no warning by the divine judgments upon his father and predecessor Nebuchadnezzar, but went on

in riot and profaneness until he was overtaken by irremediable ruin, so Athaliah disregarded the warning voice that spoke in the retributions of Heaven against her parents, her husband, and other relatives, but persisted in idolatry and crime until she was suddenly cut off and overwhelmed with an everlasting destruction. Though God is long-suffering and merciful, not willing that any one should perish in their sins, yet we are assured that he "is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath prepared for him the instruments of death: he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors."

But let us proceed to consider the circumstances and the motives of the great enormity which has marked Athaliah's name with everlasting infamy. After the death of her husband Jehoram, who is supposed to have perished by the same disease as Herod Agrippa, a miserable spectacle of Divine vengeance for abominable wickedness, Ahaziah, her son by that wicked king, succeeded to the throne. That son, unwarned by the fate of his father, and the peril incurred by his good grandfather Jehoshaphat, from connecting himself with the house of Ahab, and the great evils which had accrued from that connexion to his father and his kingdom, no sooner ascends the throne of Judah than, under the influence of his mother,

and his mother's relatives, he cements his friendship with her brother Jehoram, king of Israel, by entering into an active alliance with him against Hazael, king of Syria. In that expedition Jehoram was wounded; and while Ahaziah was on a visit of condolence with him at Jezreel, while suffering from the effects of his wounds, Jehu, a captain of the Israelitish army, marched towards that town at the head of a rebellion against his royal master. The two kings, upon perceiving that formidable chief's approach, went out to meet him, but, on coming within his hearing, alarmed by his hostile language and violent bearing, they turned their backs and fled. Jehoram was presently slain, being by Jehu shot through the heart on the spot. Ahaziah escaped for the moment, and hid himself in Samaria, but was soon after discovered and put to death by order of the same victorious leader; and it is distinctly revealed that his premature end was the result of a divine judgment upon him for having associated and confederated with the King of Israel. "The destruction of Ahaziah<sup>1</sup>," says the inspired writer, "was of God by coming to Joram, [or Jehoram,] and going out with him against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab." It is thus that many now, through

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xxii. 7.

the influence of evil companionship and evil counsel, make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and bring themselves, by the operation of a just retribution, to ruin both of body and soul. Hence the vast importance of those Scripture maxims and directions, "Evil communications corrupt good manners:" "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness:" Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly: Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing: Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

While Ahaziah was gone to assist Jehoram, it would appear that his mother Athaliah was left in charge of the kingdom. It might have been expected, that the dreadful news of the double disaster—her son's death and her brother's death, to which may be added the miserable end immediately after of her mother Jezebel, together with the many other calamities recently inflicted upon her family for its vile apostasy, would have had the effect of humbling her in dust and ashes, and bringing her to reformation and repentance. But there are hearts so abandoned and corrupt, that warnings and afflictions serve only to harden them in sin. Her desperate soul appears to have been actuated by the mingled motives of vindic-

tiveness, idolatrous zeal, and personal ambition. If her father's house is extirpated by Jehu, who was sent to execute upon it Jehovah's wrath, on account of idolatry and cruelty, and to build up a throne for himself on its melancholy ruins, she will extirpate the house of David, even though there be mingled with it her own blood, and avenge upon it the discomfiture and humiliation of Baal, appropriate to herself all its wealth and honours, and reign sole monarch of Judah and Jerusalem. Actuated by this hellish motive, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. Her husband's brothers had already perished by that vile king's orders. Her son Ahaziah's brothers, whether her own children, or those by other mothers, or, as some suppose them to have been, his cousins or nephews, had perished by the hand of Jehu. There probably remained, therefore, scarcely any of the seed royal, but the children of her son Ahaziah, *i. e.* her own grand-children, and yet these she sacrificed to the madness of her idolatry and ambition. We have not upon record a more unnatural and cruel murderess. She was far worse than Pharaoh, who commanded the drowning of the infants of Goshen. She was worse than Herod, who ordered the massacre of the children at Bethlehem. She set at nought the ties of kindred, as well as of humanity, in the pursuit of her unprincipled schemes, and to establish her own power, and to



advance her favourite superstition, she walked over the corpses of those whom she should rather have died to save. We dwell not on the lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning which filled the palaces of Jerusalem on that tragical occasion, since the Scripture has passed over them in silence. But that silence, as to the circumstantial of the recorded deed of horror, is perhaps more pathetically expressive than the most minute detail would have been. It intimates the impossibility of adequately describing, by human language, the atrocity of such unheard-of slaughter. It leaves the imagination at full liberty to picture what no words can tell, of helpless struggles, despairing looks, bursting hearts, terrific shrieks, and dying agonies. As kings had then many wives, there might be many mothers of those children, whom this implacable fury of a grandmother made for ever wretched; many, like Rachel, weeping for their children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not. Oh, the woes and the wailings which this daughter of a heathen woman caused to those mothers of Judah! But she heeded not the sorrows of mourning mothers, the cries of helpless infants, or the dying struggles of stronger victims. She proceeded in her career of blood until, as she thought, she had destroyed all the seed royal, extirpated the last vestige of the house of David, and having strewed her path with murders, she

unscrupulously took possession of the vacant and unclaimed throne. How dreadful is the lust of reigning! how baneful is the effect of superstition! What calamities they have occasioned in the world! What tragedies they have caused to be perpetrated among mankind; destroying the charities of life, snapping asunder the ties of kindred, and turning near relatives into monsters of ferocity and cruelty. Ambition, whether in ancient or modern times, through what seas of blood hast thou waded to thy object! Superstition, whether in the form of idolatry persecuting Judaism, or of Paganism persecuting Christianity, or of Popery persecuting Protestantism, what ravages hast thou committed among our fallen race! Let us bless God that we live in a country where the succession to the throne is so clearly and positively settled, as to render hopeless the aspirings of unlawful ambition; and let us strive and pray that superstition may never return to wave its iron and bloody sceptre over our land, now blessed with the liberty of the Gospel, and the consolations of true religion. In that Litany of our Church may we all heartily and gratefully join, "From all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion; from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism; from hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, Good Lord, deliver us."

From the reckless cruelty of Athaliah the queen, we turn with a cheered spirit to the

humane exertions of the princess Jehosheba, or, as she is called in the Chronicles, Jehoshebeath. She was the daughter of Jehoram, and the sister of Ahaziah, but probably by another mother, and unconnected, by blood, with the idolatrous and murderous Athaliah. She was married to Jehoiada, the then high priest of Jehovah, a man of exemplary piety and zeal for the Lord of hosts. She ventured to counteract the impious and exterminating scheme of Athaliah, and by her wisdom and humanity succeeded in rescuing the seed of David from utter extinction. She took Joash, the son of Ahaziah, a babe of a year old, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain. Josephus's account of the proceeding is, that coming into the palace, she found a male child, of about a year old, whose name was Joash, among the dead bodies of the sons of Ahaziah, whom the nurse, "he thinks, had there laid on purpose to save his life." The probability is, that Athaliah had given strict orders for all the seed royal to be put to death, and brought together into one apartment for her inspection, and for the satisfaction of her mind that they were all certainly destroyed. The nurse durst not disobey this unsparing decree; but having not the heart to kill her innocent charge, and perhaps hoping that a slight delay or a change of circumstances might, under a merciful Providence, save his life, she

laid him asleep among the corpses of his brothers, in the human slaughter-house, even as the mother of Moses, clinging to the last chance of hope, laid her unconscious babe on the banks of the perilous river, instead of plunging him in its fatal waters. On what a slender thread did once depend the prospects of Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt! And on what a slender thread hung now the continuance of David's line, whence was to spring, according to the flesh, the Deliverer of a world from the slavery and sorrow of sin! There lay the hope of the chosen race, the progenitor of the Messiah, the desire of all nations, in the unconsciousness of natural sleep, among heaps of those whose eyes were closed in the sleep of death. A princess comes to his rescue, humane and considerate, and yet resolute and intrepid, like the princess of Egypt. We may well suppose that the daughter of Pharaoh exposed herself to some danger by the rescue of Moses; but the tender heart which compassionated helpless innocence was courageous enough to brave the worst consequences of an act of humanity and charity. Jehosheba placed herself in far greater jeopardy, by conveying away the infant Joash from among the murdered sons of the king; but her affection for a brother's child, her anxiety for the preservation of the lineage of David, her zeal for the pure worship of Jehovah, and for the accomplishment of

the promises made to the fathers, with which worship and promises the continuance of David's lineage was intimately and indissolubly connected, overmastered every other feeling in her mind, and armed her woman's heart to a deed of perilous daring. She set at nought the queen's bloody decree. She sought the repository of the dead, and, probably having a previous understanding with the nurse upon the subject, picked out the sleeping child from the lifeless bodies, and conveyed him away to a place of safety. He was committed to the care of that same nurse, as Moses was to his own mother's, and kept concealed in an apartment of the temple, to which none but Jehoiada, or those permitted by him, had access,—kept concealed in that safe asylum, not for three months, like Moses, but for the protracted space of six anxious years. God laughs in heaven at the plots of the wicked, and confounds their deepest projects. He had said unto David, "Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." In vain shall earth and hell conspire to frustrate the sure promise, and to break the well-ordered covenant. Miserable Athaliah, to think that the seed of the righteous can be so easily rooted out! When thou and thy father's house shall have vanished away, the man after God's own heart shall have a perpetual successor, He, whose word is yea and amen, having said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen; I have



sworn unto David, my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations."

At the expiration of six years from the destruction of the seed royal, and the rescue of Joash from that dreadful fate, during which years the land groaned under the tyrannic sway of Athaliah, Jehoiada determines to produce the young king, and to overthrow the power of Athaliah by placing him on the usurped throne. He communicates his intention to the principal officers of the army, and they impart the secret to the most influential men of the kingdom, and summon to Jerusalem "the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel." These being assembled together at an appointed place, Jehoiada causes them to make a solemn covenant with, that is, to swear allegiance to the youthful king, and then gives them particular directions, and supplies them with the necessary arms for securing his inauguration. After these precautions, "they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and made him king. The crown symbolized the glory and majesty which belong to the kingly office; the book of the testimony, or the Bible, indicated the rules and directions by which he was to guide his thoughts and actions; and the oil signified the heavenly endowments by which

he was qualified to perform his royal functions. Thus presented with a crown, furnished with the divine word, and anointed with holy oil, all the assembly saluted him with the clapping of hands, and with the well-wishing salutation, "God save the King!" Well might they rejoice at the restoration of true religion and liberty, and the termination of the reign of darkness and oppression. Well might they bid him welcome, who came to them, as it were, from the dead, to re-establish the house of David, and to spread the blessings of peace and piety among an erring and groaning generation. With such acclamations of satisfaction and joy should we welcome the accession of David's Son to the throne of our hearts, and say, "Live in my soul, let all its powers be subject to thy sway, and reign thou there for ever and ever."

Turn we once again, for a moment, to the impious queen, whose cruel schemes were, by these proceedings, which originated in the intrepid compassion and piety of a God-fearing princess, covered with defeat and confusion. Attracted by the sound of the trumpets, and the shouts of applauding loyalty, she quits her palace, and, in the frenzy of impatient curiosity and alarm, she rushes to the temple of the Lord; and when she beheld the surprising spectacle of a crowned king surrounded by faithful subjects, she rent her clothes, and exclaimed in helpless despair, "Treason, trea-

son!" Oh, Athaliah! thy reckoning time is come for all the royal blood thy superstition and ambition shed. Like thy idolatrous and cruel mother Jezebel, thou shalt fall, unaided and unpitied. None of thy flatterers in impiety, and abettors in mischief, shall lend thee succour; and thou must meet, unbefriended and alone, thy dreadful and merited doom. No formalities of trial are needed in the case of so notorious an offender, and Jehoiada the high priest, whose counsel had at length succeeded in defeating her machinations, hesitates not to pass upon her the sentence of death, saying to the captains of hundreds that were set over the host, "Have her forth without the ranges," or the precincts of the temple, that her accursed blood may not defile Jehovah's sacred place, and put her to death. "And they laid hands on her, and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she" ignominiously "slain." How just a retribution! "He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." How sure, though slow, is the wrath of God to come on the children of disobedience! How fearful to persist in iniquity, despite the warnings and judgments of Heaven! "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished." Let the impenitent tremble at the contemplation of this divine vengeance. Let the wicked be thereby roused to

forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, that he may flee from the wrath to come.

1. From this subject, we gather a striking lesson as to the opposite effects of a false and true religion on the national temper and disposition. Of all the female characters that have come under our contemplation in these discourses, by far the worst and vilest are a heathen woman, and the daughter of a heathen woman; Jezebel, who was born and bred among pagans, and Athaliah, who imbibed her idolatrous principles. Not one of the mothers or daughters of Israel or Judah, among whom a knowledge of the true God existed, ever ran into the same excess of profligacy and barbarity. The reason of the difference is, that true religion not only secures the future salvation of the individual believer, but exercises a present humanizing influence on the whole body of a nation, and diffuses streams of moral health among persons of all ranks and ages. It tends to improve the modes of education, and to ameliorate the institutions of government. It goes to curb the arrogance of the prince, and to restrain the ferocity of the subject. It wars against the natural selfishness of the human heart, and encourages the culture of liberality and charity in thinking and in acting, and of mutual forbearance and mutual love. The result is, that it raises the tone of sentiment and feeling throughout the entire community,



even though many of its individual members may not be the subjects of divine grace, and produces an effect favourable to human welfare upon the high and upon the low, upon the young and upon the old, upon men, upon women, and upon children. Godliness, or true religion, in a national as well as in an individual point of view, has promise of the life that now is, and is conducive in a thousand ways to the diminution of present misery and the increase of present happiness, while the dark places of the earth, which are unblessed with the light of revelation, are full of the habitations of cruelty. Let us then thankfully cherish our Christianity and our Protestantism, the purest form of true religion that the world has ever seen, as a temporal and national good, setting aside for the moment its far greater value as the means of individual and eternal happiness. And let us feel a compassion for those miserable portions of our fallen race, who are lying as it were in the valley of the shadow of death, groaning under the oppressive sway of senseless and cruel superstitions, and strive and pray that the true God's holy ways may be made known to all sorts, and conditions, and tribes of men, his saving health unto all nations.

2. From this subject, we gather a striking lesson also, as to the opposite effects of matrimonial alliances with the wicked and with the righteous. Good King Jehoshaphat committed



a grievous error, when he formed a friendship with Ahab, and cemented that friendship by the marriage of his son Jehoram with Athaliah, the daughter of that impious monarch, and of his more impious queen. He thereby brought a scorpion into his family, who, with the single exception of a child providentially saved, destroyed the whole of his descendants. The great cause of the antediluvian corruption, and its awful consequences, was the sons of God taking to themselves wives of the daughters of men, or the intermarriage of a pious with an impious race. The same cause, as appears from this history, operated an almost utter extinction of the family of David, and wrought incalculable calamities in Judah and Jerusalem. Be not ye, then, unequally yoked with unbelievers. But behold in the same narrative an illustration of the good arising from intermarrying with the righteous. Jehosheba, by being united to the upright and pious high priest Jehoiada, was able, by the counsel and encouragement of a husband zealous in the cause of true religion and national happiness, to defeat the nefarious schemes of an unprincipled usurper. She rescued the royal seed from utter extinction; and her efforts ultimately resulted in the establishment of David's son on the throne of his ancestors, the ignominious destruction of the atrocious Athaliah, the subjugation of all his enemies, and the universal acknowledgment

of his lawful sway. Thus the marriage of Jehosheba with a pious high priest was the means of counteracting the worst of the melancholy effects of the marriage of Jehoram with an impious woman. How important, then, to form such alliances with those only who live in the fear of God!

3. From this history we gather, finally, how utter and inevitable is the destruction of the ungodly, and how certain is the future glory of the people of God. Ahab and Jezebel, great as their power seemed once to be, came to a violent, and the latter to an ignominious end. Every one of their children that were in the land, and within reach, was put to death by the hand or influence of Jehu; and even the ferocious Athaliah, their only surviving offspring, who was married to the king of another country, was ultimately brought to condign punishment, and destroyed amid the execrations of an oppressed people. Oh, let the unprincipled and impenitent take warning by her fate, and her parents' fate, and be assured that, sooner or later, their sins will find them out; for there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from the all-seeing eye of God. But the seed of the righteous, though for a time in peril and in obscurity, will at last come to certain happiness and glory, even as the infant Joash, though at one time in great danger of

death, and laid amidst the slain, and afterwards concealed from the nation's eyes, came forth at last from the darkness and the storm, to possess the throne and the diadem amid the gratulations of rejoicing multitudes. Ye that love the Lord, take courage at the sight. Whatever be your perils, or trials, or difficulties, for awhile in this vale of tears, let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. The time is coming on when He to whom you commit your ways shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day. Rest in the Lord, and wait ye patiently on Him, and you shall ere long come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on your heads: and ye shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Like Jehosheba and her pious husband Jehoiada, and emancipated Judah and Jerusalem, after enduring for awhile the cruel oppression of sin, you shall be consoled for all your tribulation by mingling in the glad throng around your Saviour-Sovereign's throne in the heavenly kingdom, and joining in the joyful anthem of eternal loyalty and praise—

“All hail the great Immanuel's name,  
Ye angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the Royal Diadem,  
And crown Him Lord of all.”

## SERMON XXI.

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### HULDAH THE PROPHETESS.

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2 KINGS xxii. 14.

“So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she dwelt in Jerusalem, in the college), and they communed with her.”

As we have had, in the course of these Sabbath evenings' meditations, to contemplate the conduct of women, by the light of Scripture, in all grades of life, and in very various temporal positions, we have now to regard her as sustaining an ecclesiastical character, or performing the functions of a spiritual teacher. Mention is made of prophetesses in several parts of Scripture, as of Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron; of Deborah, a prophetess, who judged Israel; of Anna, a prophetess, who departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers, night and day; and of ~~the~~ ~~evangelist~~ ~~having~~ ~~four~~ ~~daughters,~~ ~~virgins,~~ ~~which~~ ~~did~~ ~~prophecy.~~

The term prophetess is, in one place, applied to a prophet's wife, and apparently for no other reason than because she bore that relation to one sustaining the prophetic office, as the wife of the prophet Isaiah. As there were false prophets, it appears, from two passages of Scripture, there were sometimes also false prophetesses, as the prophetess Noadiah, who opposed the godly works of Nehemiah, and the woman Jezebel, noticed in the Revelation, who called herself a prophetess<sup>1</sup>. A prophetess, in the higher and present sense of the word, was a female who was endowed with extraordinary divine gifts, and enabled to communicate to man the will of God, to impart counsel beyond the reach of human wisdom, and to predict events undiscernible by human prescience or sagacity. Persons so favoured of Heaven naturally occupied a conspicuous place in the eyes of their neighbours and contemporaries, and acted as teachers of the ignorant, leaders on important occasions, and guides in periods of difficulty and perplexity. Of this character were Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and probably Philip's daughters, and Huldah, the subject of our present discourse.

From the circumstances recorded in connexion with these names, it is evident that the gift of prophecy, in old times, was not limited to the male, but extended also to the female sex.

<sup>1</sup> See Sermons on Miriam and Jezebel.



Some parts of St. Paul's writings appear to militate against that opinion, and require, before we proceed, a word or two of explanation, to reconcile their seeming discrepancy on this point with the rest of the Holy Scriptures. That Apostle, in his first epistle to the Corinthians<sup>2</sup>, says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as saith the law of Moses;" by which *Law* is probably meant the book of the Law of Moses, or the Pentateuch, which, in its former part, or Genesis, contains these words of God to Eve after her transgression, "He shall rule over thee." "And," says the Apostle further, "if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." In his first epistle to Timothy, he says to the same effect: "Let the woman learn, in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." These passages seem, at first sight, to be in opposition to those passages of Scripture just referred to, which ascribe the gift of prophecy to the woman; and even to a passage in another part of St. Paul's own writings, in which, while he gives directions concerning the apparel of women, he implies their possession of the prophetic gift, saying, "Every woman praying or

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xiv. 34, 35.

*prophesying* with her head uncovered dishonour-eth her head." But the discrepancy is only in appearance, not in reality, for the thing prohibited by the apostle is perfectly distinct from the exercise of the prophetic gift which is ascribed by other inspired penmen, and by himself in the last passage quoted, to the female sex. His prohibition refers to the delivering of opinions, or asking questions in public, or the assumption of authority to teach a congregation by women in general, without reference to supernatural qualifications. He might well infer from the analogy of things, from a consideration of God's usual method of dealing with our race in spiritual matters, from the patriarchal dispensation, in which men, and not women, were the principal instruments of heavenly communications, from the Mosaic economy, in which men only were employed in the sacerdotal office, from the evangelical ministry, which, including the twelve Apostles, and the seventy originally appointed by *Christ* to preach the *Gospel*, was confined exclusively to the male sex—from all that he knew of the past he might infer that God designed the appointment of men rather than of women to the offices of public teachers in the *Church*; or of public interpreters of the divine will. He delivered his admonitions and exhortations upon the subject in conformity with that inference, and, as a general rule, prohibited the female sex from

ministering in the congregations, or carrying on disputations in a public assembly of the faithful. But the rule that was proper and expedient for the usual course of things, ceased to be of force under circumstances which called for the extraordinary interposition of divine power or guidance, even as the laws of nature gave way before the exertion of miraculous energy. Accordingly, while, agreeably to the tenour of the Scriptures, the Apostle commands women to be learners rather than teachers, to be hearers rather than preachers, he by no means forbids those of them to prophesy who were unequivocally endowed with supernatural gifts. There is, therefore, no real disagreement upon the point between *St. Paul* and the rest of the sacred writers, or between different parts of his own writings; the seeming inconsistency arising only from our confounding God's ordinary modes of dealing with his creatures under ordinary circumstances, and his extraordinary operations in peculiar times and on great emergencies. At such times, and on such emergencies the Almighty and the All-wise One, for the best of reasons, often departs from the employment of the usual means, and the customary instrumentality, and hence He has often delegated women rather than men to communicate his solemn messages, and to effect his high purposes, such as Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah the prophetess.

Huldah lived in the reign of Josiah, king of Israel, about 240 years later than Athaliah and Jehosheba, the subjects of our last contemplations; and about 624 years before our Saviour's birth. She was the wife of Shallum, keeper of the wardrobe; an officer, it is supposed, closely connected with the court. She dwelt in Jerusalem, in the college. Now the original word here translated "college," is of somewhat doubtful meaning. If the right translation be "college," or school, we may suppose it to mean a school of the prophets, such as are elsewhere noticed in Scripture, or some important institution for male or female education, with which Huldah, on account of her eminent endowments, was officially connected. But the opinion of the learned in general is in favour of rendering the word by the expression "second order or second rank," *i. e.* the second rank of buildings from the royal palace. The term probably indicates houses or apartments adjoining the royal residence, provided for the court ladies, or those connected directly or indirectly with offices in the court or palace. The Jews maintain, that she was one of the court ladies, and that she exercised her gift of prophecy in that exalted station. Happy the court that had a prophetess within its verge, and knew how to value her holy inspiration! Residing in the immediate vicinity, and being known to possess heavenly

endowments, it became natural to have recourse to her advice under circumstances which perplexed the royal mind, or concerned the well-being of the nation. The particulars which render the Scripture notice of her name instructive and important, may be arranged under the two following heads: the occasion on which she was consulted by the king's messengers, and the revelations she made in answer to their inquiry.

1. The occasion on which she was consulted by the messengers of King Josiah, was the discovery of the book of the law in the house of the Lord by Hilkiah the high priest. Josiah was the best of all the Jewish kings since the days of David. He came to the throne at the very early age of eight years. He was early brought under religious impressions, and induced soon after to set about a public reformation of religion in the land; for in the eighth year of his reign, "when he was about sixteen," he began to seek after the God of David his father; "and in the twelfth year of his reign, when he was twenty, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images." Having destroyed the symbols of idolatry, he adopts measures for the re-establishment of the worship of the true God in its pristine purity and integrity. He gives orders for repairing and beautifying the house of the



Lord. To meet the expenses necessary for the purpose, he sanctions the collecting of voluntary offerings, by the Levites, at the doors of entrance for public worship; and after a convenient time, he sends his ministers to Hilkiab the high priest, to take account of the accumulated fund, and to lay it out in the reparation and decoration of the temple. While employed on this business, Hilkiab the high priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses, communicated the circumstance to Shaphan the scribe, and delivered it to that officer to be carried by him to the king their master. The scribe, upon returning to the royal presence, gave the monarch an account of the execution of the trust committed to him, and his fellow-officers, and Hilkiab the high priest, respecting the temple of the Lord, and acquainted him with the discovery in that sacred edifice by Hilkiab of the book which he held in his hand, and which, according to the representation of the high priest, was "a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses." The valuable treasure was immediately opened and read aloud; but Shaphan, who performed that office, had not proceeded far with its precious contents, when the king, surprised and affected by the awful things he heard, rent his clothes in token of the deepest sorrow, anxiety, and alarm.

What book was that which, in the perusal, so surprised and affected the king? The effect

was certainly similar to what would have been produced by the contents of a work with which he was totally unacquainted before. Were the sacred Scriptures then altogether unknown to the pious Josiah, who was early impressed with religion, and had already made considerable progress in its public reformation? We can scarcely imagine that. The apparently strange circumstance has been explained in several ways. 1. Some, who think it scarcely conceivable that all copies of the Scripture but this had been lost, considering the solemn injunctions contained within itself for its distribution, and the number of copies which must have been, in consequence, distributed through all the tribes of Israel in different ages, and the recorded fact, that in the reign of Jehoshaphat, about 250 years before, an itinerant ministry went about throughout the whole country, and taught the people out of the book of the law—some, influenced by these considerations, suppose the book discovered on the present occasion to have been that part of the Pentateuch only called Deuteronomy, or even that portion of Deuteronomy, including the twenty-eighth and the three following chapters, which contain the renewing of the covenant in the plains of Moab, and the most terrible invectives against the corrupters of God's word and worship. They suppose it to have been the autograph document written by the hand of Moses,

containing the covenant and its appended promises and denunciations made between God and the people of Israel on the plains of Moab, just before their entrance into the promised land, and concerning which Moses had commanded just before his death, saying to the Levites, "Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." The document being confined to the last covenant made between God and his people would, when perused, fix the royal attention more closely upon its many violations in the bygone years of idolatry, and even during his own reign, and create undisguised alarm for the consequences. Or if the volume was the entire of Deuteronomy, or the entire of the Pentateuch, the circumstance of its being found in the handwriting of the great lawgiver, and complete in all its parts after so many centuries, the wide departure of the people from the holy laws therein laid down for their guidance at the institution of their commonwealth, the gross abuses which still remained unreformed in the land, and the enormous distance still existing between the state of the nation in point of religion and morality, and the state required by the standard of the Divine testimony—the evident genuineness of the Mosaic law, and the notorious defects in its obedience—all this, combined together in the

mind, would quite suffice to account for the pious king's distress.

2. Others are of opinion, that this was the first complete copy of the law that King Josiah ever saw. Not only had idolatry often and long prevailed, but many sovereigns, who were persecutors of the true religion, had reigned both in Israel and Judah. The Scriptures would, in these ages, cease to be copied, treated with neglect, and purposely destroyed, and the rabbins expressly declare, that Ahaz, Manasseh, and Ammon, did their utmost to obliterate every trace of them from the land. Or if the destruction of them was not deliberately prosecuted, it is held to be highly probable that their number had decreased through the neglect of the kings, and priests, and people in the course of ages. Instead of every monarch, as originally commanded, transcribing the Scriptures, on his accession to the throne, and the priests and Levites multiplying entire copies of them, it appears that many kings totally neglected their duty in that respect, and it is supposed, that those officially concerned with the services of religion, to save time and toil, contented themselves with transcribing certain abstracts or abridgments of them, to serve as rituals or compendious guides in the observances and ceremonies of worship. These summaries or extracts from the Bible would circulate among the people, and supersede in their minds the

necessity of an acquaintance with the book of Moses as originally composed. But, consisting only of precepts and directions, separated from the promises and threatenings by which duties are enforced, they would lose their efficacy upon the mind, and leave it less fortified against the inroads of idolatry and superstition. It seems very probable that the king himself had heretofore seen only some such compendium, and therefore when he heard, for the first time, as part of God's holy word, those terrible denunciations in Deuteronomy against unfaithfulness and apostasy; and knowing how far his subjects and ancestors on the throne had departed from the divine commands, and how they had exposed themselves to the threatened vengeance, he was overwhelmed with grief and fear, and he expressed to the chief officers of the church and state the deepest anxiety to ascertain what could be done to avert the impending destruction, saying, "Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us."

But whither shall they go to inquire of the Lord? There had been a time when the high priest could solve such difficulties. The Urim



and Thummim on his breast-plate had once brightly reflected the light of heaven. But the priests, as well as the people, had for ages so corrupted their ways, as probably to have forfeited that oracular gift. Or the word of God in its entireness had been so neglected by all classes of the nation for so long a time, that Hilkiah, though himself a pious man, was ignorant that to inquire of God was a distinguishing part of his office, or he thought himself unworthy after so long disuse to revive its exercise in his own person. And as for Jeremiah and Zephaniah, who prophesied in this reign, it is possible that the former was at Anathoth, and too far away to be consulted with the despatch which the emergency seemed to require, and that the latter had not yet been called to the prophetic office, or was not yet known as a prophet of the Lord. But it had pleased God to raise up a pious woman to meet the difficulty. As Deborah brought relief to an afflicted nation, so Huldah was able to solve the difficulties of a perplexed king. Shaphan, though a scribe, and one who ought to have been learned in the divine law, and Hilkiah, though a high-priest, and one whose official endowments in better times had sufficed for the occasion, were glad to have recourse to the advice of the heavenly-minded prophetess, and they went and "communied with her." The subject of their communion or conversation with her was the por-

tion of the Mosaic law which had excited the alarm of the king, and the inquiry they proposed, as appears from her answer, was in what sense the divine denunciations were to be understood, to whom they applied, or what steps were to be taken to prevent their execution upon the present generation.

The answer she returned to this inquiry was twofold, an answer of severity to the nation—an answer of mercy to the king. The people, as a nation, had sinned beyond forgiveness, and must undergo the threatened penalty. They had done according to all the abominations which Moses had warned them against, and they must suffer according to all the threatenings contained in the awful book. God, through his servant Moses, had, at the beginning, by a solemn covenant set before them life and death, saying<sup>3</sup>, “If thine heart turn away so that thou shalt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I denounce unto you this day that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.” They had disregarded the menace—they had done the very thing prohibited—they had forsaken the Lord—they had burned incense to other gods—they had provoked Jehovah to anger with all the works of their hand; and, “therefore,” added God by

<sup>3</sup> Deut. xxx. 17, 18.

the prophetess, "my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched." The decree was gone forth against the long-continued contempt of God's revealed will, and the obstinate iniquity of Jerusalem should not be purged with sacrifice or offering; and the time was coming on when a highly prosperous and privileged people were to taste the bitter woes described in those words of terror, "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind; and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were evening! And at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see." Oh, fearful consequences of apostasy and impenitence, realized before men's eyes by the varied sufferings through many ages of the ancient people of God! What a pledge is exhibited in their history of the certainty of God's vengeance in the world to come against all the hardened workers of iniquity, and the despisers of God's gracious privileges! What an emblem does

the Mosaic picture of their punishment hold forth of that sorcerer which awaits the unpardoned in the realms of eternal retribution, concerning whom we read in the Revelation, that "they shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and they shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and the presence of the Lord; and they have no rest day nor night; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." Oh, let men think of this, and be roused from their carelessness and trifling. Let them be afraid of exhausting the season of grace, the accepted time, and the day of salvation, and let them make haste and delay not to be reconciled to their offended God.

But terrible as He is in his wrath against the impenitent, He will have mercy upon those who, in time, turn unto Him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. His answer, by Huldah, to the messengers of Josiah, as we said, was twofold. If it was one of severity to the people who, as a nation, had exhausted the day of grace, it was one of mercy to the individual royal applicant, who had himself sought in time the Lord his God. He had sought Him early and he found Him. He remembered his Creator in the days of his youth; and he was delivered from the evil days to come. His heart was tender, and he felt the evil and

danger of sin. He humbled himself before God on account of the iniquities of his people. He rent his clothes, and wept before the Lord in deep distress of mind at their awful departure from his service, and the terrible indignation they had provoked. He was anxious, and he exerted himself to bring about a thorough reformation in his court and kingdom. He, in short, bore all the marks of a sincerely penitent and renewed character; and, therefore, he received for himself a blessed answer of peace, "Behold, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered unto thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evils which I will bring upon this place." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." A broken heart and contrite spirit, an humble consciousness of having deserved wrath, an earnest application for mercy, a solicitude to know, and henceforth to do the will of the Most High, these are things which accompany salvation, and will never be rejected by a gracious God and Saviour. His language to all such is, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Oh, then, who shall delay to apply unto Him? Who shall disregard the blessed and comprehensive invitation, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest?"

The communication of Huldah stimulated the king and his ministers, and the high priest,



who cheerfully co-operated with their monarch to work a great reformation. As already intimated, it had been commenced before the finding of the book of the law. But that providential discovery gave an extraordinary impulse to the carrying on of the good work. The king assembled together in the house of God an immense multitude of priests, and Levites, and prophets, and people, and read in their ears the contents of the wonderful volume, and caused them to renew, in their own names, and by personal and voluntary engagement, the covenant therein contained, as originally made between Jehovah and the children of Israel in the time of Moses. He then proceeded to destroy every vestige of idolatry throughout the land, and in that same year celebrated a passover unto the Lord, pure and complete in all its parts, as commanded in the law of Moses, so that "there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." The effect of this hearty and thorough return unto the Lord, and restoration of his worship, was to avert from that reign the calamities threatened against the crying sins of the nation, so that Josiah saw nothing of the desolation of Jerusalem, and the captivity of Judah, and their attendant unprecedented national woes, but was gathered into the grave of his fathers in peace. The manner of his death may in-

deed, at first sight, appear to be a contradiction of Huldah's prophecy, for he died in consequence of a wound which he received in a battle with Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt; but in fact it was a merciful fulfilment of it. He had thought it his duty to oppose that monarch, when attempting to force a passage through his territories, and was wounded in the conflict, but was not slain on the field of battle. He was brought home to Jerusalem, and died in peace amid the lamentations of his people; and his beloved memory became the subject of mourning songs, and pathetic strains, attuned to the harps of Israel, and sung by the chiefs and matrons of Judah for many ages and generations, even to the present day. Had his life not been cut short by war, it is most probable that, according to the course of nature, being then not forty years of age, he might have lived to the period appointed for the captivity of his subjects, and the destruction of his capital, which took place in three-and-twenty years from that time, and as his piety and zeal, though the means of his own salvation, could not have availed to prevent that predestined national catastrophe, he was by a premature and honourable death taken away from the evil to come. He was spared the sight of the humiliation and disgrace of Israel, of the carrying away into a distant land of bondage both king and subject, high and low, old

and young, men, mothers, maidens, and children, and of all the heartbreaking scenes of that desolating retribution—events, oh how infinitely more distressing to a king, that was the father of his people, than his own fatal wound which he received in defence of his country! So that, in comparison with such calamities, his death, though the effect of a wound, taking place in his own metropolis and his own palace, and surrounded by the regrets and sympathies of admiring friends, attached servants, and faithful subjects, was a dispensation of most seasonable mercy and goodness, and the prophecy of Huldah was full of significant meaning and most consistent truth: “Behold, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered unto thy grave in peace, and thine eyes shall not see the evil which I will bring upon this place.”

Briefly to apply the subject, this, like all the preceding female histories we have considered, is replete with practical instruction of a very important kind, indeed far more so than we had anticipated before we came to its careful study; and we have no time to do any thing like justice to the varied lessons it conveys. We can but briefly indicate one or two of them, leaving the rest to be deduced by your own private and devout meditations.

1. I think the subject full of admonitions applicable to the present day. It is an age,

for example, when, by some, inordinate importance is attached to the doctrine of a *apostolical* succession, as if none could be true ministers of *Christ* but those who could trace up their ecclesiastical pedigree through an unbroken chain of *apostolical* consecration and ordination to the first *apostles* of the *Church*, and as if the sacraments and ordinances of the *Church* were altogether invalid, unless administered by such hands. It is well indeed to have good order and government in the *Church*, as well as in the state, and most consistent with God's word that all things connected with the ministration of religion should be done decently and in order, for God is not the author of confusion; and I think that the episcopal form of church government is the best calculated to maintain that decency and order, though it may not be without disadvantages, and indeed nothing can pretend to perfection in this world of sin and corruption. But there is nothing in the Bible to warrant the attaching of so much importance to that form of *Church* government, as if every other form had no share in the covenanted promises of God *to his Church*. Even if the inspired volume had distinctly and expressly pointed out what persons, and how ordained, were they that should minister in the *Church* sanctuary, it would not have followed, that the provisions of the *Church* covenant would be limited to the range of their ministrations.

*Such* distinct and express indication *was* made with respect to the ministers of God under the old dispensation, of which the present cannot boast, and yet, even in that case, it was found imperfect, not entirely adequate to the end proposed, liable to corruption and abuse, and, consequently, often deviated from, and superseded with the most salutary effects. The appointed priest's lips, that should have always kept knowledge, were often mute in darkness, and their lives, which should have been patterns to the rest of the nation, were a disgrace to their sacred offices, as in the case of Eli's sons and others, which caused the people committed to their care to fall away into abominable iniquities and idolatries, and they were brought back again and reformed only by the instrumentality of extraordinary messengers, inspired by the Spirit of God, but not belonging to the succession of the priesthood, as by Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets. And not only was the spiritual guidance of the nation not confined to the appointed priesthood, it was not even confined to the male sex. The present and other portions of the inspired record abundantly prove, that holy women were often made instrumental in shedding divine light upon an erring and sinful people. Who then shall presume to limit the channel of the divine operations?

2. This subject is singularly instructive in



another view, with regard to popish errors and practices. There is a remarkable resemblance between the time of Josiah, the youthful and pious king of Judah, and our sixth Edward, the youthful and pious king of England. In the reign of the one, the book of the law of Moses was found and read to the people; in the reign of the other, the Scriptures were drawn out of obscurity, by means of translations, into the vernacular tongue, and dispersed among the people. In both cases, an immense impulse was thereby given to the reformation of religion. Do not these two facts, so wonderfully parallel in their nature and consequences, speak volumes as to the importance of disseminating the word of God, without mutilation or abridgment, among all classes of people? When idolatry had overspread the land of Judah, it appears, according to one interpretation of the passage referring to the discovered book, that not one whole copy of the Holy Scriptures had been ever seen by the king or his subjects. They had at best but seen abridgments or summaries of the same, in which a most incorrect notion was conveyed of the Holy Spirit's original composition by the hand of Moses. It was precisely so at the reformation of Christianity in Europe in the sixteenth century. The people and the generality of the priests were utterly ignorant of the sacred volume in its entireness. All that was commonly known

of it consisted of short manuals, or abstracts of God's word, mingled with human compositions, which were held to be sufficient guides in morality and devotion. When the whole Bible was rendered into the vulgar tongue of the country, the people were perfectly amazed at such a work, and flocked in vast crowds to read or to hear it read. The discrepancy between its contents, and the vile superstitions and idolatries in which they had been educated, exposed the errors of popery, and produced an almost universal conviction in the land of its impure and indefensible character; and the people threw their idols to the moles and to the bats, and embraced, with glad hearts and with wonderful unanimity, the pure and undulterated form of the Gospel, with which this kingdom is blessed at the present day. What once gave that superstition a shock, from which it has not yet recovered, will, if encouraged and supported for ever, prevent its return to enslave the human race. If we would secure an unfettered and uncorrupted Gospel, let us value, and study, and strive to circulate the Holy Scriptures, which in their perfect and unmutilated form, are able to make men wise unto salvation.

## SERMON XXII.

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VASHTI.

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ESTHER i. 12.

“But the Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s commandment by his chamberlains : therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.”

FROM the time of Huldah, the prophetess, whose life was the subject of our last discourse, and who lived in the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, about 620 before the birth of Christ, a whole century passed away in Jewish history, without reference to any individuals of note among the female sex. Some, especially the Roman Catholics, might say that the heroic Judith, and the virtuous Susanna, who are supposed to have lived during that interval, must be held to form very conspicuous exceptions to that remark. But as they are mentioned only in that portion of the Jewish writings which we Protestants call the Apocrypha, and which,

however useful to be “read for example of life and instruction of manners,” we regard only as of human origin, we cannot give them a place among those whose characters have been portrayed by the infallible pencil of inspiration, and concerning whose biography no doubt has ever been entertained by any branch of the universal Church. We, therefore, pass over, as not coming within the scope of our present design, those hundred years of most stirring events connected with God’s ancient people, as foretold by Huldah, the prophetess, and others,—the Chaldean invasion of Judea—the destruction of Jerusalem, with its splendid palaces, and magnificent Temple of Solomon—the carrying away of the whole people into a distant land of captivity—their tears and sighs, and the mournful silence of their harps by the rivers of Babylon—all the sad effects of sin and impenitence; and then the change wrought in them by the severe lessons of affliction—the noble and heroic example of attachment to Jehovah which many of them displayed in the season of tribulation, even to the braving of torture and death, such as Daniel entering undismayed into the den of fierce lions, and the three children plunging without alarm into the burning fiery furnace; and, finally, the mercy of a gracious God in remembering his people in their low estate, and moving the heart of Cyrus to permit their return to the land of their fathers. All these

most interesting and momentous occurrences took place between the time of Huldah and the time when lived the only two remaining women particularly noticed in the pages of the Old Testament—Vashti, the queen of Persia, and Esther, her successor on that far-famed throne.

Of these two, the one, the subject of our present discourse, was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; the other, to whom we shall direct attention in our next, was a daughter of Abraham, according to the flesh. The history of God's ancient people is often connected with that of heathen nations; and this connexion has necessarily brought several females before our notice, in these discourses, belonging to other races and nations than that of Israel, such as Thermuthis, the daughter of Pharaoh; Rahab, an inhabitant of Jericho; Ruth, a woman of Moab; and Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre. Of all these, though of heathen origin, with the single exception of Jezebel, we have reason to entertain a very favourable opinion; and their history seems to show that at no time did "He, who made of one blood all nations of men," entirely confine the riches of his grace to the inhabitants of a single country, or the members of a particular ~~country~~, while it intimates the will of God that all the ends of the earth should come unto Him and be saved. We think Vashti not



excepted from this worthy catalogue. We consider her conduct far more entitled to our respect than our censure; and are much inclined to believe that an impartial consideration of her case will point her out as one of those who preferred the favour of God to the favour of man, and who sought, though it cost her much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of heaven. We have already intimated the time when she lived. To determine it with accuracy, we must determine what king of Persia is meant by the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther, whose wife she is said to have been. He is supposed, by some, to have been the same as Darius Hystaspes, and by others the same as Xerxes, his son, who, with an innumerable army, attempted in vain to subdue the Greeks. But according to the best authorities, and the most commonly received opinion, he was the grandson of the former, and the son of the latter, and the same as Artaxerxes Longimanus, or the Longhanded, so called, as some think, from the extraordinary length of his hands; as others think, from the vast extent of territory comprehended within his capacious grasp, his reign extending "from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces." Now this king, whom we believe to have been the husband of Vashti, began to reign about 470 years before our Saviour's birth. On the death of his father he found powerful opponents and competitors

for the throne in the persons of his cousins, the children of Artabanus, and in the person of his own brother, whose name was Hystaspes. In the course of two years he totally subdued these rivals and their adherents, and succeeded in establishing himself in the undisputed possession of the extensive Persian empire just named. In the third year of his reign he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants, for the purpose, it is supposed, of celebrating, by public rejoicings, the success which had attended his arms, and his present undisturbed enjoyment of power. After this feast, which lasted a hundred and eighty days, he made another feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan, the palace, which lasted seven days. Of these two feasts, some think the former was for the aristocracy of the empire, and the latter for the common people then resident in Shushan, the palace, *i. e.* Shushan, the city of royal residence. Josephus says, that the former feast, which continued for so long a time, was for the entertainment of the king's own numerous subjects, and the governors of their respective provinces; and that the latter, which was of a much shorter duration, was for the entertainment of embassies, and individuals from foreign nations. It is probable that the former extended over the whole face of the metropolitan city, if not, in a sense, over the whole face of the Persian empire. The

latter was confined to the grounds and gardens attached to the royal abode. The one was more general: the other more select. Both were on a vast scale of magnificence and prodigality. At the first the king displayed the ample resources of his wealth and power, for he "showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honours of his excellent majesty." At the second, though not equal to the first in the amount of expenditure, he yet exhibited scenes of most dazzling splendour and attractive luxuriousness. The spacious court of the palace was turned into a banqueting hall, the partitions consisting of richly and variously coloured hangings, "fastened with cords of fine linen and silk to silver rings and pillars of marble." The couches, whereon the guests reclined, were of the costliest materials, being made of silver and gold; and the pavement under their feet was composed of the most beautiful mosaic work. The vessels, out of which they drank, were of the most precious metal, and of endless variety<sup>1</sup> in shape, size, and workmanship; and the wines with which they were regaled were of the richest flavour and the most exquisite delicacy. That nothing might interfere with the complete enjoyment of his guests, the king issued orders, that they should entirely use their own discre-

<sup>1</sup> Some think that "diverse" implies different services of plate.

tion as to the quantity of wine to be drunk by each. It appears to have been customary among the Persians at their feasts, as has been, and too much is still the case, among many other nations, not only to press, but by a received law of revelry, to compel one another to drink, without reference either to the rules of sobriety or the ends of gratification. This is the law to which reference is made in the eighth verse of the first chapter of this history; where we should read, I think, not according to the common rendering, "And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel:" but thus, "The drinking which was according to the law none did compel," *i. e.* the law by which each guest was forced to drink certain quantities, or by certain turns, was for that time set aside by royal dispensation. In superseding this absurd practice on the occasion, the king acted the part of a true father to his subjects, and showed a regard at once for their virtue and their enjoyments, for drunkenness is a foe to every virtue, and without temperance there can be little enjoyment.

While the king was entertaining the male guests in the pavilions erected on the palace grounds, the queen Vashti was entertaining the females within the apartments of the palace. It was not usual, nor is it usual at the present day, in the East, for men and women to feast together at the same tables or in the same

rooms<sup>2</sup>. Travellers inform us, that not the least communication is allowed between them on these occasions, which accounts for the fact that "Vashti the queen made a feast for the women," not in the court, the garden, or the grounds, where the men feasted, but "in the royal house, which belonged to King Ahasuerus." Six days appear to have been spent by both sexes without the occurrence of any event to disturb the harmony and pleasure of their festivities. But on the seventh day, a circumstance took place, which changed, in the case of some of them at least, their scenes of mirth into scenes of sadness, and their short-lived enjoyments into scenes of lasting regrets. The king sends a messenger to the queen, requiring her to appear in his presence with the crown-royal on her head, "to show the people and the princes her beauty." What message shall the king of Persia send that shall not be unhesitatingly obeyed? What wish shall be expressed by the ruler of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces that shall not be immediately gratified? What governor of a distant principality shall not fear to disregard his commands? Surely, then, there is no one in Persia, in Shushan, in his own palace, in his own family, who shall presume to refuse compliance. Yes, "Vashti the queen heeded not the king's message by his chamberlains, and refused to come."

<sup>2</sup> See Burder.



Some are of opinion that she was to blame for a conduct which, at first sight, may appear uncourteous, and even haughty, and think it would have better become the meekness of a quiet spirit, which is the greatest ornament of woman, to have gone, though it might be to a company of wassailers, and that she would have better performed the part of a dutiful wife, by responding to the summons, though it required an exhibition somewhat hurtful to her feminine modesty, and derogatory to her royal dignity. The religion which we have the happiness to be blessed with, and which we believe fully to embody the revealed will of God, is eminently a religion of humility and kindness, and sets such a value upon the prevalence of peace, as to intimate, that scarcely any sacrifice of convenience is too great to be made for its preservation. Contentions and quarrels, heart-burnings and animosities, are so utterly opposed to its genius, that every one of its sincere disciples must acknowledge it to be a principal human obligation, habitually to aim at their restraint and eradication. The great Author of the Gospel is styled the Prince of Peace. His conduct on earth corresponded with the designation, and fulfilled the prophetic declaration concerning Him, that He should neither "strive nor cry, and that he should be led as a lamb to the slaughter, opening not his mouth against his persecutors, though he had power to com-

mand more than twelve legions of angels for their destruction." His precepts to his disciples were of the same peaceable tendency, and He recommended them to suffer the loss of time and property, rather than kindle the flames of litigation and hostility. "I say unto you," was his positive command, "that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go with him a mile, go with him twain. 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." Among the fruits of that Spirit, whom He sent to supply his own place, to perfect that which He had left undone, and to lead men unto all truth and holiness, are reckoned peace, long-suffering, gentleness, while hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, are classed among the fruits of the flesh, or of man's corrupt and unregenerate nature. And the language of Christ's greatest apostle is, "If it be possible, live peaceably with all men." These considerations, which are undeniably most weighty and important, have inclined many to think that Vashti would have acted a wiser part, if she had yielded to the imperiousness of circumstances, and obeyed the monarch's commands, and that she did but

indulge in an uncalled-for haughtiness, and gratify an overweening pride, when, on being summoned during the feast into the presence of the king, she "refused to come."

But, weighty and important as these considerations are, we are inclined to take a different view of her conduct, and, far from regarding it as censurable, to applaud it as worthy of praise and imitation. We fully grant that the genuine revelations of the true God most emphatically recommend the preservation of peace among men, and that they approve of the sacrifice of much for its sake. We may well believe the treasure to be an ample compensation for the loss of time, the loss of property, and the loss of personal consequence. But we must bear in mind, that it will never compensate for the loss of character, and that it is preserved at too dear a rate, when it is preserved at the risk of principle. Such, we think, a careful attention to the circumstances will show would have been the case with Vashti, if she had complied with the king's command. Let it be observed, that she was required to take a step utterly inconsistent with an established and universal custom of the realm. There is, indeed, a passage in Herodotus, which represents the Persians as introducing their wives and concubines into their public entertainments at a certain period of the feast. But it is very doubtful whether such a departure from the usual practice of the East

was any thing more than an act of licentiousness and extravagant revelry, and the outbreaking of intellects obscured and bewildered by intoxication and excess. Nay, it would appear that the summons to Vashti proceeded from that very cause; for it was when the king's heart was merry with wine, that he commanded his chamberlains to bring the queen into the presence of feasting and drinking men. Was she, then, to blame, for refusing to break through a respected custom of the country, out of deference to the wishes of the intemperate and unreasoning? Would it have become her station, as one from whom millions expected an undeviating example of propriety and decorum, to have exhibited herself to a company of drunken Bacchanalians? Would not the act of appearing in such a presence have compromised her character, and injured her reputation, and relaxed, if not destroyed, her principle as a virtuous and pure-minded woman? Such a sacrifice of modesty, more especially if, as some Jewish writers contend, the sacrifice was still more than we have supposed, and implied the presenting herself to such a company in a state too indelicate here to allude to,—such a sacrifice of modesty would have been too great even for the sake of domestic peace and harmony. We therefore think that she owed it to herself as the most exalted female in the realm—that she owed it to her subjects, who, doubt-



less, as subjects usually do, narrowly watched the demeanour of their sovereigns—that she owed it to the true God, if at all acquainted with his will, who requires “shamefacedness and sobriety in a woman professing godliness,” to disobey the unreasonable summons of her husband and her king. Her conduct appears to us to be not only free from blame, but most highly deserving of respect and admiration, and to display a combination of qualities most worthy the imitation of all her sex. Had she consulted her own vanity, she would have undoubtedly complied, for she was very fair to look upon. The very name by which she was called implies extraordinary beauty, and her personal attractions, combined with the unrivalled splendour of her royal apparel, would have dazzled every eye, and won every heart, and excited even the idolatrous applause of every beholder among the wondering multitude. Here, then, was the exercise of self-denial rather than do wrong. Had she consulted the natural timidity of her sex, she would have complied ; for, although she might have reason to fear the trusting of herself in the company of the intoxicated, she had far greater reason to fear the resentment of a disappointed despot, possessed of absolute authority, and inflamed by the fumes of wine. Here, then, was courage to brave peril rather than compromise character. Had she been swayed by temporal consider-



ations of personal interest—the possible loss of her rank, her station, her crown, the most brilliant then on earth, and perhaps life itself, that might follow as the penalty of disobedience—she would have complied. Here, then, was exemplary fortitude, prepared to encounter adversity, and probably death, rather than sacrifice principle. In short, we think that if she had attended to her own immediate ease and comfort, without reference to Him who shall bring every work into judgment, she would not have refused compliance with the royal message. Here, then, was a piety, a resolve to please God rather than men, which reminds us of that eminent servant of the Most High, who refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; yea, of those still more sorely tried confessors of the true faith, who, when required to worship the symbol of idolatry, erected in the plain of Dura, replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Let us now consider the consequences which actually followed her refusal. King Ahasuerus,

upon learning that Vashti refused to come, like Nebuchadnezzar before him, when the servants of the true God refused to worship an abominable idol, was transported with rage and fury. As it vexed Nebuchadnezzar to think that those whom he had brought from all the provinces of his empire to witness the grandeur of his majesty, and the mightiness of his power, should find him thwarted by men, who had been carefully prepared for his service, who stood continually in his presence, whom he consulted on matters of the highest moment, and whom he had placed over the affairs of the metropolitan province of Babylon; so it mortified and enraged Ahasuerus to reflect that those whom he had invited from the remotest parts of his dominions, and probably from the realms of other monarchs, and whom he meant to send away astonished at the vastness of his resources, the absoluteness of his authority, and the prompt submission paid to every intimation of his will, should behold him checked in his projects by the rebellion of a woman, and unable to rule the members of his own household. "He was, therefore," we read, "very wroth, and his anger burned within him." He summoned a council of his chief ministers and advisers, and proposed for their consideration the inquiry, what should be done unto the queen for refusing obedience to the command of the king? Arbitrary despots, who have the power of life and

death; nay, even limited monarchs, who have the dispensing of wealth and honours, find too many counsellors ready to shape their advice in accordance with the royal inclination, rather than in accordance with the dictates of justice and truth. A subtle minister of the name of Memucan, perceiving the feelings and wishes of the king upon the subject, immediately echoed his sentiments, by pronouncing the queen's conduct inexcusable, and deserving of severe punishment. He maintained that she had not only given personal offence to her royal husband, but set an example of conjugal disobedience, which would have a prejudicial effect upon the wives of the nobility, and even of the meanest subjects of the kingdom, except it were counteracted by the infliction of exemplary vengeance. To prevent the contempt which he alleged her impunity would produce in the wives of Persia towards their husbands, and the consequent 'wrath' which would be excited in the husbands towards their wives, and the domestic dissensions and heart-burnings which would follow from both, he boldly proposed her dethronement and degradation, and advised her replacement by another queen, who should more worthily fill her station, insisting that such a severe measure alone, and the publication throughout the empire of a decree for carrying it into effect, could secure the tranquillity of families among the king's subjects.

The proposal, as had been foreseen, was acceptable to the monarch, not yet recovered from his transport of resentment, while its injustice was glossed over by the plea of expediency and necessity—a plea too often recurred to by artful courtiers and unprincipled politicians; and Vashti, whose very name, according to some, implied the excellence of her character as well as the beauty of her person, was, for resisting an unreasonable command, visited with a punishment, than which scarcely a more severe could be inflicted on one in her exalted station. She was deprived of her rights as a wife and a queen; forbidden ever to appear again in her husband's presence; compelled to resign her crown and her throne; and condemned to a life of discomfort and obscurity, if not to destitution and suffering, and an early grave. We have reason to think that the king, afterwards, regretted the cruel decree which, in the fury of his rage, he passed against her, for it is said that, when his wrath was appeased, he remembered Vashti; and this confirms us in the opinion we have expressed of her worth, and seems strongly to intimate that she was treated with injustice and undue severity. And, if we are right in this view of the subject, we may rank her among the many excellent of the earth who have been called to suffer here for righteousness' sake, and with respect to whom we may confidently affirm that the time is



coming on when He to whose will they submitted themselves, and to whose direction they resolutely, without regard to temporal consequences, committed their ways, "will bring forth their righteousness as the light and their judgment as the noon-day."

We hasten, before concluding, to notice some of the very important practical lessons which the narrative we have set before you seems calculated to teach. 1. Observe, first, a feature in the conduct of the heathen king Ahasuerus, which may put to shame that of many bearing the name of Christians. He interfered to supersede an absurd custom of the country, which compelled many to drink more than was consistent with moderation and sobriety. A similar custom has too frequently prevailed in modern times and Christian lands. But no practice or regulation of society can be more opposed to the divine commands, than that which encourages, and even compels men to excess in drink. It is, therefore, a matter of joy to every man who considers the well-being both temporal and spiritual of his species, that more correct notions upon the subject have sprung up recently both in this and other countries. But great as the improvements are which have taken place in this respect among all ranks, the vice of drunkenness still prevails to a most detrimental and ruinous extent. It fearfully



operates still to the injury of the earthly and heavenly interests of thousands. It paralyses the hand of industry. It destroys domestic comfort. It hurts the health, brings on disease, accelerates death, debilitates the body, and awfully imperils the soul. It is a monster which opposes greater obstacles than any other evil you can name to the efforts of those who go about doing good, and seek to improve the physical, moral, and spiritual condition of their fellow-creatures, causing often the minister, and those who labour with him in the same field, to yield to the desponding exclamation, "I have laboured in vain: I have spent my strength for nought." Oh, if there be a drunkard now within my hearing, let me tell thee that thou art a fearful character. Thou art an enemy to thy family. Thou art an enemy to thyself. Thou art an enemy of God's servants. Thou art an enemy of the Almighty God himself. Thou indulgest in a vice, to which both reason and revelation ascribe the most dreadful effects. Thou indulgest in a vice against which the voice of inspiration denounces the most terrible woes. Hear it, thou drunkard, and tremble. "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink: that continue until night till wine inflame them. Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also." Thou indulgest

in a vice which is classed by *Proverbs* with the most degrading and enormous abominations of which our fallen humanity is capable—with idolatry, fornication, adultery, theft, murder, and unnatural crimes, “of the which,” says he, “I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Hear these words of heavenly warning, ye drunkards, and make haste to shake off the cursed habit, that ye may flee from the wrath to come.

2. Learn from this subject the truth of the wise man’s remark, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.” It is better for the immortal soul to stand by the bed of the sick and the dying, than to repose on the couches of luxury, and to frequent the haunts of pleasure. In the one, we are reminded of the frailty of life, the certainty of death, and the approach of judgment, and taught a salutary lesson of preparation for eternity. In the other, we are too often lulled into forgetfulness of this world’s evanescence, and brought under influences which soothe men into spiritual insensibility, and, by drawing away the thoughts from the unseen world, most injuriously affect their immortal interests. It is remarkable, that most of the feasts adverted to in the Bible ended disastrously. Belshazzar’s impious feast ended in the destruction of himself and his dynasty.

Herod's feast, at which the daughter of Herodias pleased him with her dancing, ended in the death of John the Baptist. The sons and daughters of Job were teasing, when the Sabæans fell upon them, and took them away. And Ahasuerus' feast issued in the dethronement and degradation, if not the execution also, of his once loved, and, we think, most excellent queen. Ye, then, who have been brought by divine grace to renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, look not back with longing desire to the scenes ye have quitted. Ye have "been delivered from the snare of the fowler, and from" an evil far more perilous than "the noisome pestilence." And ye who are debarred by poverty from partaking in the enjoyments of such festivity, be not sorry, but rather thankful for your exclusion. Ye have escaped strong temptations and great perils, which might have ruined your undying souls, for Isaiah saith of those who are too much given to feasts, wherein are the harp and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, that "they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands, and that, therefore, hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it." Frequent and expensive feastings are objectionable also, on account of the wealth which is absorbed by

them, and which, on the other hand, has very distinctly intimated, might be far better expended, by accountable beings, in relieving the needy and consoling the wicked. He did not, indeed, enjoin an ascetic life, nor did He refuse Himself to partake in moderation of feasts to which He was invited. But He evidently intimated, that there is often spent upon them too much of that property which may be laid out to an infinitely better account. These are his words: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours: lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

3. We have expressed our approbation of Ahasuerus' interference with a foolish and sinful custom, so as to promote both the sobriety and the real enjoyment of his guests. In that respect, he acted most humanely and considerately. But although he seemed to recommend moderation to others, he exceeded its bounds himself, and his excess led him on to other evils and deplorable consequences. While in that state, he forgot the respect due to the queen, sent her an immodest and unreasonable summons, and upon her refusal to obey he was

betrayed into the additional sin of vindictive rage, which issued in the cruel measure of disgracing her whom he ought to have honoured, and most probably in his own subsequent bitter and unavailing regret. How possible it is to give good advice to others, and yet to disregard it in our own case! how possible to warn others against a vice, and yet to trifle with it ourselves, and to proceed from that one vice to a second and a third, until we are at last involved in troubles and difficulties, from which there is no escape! Yea, even Samuel dreaded such a possibility in his own case, saying, "lest, after I have preached unto others, I myself be a cast-away." Oh, then, how important to all, both teacher and taught, is the Lord's solemn warning, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

4. With regard, lastly, to Vashti's disobedience, if, as we think, she was required to do what was inconsistent with her principles as a virtuous woman, and with her station as an exemplary queen, her disobedience was justifiable. In such a case, had she obeyed her husband and earthly king, she would have disobeyed her Maker and heavenly King; and we have shown, in a former discourse, that whenever these two claims clash or come into competition, there can be no doubt as to which to disregard and which to respect. The subject owes obedience to the sovereign, the servant



to the master, the wife to the husband, only so far as that obedience is consistent with the known will of God. If any authority commands what Heaven has prohibited, it is a duty to disobey. Let it be, then, our prayer and study on all occasions to ascertain the perfect will of the Most High. Let that be the guiding star of all our thoughts, and words, and actions—let us follow it through good report and through evil report—let us adhere to it whatever may be the temporal consequences—let us be steadfast and immovable in the works of the Lord, and at last our labour will be found not to be in vain. The fear of God may for a time, and perhaps during the whole of life, involve us in troubles. It may cause us inconvenience, lose us the favour of the great ones of the earth, constrain us to much self-denial, suffering, and sorrow; but all this is comparatively a light affliction, which is but for a moment, and worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. “Fret not thyself,” therefore, “because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. Be thou faithful unto death, and he will give thee a crown of life.”

## SERMON XXIII.

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ESTHER.

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ESTHER ii. 17.

“And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins ; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

ESTHER<sup>1</sup>, who succeeded the subject of our last discourse on the throne of Persia, was of Jewish origin. We have often had to notice heathen women in connexion with Israelitish history. We have now to contemplate an Israelitish woman, occupying the most exalted station among a heathen people. She was the daughter of Abihail, of the tribe of Benjamin. From that tribe sprang some very distinguished characters in sacred history, such as Ehud the second judge of Israel, Saul the first king of Israel, and Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, and

<sup>1</sup> See Note IX.

Esther, the only Jewess that wore a Gentile crown. Her parents or ancestors had been carried away captive from their country by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; but for some reason, not specified, they as well as many other families did not avail themselves of the decree of Cyrus, to return with the bulk of the nation to their native land. Hence she was born, not in Jerusalem, or in the land of Canaan, but in that eastern part of the world comprehended within, first, the Chaldæan or Babylonian, and afterwards the Persian Empire, and probably in Shushan, one of its royal residences or metropolitan cities. Having lost her father and mother at a very early age, she was adopted and educated by Mordecai, her father's nephew, an inhabitant of that city, who, as the progress of our narrative will show, was afterwards amply recompensed by a gracious Providence for his kind care of his orphan relative. Her extraordinary advancement arose out of the events which we noticed in our last discourse. We read, that some time after the period of those events, the king remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. From these words we may infer—an inference borne out by the express testimony of Josephus—that Ahasuerus bitterly lamented the loss of the queen, whom in his rage he had been persuaded to divorce, but whom, on account of the irreversible nature of the laws of

the Medes and Persians, he could not recall, even supposing her to be still in the land of the living. This regret of the king, as already intimated<sup>2</sup>, confirms us in the favourable view we took of Vashti's character. Now to divert his mind from brooding on this melancholy subject, and perhaps to turn aside from themselves the vengeance which they might apprehend their severe counsel deserved, his ministers proposed to him a plan for replacing the banished queen by an equal, if not superior, in personal attractions. They advised, that the fairest virgins throughout the numerous and extensive provinces of the empire should be brought to Shushan, and that the king should select from among them her with whom he should be most captivated, to be his royal partner instead of Vashti. Among these virgins Esther appeared. The beauty of her person, and the sweetness of her disposition, soon attracted the particular attention of Hegai the chamberlain, under whose care the young females were placed during the period of their preparation, before appearing in the royal presence. She, with the seven maids appointed to wait upon her, was lodged by that functionary in the most eligible apartments, and supplied with whatever might conduce to her comfort and set off her charms. She was so amiable and fair, that "she obtained favour,"

<sup>2</sup> See last Discourse.

not only in his sight, but “in the sight of all them that looked upon her;” and when at length she was brought to the king, it is said, that “he loved her above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.” Thus was it ruled by the providence of the Universal Sovereign, that an orphan child of the captives of Judah should be elevated to the highest earthly throne. To carry out his wise decrees, and to promote the interests of his believing people, He often “putteth down one and setteth up another. 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.”

Mordecai acted the part of a true father to Esther. He not only undertook her support and education, when bereaved of both her parents, but anxiously watched over her welfare on the eve of her attaining, and after she had attained, an unexpectedly elevated rank. “He walked every day during the period of her preparation before the court of the women’s house, to know how Esther did, and what would become of her;” and it appears that, after her succession to the throne, he ceased not to exercise a careful vigilance over her fate and interests. How kind and paternal a soli-



citude did he exhibit towards his interesting charge! He thought it possible her health might suffer by the new position in which she was placed under the king's chamberlain, and, therefore, he every day inquired how she did. He felt an intense interest in the issue of her approaching interview with the king himself, and, therefore, he every day anxiously watched what would become of her. Like every man of piety and experience, he was justly apprehensive, that prosperity might prove more dangerous in many ways to her welfare than adversity, and, therefore, he ceased not to regard her with a cautious and attentive eye, after she had become the chosen bride of the greatest earthly sovereign. Esther nobly repaid his care and kindness, by yielding to his influence, and observing his injunctions with the same feelings of respect and affection, as when she was dependent on his bounty for her daily bread; "for she did the commandment of Mordecai as when she was brought up with him." It is supposed that she used her influence to procure him an office in the royal household. Some have thought that the office he filled was the humble one of porter or gatekeeper, drawing that inference from the expressions, "while Mordecai sat at the king's gate." But the probability is, that he belonged to a higher rank of functionaries, and that the gate is mentioned as being the place where such officers *sat* or at-

tended to await the king's call. This situation held by Mordecai showed Esther's gratitude for his protection and kindness, according to the supposition of its having been conferred upon him through her interest; and, by facilitating intercourse also served to cement and perpetuate their reciprocal attachment. In the continuance of this affectionate connexion, we have a worthy example set forth to parents and children—to parents, that of watching, and caring, and praying for their children, as anxiously when basking in the sun of prosperity, as when exposed to the storms of adversity—to children, that of paying the same deference to the protectors of their childhood and the guides of their youth, when they have risen to wealth and rank, as when they received from those friends the supply of their necessary wants. The advantage as well as the duty of this line of conduct in the case of Mordecai and Esther presently appeared. Two of the chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh by name, conspired against the king's life. Some Jewish writers say that they included the queen in their murderous design, intending to take her off by poison, and slay her royal partner in his bedchamber. But the unslumbering vigilance of Mordecai, watching over the welfare of his relative, detected the foul conspiracy; and, from the easy and constant communication kept up between them, he was enabled to make a timely

discovery of it to Esther. Esther immediately forwarded the important intelligence to the king, which led to the prevention of the contemplated tragedy; and the conviction and execution of its guilty projectors. Thus did the continued intimacy between Mordecai and Esther save the king, and probably the queen also, from perishing by the hands of murderous assassins.

But the good understanding between Mordecai and Esther was blessed to the prevention of a still greater and more extensive calamity, which was no less than the destruction of all the Jews within the Persian empire. About four or five years after the conspiracy of the two chamberlains, a man of the name of Haman rose into such favour with the king as to be advanced to a rank and power far above all the rest of his subjects. He received, by an express wish of his royal master, extraordinary marks of respect and reverence from the other officers and servants in attendance at the palace. But among those officers and servants, who paid unwonted homage to the favourite, there was one remarkable exception, and that was Mordecai, the relative of Esther. "He bowed not, nor did him reverence." He was remonstrated with on the singularity and peril of his conduct; and when, day after day, he persisted in his refusal, information of the circumstance was formally laid before Haman. Such conduct on

the part of Mordecai may, at first sight, appear to indicate unusual wilfulness and obstinacy; but an attention to the meaning of the original Hebrew will lead to the inference, that the respect required to be paid to Haman was more than was due to man, and amounted to idolatrous adoration, and could not, therefore, be rendered by a conscientious Jew. That his scruples arose from this cause is further indicated by the language in which the conduct of his accusers is described, of whom we read that "when he hearkened not unto them, they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew"—language clearly intimating that Mordecai, on his part, claimed exemption from rendering the required homage, on the ground of belonging to a nation whose religion forbade it; and that they, on their part, determined to decide "whether his matters would stand," *i. e.* whether his claim would be allowed, or his objections considered valid. To these reasons, when we add the universal opinion of his nation, that he withheld this mark of reverence because the paying of it would have been idolatrous, there can be little doubt of his having acted throughout under a holy fear of offending the true God, who is alone worthy of worship. His conduct, therefore, far from being censurable as an obstinate peculiarity, was a noble and self-denying attachment to Jehovah, like that



of Moses, and Daniel, and the three children, and the confessors, and martyrs, of every age, who risked their wealth, their rank, their comforts, and their very lives, for the sake of their most holy faith. But that consideration, which was entitled to the most respectful regard from every reasonable being, had no weight with the unreasoning vanity and towering pride of Haman. On the contrary, it caused his resentment to extend to the ruin, and beyond the ruin of the individual who had dared, on such grounds, to withhold the required homage, even to the destruction of the entire nation, to whom such inconvenient scruples belonged; and we may suppose him actuated in the conception of so barbarous and sweeping a measure, not merely by a savage desire of a signal revenge against Mordecai himself, but by the ferocious resolve to extirpate from the kingdom all who might, from the same motives, imitate his disrespect. He took the utmost precaution to ensure the success of his nefarious scheme. He had recourse to the arts of divination, with a view to ascertain the most propitious time for striking the intended blow. "In the first month they cast pur, that is, the lot before him, from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar." The meaning of which verse, as is made more clear by the Septuagint version of this part, and from a



subsequent part of the history<sup>3</sup> is, that Haman's diviners endeavoured, by means of the lot, to find out the month and the day most propitious to the enterprise, and that for that purpose they went in regular order through every day in each successive month, and through every month in the year, until the lot at last pointed out the supposed exact period for the execution of their projects. That period was the thirteenth day of the last month of the year, leaving an interval of nearly a year between the concerting and the effectuating of the measure. The proud favourite no sooner imagined that he had discovered the auspicious season, than he proceeded to procure the royal permission for carrying his purpose into effect. He represented to the king, that the Jews were an inconvenient, peculiar, and a rebellious people; that their existence was injurious to the well-being of the king; and that their total destruction was highly expedient; and he engaged to pay into the king's treasury ten thousand talents of silver, as an immediate pecuniary advantage that would result from the measure, probably intended to be derived from the spoliation of the obnoxious nation, or, if not an immediate pecuniary advantage, at least, as more than an equivalent for the loss of revenue which their destruction would entail. The king consented to the whole scheme, and gave

<sup>3</sup> See Ad. Clarke, v. 12.

Haman his ring to seal the decree for carrying it into effect. He even furnished a stimulus to his atrocious machinations, by allowing him to retain in his possession, or appropriate to himself the forementioned sum of money, and by expressly giving him uncontrolled power over the objects of his displeasure, and, in less than a fortnight from the conception of the inhuman project, even on the thirteenth day of Nisan, the first month of the year, orders were despatched through every province of the king's dominions "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey."

There is only one way of accounting for the idiot acquiescence of the king in so bloody a proposal; and it is suggested, by what is added in immediate connexion with its adoption, namely, "that the King and Haman sat down to drink"—drunkenness, to which, in our last discourse, we ascribed so many evils, blinding the eyes of the king to the wickedness of a measure unparalleled for its atrocious barbarity in the annals of the human race. While, however, the duped sovereign and his crafty favourite were drowning thought and lulling conscience in the draughts and fumes of intoxication, "the city Shushan was perplexed." It

was speedily seen by the inhabitants of the metropolis, who naturally obtained the earliest information of what had been determined on, that a more impolitic, disgraceful, and cruel measure was never concocted by any government. Even those of them who belonged not to the devoted race were filled with undisguisable alarm at the confusion that must ensue, and the spoliation and destruction that must overtake many of themselves when a desperate mob had begun to taste of human blood, and to enrich themselves with the property of the murdered. Besides, it is highly probable that many Persian families had become united by intermarriages with Jewish families, and would by necessary consequence share the fate of the condemned nation. We wonder not, therefore, that "the city Shushan was" greatly "perplexed." But the Jews themselves were naturally, beyond measure, distressed at the terrible intelligence. The picture of their wives and their little ones weltering in their blood, and of themselves, at last, falling by the hands of cruelty, after attempting a vain defence, was before their mind's eye, "and in every province whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among them, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes." But of all the Jews not one was so utterly overwhelmed with

poignant and oppressive grief as Mordecai himself, the conscious but innocent cause of the terrible calamity impending over his nation. He "rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry." And although he could not enter within the precincts of the palace in such a plight, it being forbidden by law to any one to appear there in the habiliments of mourning, yet he carried the burden of his heavy wo to the palace gates, and there gave loud utterance to the insupportable sorrow of his broken heart.

The distressed condition of Mordecai soon attracted general notice, and information of it was quickly conveyed to Esther. She felt for him all the interest and kindness of an affectionate daughter, "and she sent raiment to clothe him, and to take away his sackcloth." This she did, we suppose, to intimate her lively concern for his welfare, to signify her anxious desire that he "should put on the garments of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness;" and also, perhaps, to enable him, by being clothed in a garb admissible within the palace gates, more distinctly to make known to her the nature of his trouble by personal communication. But the evil he lamented was too great to allow a moment's intermission of mourning, and, therefore, he declined the well-intended offer, clung to his habiliments of wo, and continued



to be as one who refused to be comforted. Esther then sent him another message by Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom she charged to make a particular and complete inquiry into the nature and cause of the unusual affliction that had overtaken her beloved relative. In answer to that inquiry, Mordecai detailed all that had taken place with respect to Haman and himself, the measures which that proud and vindictive minister had adopted for the purpose of revenge, and the consideration by which he had persuaded the king to consent to those measures, not omitting the sum of money he had offered to pay into the treasury. He furnished, for the perusal and conviction of the queen, a copy of the decree, which had been actually issued for the destruction of the Jews; and concluded with charging her to use all the influence she possessed for the counteraction of the horrible design. The Greek translation of the story represents him as employing very moving arguments to induce her compliance, adjuring her by the remembrance of her once desolate and helpless condition when left an orphan without a father or a mother, by the parental care which he had then extended towards her, by the tenderness and fondness with which he had watched over her infancy, and carried her in his arms, and by all the interest and solicitude which he had always felt and manifested on her account, to "go in



at once even unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.”

It might, at first, appear that she would need but little persuasion, and that so much of argument and entreaty was scarcely required to induce her undertaking such a commission. But on attending to a custom of the Persian court, we find in her way a great and almost insuperable difficulty. No man or woman ever entered into the inner court, or the king's secret apartments and favourite habitation, unless especially invited by the king himself, without hazarding life. If any of his ministers, or courtiers, or wives, appeared there, without being led in, or ordered to come in by the king himself, a well-known law commanded that death should be the penalty of the intrusion. The only exception was the case of those to whom the king, on their appearance, might be pleased to hold out his golden sceptre, and thereby signify that their lives were mercifully and graciously spared. How, then, could Esther present herself uninvited before her royal husband? If she went in upon the chance of having held out to her the golden sceptre, the symbol of grace and mercy, there was a circumstance which might well cause her to have much misgiving as to the issue. She had not been called into the royal presence for thirty days—an interval of absence which she might fear indicated a

waning of affection towards her on the part of the king, and which, accordingly, weakened in her mind the hope of escaping, by virtue of the royal clemency, the dreaded consequences of intrusion. It is not an improbable conjecture that this prolonged separation of the queen from the king's apartments was the effect of Haman's intrigues, who, having received intimation of the relationship between Esther and Mordecai, might fear that her influence, if permitted to have intercourse with her husband, would defeat the barbarous scheme determined on against her people. Perhaps this very suspicion crossed her mind; and the fear of enemies undermining her in the royal affections, more to be dreaded than the capriciousness of a despot's love, would, in that case, increase her reluctance to appear uninvited in his presence, and cause to appear exceedingly faint the chance of escaping the fatal operation of the law. We cannot much wonder, then, that the thought of complying with Mordecai's request was very startling and alarming to her mind, already occupied with many causes of disquietude; and that the love of life prevailed, for a time, in her young heart, and dictated a refusal to undertake the perilous enterprise. Oh, life! most precious art thou to every heart! For thee men sacrifice willingly rank, and wealth, and every earthly possession. When Satan had tried the patriarch Job with

the loss of property, the loss of sons and daughters, the loss of his wife's sympathizing support, he maintained that the greatest trial of humanity had not yet been applied to him, the peril of losing his life, saying, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Let us not then be hasty to blame Esther for being reluctant, in the midst of youth and health, to jeopardize the precious gift of life.

But Mordecai, much as he might sympathize in his youthful relative's feelings, justly thought that the coming crisis was of such a nature as to justify the imperiling of an individual's life in the attempt to give it a favourable turn. He, therefore, upon receiving her answer, hesitated not to repeat solemnly and urgently the request he had made. He reminded her that she herself must eventually perish by the operation of the bloody decree that had been sent forth; whence we may infer, as already intimated, that the lineage of Esther, however it might, for the present, be carefully concealed from the king, was far from being unknown to Haman and his co-partners in guilt. He also expressed his confidence as a man of faith, that Jehovah would, in some way, interpose for the deliverance of his people, even though she refused her instrumentality, while she and her father's house would be destroyed, as a just judgment upon her for refusing to do what she

could to prevent so dreadful an evil. He concluded with an argument calculated to come home with irresistible force to every pious heart, saying, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" As though he had said<sup>4</sup>, "Is it likely that Divine Providence would have so distinguished thee, and raised thee from a state of abject obscurity, merely for thine own sake? Must it not have been on some public account? Did not He foresee what was coming; and has He not purposely raised thee to that station in order to counteract one of the most ruinous purposes ever formed? Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

This appeal to her piety and her responsibility to the Supreme Disposer of all things, served to overmaster her womanly fears, and to extinguish every selfish feeling in her bosom, and armed her heart with heroic courage to accomplish the required task. But she undertook not the perilous enterprise in her own strength. She sent back to her anxious relative a request, that he and all the Jews in Shushan gathered together would, by fasting, intercede with the Most High in her behalf. She determined herself, together with her maidens, to fast on the occasion, and expressed her resolution after that, in the strength of the Almighty,

<sup>4</sup> Ad. Clarke's Comm.



to hazard her life in the defence of her people, saying, "If I perish, I perish!"

Oh, worthy daughter of Abraham! Very sore was thy trial, but grace has enabled thee to triumph. Very hard was thy conflict with flesh and blood, but thou hast conquered at last. Equal, if not superior in true nobility of soul, to the most pious and most heroic of thy noble race, and to the best of all the sainted heroines of sacred history, art thou. Not the mother or sister of Moses, not Rahab in Jericho, nor Ruth in Moab, nor Deborah, nor Jael, nor Jephthah's daughter, were more self-denying, devoted, and courageous in the service of God and his people, than thou. Dear, for this, shall thy name for ever be to every heart among the chosen race. In all their weary wanderings, in all their removes from place to place, in adversity and prosperity, in persecution and in triumph, in tribulation and in joy, they shall bless and honour thee, and thy memory shall be as incense of sweet-smelling savour among all their posterities for evermore.

The issue of her courageous undertaking, we have not at present time to consider. We shall see it in our next discourse, and conclude the present with a few practical reflections on the events we have related. From this portion of sacred history we learn—

1. How God can bring good out of evil for the accomplishment of his high purposes, and



the promotion of his people's good. It was an evil on the part of Ahasuerus and his counselors, to degrade the virtuous Vashti, but the Almighty overruled it to the advancement of Esther, a daughter of the chosen race, destined, by virtue of that exaltation, to save a nation from ruin. It was an evil, as it was dishonouring to the true God, to have recourse, as Haman did, to the arts of magic and divination to ascertain the proper time for action, but the Almighty overruled that superstitious practice to the subservience of his hidden counsels and gracious purposes towards his people, causing the lot which was cast in the first month to fall upon the very last month of the year, and thus interposing a wide interval between the conception and the execution of the bloody plot, and leaving time to adopt measures for its counteraction and defeat. Brethren, if ever we are pained or alarmed by the sight of wickedness, or the prospect of superstition—whether individual or national—let us remember the almightiness of the supreme Disposer of all things, and lift up our hearts to Him in prayer, and in confidence that He will, according to his infinite wisdom, overrule the whole to the advancement of his own glory, and the final happiness of his people.

2. Observe the dreadful effects of evil passions when unrestrained by circumstances from without, and unchecked by divine grace from

within. Haman's pride, when fostered by elevation, became unbounded and insatiable, and, when offended, gave rise to a resentment and vindictiveness, so exacting and inhuman, that his feelings could be gratified with no less a sacrifice than the extinction of a whole people. For the offensive conduct of one, thousands are devoted to death—thousands who participated not in the offence complained of, and who had never even heard the name of their offending countryman—supposed guilt and unquestioned innocence being doomed alike to perish in one indiscriminate massacre! How hateful is pride, how cruel is wrath, how outrageous is anger! Oh, let us earnestly pray for “the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.”

3. Learn hence in all your troubles to rest upon the blessing and aid of Heaven. Trust not to your own arm, neither rely on your own strength, or wisdom, or contrivance, or foresight. You may be very anxious, for example, about your children, and imagine that you can do great things for them, by putting them forward in life. But, alas! you may be cut off, both father and mother, in the very infancy and helplessness of your beloved ones, and leave them orphans in the wide world. What, then, can you best do for them? Ensure for them the friendship of their heavenly Father. He

will take them up when earthly parents forsake them. He can dispose the heart of relatives and friends, like that of Mordecai, to supply the place of a father and a mother to them. He can exalt them from the most desolate condition, as he exalted Esther to conditions of highest prosperity and influence. "He can raise up the poor out of the dust, and lift the needy out of the dunghill, and set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." "Leave thy fatherless children unto me," saith God, "and I will preserve them alive." And with regard to other evils, of which you may be apprehensive, and which you may take great pains to prevent, remember that your chief help is in the name of the Lord. Mordecai and Esther might have been taken by utter surprise, and overwhelmed by a sudden calamity, had not their All-seeing and Almighty Protector caused the lot to fall on a distant day, and given them time to find a way of escape. You may labour, and study, and plan, but the Divine blessing alone can ensure you success. "The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

4. Let children learn from Esther's conduct the duty of reverencing those, whether parents or relatives, who brought them up. She, when elevated to a throne, did the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him. Here was a spirit of humility and

obedience, so rare in human nature, that I believe nothing but the implantation of divine grace can account for it. But how lovely a picture such a demeanour presents, and how worthy of imitation by all the young, both sons and daughters! Too often do children forget the respect due to those who once bestowed much labour and anxiety upon their comforts and interests. Too often, if they are raised in the world above their parents or kind relatives, are they ashamed of those to whom they were once indebted for their daily bread. Let none of you, my young friends, be ever guilty of such meanness and wickedness. Take for your pattern the Queen of Persia, who, when advanced to the very highest earthly elevation, did the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him. Or rather follow the example of a greater far than Esther, of whom, though He was higher than any earthly potentate, and though in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead, it is said that He paid every respect to his parents according to the flesh, and was obedient unto them.

5. See in Mordecai a noble example of fidelity to his God in the midst of most discouraging circumstances. Had he been less sincere and earnest in his devotion to Jehovah, he would have attempted to reconcile it to his conscience to render adoration to Haman by calling it only a sort of secondary worship, and



not that kind of worship to which the Supreme Being is entitled. Do not thousands, under this kind of delusion, now offer prayer and praise to men and women who were once but sinful creatures like themselves? But Mordecai had been taught in a better school. He had not so learned to trifle with the God of his fathers. He had heard and believed that He allowed none of his peculiar honour to be given to another, and justly thought that nothing could modify the plain and positive command, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." With this conviction, nothing could move him from the course he had adopted—not the remonstrances of his friends, not the ridicule of his acquaintances, not the threats of his enemies, not the terrors of disgrace and death—nothing could move him from his stedfastness in refusing to yield any kind of adoration, save to God only. His resolution was taken, whether he lived or whether he died, to be the Lord's. Oh, pray that we also may be endowed with the like fidelity.

6. But look, in conclusion, at the sublime acquiescence of Esther in that pious man's request. She at first felt a reluctance to face in her young days the valley of the shadow of death—to part with pomp and splendour, with wealth and rank just attained, and to encounter in the midst of health and bloom the terrors of



the scaffold, the gloom of the sepulchre, and the unknown possibilities of the unseen world. But she at last received strength to meet the trial. She found grace to undertake the momentous enterprise, and she hazarded her life for the salvation of her people. A noble sacrifice indeed ! But who is not thereby reminded of a far nobler sacrifice still ? When the entire of our fallen race was brought to the brink of perdition by the pride, the envy, the malice of Satan ; and when there was no eye to pity and no hand to relieve, behold the only-begotten of the Father stand forth in the midst of the celestial councils, not reluctantly, nor after long persuasion, but of his own free-will and spontaneous promptitude stand forth, and exclaim, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. I will be led as a lamb to the slaughter to save that perishing race. I will pour out my soul unto death, to rescue those millions from death eternal. I will lay aside my celestial pomp and glory, my attendance of angels and seraphs, my station at the right hand of the Highest, and descend to yonder wretched world, and will encounter its worst trials, its poverty, its scorn, its cruelty, and will pass through the ignominy and agony of the bitterest of deaths, and the thick darkness of the gloomy grave, to defeat the enemy of immortal souls, and to deliver the undying from a fate worse than death." Oh, what shall we render unto the

Lord for this his marvellous loving-kindness to  
the help less race of Adam! Who shall not  
appreciate and hold it in daily and everlasting  
remembrance!

“ O Lamb of God! the victim slain  
On whom our sins were laid;  
Whose life for every soul of man  
Was once an offering made.

“ The Great Redeemer, Thee we own,  
Of all our fallen race;  
Our faith would look to Thee alone,  
And rest upon thy grace.

“ Oh, make us thine, that we may know  
And feel our sins forgiven;  
So shall we do thy will below,  
And praise thy love in heaven.”

## SERMON XXIV.

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ESTHER.

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ESTHER v. 1.

“Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king’s house : and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house over against the gate of the house.”

IN our last discourse we discontinued our account of Esther at that point of her history where she exhibits the sublime spectacle of one determined, in the strength of God, to risk her life for the salvation of her people. We left her with those words of devout heroism on her lips, “If I perish, I perish!” For three days and three nights did she, and her maidens, and Mordecai, and all the Jewish inhabitants of the city, intercede with the supreme Disposer of all things for a blessing on her perilous enterprise. On the third of those days she rises in the true majesty of a heaven-inspired faith, and addresses herself to the arduous work appointed her to do. She lays aside the garments of hu-

miliation and sorrow, and puts on her royal apparel meet for the eyes of the king. She quits her own apartments, though we may suppose not without regret at so soon resigning scenes of unrivalled dignity, to which she had been unexpectedly elevated, yet with a determined willingness, if such be the will of God, to see them no more. She traverses the intervening halls, or corridors, or passages, though we may suppose not without a heavy heart, seeing that every step she took might be bringing her nearer and nearer to the gates of death, yet with a firm resolve to count not her life dear unto her, so that she might finish her course in the service of her people, and according to the will of her God. The awful moment decisive of her fate is come. She reaches the entrance of the forbidden ground :

“ A moment’s pause, one upward glance,  
One earnest prayer to heaven,  
And quickly to her fainting heart  
The needed strength is given.”

She ventures forward, and presents herself at last within the inner court of the king’s house. Oh, crisis big with the destiny of a queen and a nation ! It was, however, in all probability but a very brief and transient crisis, for the monarch happened to be seated on his royal throne, right opposite to the gate or door of his house, so as to command a view of the entrance into the inner court which surrounded it, and

in which Esther was now stationed; and his eyes fell upon the queen probably on the instant of her appearance there. He no sooner beheld his lovely wife, perhaps now rendered doubly interesting by the deep emotions and anxious cares which agitated her bosom:—

“The self-devotedness and zeal  
 Within her bosom glowing,  
 Around her thoughtful countenance  
 Unearthly beauty throwing:”—

He no sooner beheld her, than, by the ordination of a gracious Providence, he was induced to exhibit the token of favourable regard, and he held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Blessed be God, her life is spared. She can speak for the life even of her people. Who can describe her unutterable transports of hope and joy, as she responded to the auspicious omen, and “drew near and touched the top of the sceptre!” Having touched the top of the golden sceptre, she is sure of life for herself. She begins to trust that she shall save the life of her people. Her confidence of success increases upon hearing, immediately after, the accents of strong partiality and bountiful goodness towards her from the lips of the king, who said, “What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom.”

In answering these kind questions and this most gracious offer of the king, she manifested



a forethought and prudence equal to the courage and devotion she had exercised before. For the present, she merely requested that the king, and together with him, strange as it might at first appear, Haman, the very man who was the great enemy of her people, would come that day and partake of a banquet which she had prepared for them. She deemed it necessary, we imagine, to invite Haman, to lull his suspicion of her design, and thereby to prevent his taking any immediate steps to counteract it. When we have to do with the unprincipled and unscrupulous, we must be "wise as serpents" to defeat their wicked machinations; while, in respect to the causing of mischief ourselves, we must be "harmless as doves." To that entertainment the monarch and his favourite came, and at that part of it called the banquet of wine, that is, at the time when the wine was introduced, the king repeated to the queen his former gracious questions and offer. Esther did not yet reveal her ultimate object, but contented herself, for the present, with inviting the same two guests to a similar banquet on the following day, at which she promised to make known the petition and request she had at heart. The purpose of this delay, on her part, was the more certainly to secure the end she had in view. Finding, on the one hand, that she was gaining on the king's affections, and being, on the other, not yet sufficiently confident of

possessing such an influence over his mind as the very momentous nature of her mission required, she wisely judged, that by another interview, she would still more ingratiate herself in his favour, and make more sure of the success of her suit. Such, we have little doubt, were Esther's motives for delay. But He that ruleth over all was using this delay, and, we doubt not, had suggested it to the queen's mind, for a still more important purpose—for the purpose of developing circumstances, which had such a bearing on the matter under her consideration, as to make it next to impossible that she should fail of success. The circumstances which occurred during that short interval exposed more distinctly the baseness of Haman, brought clearly into the king's view the merit of Mordecai, and consequently led to the exaltation of the one, and the accelerated confusion of the other, and thus conduced irresistibly to the complete triumph of the royal supplicant. Let this remind us how much better a kind Providence can work in our behalf than any contrivance or labour of our own. All your caution and foresight may end in disappointment if you lean only to your own understanding and your own strength; but cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee. Esther, indeed, did all that could have been done by a prudent and circumspect conduct. But, had she been contented with doing no more, she might have

failed, after all. She, however, had done far more. She had applied to the Almighty in her time of need. She had directed her people to apply for help to the Almighty. And He that heareth prayer was answering their intercessions in a marvellous way, and realizing unto them the blessed experience of the Psalmist, "Offer unto God thanksgiving: and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

To detail the circumstances which occurred during that delay, we first notice the conduct of Haman. He left the first banquet of Esther exceedingly elated with the honour he had received, and with the additional honour of an invitation for the following day. But, almost immediately afterwards, his vanity and pride received a great mortification as he passed through the gate on his way homewards, from the conduct of the obnoxious Mordecai, who persisted in refusing him the required reverence. His heart boiled with such furious resentment, on account of the repeated affront, that he could scarcely refrain from punishing it on the spot by outrageous violence. He no sooner reached his house than he bitterly complained of it to his wife and friends purposely called together for consultation on the subject. After setting before them his wealth, and rank, and power, he appealed to them whether it was endurable

that an individual like Mordecai, should be permitted to pursue a line of conduct which marred all the happiness of his exalted station. He referred to his high promotion, and unrivalled advancement by the king—to the singular honour of having been admitted, by the queen, in preference to all others, to feast with her and her royal consort alone—to the additional honour of having been invited to a similar entertainment the following day, and “yet,” added he, “all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king’s gate.” How distressing are the inquietudes of vanity! How harassing the exactions of pride! Let the heart that is under their influence have abundance of all things; yet the denial of one thing will make it unhappy. Ahab, though possessed of a throne, took to his bed, and refused to eat bread, because the vineyard of Naboth was denied him. The truth is, that all that this world contains will not make an immortal soul happy. Nothing can satisfy its unearthly longings but the fulness of God himself. Every individual, therefore, in whom God’s sanctifying Spirit dwelleth not—and He will be no inmate with pride and vanity—is a discontented and dissatisfied being, whatever may be the external wealth and splendour which surround him. The angels ceased to be happy in heaven when they cast off their allegiance to their Maker.



Adam ceased to be happy in Paradise when he discontinued his fidelity to his Creator. Solomon was unhappy in all his glory, and found all in this world to be vanity and vexation of spirit while he had not God for his portion. And Haman was wretched, though he had the kingdom of Persia at his feet, while he cherished feelings inconsistent with the indwelling Spirit of God. And wretched is every man—unspeakably wretched will every man hereafter be, who has not the God of Jacob for his help, and in whose heart his love is not shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. Join we, then, most earnestly in that prayer of the Jews, “O God, make clean our hearts within us. And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.”

Haman's wife and friends, instead of remonstrating with him upon the unreasonableness of his discontent, and the sinfulness of his rage, as wise counsellors and well-wishers would have done, fostered his worst passions, and encouraged him to take decisive and immediate steps for their gratification. They advised him to have a gallows erected without delay, and to request the king's permission, on the morrow, to have Mordecai executed upon it. He should then, they said, have his mind at ease, and be able to “go in merrily with the king unto the banquet.” He was pleased with the murderous proposal, caused the instrument of death to be prepared, and retired to rest in the confident hope of ob-



taining the royal assent to the speedy and ignominious destruction of the man he hated. But, oh! how He who sitteth in the heavens laughs at the counsels of the wicked, and taketh the sinfully wise in their own craftiness! He controls the wings of sleep, and forbids him that night to visit the monarch's eyes. Ye, who have spent the hours of darkness in wakefulness, unable to obtain slumber for your eyelids, can tell how heavily then move the wheels of time. What shall the king do to wile away the leaden moments? He calls for the chronicles of the kingdom, in which every occurrence of importance was recorded, and commands them to be read in his hearing. It was so ordered that the passages read contained an account of the conspiracy, formed a few years previous, against the life of the king, by Bigthan and Teresh, the two chamberlains, specifying the name of the person whose vigilance and timely information defeated their design, and led to their conviction, and who was no other than that very Mordecai, now brought to the very brink of destruction by the vindictive malice of Haman. Upon hearing the record of this murderous plot, the king naturally inquired what reward had been given to the individual to whose sagacity and promptitude he was indebted for his life. He learnt, with evident surprise and chagrin, that the meritorious service had remained entirely un-

recompensed and unnoticed, like that of the poor wise man, mentioned in Ecclesiastes, who, by his wisdom, delivered a beleaguered city, and of whom it is said, "yet no man remembered that same poor man." He instantly felt a desire to repair the discreditable neglect, and with that view asked which of his courtiers or ministers were within call, that he might immediately consult with them upon the subject. He was answered that Haman was within the palace, who appears to have arrived there at an earlier hour than usual. And why had Haman come so early? Malice and revenge had made him restless and impatient, and he had presented himself at the palace before the usual time, from an anxiety to see the king as soon as possible, and to obtain his consent, with the least delay, for the execution of Mordecai on the gallows he had already prepared for him. The king orders him to be called into his presence, and proposes to him the question, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" Haman, ignorant of what had passed during the night within the palace, and believing that no one appeared so high in the king's favour as himself, doubted not that the honour was intended for his own person, and answered, "For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon,

and the crown royal which is set upon his head : and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." In proposing such honours for himself, even if he had really been the person intended by the king, he manifested as much folly as pride. The royal apparel was never worn but by the king ; and it was death, under ordinary circumstances, to put them on when the king had laid them aside. Accordingly, his shortsighted and overweening vanity tempted him to include, in the arrangement for his own exaltation, what might have awakened in the royal mind a suspicion of treason—a suspicion that nothing would satisfy such towering ambition but the dignity of occupying the throne itself, and what, therefore, might have turned upon him the fatal wrath instead of the unprecedented favour of his royal master. So imprudent as well as sinful is the heart that is under the unrestrained influence of vanity, ambition, and pride. It would have been a foolish as well as an arrogant thing to propose such honours for himself ; but how immeasurably foolish he must have appeared in his own eyes, and what a mortifying shock his arro-

gance must have received, when he found those honours were intended for another, and that other the man whom, of all others, he most detested, the unbending Mordecai! The honours were for Mordecai the Jew, whom he had that day intended to cover with ignominy. The sunshine of the royal favour was for Mordecai the Jew, whom he had intended that day to bring to the darkness of death. And to increase his mortification, he himself, in exact accordance with his own suggestion, was, as one of the king's most noble princes, to perform the ceremony in honour of the man he abominated. His own hand was to take the apparel and array Mordecai withal; and to bring him on horseback through the street of the city; and his own lips were to proclaim before him, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour." Overwhelming reverse! How could he endure such mortifying disappointment! He was totally unable to endure it in the presence of the king and courtiers; and, consequently, after the ceremony, while Mordecai returned to the palace gates, "Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered"—the expressive symbol of grief of heart and confusion of face. And what consolation did he receive in the season of his humiliation and distress from Zeresh his wife, and his friends, those evil counsellors who had encouraged him



to deeds of guilt?" Alas! they did but aggravate his wretchedness and despondency. They foreboded him still greater evil from the influence of the man who had baffled him, saying, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." Miserable comforters were they all!

This domestic council, which seemed to suggest nothing but gloomy forebodings and darkening prospects, was broken up by a royal message, summoning the perplexed Haman to the second banquet which Esther had prepared for him and the king, and the invitation to which had so inordinately flattered his vanity and increased his arrogance. We know not with what thoughts and feelings he actually went to that banquet. We can scarcely think that he went in merrily to that feast, as his foolish wife and friends had once predicted. Or if brighter prospects beamed upon him, as his mind reverted to this distinguished honour, they were destined soon to be for ever clouded. At the same period of the feast as on the preceding day, the king repeated his former questions and offer, and said, for the third time, "What is thy petition, Queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of my kingdom." The promised time had come for revealing the momentous secret. The cri-



tical period had arrived for making the decisive effort to expose guilt and vindicate innocence. And with what inimitable skill and wisdom did divine grace enable her to perform her arduous task! With what words and sentiments of irresistible pathos did she appeal to the pitying compassion of her royal husband! She told him with streaming eyes that she was doomed to die. She told him with bitter sorrow that her entire nation was condemned to die. "Let my life," said she, "O king, be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish," repeating the very words of the bloody edict. The king was, by this moving speech and alarming statement, thrown into the wildest tumult of surprise, and grief, and anxious curiosity. When set before him in its proper light, he was struck with horror at a conspiracy so sweeping, cruel, and diabolical, and impatiently demanded who was the man, and where was the man, who had presumed in his heart to meditate such a crime. "The adversary and enemy," said Esther, "is this wicked Haman." Oh, Haman! those words sound like thy death-knell. What wilt thou do, and whither wilt thou go for refuge? The king quits the apartment in ungovernable rage at the baseness and barbarity of thy cruel machinations. He plunges into the open air of the adjoining gardens to shun thy detestable

presence, and to cool the burning fever which the thought of thy hellish plot has kindled in his brain. Thou seest that evil is determined against thee. Thou availest thyself of his brief absence, to fall down on thy knees to beg thy life of her whom but now thou hadst compelled to supplicate for her own and her people's. But thou hast no time to make thy supplication. He who has the power of life and death returns too soon, and in the wild turmoil of indignant fury, puts a construction on the meaning of thy suppliant posture, that even thy wicked soul under such circumstances could not contemplate—and, without hearing a word of defence or entreaty, commands thee forth to instant death, and, oh righteous retribution! thou art executed on the very gallows which thou preparedst for Mordecai! How hast thou exemplified the Scripture truths, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall!" "Thou art sunk down in the pit which thou thyself has made; in the net which thou didst hide is thy own foot taken."

While the wicked perish miserably, the righteous are had in everlasting remembrance. Not only is Mordecai's cruel enemy baffled and destroyed, but Mordecai himself is promoted by the king to the highest rank, and loaded with wealth and honours. His great service in defeating the conspiracy of the chamberlains has

already obtained him a distinguished mark of royal esteem and gratitude. His relationship to the queen, which had now been made known to the king, procures him a more permanent station of dignity and wealth, and his persecution by Haman, we may well suppose, points him out as the most worthy person to fill the post and enjoy the privileges vacated by that unhappy individual. "And the king took off his ring which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai"—thus conferring upon the Jew all the rank and influence lately enjoyed by the Amalekite. "And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman." The decree, however, which had gone forth against their people was still in full force, and, therefore, Esther lost no time in presenting herself before the king, unbidden as before, to prevent its execution. She fell down again at his feet, and besought him with tears to reverse the letters devised by Haman against the Jews, saying, "For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" But what need now of all this lamentation and entreaty? Was not every difficulty removed by the circumstances just developed, and by the king's solemn engagement to grant the queen's request to the half of his kingdom? No. A very great difficulty still existed, arising from an absurd peculiarity of all the laws and

edicts of the Medes and Persians already referred to—that they were unchangeable, incapable of being repealed or annulled. It was that peculiarity which put it out of the power of Darius to save his highly valued counsellor Daniel from the den of lions. And now his successor Ahasuerus, though willing to gratify the queen to the half of his kingdom, and most anxious to save her people and Mordecai from the ruin contrived against them, could not, without endangering his crown and his life, reverse a single word of the murderous decree that had gone forth. He did, however, all he could to repair the mischief. If it was not in his power literally to reverse the issued edict, he could do much to neutralize its effect, by issuing another edict, authorizing the Jews to gather themselves together in their own defence against the appointed day, and “to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, and to take the spoil for a prey of”—using the identical words of the first decree—all that should in any part of the Persian dominions dare to rise up against them. This second decree worked a mighty change in favour of the endangered people. Conveying the king’s sentiments in their behalf, it influenced all the authorities of the kingdom to abet their cause, and discountenance their enemies. And, by the time when the day fixed for their slaughter arrived, they had become so power-



ful and formidable that no man could withstand them, for the fear of them fell upon all the people." They obtained an easy victory over such as rose up against them; and their sorrow was turned into joy, and their mourning into a good day. Mordecai appointed the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar, the days immediately following that fixed for their destruction, to be kept by the whole nation as days of praise and thanksgiving, of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. They called them the days of Purim, the plural of Pur, or the lot, in allusion to the lot which Haman cast for their ruin, but which the Lord disposed to their triumph and exaltation; and they have kept those days as annual feasts in all their generations, in all their troubles, in all their wanderings, from that memorable period even to the present time.

We close the wonderful history with a few practical remarks. 1. From Haman's discontent learn the unsatisfactory nature of worldly possessions. All his wealth and glory availed him nothing, while Mordecai the Jew, who refused him reverence, sat at the king's gate. You may reach the highest earthly elevation, and surround yourselves with riches, luxuries, and honours, and yet be unhappy. You may rise up early, and late take rest, to accumulate a fortune, and succeed in accumulating a for-



tune, and yet be so wretched in your mind as to regard all you have done, and all you have attained, to be no better than vanity and vexation of spirit. I have read of a great statesman and scholar of modern times, who wished he could exchange conditions with a poor mechanic of his acquaintance, whom he knew to be a pious man. Nothing can give content to the mind of immortal man but the grace of God. Set not your hearts, then, upon earthly things. Do not deceive yourselves with the idea that high prosperity will leave you nothing to desire. You will be as uncomfortable as ever if you secure not the good part which cannot be taken away. Seek the unsearchable riches of Christ; seek the honour that cometh from the King of Heaven, and you shall discover the true secret of happiness, "for the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

2. From the conduct of Haman's wife and friends, learn what broken reeds, in the day of trouble and adversity, are sinful companions and evil counsellors. The persons who instigated him to crime, far from comforting his heart when a cloud came over it, did but depress it still more by forebodings of greater evil. And is it not ever found, that those associates who encourage their fellows to evil, are the first to desert them, or to treat them with derision and

scorn when threatened with failure or suffering? Have we not here a specimen of what the wicked shall be to one another in the world to come? They will reciprocate cutting reproaches and bitter curses for having banded together against the Lord, and against his anointed, to their own irremediable ruin. Flee, then, the company of the ungodly. Walk not in the counsel of the wicked. Stand not in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. Associate yourselves with the excellent of the earth. Join yourselves to the people of God. Cultivate the communion of the saints. They will comfort you in the day of trouble. They will aid you in the season of distress. They will weep with you when weeping, as well as rejoice with you when rejoicing; and when you shall come out of all your tribulation, you will find them joining in your hallelujahs of triumph at the right hand of God for ever.

3. In the change which took place in the circumstances of Haman and Mordecai, behold a symbolic picture of the reverses of the world to come. Haman, the king's favourite, prepared a gallows for Mordecai. Mordecai became the king's favourite, and Haman was executed on the gallows. Similar will be the change of ranks and places in the scene of final retribution. The man that was here clothed in purple and fine linen, because he lived and died impenitent will there be compelled, in the

nakedness of guilt, and the defencelessness of his unrenewed nature, to dwell in everlasting desolation, while the man of mean attire here, because a child of God will wear a robe of spotless righteousness, and a diadem of unfading glory. The man that here fared sumptuously every day, because he lived and died impenitent will there himself become the food of the worm that never dieth, while the man that could scarcely obtain bread and water here, because a child of God will there feed on the fruit of the tree of life, which is in the midst of Paradise, and enjoy the milk and honey of heaven's choicest pleasures. The man that was here greeted, wherever he went, with marks of deference and respect, because he lived and died impenitent will there be doomed to shame and everlasting contempt, while the man whom here none would notice, because a child of God will, after death, become the companion of powers and principalities in heavenly places. Then will be illustrated, on the grandest scale, the declaration, "Them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Oh, then, who shall not now seek first the kingdom of Heaven and his righteousness? Who shall not count as nothing the advantages of this world when they come in competition with those of the world that is eternal? Who shall not count all things as

ding that he may win Christ, and be found in Him? Who shall count even his life dear unto Him, so that he may keep the faith, and finish his course in holiness, and obtain a crown of righteousness, and hear the welcome invitation, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world?"

4. By the success of Esther, in accomplishing the rescue of her people, we are reminded, —and, indeed, what part of the inspired volume, whether the Old or the New Testament, does not remind us?—of the great salvation wrought by one far greater than Esther for the whole of our fallen race. We saw the Queen of Persia walking, with a sad step and a heavy heart, to the interview which might cost her her life; but she shrunk not from the dread encounter in the attempt to deliver her people. But, oh! how heavier was his weight of wo whose soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death! how dreadfully more piercing was the agony of Him who, in the prospect of the sufferings, to be endured for man's deliverance, sweated great drops of blood, which flowed down his body to the cold ground! How intense the torment of the coming struggle, when in a paroxysm of terror He exclaimed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" How dark and overwhelming was the misery of







down Satan under your feet. And oh, when we have conquered every foe, and come forth out of every tribulation, what a feast shall we keep in honour of our Great Deliverer! Centuries have not wiped away from the hearts of God's ancient people the perilous enterprise of Esther. The ages of a long eternity will not obliterate from our hearts the love of Him who for us actually went through death and hell.

My admiration raise :  
 Oh God ! thy name exalted is  
 Above the highest praise.

“ When shall our souls mount up to thee,  
 Most holy, just, and true,  
 To eat that bread, and drink that wine,  
 Which is for ever new ?”

5. But the most striking and instructive lesson taught by this wonderful history is the superintendence of a particular Providence, and the minute care which the King of heaven takes of his chosen people. How marvellously did He cause all things to work together for Mordecai and his nation, who trusted in Him ! We think it probable that Mordecai was connected with the palace before the dismissal of Vashti, though he might be raised to a higher

post after the elevation of Esther. In that case he might have come in contact with Haman, and drawn down his displeasure upon himself and his people, without a friend at court of sufficient influence to counteract his hellish design. Jehovah, foreseeing the peril, paved the way for the advancement of Esther to meet it. Again, the lot might have fallen on an early day, in which case there would have been no time to take measures for preventing the intended massacre. Jehovah, foreseeing the necessity of delay, caused the lot to fall on one of the latest days of the year. Moreover, Esther might have made known her petition and request on her first interview with the king. Her mind was directed to put off her communication till the following day, and God most wonderfully turned that interval to the advantage of Mordecai and the confusion of Haman, precluding the still greater advantage and confusion which respectively befell them at last. That night sleep refuses to visit the monarch's eyes, and there is, in consequence, brought to his notice the merit of Mordecai, which led to his glorification and the humiliation of Haman. All bore so wonderfully on the queen's suit, that we cannot but see therein the finger of Omniscience. Had there been a single link wanting in this complicated chain of circumstances, the massacre might have taken place. All combined effec-

tually prevented it. Oh, then, let us ever trust all our concerns, national, ecclesiastical, and individual, to the wise direction of a careful and merciful Providence. “Review past dispensations, and gather encouragement for present confidence! If God be for us, who can be against us? Did he not choose Abraham among a nation of idolaters, and call him friend? Did he not release Joseph from the pit, and raise him to princely glory? Did he not rescue Moses from the destructive waters, and constitute him the leader of his oppressed people? Did he not deliver David from the lion and the bear, from the strength of the giant, and the madness of Saul, and exalt him to a throne? He was with Elijah in the desert, with Job in his poverty, with Jonah in the sea, with Peter in his fears, with Paul in his persecutions, with Daniel in the den of lions, with Esther and Mordecai, when exposed to ignominy and death. He has in all ages supplied his saints’ necessities, alleviated their sorrows, sweetened their trials, turned shame into honour, and death into life in their behalf. Believe in Him, and He will deliver you from all difficulties, preserve you in all dangers, and make you more than conquerors over sin, and misery, and death, and hell. Believe in Him, and He will array you in a robe of light, adorn you with a crown of glory, associate you with

holy angels, stamp immortality on your blessedness, wipe all tears from your eyes, and admit you to rivers of pleasure at his own right hand for evermore<sup>1</sup>.” “Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

<sup>1</sup> Altered from Cox.





## NOTES.

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### NOTE I. p. 8.

THE vow of the Nazarite consisted in the following particulars :—1. He consecrated himself in a very especial and extraordinary manner to God. 2. This was to continue for a certain season, probably never less than a whole year, that he might have a full growth of hair to *burn in the fire which was under the sacrifice of the peace-offering*. 3. During the time of his separation or *Nazarate*, he drank no *wine* nor *strong drink* ; nor used any *vinegar* formed from any inebriating liquor, nor ate fresh or dried *grapes*, nor tasted even the *kernels* or *husks* of any thing that had grown upon the vine. 4. He never *shaved his head*, but let his *hair grow*, as the proof of his being in this separated state, and under vows of peculiar austerity. 5. He never touched any dead body, nor did any of the last offices, even to his nearest kin ; but was considered as the priests, who were wholly taken up with the service of God, and regarded nothing else. 6. *All the days of his separation he was holy unto the Lord*. During the whole time, he was to be incessantly employed in religious acts. It is very likely that St. Paul had taken the vow of a Nazarite upon him, from the circumstance mentioned Acts xviii. 18, *Having shorn his head at Cenchrea, for he had a vow*. See more on this subject in Ad. Clarke's Comment. on Numbers vi.

## NOTE II. p. 47 &amp; 58.

To the conversation between Naomi and Ruth related in the inspired volume, the Targum adds many particulars as follows: "And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, *for I desire to become a proselyte. And Naomi said, We are commanded to keep the sabbath, and other holy days; and on it not to travel more than two thousand cubits.* And Ruth said, Whither thou goest I will go. *And Naomi said, We are commanded not to lodge with the Gentiles.* Ruth answered, Where thou lodgest, I will lodge. *And Naomi said, We are commanded to observe the one hundred and thirteen precepts.* Ruth answered, *What thy people observe, that will I observe, as if they had been my people of old.* *And Naomi said, We are commanded not to worship with any strange worship.* Ruth answered, Thy God shall be my God. *Naomi said, We have four kinds of capital punishments for criminals: stoning, burning, beheading, and hanging.* Ruth answered, In whatsoever manner thou diest, I will die. *Naomi said, We have a house of burial.* Ruth answered, And there will I be buried."

## NOTE III. p. 112.

This prediction was verified in the reign of Solomon, when the exercise of the high-priesthood was taken from Abiathar and committed to Zadok. By that transference the office reverted to its original channel, the elder branch (Eleazar's) of the house of Aaron. How it came to Eli, who belonged to the younger branch (Ithamar's) we are not informed. It was probably for a reason similar to that which caused its re-transference from the younger to the elder branch. The prediction, however, is by many supposed to have a more extensive reference than to Zadok, and Solomon, the Lord's anointed on the throne of Israel; and to allude to Him that was *anointed* to be the King of the Jews, to our great High Priest, and to the system.

## NOTE IV. p. 117 &amp; 143.

The ark was, in the reign of Solomon, placed in the Temple which he built on Mount Zion. There it remained till the times of the last kings of Judah, who gave themselves up to idolatry, and were so daring as to put their idols in the very holy place itself. The priests, being unable to endure this profanation, took the ark, and carried it from place to place, that so they might preserve it from the fury of these impious princes. [This is not inconsistent with what we have said about the ordained immovability of the sacred coffer. Extraordinary circumstances may justify a departure from ordinary rules respecting modes and places of worship, to prevent a still greater evil.] Josiah commanded them to bring it back to the sanctuary, and forbade them to carry it, as they had hitherto done, into the country.—Calmet. The Talmudists relate that Solomon, having learned by revelation that the Assyrians would one day burn the temple lately built by him, and carry away all the rich materials which he had placed there, took care to have a secret place made under ground, where, in case of necessity, he might conceal the most precious ornaments and sacred things belonging to the temple from the knowledge of any enemies; and that Josiah, having a foresight of the calamities which were about to fall on the Hebrew nation, hid there the ark of the covenant, together with Aaron's rod, the pot of Manna, the high priest's pectoral, and the holy oil; but that during the Babylonish captivity, the priests having lost all knowledge of the place where these things had been concealed, they were never afterwards seen, and were not in the second temple. The Gemara of Jerusalem and that of Babylon, both acknowledge that the ark of the covenant is one of the things wanting in

the second temple, after the return from the captivity of Babylon. The Jews flatter themselves that it will appear again with the Messiah whom they expect. But Jeremiah, speaking of the time of the Messiah, and the calling of the Gentiles to the faith, says that they shall neither talk nor think of the ark, nor remember it any more.—Jer. iii. 16.

NOTE V. p. 129 & 132.

The Hebrew expression translated "*in the one of the twain*" means literally "*in the twain*," and so some versions render it. But it is doubted whether it refers to Saul's *twain*, or two *daughters*, Merab and Michal, one of whom was betrothed to David, and the other was about to be actually given to him; or to David's *twain*, or two *claims* of merit in having killed Gohath, and in slaughtering the required number of the Philistines.—*Pole's Syn. Crit.*

NOTE VI. p. 294.

According to a quotation of Grotius from Diodorus Siculus, Ariopharnes, king of Thrace, used similar means to solve a perplexing question. Being appointed to decide between three young men, who each professed to be the son of the deceased king of the Cimmerians, and claimed the crown in consequence, found out the real son by commanding each to shoot an arrow into the body of the dead king: two of them did this without hesitation: the third refused; and was, therefore, judged by Ariopharnes to be the real son of the deceased. This, says Ad. Clarke, is a parallel case to that in the text: a covert appeal was made to the principle of *affection*, and the truth was discovered, as in the case of the living child.



## NOTE VII. p. 329.

Some are of opinion that the expressions relating to Hiel, the rebuilder of Jericho, signify only great delay : that he, who should undertake it, should spend nearly his whole life in it ; all the time of his manhood, or the most important portion of his life ; that if a man laid the foundation when his first-born came into the world, his youngest and last son should be born before the walls should be in readiness to admit the gates to be set up in them ; and that the phrase is of the proverbial kind, intimating *greatly protracted labour*, occasioned by multitudinous hindrances and delays.

Another opinion respecting the passage is, that he who rebuilt this city should, in laying the foundation, slay or sacrifice his first-born, in order to consecrate it, and secure the assistance of the objects of his idolatrous worship ; and should slay his youngest son at the completion of the work, as a gratitude-offering for the assistance received.

## NOTE VIII. p. 330.

Some commentators are of opinion that the Hebrew word *Orebim*, rendered in our common English version "*ravens*," signifies also "*merchants*," persons occasionally trading through the country, whom God directed by inspiration to supply the prophet with food. Others think that the original means "*Arabians* ;" and others, the inhabitants of a city or town of the name of *Orbo* or *Oreb*, and that they, especially influenced by the Spirit of the Lord, furnished his servant with necessaries in his retreat. These opinions, however, as well as that presented in our common version, still imply the working of a miracle—an extraordinary manifestation of Heaven's superintending care.



## NOTE IX. See ESTHER.

Hadassah was, probably, her first, or Chaldaic name, which, in that language, signifies a myrtle; Esther, the name given her when she came to the Persian court, which, in that language, signifies a star. Being the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai, she must have been Mordecai's cousin, though the Vulgate and Josephus make her Mordecai's niece.

THE END.

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## Waiting.

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**T**he world, Micawber-like, is waiting for happiness to turn up by some fortuitous circumstance, but Micawber-like, it never turns up, until we get to work ourselves and turn it up. Happiness is the culmination of love's labour successfully performed—it is the spiritual blossom evolved from the fulfilment of duty.

But people are praying (preying) and waiting for a "Saviour" to appear who will deliver them from their sins and transport them to a place of happiness; and while waiting for some one to do that which they are obliged to do themselves, they are getting farther and farther away from their salvation. Salvation can never come through greed, selfishness, unkindness and sensual gratification. While these are cultivated by the individual, he will always be in need of salvation.

A Messiah could do no more than teach obedience to the Law of Love and wisdom. Learn to conform to the mental-spiritual and physical laws of harmony. Bring the body and mind under harmonious control. This you know in theory; put it into practice, and the Saviour will appear!

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