



*P 67.*

**The death of Absalom.**

# THE LIFE

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OF

# A B S A L O M.

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## P R E F A C E.

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**IF** any one should be disposed to ask, why the life of so bad a man is here presented to the public, it will be a sufficient answer to say, that it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit to fill a large space in the Scripture with this very history. The Bible gives us accounts not only of holy men for imitation, but of wicked men for warning. In Absalom, we have a picture of treachery and bloodshed such as must fill us with horror. Such

dread is salutary. It is good to shudder at sin. The youthful reader may tremble at the profligacy of a good man's son, and pray to be delivered from temptation. The little volume is humbly commended to the divine blessing.

# THE LIFE OF ABSALOM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A PROFLIGATE SON.

It is well known to all who are acquainted with Scripture history, that before David was fully established in the kingdom at Jerusalem, he reigned seven years and a half at Hebron. This place was in the hilly part of Judah, about twenty miles southward of the capital, and was famous in the history of Abraham. During the time that king David held his court at Hebron, six sons were born to him, namely, Amnon, Chileab, Absalom,

Adonijah, Shephatiah, and Ithream. Of these, the first, the third, and the fourth became somewhat famous; and it is painful to observe that these were all wicked men.

The mother of Absalom was a Syrian princess, Maacah, a daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, whose land David had invaded, while he found refuge with Achish the Gittite. We know little of this woman, or of the early life of her son. It is highly probable that she was a heathen, and that Absalom was brought up without those advantages which children derive from pious mothers. And the reader who enjoys this unspeakable blessing may well pause a moment and give thanks to God for it.

During the early years of Absalom, his father was engaged in perpetual war for the establishment of his kingdom, but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker. At length the Lord gave him rest from all his enemies, and settled his throne in Jerusalem. In the mean time his sons seem to have been growing up in wickedness, so that the very first we hear of them is in connection with a great crime.

Absalom had a beautiful sister, named Tamar, who was insulted and injured in the most dreadful manner, by her half-brother Amnon, the eldest son of David. To this conduct Amnon was instigated by a wicked rela-



tion, Jonadab, David's nephew. When Absalom heard of the disgrace and affliction of his sister, he took her to his own house, and gave her shelter. But he showed the craft and malignity which were peculiar to his character, by keeping hidden in his heart his deep intentions of revenge. No one could have judged from his words or actions what was about to happen. But the most dreadful malice is often that which is long concealed; and so it was in the case of these unnatural brothers. For two full years did Absalom harbour the spite in his bosom, before he took his revenge. Though he hated Amnon, he uttered not a word of anger to him; but awaited his time.

We are told that when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth; but we do not read that he punished Amnon in any way. It is possible that he spared him, because he was his first-born. If so, it was a mistaken kindness, and ended in manifold calamity to all the parties concerned.

At length an opportunity occurred for Absalom to revenge himself. The season of sheep-shearing had arrived, which in Judea takes place in the spring. It is an occasion of great rejoicing in most pastoral countries, as we find in the case of Laban and Judah. Where there are multitudes of flocks, the getting in of the wool, which is their chief commodity, employs a great

many hands, and is accompanied with merry-making. In America, we see very little to remind us of the great scale on which this business is conducted in the East. Some of the Arab Emirs have such herds and flocks as would astonish us. Sir John Chardin saw one whose flocks extended ten leagues, or thirty miles; and near Aleppo he saw Turcomans with four hundred thousand beasts of carriage, and three millions of sheep and goats. Nothing like this, however, could exist within the narrower limits of Palestine. Yet it was a pastoral country, and the sheep-shearings were times for meeting and carousing.

On this occasion Absalom prepared an entertainment, and sent invitations

to the king and all the princes royal. David declined, lest so expensive a feast should be burdensome; but after much importunity he gave permission to Amnon and his other sons to go.

All this was part of the horrid plot which Absalom had laid against his brother. For he had commanded his servants, saying, Mark 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.

What a complication of crimes! Not only murder, but the murder of a brother; at a feast, under the appearance of friendship; when the poor victim was drunk with wine, and

doubly unfit to be hurried into eternity, being unable even to cry for mercy! Let this be recorded also among the evils brought on by wine-drinking at feasts. Thousands have been slain in brawls occasioned by drunkenness. Let us hope that the day is not far off, when men shall be able to meet and be happy in one another's company without intoxication.

The event was according to the cruel wish of Absalom. The assassins fell upon Amnon, and left him weltering in his blood. All was consternation, and the other princes mounted their mules and fled. It has been supposed, by some, that Chileab was dead, and that as Amnon was heir apparent, Absalom sought his



*F.*

*P. 12.*

**The death of Ammon .**

death as much from ambition as from revenge. His history afterwards shows that he had a craving for the crown of his father.

While the princes were on the way, tidings came to David, that all his sons had been destroyed. At this news, the king arose, tore his garments, and lay on the earth, while the servants stood around with their clothes rent. But Jonadab, already mentioned as the nephew of David and the friend of the prince royal, explained the real state of the case, by saying: "Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead; for by the appointment of Absalom, this hath been determined

from the day that he injured his sister Tamar."

From these words it would seem that this "subtle man" (as he is called) was a traitor of uncommon baseness. He was guilty of Amnon's crime, and appears to have been privy to his murder. Such is the friendship of the wicked!

The young man who was keeping watch looked out, and saw a multitude coming by the way of the hill behind him. Upon which Jonadab said to David: "Behold the king's sons come; as thy servant said, so it is." He had scarcely uttered these words when the princes entered, lamenting aloud; and the king also and all his servants wept very sore



In the mean time, Absalom, to escape the punishment due to his murder, fled to Geshur, where he found refuge with his grandfather, Talmai, who was the king of the country. Of his conduct during the three years he spent in Geshur, we know nothing. But we know that the affection of his father was weak and inordinate. He forgot his grief for Amnon, if he did not forget his indignation for the crime which had been committed in his family. He mourned for the murderer every day. He wished for his return. The sacred writer tells us, that the soul of David was consumed to go forth unto Absalom. It was a longing which one of the court knew how to turn to his own advantage.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE MURDERER'S RETURN.

JOAB was one of the most remarkable men of his age, being the prime minister, or, what in Eastern courts is called, the vizier. He was also a nephew of the king. His talents and courage were great; but he was deceitful blood-thirsty, and revengeful. He was commander-in-chief of the forces, while David was king in Judah only. When Joab treacherously killed Abner, David allowed him to go unpunished. Joab led the way in taking from the Jebusites the city which was afterwards called Jerusalem. He subdued the Ammonites, and served the wicked purposes of the

king in the murder of Uriah. Joab was sagacious enough to perceive that the aged king only waited for an opportunity to recall his offending son, who had now been absent three years. He accordingly devised a method which was ingenious and successful; and which, though it may seem strange to us, was much in the manner of the east, where, even to this day, ideas are conveyed very much by symbol and parable.

To accomplish his purpose, he sent to Tekoah, a little city in the tribe of Judah, within sight of the Dead Sea, about twelve miles from Jerusalem, and procured a wise woman, whom he instructed in the part which she was to play. She was introduced to

the presence of the king, as an aged widow, in deep mourning, to state a case of great distress. She fell on her face, and did reverence, and spoke as follows: "Help, O king!" And the king said, "What aileth thee?" She replied: "I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. And thy handmaid had two sons, and they 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 whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also. And so they shall quench my coal which is

left, and shall leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth.”

There was much in this artful representation to affect the mind of the king. The petitioner was a widow. She lived at a distance, and was a stranger. She was aged; and her case was similar to that of the king himself. He immediately promised to see justice done. When the woman still further pressed the cause, David was still more affected, and said, “As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth.” The woman became still more confident, and proceeded to apply the case to that of Absalom, though without naming him. She gently reprov'd the

king for not recalling his banished son, and drew her argument from the long-suffering of God, who does not execute immediate justice on offenders. David was much affected, and at the same time perceived the artifice. He said, "Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?" The woman of Tekoah confessed that it was even so: "for," said she, "thy servant Joab bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thy handmaid."

The king had been thus led to express an opinion which applied to the case of Absalom. To be consistent, he could not but recall him; and it was fully agreeable to his feelings. He therefore said to Joab: "Behold now, I have done this thing; go there-

fore, bring the young man Absalom again. Joab prostrated himself on the earth and thanked the king, saying: "To-day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of thy servant." Accordingly Joab proceeded immediately to Geshur, and brought back Absalom to Jerusalem. But David refused to see him, no doubt, choosing in this way to show his detestation of the crime. Absalom went to his own house.

During all these years, we have reason to believe, that Absalom was laying plans for ascending the throne. He was popular in a high degree, and knew what measures to take in order

to become more so. In all Israel there was none to be so much praised for his beauty. From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. The quantity and beauty of his hair were especially remarkable; and when he had it cut off yearly, the weight was astonishing.\*

The fiery and imperious temper of Absalom will appear from a little incident mentioned by the historian. After he had spent two years at Jerusalem, he began to be impatient because he was not admitted to court. He

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\* We must refer to critical commentaries for the explanation of 2 Sam. xiv. 25. It is a difficult passage, and has been variously understood by the learned. For the youthful reader, the statement above is sufficient, being true on all suppositions.



sent twice to Joab, asking to be presented to the king; but the crafty general refused to come to him. Determined to have an interview, Absalom sent his servants to set fire to a field of barley, which belonged to Joab. This was successful. Joab hastened to the prince with his complaints. Absalom now had an opportunity to open his mind. "Behold," said he, to Joab, "I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now, therefore, let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me." This was a proud, angry, and impenitent

speech, for one who was worthy of death, and whose life had been given to him. Nevertheless Joab went to the king, and obtained permission to introduce the offender. Absalom came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground. The king kissed him, in token of forgiveness. Such forbearance and fatherly kindness would have melted the heart of any one who was susceptible of dutiful or ingenuous feeling. But we shall see that this unnatural son repaid it all with conspiracy and rebellion. The kiss which he gave the aged king was a kiss of treachery, like that of Judas.

## CHAPTER III.

## INTRIGUE AND TREASON.

THE name *Absalom* means, the "peace of his father;" but he was his father's greatest trouble. At the time of which we are writing, he began to assume something of royal state. He prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. This was the manner of Eastern kings. It had been predicted by Samuel the prophet, when the people desired of him a king: "He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots." 1 Sam. viii. 11.

He next proceeded to gain popularity among the subjects of his father, by making them discontented with the government, and turning their attention towards himself. Amnon was dead. Of Chileab, we read nothing: Solomon was young, and of too mean descent to be formidable. Absalom was determined to be king himself. This was what God had threatened against David, by the prophet Nathan, after the death of Uriah: "*Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house.*" 2 Sam. xii. 11.

It was Absalom's way to rise early, and place himself near the gate of the city; this being, in Eastern countries, the place of concourse and of public trials. When any man was on his

way to the king, to seek for justice in a controversy, Absalom would make advances to him, salute him, and ask about his place of abode and his suit. He would then tell him that his demand was just, but would at the same time inform him that there was little hope of his obtaining redress, because there was no judge appointed, to whom he could apply. He would exclaim, "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man who has any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" And when any man approached to do him reverence, he would seize him by the hand and kiss him, with a great show of affectionate familiarity. These are the arts, by means of which demagogues,

all the world over, deceive the people. And in this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

The next step was to set up his standard as a king. The place which he chose for this was Hebron, a royal city of Judah, which was his native place, and the spot where his father had begun to reign.

In order to have a pretext, Absalom pretended great devotion, and talked to his father of a vow: "I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For while I abode in Geshur, I vowed a vow, saying, if the Lord shall bring me again to Jerusalem,



P 29.

**The standard of revolt planted  
at Hebron.**

then I will serve the Lord." There is reason to suspect that this was a mere fabrication; but whether he had made such a vow or not, his purpose was to carry forward his conspiracy. David acted like a father, and said, "Go in peace."

Absalom proceeded to Hebron, and took with him two hundred citizens of Jerusalem, who were entirely ignorant of his intentions. He had, however, sent secret messengers through the whole kingdom, to give notice, that as soon as they would hear the sound of the trumpet, they should say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. And no doubt trumpeters were engaged in every city to give this signal. The conspiracy was very strong, and every



day there were accessions to Absalom's faction.

At length, the alarm of what was taking place reached the royal palace. A messenger arrived, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom!" It might have been expected that the king should have prepared his army for defence. We know his valour, and that he was a man of war from his youth. But in this case, he seems to have been prevented, either by tenderness towards his son, or by a feeling that this was a deserved punishment for his sins. He therefore said to his attendants, "Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he

overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword." His courtiers replied, "Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever our Lord the king shall appoint." Then the king went forth, and all his household with him. He forsook his palace, the temple where he worshipped, Mount Zion, which he loved, and the city which he had conquered. He fled as an exile, from his own capital. All his faithful servants followed him; all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath. These passed before him. All these soldiers are supposed to have been Philistines and they probably at-

tached themselves to David, at the time when David was an exile at the court of king Achish, in Gath. They were, in whole or in part, commanded by Ittai, of Gibeah, one of David's most valiant generals.

It is a fine trait in the character of the king, that he did not wish any of his friends to be unnecessarily involved in his disgrace and danger. He therefore said to Ittai, Wherefore goest thou with us? Return to thy place, for thou art a stranger and an exile. As thou camest but lately, should I make thee go up and down with us? I must go wherever I can, but do thou return, and take back thy brethren; mercy and truth be with thee!

The faithful Gittite was too much attached to David to follow this magnanimous counsel. He replied, "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." This reminds us of the affection with which Ruth chose to share the afflictions of her mother-in-law, Naomi; saying, "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." The king consented, therefore, to the loyal purpose of his servant.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE FLIGHT OF THE KING.

WE now have to follow the aged and afflicted monarch in his flight from an unnatural son. He sets out on his mournful march, and with his faithful body-guard passes over the Kidron, a little brook which separates Jerusalem and its hills from the Mount of Olives. It is the same rivulet which our blessed Saviour afterwards passed on the way to his sufferings. The people of all the surrounding country sympathized as they looked on this strange sight, and wept with a loud voice. The ministers of religion were true to their king. Zadok

and Abiathar, with all the Levites, were in his train. They bore the ark of the covenant, the most sacred emblem of the divine presence, which had so many times secured victory to the armies of Israel.

Great as was David's attachment to the ark, and to divine service, he was unwilling to remove it from the tabernacle, its proper place, or to deprive the people of their glory and defence; especially as he felt that he was suffering the just punishment of his sins. He therefore said to Zadok: "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight

in thee: behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him!"

Here we observe a resignation to the will of God, which could proceed only from divine grace, and which is worthy of all imitation. It is the peculiarity of eminent servants of God. Thus holy Job said, under his unspeakable trials, "What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

➤ The king was, moreover, unwilling to take away Zadok, who was a high-priest as well as a prophet. He addressed him thus: "Art thou not a seer? Return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the



plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me." They accordingly returned with the two young priests, their sons; and we shall see hereafter the important service which they were enabled to render.

The fugitive monarch now began to ascend the Mount of Olives. He wept as he went up. He was bare-foot, and his head was covered, which was a sign of guilt, as well as of mourning. The heads of the accompanying multitude were also covered, and their feet were bare, and they wept as they went up. It was a sad and touching procession.

At this stage of his flight, David received a piece of information which

greatly added to his sorrow, as showing the unfaithfulness of a near friend. There was in his court, one Ahithophel, from Giloh, a town of Judah. This man was noted for his political sagacity. He was the privy-counsellor of the king; and such was his reputation for wisdom, that when he gave an opinion, it was followed by the people as if it had been an oracle. Absalom thought it all-important to attach so valuable a person to his cause. When he went to Hebron, therefore, to sacrifice, he sent to Giloh for Ahithophel: and this treacherous counsellor became one of the conspirators. We shall see how little the wicked usurper gained by this associate. News was brought to

David that his counsellor had gone over to the enemy; on which he exclaimed: "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!" That is, although this man is so crafty, and is now counselling my enemy, let him not so counsel as to succeed against me! And we shall soon see that the prayer was answered.

Scarcely had they reached the summit of the mount, before David was met by one of his nearest friends, Hushai, the Archite, from Archi, supposed to be the modern Area. His clothes were rent, and he had earth upon his head. These were tokens of sorrow. He joined himself to David, at the place where the king was engaged in committing his case to God

in prayer. It was perhaps in answer to this very prayer, that a plan was suggested to his mind which afterward proved of great importance. He addressed himself to Hushai thus :

“If thou passest on with me, thou wilt be only a burden : but if thou return to Absalom, and say, I will be thy servant ; then thou shalt defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.” We have no reason to believe that David instructed Hushai in the particular method of carrying out his plan ; an observation which it seems important to make here, because the stratagem which we shall find that he employed was not altogether consistent with integrity. David further told him to use the young priests Jonathan and

Ahimaaz, who had now returned to the city, as special messengers. Hushai accordingly went to Jerusalem where Absalom had now entered.

All the wisdom of kings cannot prevent their being sometimes deceived by false representations. Of this we have a remarkable instance in what occurred about this point of David's flight. When he had passed a little beyond the top of the hill, he was met by Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth. This Mephibosheth was a grandson of Saul, and a son of David's bosom friend, Jonathan. But he was a cripple, and altogether remote from any ambitious projects. David had been kind to him, had admitted him to the royal table, and had restored to him

his inheritance. Ziba, the servant and principal manager of Mephibosheth, met David, as we have said, upon the Mount of Olives. He brought an acceptable present to the exhausted company; two asses, laden with two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisins, and a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin-bottle of wine. And the king said, "What meanest thou by these?" And Ziba said, "The asses be for the king's household to ride on: and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. Upon which Matthew Henry remarks: "The wine is intended for those that were faint; not for the king's own

drinking, or the courtiers; it seems they did not commonly use it; but it was for cordials for them that were ready to perish. Prov. xxxi. 6. Blessed art *thou, O land, when thy princes use wine for strength, as David did, and not for drunkenness, as Absalom did.* 2 Sam. xiii. 28. See Eccl. x. 17."

David now inquired concerning Mephibosheth, and Ziba replied that his master had joined the conspiracy, in hope of coming to the throne of his father. "Behold he abideth at Jerusalem; for he said, to-day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father." It was a false and slanderous accusation: but David was deceived, and gave to Ziba all the

possessions which he had formerly restored to his master.

In the book of Psalms, David makes frequent allusion to the scoffs and reproaches of wicked men, from which he suffered. "In mine adversity," says he, "they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together." Ps. xxxiv. 15. "I mourn in my complaint and make a noise; because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me." Ps. lv. 2, 3. There are some spirits who are both mean and malignant; who choose times of trouble for injuring those whom they hate, and who "talk to the grief of those whom God has wounded." Such



a one was Shimei the son of Gera. When his afflicted king came to Bahurim, a place not far from Jerusalem, but beyond Mount Olivet, Shimei came out to insult him. He was of the family of Saul, and therefore related to Ishbosheth and Abner, who had been slain. He now found an occasion to express his malice with impunity. He came forth, and cursed David. He cast stones and dust at him and his retinue, crying aloud, "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,



*P. 16.*

## The Sin of Shimei.

thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.”

This was more than the servants of David could bear. Among them was his nephew, Abishai, who, as well as Joab, was a son of David's sister, Zeruah. He was one of David's most valiant generals, and we read, that he once delivered his master from a gigantic enemy, named Ishbi-ben-ob. On hearing the reproaches of Shimei, Abishai said, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me, I pray thee, go over and take off his head.” But David was affected in a very different manner. Though innocent of the blood charged upon him by Shimei, he was not innocent of the blood of Uriah. He felt himself under

the chastising hand of God. He acknowledged that the cursing of this Benjamite, though wickedly intended by him, was permitted by God for his own humbling. He therefore rejected the proposal of his nephew, saying: "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?"

And David said to his attendants, "Behold, my own son seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that

the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.”

The wretched calumniator seems to have persisted in his clamour and abuse until he was wearied out. The king and his people, meanwhile, refreshed themselves after their journey.

The incident has been beautifully versified in one of Wesley's poems :

“ Pure from the blood of Saul in vain,  
 He dares not to the charge reply :  
 Uriah's doth the charge maintain—  
 Uriah's doth against him cry !  
 Let Shimei curse : the rod he bears  
 For sins which mercy had forgiven !  
 And in the wrongs of man reveres  
 The awful righteousness of Heaven.  
 Lord, I adore thy righteous will,  
 Through every instrument of ill  
 My Father's goodness see :  
 Accept the complicated wrong,  
 Of Shimei's hand, and Shimei's tongue  
 As kind rebukes from thee.”

## CHAPTER V.

## THE USURPER ON THE THRONE.

WHILE the lawful sovereign was thus flying, his cruel and perfidious son was setting up his standard in the capital. He had near him the crafty Ahithophel, and the valiant Amasa. Hushai, Zadok, and Abiathar were also near him, but with friendly intentions towards their king. Their sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, were waiting for intelligence, at En-rogel, a well not far from the city, because it was necessary to the scheme that they should not be seen in Jerusalem. The body of the people seem to have

been united to the apparent conqueror  
2 Sam. xvi. 13.

It was now necessary that Absalom should hold a council, in regard to the course to be pursued. Ahithophel, whose word was an oracle in such matters, advised him to perpetrate an act which should disgrace his aged father and show his own contempt for him; because then the people might be assured that peace would never be made between them, and that they were safe in following the usurper. "All Israel," said Ahithophel, "shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong." With this counsel, the profligate son complied; and the people perceived that the

breach between father and son was irreparable.

In regard to the war, Absalom had two sorts of counsellors. One advised despatch, the other delay. It was the opinion of Ahithophel, that they should without delay seize on the person of the old king; which would be the same thing as conquering all the people. He made this offer: "Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: and I will come upon him when he is weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only. And I will bring back all the people unto thee. The man whom



thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.”

It is shocking to consider the coolness with which Absalom listens to plans for the murder of his father, and hears him called “the man whom thou seekest!” But he had long since forsaken all filial duty, and he assents to the proposal. Fiend-like as it was, it was the very best for his horrid purposes. But it was God’s purpose to turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.

There was another counsellor, whose advice it was thought expedient to obtain. This was Hushai the Archite. He loved his rightful sovereign too well to second such a proposal. He set before them the danger

of the enterprise, the valour of David, and the need of greater forces. He said: "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. For thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. He is now hid in some pit, or in some other place; and if at the first skirmish some of your forces are overthrown, the report will go abroad, that Absalom's party has met with a great slaughter. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty

man, and they which be with him are valiant men. Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, (from one end of the land to the other,) as the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him, in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him (such is our number) as the dew falleth on the ground; and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone left." That is, we shall so over-

whelm him with numbers, that if he fly to a city, we shall destroy it, and drag it away stone by stone.

Such was the speech of Hushai. It appealed to their fears; it suggested the danger of an ambush; and it encouraged them to rely on the force of numbers. And Absalom and all his men said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the Lord had appointed to defeat the crafty counsel of Ahithophel, in order to give time to David, and to bring evil upon Absalom. The mortification of Ahithophel was so great, because his plan was not followed, that he saddled his ass, and arose, and went home to Giloh, and put his household in

order, and hanged himself. Thus his treachery ended in suicide, and thus was the wise taken in his own craftiness. In the meantime Absalom prepared his forces, and made Amasa his commander-in-chief. This Amasa was another of David's nephews, the son of his sister Abigail.



## CHAPTER VI.

## PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE.

IT will be remembered that David had three faithful friends in the camp of his enemies. They were acquainted with the result of the council of war, and Hushai directed Zadok and Abiathar to send word immediately to David, urging him not to remain in the plains of the wilderness, but to pass on, so as not to be overtaken by the forces of Absalom. The priests sent word by a servant-maid to their sons, who, as we have said, were waiting at En-rogel. This was a fountain, which still exists as a deep well, just below the union of the valleys

Hinnom and Jehoshaphat, under the name of the Well of Nehemiah. But as the young men were preparing to carry the news to David, they were seen by a boy, who hastened to give notice to Absalom. This placed them in great danger; but they made all the haste they could, to escape from their pursuers. When they arrived at Bahurim, already mentioned as beyond Olivet, they took refuge in a certain house.

Like most eastern buildings, it had within its walls an open place or court, in which there was a well or pit. Ahimaaz and Jonathan descended into this pit, for concealment, and the woman of the house laid a covering over the mouth of the well,

and spread a quantity of meal upon it, so that no one would suspect what was beneath.

Very shortly after this, the messengers of Absalom arrived, and eagerly inquired, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" The woman answered, "They are gone over that brook." This was an untruth, and though told in order to save the lives of the young men, it was not the less sinful. As soon as the pursuers were gone, Ahimaaz and Jonathan came out of the well, and made all speed to carry to David an account of Absalom's intentions. The pursuers, having failed of their prey, returned to Jerusalem.

David immediately put his army in motion, and succeeded in transporting



them all across the Jordan before morning.

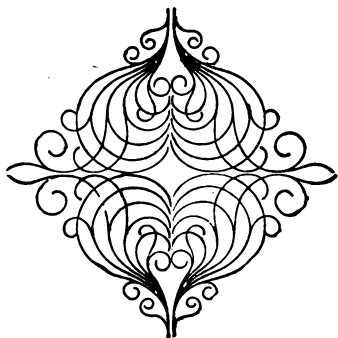
On arriving at Mahanaim, the place where Jacob once saw a vision of angels, David was met by three friends, Shobi the Ammonite, Machir of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite, who brought beds and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and flour, and parched corn and lentiles, and parched pulse, honey, butter, sheep, and cheese; saying, "The people is hungry and thirsty and weary in the wilderness."

Both armies were now on the eastern side of Jordan. Absalom being in the district of Gilead, and David more to the south. Here David proceeded to number his forces

and arrange his plans. He set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. These might be compared to colonels and captains in modern armies. The three generals were Joab, Abishai and Ittai; each of whom was in command of one-third. But it was the purpose of David to take the chief command in person.

The attendants of the king were unwilling that he should risk his person in battle. With much affection and loyalty, they said, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore, now it is better that thou

help us by remaining in the city. The king yielded to their entreaties, and took his post by the gate of the city while the host defiled before him, by hundreds and by thousands. Every thing was now approaching the crisis of this stirring contest.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE CATASTROPHE.

THE anxiety of king David in expectation of this conflict must have been such as no words can express. It was not the dread of personal danger: he had been familiar with danger from his early days. In his boyhood he had contended with a lion and a bear. In his youth he had slain a giant. Again and again he had conquered the Philistines. For many years he had scarcely ever been free from war. But in all these cases, he had fought with enemies; now he was to fight with a son! If he should be defeated, it would be to fall by the

hand of one he loved: if he should conquer, it would probably be by the death of his Absalom. His heart was rent by the consideration of this ingratitude and malice in one to whom he had been too forbearing and kind. His feelings expressed themselves in such strains as these :

“Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round

about. Arise, O Lord ; save me, O my God : for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone ; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord : thy blessing is upon thy people.”

Though David undoubtedly wished for victory, he did not wish to buy it at the price of his son's life. Therefore, when giving orders to his generals, he said to them, in the hearing of all the people, “ Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom !”

The spot where the battle was to take place was in the wood of Ephraim, beyond Jordan. The fight extended over a large tract of country, and was chiefly in a forest, where

multitudes of the Israelites were destroyed. 2 Sam. xviii. 8. Victory was on the side of David, and, the rebellious Israelites fled in every direction. The number of their slain was twenty thousand.

Absalom, who led his own army, rode upon a mule; and, when in hot pursuit, passed under the branches of an oak tree, which caught his head in such a manner, that he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the beast went from under him. As he hung here in fearful expectation of what might befall him, one of David's army saw him, and carried the news to Joab. "Why," exclaimed Joab, didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten

shekels of silver, and a girdle!" "Though I should receive a thousand," answered the man, "yet would I not put forth my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai, and Ittai, saying, beware that none touch the young man Absalom."

Joab, though he had been connected very nearly with the prince, had no such scruples. "I may not tarry thus with thee," said he, and hastened to the oak, where Absalom was hanging, yet alive. He took three darts and thrust them through the heart of Absalom; while ten young men, his armour-bearers, probably at the same instant, fell upon the wretched prince with their weapons.



Thus died the traitorous son! The war was now ended, and Joab blew the trumpet, and called back the people.

Among the troops of David was Ahimaaz, the young priest above mentioned. He may have been present to encourage the soldiery and blow the silver trumpet, which was the priest's office in time of war. His zeal for David was great, and he was eager to carry the news: perhaps he thought that he could break it to the king in such a way as might prepare him for the shock. "Let me now run," said he, "and bear the glad tidings, how that the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies." "No," replied Joab, "thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear

tidings another day : but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead." He seems to have thought it best to send an inferior person, and accordingly he despatched Cush, supposed to be an Ethiopian. We shall see that Ahimaaz was sent after all.

Joab now said to Cush, "Go, tell the king what thou hast seen." And Cush bowed himself unto Joab and ran. Ahimaaz again besought Joab to be allowed to carry tidings, and leave was given him. There were thus two couriers running at once across the plains; the second of whom arrived first at the king's seat.

Meanwhile, David was sitting in painful suspense between the two

gates of the city. A sentinel was watching upon the roof over the wall-gate. He cried to the king, that he saw a man running. "If he be alone," replied David, "there is tidings in his mouth." No doubt judging that, if he were a mere fugitive from the enemy, he would be accompanied by others. The watchman now saw another running. The king said, "he also brings tidings." "The running of the foremost," said the watchman, "seems to me like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man, and bringeth good tidings." When Ahimaaz came within hearing, he cried, "All is well!" And he fell down to the earth upon his face before

the king, and said, "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." And the king said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent Cushie and me, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." This was certainly an evasion; into which Ahimaaz was betrayed by tenderness for the king's feelings: for even if he had not witnessed Absalom's death, he had been expressly informed of it by Joab. 2 Sam. xviii. 20. Presently Cushie arrived, having been outrun by his companion. He cried, "Tidings! my lord the king! for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that

rose up against thee." With trembling haste David inquired: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Cushi replied, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." This was enough: it disclosed to David the sad event. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said,

"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Human language can express nothing more touching. The words of his lamentation have reached the heart of every reader, and comment is unnecessary.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE KING'S GRIEF AND HIS RESTORATION.

THE grief of David was unspeakably great. His beloved son had died a violent death; he had died in his sins, and gone into eternity. Of all human griefs, this is the one which most deeply pierces the heart of a parent. Let the thought impress itself on the mind of every son!

The act of Joab in putting Absalom to death was an act of disobedience against the express command of David. He heard of the excessive grief of the king, and found that the whole army was also in mourning; returning to the city not

like conquerors, but by stealth, as people, being ashamed, steal away in battle. The king, covering his face, continued to cry, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Joab was concerned at these consequences of his zeal, and feared lest the people should be disaffected toward the king. He, therefore, went into his presence, and said, Thou hast this day shamed the faces of all thy servants, who this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy family; because thou lovest thine enemies and hatest thy friends. Thou hast this day shown (by thine excessive grief) that thou regardest neither princes nor servants. For I this day perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we

had died this day, it would have pleased thee well. Arise, therefore, go forth, and speak kindly to thy servants. Joab further declared, that unless the king followed his advice, the people would all abandon him before night; which would be the worst calamity of his life.

David complied, and showed himself to the people, by taking his seat publicly in the gate. It was soon noised abroad that the king was there, and all the people, who had gone dissatisfied into camp, came out and saw their monarch.

The body of the people now began to repent of their rebellion, and to speak of restoring their rightful sovereign. They called to mind his good



deeds, while they remembered the dreadful end of the usurper. "The king," said they, "saved us from the Philistines and other enemies, and now he is a fugitive: and Absalom, whom we anointed king in his place, is dead in battle. Why, then, does no one move to bring David back?"

These things were reported to David, and he sent a message to the elders of Judah, as his own tribe, to restore him to the throne, on which they had first placed him. He also sent a message to Amasa, inviting him to be loyal, and offering him the post of commander-in-chief, in the place of Joab. The tribe of Judah was moved by the appeal. They rose in a body, and said, "Return thou, and all thy

servants!" The king accordingly returned, being escorted from the ferry over Jordan, by the men of Judah.

Those who had reviled and deceived David were now among the first to humble themselves. Shimei and Ziba were ready at Jordan to seek for peace. The abusive Benjamite narrowly escaped with his life, but David declared that in this day of joy, no man's life should be destroyed. He was also met by Mephibosheth, who explained the trick of his servant, and was so overjoyed at the king's return, that he was willing even to sacrifice all his inheritance.

The men of Judah carried back their king in triumph. But here arose a controversy between them and the

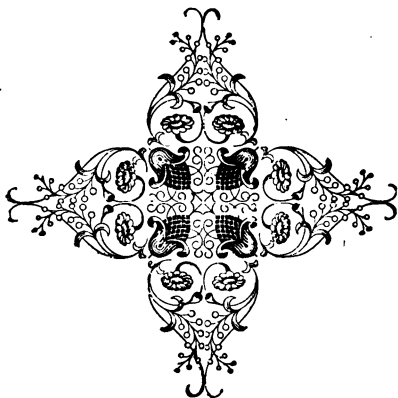
other tribes. The men of Israel came to David and said, "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen thee away, and have brought you all over Jordan?" "Because," answered the men of Judah, "the king is near of kin to us." But the Israelites replied, "We have ten parts in the king, and therefore, more claim to David than you. Why then did you despise us, by not taking our advice before the king was restored." So the contest was warm; but the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

We have now seen David securely re-established on his throne. The rebellious prince left no male offspring. His two sons died before him, and

his only surviving child was a daughter named Tamar. Absalom seems to have foreseen that his memory would be hateful. For he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." So he erected a pillar in what was called the king's dale. It remained there many years and was called **ABSALOM'S PLACE**.

It is instructive to observe the course of providence, with regard to wicked men. Even in this world, the wrath of the Almighty often falls upon them in a visible manner. Absalom himself came to a bloody and ignominious end, as we have seen. Ahithophel committed self-murder. Amasa was treacherously and cruelly assassinated by Joab, near the great

stone which was of Gibeon. Joab himself, and Shimei, were both executed, after David's demise, by order of king Solomon. Such is the course of divine wisdom and justice; for *all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword.*



## CHAPTER IX.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

PAINFUL as the history is, which we have been considering, it is nevertheless full of instruction. Among the reflections which may occur to our minds, the following deserve particular notice.

1. *Parents who fear God may, nevertheless, have ungodly children.* This is a fearful thought, which ought to send all Christian parents to the throne of grace, with earnest prayer that God would convert their offspring to himself. David was a man of eminent holiness. We read of no one

who engaged in more intimate communion with God. The book of Psalms is a record of his spiritual experience. Yet several of David's sons were eminently wicked; and none was more so than Absalom. Since even the true piety of parents does not secure the piety of their children, how earnest should they be to procure for those whom they so much love this inestimable gift! By daily and unwearied instruction, by admonition and reproof, by timely correction, by holy example, and by importunate, unceasing prayer, they should labour to bring them into Christ's fold. No affliction can be greater than that of seeing beloved children departing from God, and plunging into a

eternity of woe. May God, of his infinite compassion, save parents from so dreadful a calamity!

2 *Let none of our readers suppose that the piety of their parents will save them.* Grace does not go by natural descent, though corruption does. Noah, Isaac, Aaron, Hezekiah, and others, had children who were very wicked. It is true, in general, that the seed of the righteous are saved: but lest children should expect this, as a matter of course, there are many exceptions. We must repent and believe for ourselves. And the sin and punishment are greatly aggravated in the case of those who have been blessed with pious parents, and nevertheless have departed from their



instructions. Such persons sin against peculiar light. They are servants who have known their Lord's will, and yet have not done it. These are to be beaten with many stripes. Dreadful indeed will be the anguish of impenitent sons and daughters, at the day of judgment, when they shall see their parents ascending to heaven while they themselves are forever separated from them, and thrust down to hell!

3. *We here learn the awful lengths of iniquity to which those sometimes go who depart from God.* We know not how far Absalom was instructed in religion. We can scarcely think, however, that any son of David could be left without some training in divine service. Yet the first we read of

him is his wickedness, and we read nothing of him but wickedness, till the day of his death. His life was full of deceit, treason and bloodshed. He could not stop at ordinary wickedness. He murders his brother, and he purposes to murder his father.

A heathen once said truly, that no one becomes an atrocious sinner all at once. By little and little young persons are led astray. Satan employs evil companions to seduce them, and then he destroys them all together.

Beware of the first rising of malignant passions. They grow into violence and murder. No doubt, Absalom indulged in anger and malice long before he had a thought of bloodshed. Our Saviour thus teaches: "*Whoso-*

*ever is angry with his brother, without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment."* And the apostle John says, "*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer!*" Let young persons think of this, and restrain their angry passions, which liken them to Cain and Absalom.

4. *This history shews us that God does not leave his children to be overwhelmed by affliction.* In this world they all suffer tribulation, and when they sin they are chastised, sometimes most severely. Though many are the afflictions of the righteous, the Lord delivereth him out of them all. All things work together for good to them that love God. If a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his

enemies to be at peace with him David was afflicted, plotted against, and persecuted, from his very youth ; yet God was always near him to deliver him ; and he records these mercies in many of the Psalms. The eighteenth psalm, in particular, is entitled " A psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who spake unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul." And in it he utters words on which the reader will do well to ponder, and which may suitably conclude this little book :

"The Lord liveth ; and blessed be my Rock ; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. He delivereth me

from mine enemies ; yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me : thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore, will I give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king : and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David and to his seed forevermore.”

**THE END.**