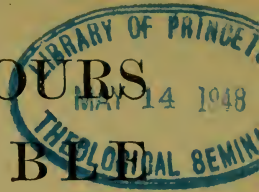


DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE



FROM THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA
TO THE CLOSE OF DAVID'S LIFE

BY
J. R. MILLER, D.D.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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British Congregationalist.

DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

By J. R. MILLER, D.D.

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FROM THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA
TO THE CLOSE OF DAVID'S LIFE

GENERAL PREFACE

THERE are two methods of studying the Bible. One is, verse by verse, giving close thought to every word, even looking into etymology and grammatical construction, so that the exact sense of the text may be learned. Such study is important. Many rich shades of meaning are often revealed by intelligent and scholarly exegesis. Commentaries that take us over the Bible in this microscopical way are valuable. We need every particle of light on the Scriptures we can get.

Then another way of studying the Bible is in order to get from it practical lessons for our own daily common life. What does the passage teach us? What Divine instruction have we in it for ourselves? It is the latter purpose that is in mind in this book. It is not a commentary in the usual sense. It is not an exegetical study of the Scriptures that is proposed. No textual criticism is given. There is no discussion of questions of dates, of localities, of authorships, or archæological researches. Its single aim is to suggest some of the spiritual and practical lessons which may be gathered from great passages.

The book does not attempt to cover every chapter; to do this would make it altogether too long—it deals only with what appear to be leading and representative portions of the Bible.

It is a book for use in the inner chamber where life receives its impulses for conduct, for duty, for service and for devotion. The Bible is a very ancient book, but it is also a book for to-day. It brings us face to face with God, and its teachings are meant to guide us in all our ways.

J. R. M.

Philadelphia, U. S. A.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

| | PAGE |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| THE GIVING OF MANNA | I |
| EXODUS XVI. 1-15; NUMBERS XI. 7-9 | |

CHAPTER II

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| THE TEN COMMANDMENTS | 10 |
| EXODUS XX. 1-17 | |

CHAPTER III

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| WORSHIPING THE GOLDEN CALF | 20 |
| EXODUS XXXII. | |

CHAPTER IV

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| THE TABERNACLE | 29 |
| EXODUS XL. 1-38 | |

CHAPTER V

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| NADAB AND ABIHU | 38 |
| LEVITICUS X. 1-11 | |

CHAPTER VI

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| JOURNEYING TOWARD CANAAN | 47 |
| NUMBERS IX. 15-23; X. 1-36 | |

CHAPTER VII

| | PAGE |
|-------------------------------|------|
| REPORT OF THE SPIES | 57 |
| NUMBERS XIII., XIV. | |

CHAPTER VIII

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| THE BRAZEN SERPENT | 65 |
| NUMBERS XXXI. 1-9 | |

CHAPTER IX

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| MOSES' DEATH AND BURIAL | 73 |
| DEUTERONOMY XXXIV. | |

CHAPTER X

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| JOSHUA ENCOURAGED | 83 |
| JOSHUA I. 1-9 | |

CHAPTER XI

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| CROSSING THE JORDAN | 91 |
| JOSHUA III. 9—IV. 7 | |

CHAPTER XII

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| THE FALL OF JERICHO | 99 |
| JOSHUA VI. 1-27 | |

CHAPTER XIII

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| JOSHUA AND CALEB | 107 |
| JOSHUA XIV. 5-15 | |

CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER XIV.

| | PAGE |
|----------------------------|------|
| CITIES OF REFUGE | 115 |
| JOSHUA XX. 1-9 | |

CHAPTER XV

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| JOSHUA'S PARTING ADVICE | 124 |
| JOSHUA XXIV. 14-25 | |

CHAPTER XVI

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| THE CURSE OF MEROZ | 133 |
| JUDGES V. 1-23 | |

CHAPTER XVII

| | |
|--|-----|
| GIDEON AND THE THREE HUNDRED | 141 |
| JUDGES VII. | |

CHAPTER XVIII

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| RUTH AND NAOMI | 152 |
| RUTH I. | |

CHAPTER XIX

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| THE BOY SAMUEL | 162 |
| I. SAMUEL I. 1-28; III. 1-14 | |

CHAPTER XX

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| SAMUEL THE JUDGE | 171 |
| I. SAMUEL VII. 2-13 | |

| | PAGE |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| CHAPTER XXI | |
| ISRAEL ASKING FOR A KING | 179 |
| I. SAMUEL VIII. 1-22 | |
| CHAPTER XXII | |
| SAUL CHOSEN KING | 188 |
| I. SAMUEL IX., X. | |
| CHAPTER XXIII | |
| SAMUEL'S FAREWELL ADDRESS | 197 |
| I. SAMUEL XII. | |
| CHAPTER XXIV | |
| SAUL REJECTED AS KING | 205 |
| I. SAMUEL XV. | |
| CHAPTER XXV | |
| SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID | 215 |
| I. SAMUEL XVI. 1-13 | |
| CHAPTER XXVI | |
| DAVID AND GOLIATH | 223 |
| I. SAMUEL XVII. 1-54 | |
| CHAPTER XXVII | |
| DAVID AND JONATHAN | 232 |
| I. SAMUEL XVIII. 1-4, XX. 1-42 | |

CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER XXVIII

| | PAGE |
|------------------------------------|------|
| SAUL TRIES TO KILL DAVID | 241 |
| I. SAMUEL XVIII. 5-16 | |

CHAPTER XXIX

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| DAVID SPARES SAUL | 250 |
| I. SAMUEL XXVI. 5-12, 21-25 | |

CHAPTER XXX

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN | 258 |
| I. SAMUEL XXXI. 1-13 | |

CHAPTER XXXI

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| DAVID BECOMES KING | 267 |
| II. SAMUEL II. 1-10 | |

CHAPTER XXXII

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| DAVID BRINGS UP THE ARK | 277 |
| II. SAMUEL VI. 1-12; I. CHRON. XIII. | |

CHAPTER XXXIII

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID | 285 |
| II. SAMUEL VII. 1-16 | |

CHAPTER XXXIV

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| DAVID AND AESALOM | 293 |
| II. SAMUEL XV. 1-12; XVIII. 24-33 | |

CHAPTER I

THE GIVING OF MANNA

*Read Exodus XVI. 1-30;
Numbers XI. 7-9*

THE people of Israel had now entered upon their forty years of discipline. During this period they were to be made into a nation. This wider purpose should be kept in mind in all our studies of the incidents of the wandering. The people were to be trained to trust God and to obey Him. The first experience recorded was at Marah. There, in great thirst, after three days of desert journey, they came upon springs to which they eagerly rushed, only to find the water bitter, unfit to drink. A tree growing close by was cut down and cast into the waters, at once sweetening them. Thus a lesson in trust was taught—God was leading them and He would not fail to provide for their needs.

Often in life God's children come to bitter springs. What promised to be experiences of refreshing prove to be disappointing. Human lives have many sorrows. But always close by the bitter

spring grows the tree which will sweeten it. The fathers interpreted the tree of Marah to mean the cross of Christ. The gospel has comfort for all in any trouble. Dr. Fairbairn speaks of the words of Christ as a handful of spices cast into the world's bitter streams and sweetening them.

After leaving Marah the people journeyed to Elim, where they found an oasis with twelve springs of water and three score and ten palm trees. Life is not all disappointment and bitterness. Troubles pass away. Joy comes after sorrow.

Moving farther into the inhospitable wilderness, the people soon found themselves needing bread. They had already forgotten the lesson of Marah—the kindness of God in providing for their needs—and began to murmur. Again God's answer to their ungrateful complaining was love—a new mercy. "I will rain bread from heaven for you."

Manna was a substance which fell with the dew. For forty years it was rained about the camps of the Hebrews, until they reached Canaan and had the natural products of the fields for food. It fell in small grains, like frost flakes, white, and in taste like thin flour-cakes with honey. It was gathered every morning except on the Sabbath, and in place of this a double portion fell on Friday morning. If kept over night it became corrupt except on the Sabbath. Manna was the principal part of the food of the people all the forty years. As a perpetual memorial of this miracle a golden pot or basketful of it was laid up before the ark.

God always has some way to provide for the wants of His people. He is not limited to ordinary means. He never works needless miracles. He did not send manna while the people were in Goshen, because there was no need for it then. But here in the wilderness, where food could not be got in any ordinary way, He supplied it supernaturally.

“Yes,” someone says, “that was the age of miracles, but we cannot expect God to provide for us in these days as He did for Israel.” The answer is that God’s love is just as watchful and as faithful now as it was in the days of miracles. We may always with perfect confidence depend on our Father to provide for us in some way when we are following His guidance. Indeed, it is God who feeds us every day, just as really as it was God who gave the people the manna each morning. We do not call it a miracle when our daily morning meal is spread for us, yet it is no less God who gives it to us than if a separate miracle were wrought each morning to feed us.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,

And back of the flour the mill;

And back of the mill is the wheat, and the shower,

And the sun, and the Father’s will.”

Something was given to the people to do even when the bread was supplied supernaturally. They “shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day.” They were not to lay by in store, but were taught

to live simply by the day. When night came they had not a supply of food left over for the next day, but were entirely dependent upon God's new supply to come in the morning. In this method of providing God was teaching all after generations a lesson. When the Master gave the disciples the Lord's Prayer He put this same thought of life into it, for He taught us to say: "Give us this day our daily bread."

This is an important and most valuable lesson for every Christian to learn. We should make a little fence of trust round each day and never allow any care or any anxiety to break in. God does not provide in advance for our needs. We cannot get grace to-day for to-morrow's duties, and if we try to bear to-morrow's cares and burdens to-day, we shall break down in the attempt. Time comes to us, not in years, not even in weeks, but in little days. We have nothing to do with life in the aggregate—that great bulk of duties, anxieties, struggles, trials and needs, which belong to a year or even to a month. We really have nothing to do even with to-morrow. Our sole business is with the one little day now passing, and the one day's burdens will never crush us; we can easily carry them until the sun goes down. We can get along always for one short day, and that is really all we ever have.

"One day at a time! That's all it can be:
No faster than that is the hardest fate;
And days have their limits, however we
Begin them too early and stretch them late."

The Divine purpose in all this experience comes out here—"that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or not." God is always proving us. Trials test all of us, whether or not we will submit with humility and obedience to the experiences that are sore and painful. Life's needs prove us, whether we will trust God in the time of extremity or not. None the less do the gifts and favours of God prove us. They test our gratitude. Joy proves us as well as sorrow. Some people forget God when all things go well and they have only prosperity. Do we remember God always as the Giver of each new blessing? Are we grateful to Him for all that we receive? These favours also test our faith. Do we still lean on Him while we have plenty? Ofttimes one who turns to God when help is needed fails to look to Him when the hand is full. The Divine mercies also test our obedience. Do we obey God as carefully and follow Him as closely and trustingly when our tables are full as when the pressure of want or need drives us to Him? Every day is a probation for us.

In the midst of this great mercy of manna God taught the people to remember the Sabbath. On the sixth day they were to gather and prepare twice as much food as on other days. The reason was that on the Sabbath no work was allowed. No manna fell on that day. There are several interesting things to notice here. While on other days manna laid up would not keep over, the extra day's portion gathered on the sixth day remained fresh

and pure for use on the Sabbath. Still further, on the morning of the Sabbath no manna fell as on other days. Thus God taught the sacredness of His own day.

He teaches us also here that in order to keep the day as it ought to be kept we should prepare for it the day before. The people were to gather the Sabbath's portion on the sixth day. There would seem to be in this provision and preparation in advance a suggestion of the way we may best observe our Christian Sabbath. Some of us remember certain old-fashioned times in the country, when on Saturday evening careful preparations were made for the Sabbath, so that there would be no needless work done on the Lord's Day. Wood was cut and carried in, all the implements of worldly labour were put away, boots and shoes were cleaned and blackened, coffee was ground and food cooked, so far as possible—in a word, everything was done that could be done beforehand to insure the most restful Sabbath possible. This old-fashioned custom is a good one to keep in vogue always. Very much of Sabbath enjoyment and profit will always depend upon the measure of preparation we make for it in advance.

The Lord spoke of this manna miracle as an exhibition of His glory. "At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt; and in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord!" The supply of food was an exhibition of God's glory. We may see the same glory

in every evening's and morning's blessings which a thoughtful Providence brings to us. We think only of the unusual, the supernatural, as manifesting the glory of God. We forget that this Divine glory is shown just as really and as wonderfully in every day's new blessing. The miracle of daily Providence is infinitely more stupendous than the feeding of a prophet for a few months from an unwasting handful of meal, the feeding of five thousand in Galilee with a few loaves and fishes, or even the feeding of a nation for forty years with manna. If the single special miracle shows glory, what does the great continuous miracle of each day's common blessings, year after year, and century after century, show? Let us learn to see the glory of God in every loaf that comes to our table, in every drop of water that glistens on a leaf in the morning sun, in every blade of grass and bursting bud and blooming flower in field or garden.

One special lesson that God wished the people to learn was trust. So He rebuked their complainings and murmurings when they found fault and became afraid when they had hardships to meet. "The Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against Him." This is startling. Does God really hear every discontented word we speak? Does He hear when we grumble about the weather, about the hard winter, about the late spring, about the dry summer, about the wet harvest, about the grubworm and the grasshopper? Does He hear when we fret and murmur about the drouth, about

the high winds, about the storms? Does He hear when we complain about our circumstances, about the hardness of our lot, about our losses and disappointments?

If we could get into our hearts and keep there continually the consciousness that every word we speak is heard in heaven, falls upon God's ears before it falls upon any other ear, would we murmur as we now do? We are always on our guard when we think anyone we love and honour is within hearing, and speak only proper words then. Are we as careful what we say in the hearing of our Father? We are careful, too, never to speak words which would give pain to the hearts of those we love dearly. Are we as careful not to say anything that will give pain to Christ?

There are many interesting points of analogy between the manna and Christ. The manna is called "bread from heaven," and Christ is "the bread out of heaven," "which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world." The manna was indispensable—without it the people would have perished. Without Christ our souls must perish. The manna was a free gift from God—there was nothing to pay for it. Christ is God's gift, coming to us without money and without price. Yet the manna had to be gathered by the people, Christ must be received and appropriated by personal faith. "Take, eat," runs the formula of the holy communion. The bread is offered to us, but we must take it and we must eat it. So must we take

Christ when He is offered to us. The manna came in great abundance, enough for all; there is such abundance in Christ that He can supply all the wants of the soul and of all souls that will feed upon Him. No one ever came hungry to Him and found no bread. Manna had to be gathered each day, a supply for that day. We must feed upon Christ daily. We cannot lay up supplies of grace for any future. We cannot feed to-morrow on to-day's bread. The manna had to be gathered early, before the heat of the sun melted it. We should seek the blessings of Christ's grace in life's early morning before the hot suns of care and trial beat upon us.

CHAPTER II

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Read Exodus XX. 1-17.

MOUNT SINAI became the meeting-place of God and the people of Israel. The Lord met Moses on the mountain and told him that He would reveal Himself in a thick cloud and speak to him in a voice that the Israelites would hear. Solemn preparations were made for the great event. Bounds were set, inside of which no one should pass on penalty of death. On the third day the promised revelation came. There were thunders and lightnings, and a cloud enveloping the mountain. Then out of the midst of the awful scene God spoke to the assembly of Israel the Ten Commandments as the basis of His covenant with them.

The commandments are of Divine origin. The Lord based the obligation of the people to obey these commandments on what he had done for them. "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Someone scoffingly asked an Arab: "How do you

know that there is a God?" The Arab answered: "How do I know whether it was a man or a camel that passed my tent last night?" The footprints told what had gone by. Everywhere we find the footprints of God. Life is full of His goodness and mercy. When we think of what He has done for us we cannot but recognise His right to command us. All the hopes of the Israelites had come of God's deliverance. Once they were slaves and He had set them free. Had it not been for His love for them and His power put forth in their behalf, they would still have been slaves in Egypt. He had redeemed them and now they were a free people, on their way to a land in which they would grow into a great nation. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." The commandments are given in the second person singular—"Thou shalt." God's law deals with individuals and comes to each one personally and separately. The first commandment requires that God shall have the first place in our life. The opening words in the Bible are suggestive: "In the beginning God." We should put Him first and keep Him first in all our life.

Everyone has some god. Our god is that which rules us, that which we love, obey, live for and reverence. We talk with pity of the idolatry of heathen nations. But there are idolators nearer than India or China. In whatever heart the true God is not worshipped something else is. Is God indeed our God? Do we love Him above all persons and all things? Is He really first in all our

thoughts, affections, plans and hopes? It is not enough that we give Him the first place in our creed, saying: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord." If lip confession is all we have to give Him, He cares nothing for it. What is God to our hearts, to our consciences, to our wills? Do we trust Him? What is He to us? How much would we lose out of our life if we were to cease to trust Him? Then it is not trust only that God asks—He claims also our worship and obedience. "If ye love Me," said Jesus, "ye will keep My commandments." This first commandment ought to start a great many searching questions in our hearts as we study it.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow thyself down to them, nor serve them: for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments."

This commandment does not forbid the arts of painting and sculpture, for even in the tabernacle carved figures were placed. What is forbidden is the worship of God under any form or image. When God says that He is jealous, and visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, He does

not mean that He punishes the children for the evil that their fathers have done. Each one must bear his own burden of guilt. But sin casts long shadows. It does not stop with him who commits it. Parents who are tempted to do wrong should think that besides bringing punishment upon themselves they are also sowing seeds of hurt and curse for the children they love.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.” There are many ways of taking God’s name in vain. One is to use it without reverence and love. One tells of a miner, with grimy hand, plucking a pure, sweet flower. It seemed unfit, almost a desecration, for the lovely flower to be held in the soiled hand. How infinitely more of a desecration is it when in trivial speech we speak the name of God! The ancient Hebrews would never utter the sacred name of Jehovah; they said it was too holy to be taken upon human lips. In some parts of the East the Mohammedans will not tread upon the smallest piece of paper which they see lying on the ground. They say it may have on it the name of God. If we only thought more of the holiness and majesty of God we would surely honour His name more thoughtfully. Even Christians are oftentimes careless in the use of God’s name in their speech.

One common application of this commandment is to profanity in speech. Even boys who are but learning to lisp their early words are heard using

the Divine name in awful oaths and cursing. Men who claim to be cultured and refined speak the name of God profanely, using it to give emphasis to their speech.

All the universe honours God's name. The stars as they shine flash His praise. The storm, the sunshine, the towering mountains, the sweet vale, the thunder peal, the whisper of evening, the sweet flowers, all honour God. Man alone profanes, dishallows and blasphemes the blessed name. Profanity is a sin which brings no pleasure, no gain; it does not adorn one's speech, but disfigures it. There seems to be no reason for it but contempt of God in human hearts.

“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work : but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God ; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates : for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day ; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” Many people seem to forget God's day. The day is like all other days to them. They drive their work just as on week days. Or if they do not work they take the time for worldly pleasure. It is time we should be reminded again of what God has said about the Sabbath.

“Honour thy father and thy mother ; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy

God giveth thee." There are many reasons why we should honour our parents. We owe a great deal to them. They watched over us through years of helpless infancy. They toiled, suffered and sacrificed for us. They bore patiently with all our faults. They took the storms of life themselves that they might shelter us. Perhaps they appear a little faded and old-fashioned to our keen, critical eyes. But if so, we should not forget how it all came about. It was in caring for us that they lost their freshness and vigour.

The Brittany peasants give this beautiful legend of the way the robin got its red breast: When Jesus was being led out to crucifixion, bearing His cross and wearing His crown of thorns, a bird, pitying Him, flew down and plucked a thorn from His brow. The blood from the wound gushed out and splashed the bird's breast. Ever since that day the robin has borne this mark of its pity for the suffering Christ. This is only a legend, but it teaches a beautiful lesson. We should ever be eager to pluck out the thorns which are piercing the brows of our mother and father. Some children, however, by their careless life or by their neglect, weave circlets of thorns for the brows of those whom they ought to love and bless.

Jesus gave us the highest example of honour to parents in the way He showed His love to His mother. It was a sweet friendship that existed between this mother and her Holy Son. He opened His soul to her and she gave not a mother's love

only, but also a mother's counsel, and strong, inspiring help. Then His love overshadowed her to the last. One of the seven words spoken while He hung on the cross told of His faithful affection for her. Mary was a woman then of more than fifty, "With years before her too many for remembering, too few for forgetting." The world would be desolate for her when her Son was gone. So He made provision for her in the shelter of a love in which He knew she would be safe. As He saw her led away by the beloved disciple to his own home, part of the pain of dying was gone from His own heart. His mother would have gentle care.

"Thou shalt not kill." So long as we interpret this commandment only with bare literalness, it does not give us much trouble. Not many of us have ever killed anybody. But when we read into it the meaning that our Lord gave it in His Sermon on the Mount we find that it is not so easy to keep it. God looks into the heart, and He may find the spirit of murder there when no hand is raised to strike. All bitterness, malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, uncharitableness, and all angry thoughts, dispositions and feelings are the beginnings of murder.

There are many ways in which we may indirectly injure the lives of others. The dealer adulterates the food he sells and the preparations act as slow poisons, secretly destroying the lives of those who use the food. A mother allows her children to violate the laws of health, to eat unwholesome food, to expose themselves to storm and cold, to be ir-

regular in their rest and exercise. By-and-by they sicken and perhaps die. She wonders then at the strange ways of Providence and asks why it is that God so afflicts her. The plumber does careless work, and diphtheria finds its way into a home. The builder is negligent, and a wooden beam lies too close to the flue, and one night catches fire, leaving death in the ruins of the home. We are our brothers' keepers, and any failure in our guardianship leaves guilt on our souls.

When the old Hebrews built a house they were required by law to put a battlement round the flat roof, lest someone might fall off and be injured or killed. So we should not only guard against harming others directly, but should also construct our whole life and influence so that no one may indirectly receive injury from us.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” The seventh commandment also searches the heart, taking cognizance of the thoughts, feelings, desires, affections and imaginations. We must learn to guard our thoughts if we would please God. “Blessed are the pure in heart.” One part of true religion, as St. James defines it, is to keep one's self “unspotted from the world.” Lilies float in the black water of a bog and yet remain pure and white, without spot or stain. So by the grace of Christ every young person should try to live a pure and heavenly life in the world, but unspotted by the world's evil.

“Thou shalt not steal.” There are many ways of stealing without deliberately putting one's hand

into a neighbour's pocket and abstracting his gold or silver. The postmaster had failed to cancel the stamp on a letter, and the young girl who received it steamed it, took off the stamp and used it again to send a reply to her friend. She thought she had done a smart thing—she did not see the eighth commandment broken under her feet. A boy went to the store for a pound of coffee. The shopkeeper was hurried, and in his haste gave him five cents too much change. The boy ran home chuckling over the mistake in great glee, because the grocer had cheated himself. He did not think that while the man had made an honest mistake he himself was a thief. A man borrows money from a friend. He promises to return it next Tuesday. But he never returns it at all. He often thinks of it, but as his generous friend does not ask him for it he allows it to stand. He supposes he is a debtor—he never thinks for a moment that he is a thief.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” There is probably not a large amount of false witnessing in courts of justice. Even wicked men are afraid to lie under oath. But there is a vast amount of lying about other people which is done in the ordinary conversation of the street, the office, the parlour. Anything is false witnessing which misrepresents another or puts him in a wrong light. Taking up any evil report which we hear and repeating it again is really bearing false witness. Our neighbour's good name is a jewel which we should sacredly guard. The best rule is

never to say anything unkind of another, even if it be true. It might stop much of the fashionable talk of society, but little matter; the world would not be greatly the loser.

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s.” The tenth commandment forbids the sin of covetousness, and teaches the duty of contentment. A Roman Catholic priest said that among all the thousands of confessions which had been made to him, no one had confessed the sin of covetousness. Yet probably no sin is so common, no one of the commandments is so often broken.

One of the best proofs of the Christian spirit is the ability to rejoice in the success and prosperity of others. Does it make us glad to see our neighbour possessing good things, or does it make us envious? Do we rejoice in his prosperity, or do we begrudge his good things to him and wish they were ours instead? Does other people’s happiness or success make us happy or discontented? When we look down to the root of things we discover that many crimes start just in the simple desire to have something that is not ours. “I saw, I coveted, I took,” told the whole story of Achan’s sin.

CHAPTER III

WORSHIPPING THE GOLDEN CALF

Read Exodus XXXII

MOSES continued long in the Mount receiving instructions from God concerning the institutions of religion which were to be established in Israel. Meanwhile, what were the people doing in their camps at the foot of the Mount? While God was providing for them with such wise and loving thought, planning for their national life and giving them laws for their government, they grew weary of the absence of their leader, became restless and began to look back towards their old life. This shows the influence that Moses had over the Israelites and how much he meant to them. So long as he was with them they were willing to follow his counsel and obey the Lord. But when he was absent and when his absence, though on their behalf and for their sake, was long continued, they forgot his teachings and in their hearts began to tire of serving the Lord.

Many people are good as long as another good

person is beside them to influence and direct them. But when their friend passes out of their life they drift away into wrong ways. Many a boy begins a downward course at his mother's coffin or by his father's grave. Many a Sunday-school scholar drops out of a class and begins to drift towards the world when a faithful teacher goes away. Many departures from God begin when a young man goes out from his old home and from under the influence of the household life and associations. The losing of a friend is oftentimes the beginning of decay in moral and spiritual life.

There is a story of a man who had formed the drinking habit. One day he met a friend and said to him: "When I am with you I have no desire to drink, and if I come into your presence when the desire is upon me it is instantly overcome. If I could come to you always when I am tempted I would not fall." The friend told him to come to him at any hour of the day or night, and he would gladly help him. The invitation was accepted, and again and again a little talk in the friend's office and a little prayer sent the struggler with temptation out brave and strong for victory. For years the young man never once fell. At length his friend died. Then when the temptation came again he had no place to go and found no voice to cheer him, no hand to hold him up, and fell back into his old sin. Whatever human friends may do to help us, we need Christ, too. A man is often a hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, but

we need more than a man, else when the man is missing there will be no one to help. The strongest human friendship will some day pass out of our life, and then if we have not Christ we shall fall.

The Israelites had been used to seeing other nations worship images, and they longed, too, for some visible image of God. The worship of the Lord they had been taught was pure and holy, while idolatry gave license to human passions. Discouraged by the long absence of Moses, and their hearts turning back again towards the world's ways, they came to Aaron, saying: "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us." We can easily find fault with the Hebrews, but are we much better? We make our covenants and promises to serve God; do we keep them? In young people's societies the members pledge themselves to do certain things, and each month renew their pledge at their consecration service. Are none of these covenants ever broken? Christian people solemnly dedicate all they have and all they are to Christ. At every communion service they renew their promise and pledge of consecration. Do they never forget these promises and violate these covenants? Of course, there are temptations, but temptations are meant to be opportunities for victory and achievement. Instead of yielding, we should be victorious through God's help, and in every victory we gain we shall become stronger ourselves. Temptations are never reasons for falling. They are only testings of our faithfulness, and every one of them ought to be an

occasion for victoriousness. When God permits us to be tempted He does not want us to yield and fall into sin. His thought for us is that in the testing we shall endure and be proved true, and that in the resisting we shall gain new experience and new power to stand faithful.

Aaron showed strange weakness in this crisis. Those who are set to be leaders of others have a tremendous responsibility. Other eyes are upon them, and for them to falter or prove weak will be to draw other lives with them downward. One fine qualification was mentioned in Aaron when he was appointed to help Moses—"He can speak well." But eloquence is not enough in one who stands for God. Moses was slow of speech, but he could stand like a rock. If he had been in Aaron's place that day the people would not have dared suggest a calf of gold, or if they had done so they would have been met by such an answer that they would never again have thought of such a departure from God.

Aaron, however, seems not to have offered even a word of opposition or resistance to the suggestion made by the people. He assented to their request without even a protest or a single effort to keep them from sin. "Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden rings . . . and bring them unto me." Some writers suppose that Aaron thought the people would not grant the request he made for their jewellery. But if this be true, it still shows Aaron's weakness. It is never safe to parley in such a case

as this. In the absence of Moses, Aaron was the responsible leader of the people. If he had boldly told them of the sin they were thinking of committing, speaking out with stern denunciation of it as Moses would have done, he would almost certainly have turned the tide of feeling and saved them from their great sin. By yielding, however, even though he hoped to defeat their intentions in some other way, he showed his own pitiable weakness and opened the way for the great flood of evil which came in upon the nation. We should learn to stand like a rock in all matters of duty or principle. We are all leaders of some others. People come to every one of us with their questions about this or that thing which they are thinking of doing. If it is wrong, we should unequivocally tell them so and refuse to lend our encouragement to the sin.

The people were so eager to have the golden calf that they did not hesitate to do as Aaron requested. The women loved their jewels, but in their enthusiasm they were ready to give them up. "All the people brake off the golden rings . . . and brought them unto Aaron." When the work of Christ demands self-denial or sacrifice, no matter how costly, we should be ready to make it. When the things we love most deeply and cherish most sacredly are asked of us, they should be given up at once for God. Idolatry, wherever it is practised, shows a measure of devotion and a spirit of sacrifice that are not always found among the followers of Christ.

When the idol was ready, the people said to each

other: "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." They did not mean to turn away from the Lord, but to worship Him under the visible form of the golden calf. What they claimed to be doing was the making of an image to represent the true God who had blessed them so much and whom they wished to honour. It was the second commandment, not the first, therefore, which they specially broke. They had been forbidden to make or to worship any graven image. God desired purely spiritual worship. It is not likely that any of us will make images and worship them as gods, but whatever we put in the place of God in our hearts as the first object of our thought, love and obedience, becomes an idol to us. We should guard carefully against this sin. God only should be worshipped.

The incident of the golden calf shows how easy it is to turn away from God. The way of obedience is a straight and narrow way. It lies along the path of the commandments. The Israelites turned aside from this path and walked in ways of sin. God has made the way still more plain for us. We have conscience, the Bible, Christian friends and teachers, and the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we certainly know the way or can know it. Yet many of us are continually turning aside. God is then grieved, and trouble and sorrow come upon those who forget Him.

The story of God's anger and the intercession of Moses for the people, as told in this chapter, is full

of instruction. We see what a fearful thing sin is. Moses hastened down when he was told that the people had corrupted themselves, and in his anger dashed the tablets of stone from him and broke them, when he found the people engaged in heathen rites. He then destroyed the calf, rebuked Aaron, and calling for those on the Lord's side to gather about him, he sent them to slay the leaders in the idolatrous rebellion.

Moses' faithfulness in dealing with the people after their sin teaches us a great lesson. "Ye have sinned a great sin: . . . I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin." They had broken their covenant with God, and in doing so had forfeited the favour and blessing which God had promised them on the condition of obedience. There was only one hope—Moses would intercede for them. When we break our covenants with God we have the same way—it is the only way—to get back into divine favour. It is a privilege to have human friends who will go up into the mount of prayer and plead with God for our forgiveness when we have sinned. The Lord's words to Moses when he told Him of the people's sin reveal the almost omnipotent power of intercession. "Let Me alone," God said, "that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." If there had been no intercession, if God had been left alone, they would have been blotted from the earth because of their great sin. It was only the pleading of Moses for them that saved them.

We cannot know what blessings come to us and what woes and penalties are averted through the intercession of our friends. No duty of love is more sacred than that of praying for those we love. Especially should we pray for them if they have sinned, that they may be forgiven. Not to make intercession for them, then, is to leave them to receive the reward of their evil-doing without any plea on their behalf. But precious to us as are human mediators and intercessors, there is something better yet—Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for us. When we have sinned He is our Advocate with the Father.

The pleading of Moses for the people shows what a great heart of love he had. "If Thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book." It is doubtful if Moses himself knew precisely what he meant when he prayed thus. The prayer came out of a great heart bursting with sorrow and with love. So much we know, however, that Moses was willing to make any sacrifice, even to lay down his own life, that he might save his people from the doom which their sin had brought upon them. Jesus Christ not only was willing to lay down His life, but actually gave His life, making Himself an offering for sin, that He might redeem His people.

Sin brings sorrow. "The Lord smote the people, because they made the calf." The sin was forgiven, but not all the consequences were averted. God spared the people, but He punished them for their

wickedness. It is always so. The pardon of God does not save us from all the effects of our sin. The wounds may be healed, but the scars remain. Many a good Christian bears all through his years the marks of his early sins. God forgave David's sin, but the forgiveness did not take away all the consequences. The child of Bathsheba died, and then through all David's life retribution followed him, the same sins which he had committed reappearing in his own family, leaving their blight and curse upon his home.

CHAPTER IV

THE TABERNACLE

Read Exodus XL

THE tabernacle was not built after the plans of any human architect. Moses did not design it himself. It was made according to the pattern shown in the Mount. We must worship God, not according to our own ideas of propriety and taste, but according to the Divine directions.

The Divine instructions for building the tabernacle were definite and minute, but the work was to be done by human hands. The people were to contribute to the cost. Offerings were to be invited from the people—gems and jewels, precious metals, skins and yarns, spices and oils. Everyone among the people should have the privilege of contributing. The tabernacle was to be built with free and voluntary gifts.

The tabernacle was not like our modern churches, either in its form or in its purpose. It was not a place where the people came together to sing and pray and hear God's Word. Indeed, the people

never entered the tabernacle at all. None but the priests were allowed inside the sacred tent. It was really God's dwelling-place.

The tabernacle was a type or illustration of Christ. God dwelt in a tent in the midst of His people. When Christ came He was the Word, God Himself, dwelling not then in a tent but in human flesh. His name was Emmanuel, God with us. There is an evident allusion to this first tabernacle in the words of the writer of the Fourth Gospel: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt, tabernacled, among us." We do not need the symbol any more, since we have the reality. The tabernacle also showed the way of access to God. There the people came with their sacrifices and offerings, their prayers, their needs and sorrows, finding God ready to answer and help. The tabernacle also taught God's holiness, for none but the priest was permitted to enter it. We can come to God only through Jesus Christ our High Priest. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

The furniture of the tabernacle consisted of four pieces—the ark of the covenant, the table with its bread and wine, the seven-branched candlestick, and the golden altar of incense. First there was the ark of the testimony. This was only a box or chest, made of acacia wood, but it was the centre of the whole sacred shrine. In it were placed the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. The covering of this ark was not a mere lid, but a most sacred part of the furniture.

It was made of pure gold, indicating its sacredness. It represented the very throne of God, and there He sat to receive the confessions and the praises of all the people. It was a mercy seat, for God is a God of mercy. When people come to Him they are not coming to a God who is angry, who will not forgive, whose look is a consuming fire. He is a holy and righteous God, but also a God who is gracious and compassionate. The approach to the mercy seat was made always by the high priest with blood, which told of atonement. The cross of Christ is now our mercy seat.

Above the mercy seat appeared the Shekinah, the Presence of God, on which no eye could look save when beneath it, hiding the accusing law, is the mercy seat. Just how much all this meant to the worshipping Hebrew we cannot tell; to us, however, the meaning is clear. Christ is our High Priest. He made His offering of Himself on the altar and then passed through the veil and appeared before God with His own blood, which He offered there and thus obtained eternal redemption for us.

The high priest went into the Holy of Holies, not for himself only but for all the people. He bore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate and thus represented them all. When he passed into the Holy of Holies and stood before the Shekinah, all the people stood there in him. There is access for us to the mercy seat, but only through Christ.

The priest could stand before the mercy seat only when he had made an offering

on the altar and bore the blood of the sacrifice to sprinkle on the golden lid. That is, access to God could be had only after atonement had been made. This, too, has its plain teaching for us. Jesus Christ could open the way for us into God's presence only by making an atonement for us. When He was dying on the cross, the veil which, until this time, had shut men away from God's presence was torn in sunder. This rending of the veil was not accidental, but symbolised the truth that now the way to God had been fully opened. There is no longer any need of a priest—Christ Himself is our great High Priest, ever standing before God and making intercession for us.

There was also a table in the tabernacle. "Thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are upon it." This was the table of the shewbread. It was overlaid with pure gold, surrounded with a border of gold. The table was furnished with dishes, on which, every Sabbath, twelve loaves of bread were laid. These remained there for seven days, and when replaced by new loaves were given to the priests to be eaten by them. Besides the bread, there were vessels on the table, no doubt containing wine. These provisions had their spiritual meaning. A table is spread for God's children wherever they are. Christ not only redeems His people by His blood, but He offers Himself also as bread, the bread of life. In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray for our daily bread, and the promise is given that our Father will provide for

all our wants. The tabernacle was God's House, and the table spread in it gave it the character of a home. It tells of the fellowship of love. Our Father brings us into His very family and causes us to sit with Him and commune with Him. The table suggests also the abundance of the provision which Christ makes for us. We have the same picture perpetuated in the Lord's Supper. Friends of Christ gather as a family and sit down together with their Lord. All this points forward to still another scene, when all God's children one day shall gather as one family in heaven.

Another article of the furniture in the tabernacle was a candlestick or candelabrum. The candlestick represented the Church. There was only one central stem, indicating the unity of the Church. Then there were seven branches, each one with its lamp, indicating the multiplicity of God's people. The lighted lamps burning in the darkness of the tabernacle symbolised believers, who shine as lamps in this dark world.

Jesus says to His disciples: "Ye are the light of the world." Every Christian should shine to make one little spot of the earth brighter. We are brightened that we may brighten. All this was beautifully and impressively taught here at the beginning, in this Divine picturing of religion. We have it made clearer still in the vision of Zechariah. The oil is supplied without human agency, but the light shines in the lamps; that is, in the human lives which are Divinely lighted. The Church is to shine

as the aggregate of all its individual members. If one little lamp goes out or shines dimly, one spot in the world is left unlighted or only dimly lighted.

Another thing in the furniture of the tabernacle was the golden altar for the incense. Incense was an emblem of prayer. There are several suggestions. For one thing, there was a Divine prescription for making the incense. "Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight; and thou shalt make of it incense, a perfume after the art of the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy." Any compound different from that described was not acceptable. There is also a Divine prescription for prayer. We are clearly taught how we must pray, of what ingredients we must mix our incense. The fire used on the golden altar must be holy fire from the altar of burnt offering. Prayer is not a sweet savour unto God unless it be kindled by the fire of God's love and by the Holy Spirit. Burning incense was fragrant; true prayer was sweet perfume before God. As the fragrance of flowers is pleasing to us, arising from forests, meadows, fields and gardens in the summer days, so is the prayer of earth which ascends from the homes and sanctuaries, from secret closets and from supplicating hearts. The incense was offered by the priest within the Holy Place, while the people were praying without. Christ in heaven offers our prayers before God, purifying them and adding to them the incense of His own

sacrifice, and then presenting them, sweetened by His own intercession.

Outside the tabernacle there was another altar—the altar of burnt offering. This altar was the first object the worshipper saw as he approached the sacred tent. It stood guard over the way to the Holy Place. No one could enter the tabernacle, to reach God's presence, except by the way of the altar of burnt offering. It thus pictures Christ's cross. Before we can gain access to God we must stop at the cross and find forgiveness of sins. An unforgiven soul has no access to God. The cross is the gate and the only gate which opens to new life and to glory.

There was also a laver outside the tabernacle. It was placed between the altar and the tabernacle door. After sacrificing upon the altar, the priest must stop at the laver and wash before he entered the Holy Place. We need not only the blood of Christ to atone for our guilt, but also the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. The altar of burnt offering told of justification, and the laver told of sanctification.

When the tabernacle was set up, it and all its vessels and furniture must be anointed. Nothing was ready for use, though all things had been made after the Divine pattern, until anointed with holy oil. There was a Divine prescription also for the making of this sacred oil: "Take thou also unto thee the chief spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even

two hundred and fifty, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty, and of cassia five hundred, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin; and thou shalt make it a holy anointing oil, a perfume compounded after the art of the perfumer: it shall be a holy anointing oil." With this oil the tabernacle and its furniture were to be anointed.

This anointing made the place holy. After this it would have been sacrilege to use the tabernacle or any of its vessels for any common service. Our lives, when anointed by the Holy Spirit, are sacred to God, and should not be used in any profane or unholy service. There is a story of an artist who had made a noble representation in marble of the Redeemer and who afterwards refused to make any figures of any but sacred subjects. He was requested to make statues of heathen goddesses for ornaments, but he said his art was now consecrated to God. "The hands that have cut the figure of the Christ in marble," he said, "must not carve anything that is not holy." So we may say that the lips that speak Christ's name in prayer should utter none but holy words. The hearts which are temples of the Holy Spirit should not entertain any impure or unworthy guests. Whatever is touched by the consecrating oil of Divine grace must never be profaned by any but holy use.

Aaron and his sons were appointed priests. They were washed with water, symbolising their spiritual cleansing in preparation for their sacred work. Then upon them were put the holy garments. These

garments had their typical meaning. For example, on each shoulder, in the golden clasp that fastened the two parts of the ephod, was an onyx stone, on which were engraved the names of six of the tribes of Israel—six on one stone and six on the other. Thus the high priest bore all the people on his shoulder, the place of strength and upholding. Again, the priest's breastplate had in it twelve precious stones, with the names of the twelve tribes cut in them, on each stone the name of one tribe. This breastplate the priest wore over his heart, the place of love. Thus he bore the people in this typical way on his shoulders for support and upholding, and on his heart for affection and cherishing. Thus Christ, who is our High Priest, bears all His people on His shoulder for uplifting, and in His heart in tender, unchanging love.

CHAPTER V

NADAB AND ABIHU

Read Leviticus X. 1-11

THE incident of Nadab and Abihu is the story of a sin which casts a shadow over the beginnings of the tabernacle worship. These young priests were presumptuous, elated by the new honour conferred upon them, and, besides, were probably under the influence of wine. Swift and terrible punishment came upon them for their sin, the essence of which was that they disregarded definite Divine instructions and took their own way instead of God's. It was right to offer incense, but it must be offered in the way God had prescribed. The fire must come from the altar of burnt offering, but these priests took common fire instead.

One lesson is that we are not to be guided by what we think proper and fitting in serving God, but by what God Himself tells us He wants. Saul, in one of his campaigns, thought he would honour God by sparing some of the finest cattle he had taken from the Amalekites, which God had bidden him

to destroy and offer them as a burnt offering. But his act was displeasing to God. "To obey is better than sacrifice," Samuel told the king. The Lord knew what was the best thing to do with the Amalekites' cattle. Precise obedience is what pleases God. He cares nothing for sacrifices if in making them we have disobeyed Him. Any fire would make incense burn fragrantly, but God had not said any fire would do. It must be holy fire.

Our worship must be of the heart, inspired by love for Christ and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. All our life must be according to the will of God. It is not enough that we make it brilliant, that it shall win the praise of men—it must please God. It is well for us to ask ourselves continually what God thinks of us and of the things we do. No matter how men compliment us on the excellence of our achievements, if God is not pleased and does not approve us, human commendation is only a mockery.

Another teaching is that we are always in danger of offering strange fire in our worship. If our prayers are only out of our own heart, for things we ourselves want, without reference to God's will, they are kindled with strange fire. If we offer only forms of worship, however ornate and beautiful, but without faith and love and true adoration, we are offering strange fire to God. If we live in sin, breaking the commandments, and then come before God with devout postures and pious words, it is strange fire we are bringing. If we make money

dishonestly and then come with the fruits of our dishonesty in our hands, giving them for God's service, we are offering strange fire in our censer. Only the prayers that are in accordance with the will of God and are inspired by the Spirit of God are acceptable to the Hearer of prayer. Only the service that is rendered in obedience and holiness is pleasing service. Only the money that is earned according to God's law is a fragrant offering when laid upon God's altar.

Someone tells of an old codfish dealer, a very earnest and sincere man, who prayed every day. One of the chief joys of his life was the hour of daily family worship. One year two merchants persuaded him to go into a deal with them, by which they could control all the codfish in the market and greatly increase the price. The plan was succeeding well when this good old man learned that many poor persons in the city were suffering because of the great advance in the price of codfish. It troubled him so that he broke down in trying to pray at the family altar and went straight to the men who had led him into the plot, and told them that he could not go on with it. Said the old man: "I can't afford to do anything which interferes with my family prayers. And this morning when I got down on my knees and tried to pray there was a mountain of codfish before me, high enough to shut out the throne of God, and I could not pray. I tried my best to get around it, or get over it, but every time I started to pray that pile of codfish loomed

up between me and my God. I wouldn't have my family prayers spoiled for all the codfish in the Atlantic Ocean, and I shall have nothing more to do with it, or with any money made out of it."

When Nadab and Abihu had offered the strange fire the punishment followed swiftly and terribly. "There came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them." On one page of the Scriptures we read: "God is love," but on another page we find the words: "Our God is a consuming fire." We see so much of the Divine mercy that covers up our sins and hides them, putting out their blackness with the glorious whiteness of grace, that we are in danger of forgetting how exceedingly sinful sin is, how hateful to God, and what penalties it brings upon itself. Indeed, the smallest sin is a breach of law which would invariably draw instant death upon him who commits it were it not for the patience and forbearance of God. Such judgments as this give us glimpses of sin's true character and its invariable penalties, unless we are shielded beneath the wings of Divine love.

God's holiness is always manifested in His acts, whether they be of mercy or of justice. In the case of these men the holiness was shown in their punishment. They refused to honour the Lord by doing that which he had commanded them to do, and were struck down at the tabernacle door for their sin. The law of God always has a double aspect. From one side it appears bright and full of blessing, from the other side it is dark and full of ter-

rors. It is like the pillar of cloud which led the people in their journey from Egypt. It was light on one side, towards the Israelites; it was dark and terrible towards the Egyptians. Even of the gospel of Christ the same is true. St. Paul tells us that it is either the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. If we accept it, it has only good for us; but if we reject it, it has only condemnation.

The conduct of Aaron in the presence of his great sorrow is pathetic. "Aaron held his peace." His heart was crushed by the terrible sorrow, but he recognised the justice of God and bowed himself submissively to the Divine will. We may always be silent to God, therefore, even in the darkest hours and in the most painful experiences. We do not need to understand—God understands, and He is our Father. On the grave of a child in an English churchyard these words are cut in the marble: "Who plucked this flower?" The answer from Christ will be: "It was I." Then sorrowing ones should be silent in their grief.

He has a sovereign right to do as He will, and we may not question what He does. We know that God is love and that all He does is done in love. We know that He is wise and good and that His way is always right and best for us. We should never be afraid to trust Him when we cannot understand.

Aaron's sorrow was made far more intense by the fact that his sons had died in an act of disobedience to God. It makes a vast difference, when parents

sit beside the coffin of their dead, whether the child has died in sweet faith in Christ or in sin. If Aaron's sons had fallen in the performance of some duty, giving their lives a sacrifice in obedience to God, there would have been no bitterness in the father's heart. But when death had come because of their sin there seemed no comfort. What could the father say? David's grief over Absalom was similar. All the stricken king could say was: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would I had died for thee!" Aaron said nothing, bearing his sorrow in silence.

It seemed a strange command that Moses gave, forbidding any exhibition of grief over the death of these young men. "Let not the hair of your heads go loose, neither rend your clothes." One reason for this was that any expression of grief in this case would seem to be a complaint against what God had done, and they were not, either by word, by act, or by look, to show anything but the most perfect submission. These men had sinned, and had been stricken down because of their sin. There must be reverence and submission before God, and not complaint.

Another reason why they should not give expression to their grief was that they had their duties to perform in the tabernacle and must not leave them for a moment, not even to attend to what seemed to be the sacred duties of affection. The worship of God must not be interrupted even by the experience of sorrow. We must not understand,

however, from the command in this particular case, that we are never to weep over our friends who have died. Grief is human. Jesus Himself wept beside the grave of His friend Lazarus, at Bethany, and He does not forbid tears in time of affliction. But we should never weep rebelliously, and our grief must never interfere with our duty. Ofttimes there are things to be done even in the midst of our sorrow, and duty must not stop even for tears. Jesus refused a disciple permission to go home to bury his father before going forth with the gospel message. We must go on with our work in the very days of bereavement. Sometimes people let their tasks drop out of their hands in the time of trouble, as if they are absolved from any further participation in the duties of active life. But this is wrong. We lay our dead away to-day, and to-morrow we must return to our place in the midst of life's activities. Our friend's work in this world was done when God called him away, but our work is not finished, and we must not neglect it, even though our hearts are breaking with grief.

One of the saddest things about this whole story is that the crime seems to have been the result of intemperance. The fact that the command was given at that particular time and in connection with this terrible occurrence, that priests should drink no wine when they were about to enter the tabernacle to engage in their sacred duties, seems to imply that the sin of these men was due partly at least to intoxication. The lesson is very urgent.

It applies first to priests, to those who minister at God's altar, to those who have to do with spiritual things. They should not take strong drink when they are about to engage in God's service. The reason suggested is that their minds may always be clear to understand what is right and what is not right, and that they may be able to teach the people wisely and discreetly all the words of God. Those who yield to the influence of strong drink are thereby disqualified for the sacred work of their office.

But we need not confine this Divine counsel to priests or ministers. The lesson is for all. We should always live so as to be at our best, with mind unclouded, that we may know distinctly what our duty is. Strong drink unfits anyone for truest and best living. It takes away men's senses. It makes them reckless. They are unable while under its influence to do their work well.

At a large banquet given in a great city by physicians, in honour of a distinguished surgeon from abroad, the visitor turned down his glasses when the wine was brought on. One sitting beside him asked somewhat playfully: "Why, doctor, are you an abstainer?" The honoured guest replied: "Not perhaps for the reason usually given, but I am a surgeon, and any moment may be called to perform some delicate operation on which life and death depend. I must never be unready. I must always be in condition to do the most perfect work possible as a surgeon. Even the smallest indulgence in

drink unfits me, at least in some degree, for doing my best work. Hence I never drink at all."

The great doctor's experience is suggestive. Every man should be always at his best, ready to do his duty in the fullest, completest way. Anything which unfits him for this he should never do. A young surgeon was proving most skillful and successful in his profession. His specialty was the eye. He was becoming very proficient. He was passionately fond of cricket. But he discovered that playing was affecting his hands. He saw that if he would do his best in his work on the eye he must give up his cricket. It was hard to do this, but he did it cheerfully in order that his hand might always do its best in his profession. Whatever in life, though it be only harmless play, that hinders us in reaching the highest attainments or doing the truest and worthiest things, we should gladly sacrifice. This is one of the reasons for abstinence from strong drink. Some men tell us that it excites and stimulates them so that they can think more brilliantly and work more rapidly and efficiently. But the effect in such cases is illusive, is only temporary at the best, with unwholesome reaction. The excitement produced by wine is not normal, is unnatural, and, as in the case of the great surgeon, really unfits one for work that requires steadiness and nerve and the fullest possession and use of all one's faculties. St. Paul's counsel is always the sanest: "Be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit."

CHAPTER VI

JOURNEYING TOWARDS CANAAN

Read Numbers IX. 15-23; X

THE stay at Sinai was ending. The time had come for the beginning of the march towards the promised land. Pauses in life are necessary. The tarrying at Sinai was not loitering on the way. It was part of the will and plan of God for the people. They stopped there at God's command that they might receive revelations and instructions. At Sinai the law was given. There they received also the tabernacle with its furniture and all its equipment for worship. There the great system of feasts and all the ritual of religious life were promulgated.

The year spent at Sinai was therefore not a lost year. It was a year spent with God in necessary preparation for the beginning of national life. Activity is not the only duty in true living; sometimes it is quite as essential that we wait with God as that we work for Him. Youth must take time for growth and for education before entering upon ac-

tive tasks and duties. We need to get acquainted with God, to learn our relation to Him, to know His will for us and our duty to Him, before entering His service in a public way.

Some people chafe when they are interrupted in their progress, kept waiting when they want to hasten on. But the pauses in life, when they come in Providential guidance, are as fruitful of good and blessing as the hours of most strenuous activity. Night is not a wasteful mistake in the ordering of time. Sleep is not self-indulgence. The hour of devotion at the beginning of the day is not lost time. Stopping for meals does not keep us back in our day's schedule. "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey." Some pauses in life are enforced. The busy man in his busiest season is stricken with illness and has to drop all his pressing work and be shut up in a sick-room. But he need not fret. The days of illness are not meant to be lost. If rightfully accepted and used they do not set us back in our life. We have to grow, and we may grow more in a week or a month in a darkened room, suffering pain, than in a year of free, unhindered life in the world.

Sinai was not therefore an interruption on the way to the promised land; it was a preparation, a help. But at length the time came for going on. Here the people are receiving their instructions for the march. They would need guidance, for there was no great highway to follow. Their route lay through a wilderness. They would be Divinely led

every step of the way. "Whenever the cloud was taken up from over the Tent, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel encamped. At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they encamped: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they remained encamped. . . . Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, abiding thereon, the children of Israel remained encamped, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up, they journeyed."

We do not seem to have any such guidance in our lives. That is, we have no pillar of cloud or fire to lift and go before us when we are to go forward, to settle down when we are to stay our steps, and to rest over us when we are to keep still and do nothing, whether it be for two days, or a month, or a year. There come times to many of us when we would like to have just such guidance, when our hearts cry out to have some unmistakable leading, when we should be freed from the responsibility of having to decide certain questions for ourselves.

Is there anything now in place of this wonderful supernatural guidance which the Israelites had in their journeys? There certainly is nothing which our eyes can see. The Incarnation was the coming of God into the world in a human life, and now there is no longer any need for the forms of Divine revealing that were used before Christ came. Yet

the New Testament assures us of Divine leading in these Christian days, just as real and as unmistakable as was the leading of Israel in the wilderness. Part of the care of the Good Shepherd for His sheep is their guidance. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Jesus led His own disciples while He was with them, answered their questions, told them what they should do, was their real Companion in their journeys, helped them over the rough, dangerous places and through the dark ways. There is no doubt about the guidance of our Master's personal friends while He was with them.

But when He left them they seemed to have no leading, no way of finding the road. They were like a company of orphan children in the sad days after His death. They did not know what to do or where to go. They were timid and afraid. When they met together they locked the door for fear of enemies. But Jesus had assured them that He would be absent only a little while and would soon be with them again. When at the last supper Thomas asked Him about the way to the place where He was going, and how they could know the way, Jesus answered: "I am the way." He Himself would be their guide. We are sure, therefore, that the friends of Christ will be led through all this world's tangled paths just as unmistakably as if they had a visible pillar going before them. We have the guidance of the Holy Spirit who will lead us from within, filling our hearts with wisdom, en-

lightening our eyes and making the way plain. We have the guidance of the Word of God which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We have Providential guidance. Life is full of God. He is in all events and circumstances. We talk about the strange way in which things happen, working out good for us. Only, really, things do not happen—nothing happens. The old poet was far nearer the truth when he wrote:

“It chanced—Eternal God that chance did guide.”

We need not ever seek guidance in vain—God is everywhere, and He is ready always to show us the way if we want to find it, if we truly seek it, and if we are willing to take it.

The trouble is we often do not want to take God's way. When the pillar settles down we are not ready to pitch our tent, but push on. Or when the cloud lifts to lead on we are not ready to go forward, at least to go the way it moves. We are too often more willing to hear some earthly guidance than the heavenly. In His parable Jesus said of the sheep that they know the shepherd's voice and follow him, but will not follow a stranger, for they know not the voice of strangers. We may always hear the Good Shepherd's voice if we will, and may always have heavenly guidance in all the ways of our earthly life.

It is well for us to have our hearts so sensitive towards God that we shall always recognise the

leading He would give us. It is a lofty privilege to have in our earthly life heavenly guidance. Dr. Peabody, of Harvard University, tells of watching a vessel lying becalmed on a glassy bay. There was not a breath of air to fill the sails. While the men were waiting and watching, however, they noticed that the little pennant, far up on the masthead, began to stir and lift. There was still not a ripple down on the water, nor the faintest moving of the air on the deck, but when they saw the pennant's stirring they knew that there was a wind rising in the higher air, and they quickly spread the upper sails; and instantly the vessel began to move under the power of the upper currents, though on the surface of the water there was still a dead calm.

The incident suggests something like this also in common life. There are lower and higher currents. There are influences that are only earth born, and there are currents that blow down out of heaven from God. There are friendships that offer guidance which would lead us only along low plains, and there are friendships which would lift us up towards God, and whatsoever things are true. Too many people set only the lower sails and catch only the winds that blow on earthly levels. But if we would get the Divine guidance we must catch the upper currents; that is, put our lives under heavenly influences. We may do this by abstaining from evil companionships—not walking in the counsel of the wicked, nor standing in the way of

sinner, nor sitting in the seat of scorers. We may do it by choosing for our companions and friends only those who are godly, by living in the atmosphere of holiness. If we walk with God we shall ever be where the upper currents blow, and we shall always be in the way where God will lead us.

Very beautiful is the prayer in one of the Psalms: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." This prayer we may make every morning as we go out for the day, and our prayer will be answered if it is sincere. We need, too, to make the prayer, for we cannot find the way ourselves. There is no morning when we do not need to make it, for even the day when the path seems plainest may have its experiences of peril. The guidance may come when we think it has not come, and the bit of hard path which it seems to us certainly cannot be the answer to our prayer may indeed be God's very way for us. The cloud may sometimes rest for weeks or months when we think it ought to lift and lead on; still it is all right. No movement really takes us forward unless God leads on. No resting ever retards our progress if it is God's will that we should rest. All our guidance is hour by hour, step by step. The cloud showed the people only a little bit of the way at once, and any moment might settle down. So our guidance is only a step at a time. We have it in Newman's great hymn:

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
 Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
 Lead thou me on:
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.”

In the story of Hobab we have an illustration of the human part in the guidance of the people. The cloud was to lead them in all their marches, calling them to move, indicating the course they should take, and fixing the place at which they should rest. But there was need also for human guidance in the details of the marches. One who knew the wilderness, its paths, its springs of water, its shelters, its dangers, was essential to the commander in leading his people towards Canaan. Hence Moses desired the help of Hobab, the Kenite. The Kenites were an Arab tribe. When Moses fled from Egypt he took refuge with these people, marrying a daughter of Jethro, their chief. Jethro was helpful to Moses in his organisation of the people, and when the march was about to begin Moses earnestly requested Hobab to accompany him. “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good,” was the assuring invitation.

We should invite our friends to join us and go with us on our pilgrimage towards the holy land of heaven. Yet we must really believe in God ourselves and in the promises of the inheritance which He has in reserve for us, or we cannot assure others of the good things they will receive if they go with us. But if our faith is strong and clear we can

say to people confidently that it will be a good thing for them to unite with the church. It will bring them into the company of those who are journeying towards the good land.

The invitation, however, did not impress Hobab. His answer was: "I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land." His own home and kindred evidently drew strongly on his heart. The good promised him did not seem sufficient to win him away from the simple associations of his life. There are many people who make a like response to kindly invitations to unite with the church. They are not willing to leave their own companionships and fellowships, to make the sacrifices they would have to make.

Moses showed much earnestness and importunity with Hobab. He was not willing to leave him behind. They had long been good friends, and it was hard to go on even to the land of promise and have Hobab not go with him. He said: "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp . . . thou shalt be to us instead of eyes." The first plea of Moses was that Hobab would find good for himself by accompanying Israel. Now he pleads that Hobab would be helpful on the way. Moses needed him. Hobab had been brought up in the desert and knew every part of it, every path, every spring of water, every bit of pasture. He would be able, therefore, to be a guide to the people in their journeys.

Moses felt that he could not spare Hobab, that

he could not take the people through the wilderness without his help. This appears to have had more influence with Hobab than the promise that he would receive good himself by going. Some people are more strongly influenced by opportunities for usefulness and helpfulness than they are by promises of personal good. In every appeal, too, which Christ makes for followers, He has the two thoughts in mind—He would save the man himself, lift him up to life and blessedness; then He would have the man become a helper of others, a helper of the church.

There are many people not yet members of the church whom God needs and whom Christ is calling, and who could be greatly helpful to the cause of Christ if they would become His followers. There are men with money who would do very much in the world if only they were Christians devoted to Christ. There are men with gifts of speech, who, if they would unite with the church and devote their energies and powers to the service of Christ, could win many souls and give great help in the building up of Christ's kingdom. There are women with large social influence whom Christ needs. If they would enter His church with devoted hearts and ready hands their lives would be great blessings to many.

CHAPTER VII

REPORT OF THE SPIES

Read Numbers XIII., XIV.

THE story of the spies is very interesting. Just how it came that spies were sent is not very clear. From Deuteronomy it seems that it was at the demand of the people. Moses says:* "Ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, Let us send men before us, that they may search the land for us, and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come." In Numbers, however, it is said that the Lord commanded Moses to send men to spy out the land. The meaning would seem to be that the people requested it, and the Lord approved the request and gave the command to Moses. The sending of the spies was a wise and natural precaution and did not necessarily imply doubt. God wants us to use our sense and judgment in all possible cases. What we can find out for ourselves He does not

*Deut. 1:22.

wish to teach us in a supernatural way. He never works an unnecessary miracle.

The task of the spies was important. They were to learn all they could about the country and the people. They should find out whether the inhabitants were weak or strong, so that they would know how to meet them. Anxiety is forbidden, but forethought is not. We should study out problems that we may know how to meet them.

The spies did their work thoroughly. They studied the people, their resources, their cities, their defenses. They studied also the land, its quality, its fruitfulness, its possibilities. We are not to go blindly through life when it is possible for us to learn the condition of our pilgrimage. Many times we cannot know—there are mysteries in the Divine Providence which we cannot now comprehend. Then it is our duty to go forward in faith, knowing that God understands, and trusting Him. But when we can learn we ought to seek to know.

When the spies came back they brought samples of the fruits of the land. They cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes and carried it on a pole between two men. It must have been a large cluster to require two men to carry it in this way. When the people saw the fruit they asked: "Are there more of these?" The spies answered: "Yes; we brought just this one cluster to let you see how fine the fruit is. But there are more clusters just as fine."

Is there not something very like this going on in this world all the time? No spies have gone over into heaven to bring back any of the specimens of fruit that grow there. But God has sent into our earthly wilderness-life many samples of the good things of the heavenly life, foretastes of the full glories awaiting us there. All spiritual blessings enjoyed here are mere samples of what life in heaven will be. The joy, the peace, the love, the grace we get in time of need are very sweet, but they are just little specimens of fruits that grow everywhere in the better land.

The old rabbins say that when the famine began in Egypt and the storehouses there were opened, Joseph threw some of the chaff of the grain upon the Nile, so that it might float down and show those who lived below that there was food laid up for them farther up the river. So the blessings of Divine grace which we enjoy in this world are little more than the husks of the heavenly good things sent down on the river of Divine grace as foretastes or intimations of what is in store for us in heaven. The peace we get here is very sweet, but it is only the faintest image of the peace of heaven. The joy the Christian has here is deep and rich, but heaven's joy is infinitely deeper and richer. The communion of earth is very precious, as we turn over the Bible pages or sit at the Lord's table, but it is nothing to compare with the fellowship of heaven. "To depart and be with Christ . . . is very far better." Every true Christian we see is carrying

on his shoulder a cluster of Eshcol grapes gathered from heaven's vines. Heaven is full of just such blessings. The best spiritual things of earth are but hints of the glorious things that wait for us.

There must have been great excitement when the spies were seen returning. Crowds would run to meet them. Then came their report. They spoke enthusiastically of the country; it was a land flowing with milk and honey. Its fruits were luxuriant. It produced golden harvests. Its soil was rich. Its hills were full of minerals. They could not speak too enthusiastically of what they saw. But they went on to speak of things not so pleasant. They were afraid of the people. It was a good country, but it would have to be conquered, and they feared that they were not able to conquer it. They had seen giants there, and they were dismayed at the thought of meeting these men in battle.

It is easy to find something like this in these days of ours. People stand by the edge of the new life and look over into it. They cannot help seeing that it is a good thing to be a Christian, that the religious life has many comforts and blessings which those living a worldly life can never have. But they are afraid of the opposition they will have to meet if they accept Christ and come out on His side. There are enemies to fight, too, strongholds to conquer, evils to overcome. There are even giants—giants of temptation—and these seem terrible to the timid people who fear to move forward.

Too many see only this side of life, the dark side, the side of trial and hardship, of sacrifice and cost, and do not see the side of help, of promise, of victory. They magnify all difficulties, and the commonest forms of opposition become great hobgoblins of terror to them. It is a poor, cowardly way to live, unworthy of anyone who wears the human form, especially of those who are God's children. Of course we shall have our battles. Of course there are enemies, even giants, to meet. But if God be for us, we need not fear any enemies.

It is to be remembered that we need opposition and struggle if we are to grow into moral and spiritual strength. Jesus Himself was tempted, tried, put to the test, that His life might be developed and made strong. He was "made perfect through suffering." A soldier can learn to fight only by fighting. Without the exercise which comes through meeting enemies, we never could attain the stature of full-grown men.

We know also that the opposition we have to meet in our Christian life is not an evidence that God is fighting against us. He is not trying to defeat us. James says: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." There is a blessing, therefore, in being tempted—only thus can we win the crown. Again James says: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations." Temptations work patience in us. God's intention when He suffers us to be tempted is not to cause us to sin—that is Satan's object—but God's is that we

shall be made stronger and that we may endure and be victorious and receive the crown of life. Of course, there are giants, but we shall overcome them, and the overcoming will make men of us.

{ There were two brave men among the spies, two men who believed in God in spite of all the obstacles and difficulties they saw. These were Caleb and Joshua. Joshua here reminds the people of what Caleb had said to them that day: "Caleb stilled the people . . . and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it—the land of promise—for we are well able to overcome it." That was the right kind of talk. Caleb was a true hero. He did not make little of the dangers and difficulties, but he believed in God and in the invincibility of the human courage that is faithful to duty and obedient to the Divine command. We should learn much from Caleb's splendid heroism of faith on this occasion. We should learn never to doubt God's power to help us to do whatever He has commanded us to do. We have nothing to do with dangers and difficulties—our whole duty is to believe in God and do what He commands. Every Christian young man should get Caleb's ringing words and Caleb's sublime courage into his heart.

During the Peninsular War a brave young ensign was observed wherever the fight was thickest and sorest, to make his way to the front, holding up his colours, cheering the men by his wonderful daring and courage. Hour after hour he stood his ground, and while hundreds were falling round him

he remained unhurt. At the close of the engagement his superior officer said to him: "Carnegie, how did you manage to stand fire as you did? You should let some of us into the secret. You were always at the front and yet you have not a scratch on your body. What's the secret?" "It is the king's secret, sir; but you may know it better than I do, for you have served him longer. I remembered for whom I was fighting—my king—and that gave me strength and courage so that I did not think of myself."

But Caleb's words were not sufficient to turn the tide of discouragement in the hearts of the people. There were ten men against two, and the ten still persisted in saying: "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we." There is something very pitiful in the behaviour of these men as we see it here. They ought to have been leaders of courage and hope, but, instead, they were discouragers.

It is easy to dishearten people, but we have no right to do so. It is said that during the South African War a civilian was arrested, tried by court-martial, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment for being a discourager. He was a loyal Englishman and did nothing against his government, but he had lost heart himself, had given up, and felt that there was no use in trying to hold out, and then he went about among the soldiers who were conducting the siege, saying discouraging things which made it harder for them to be brave and strong

in the face of danger. The court-martial adjudged that the discourager was guilty of disloyalty, and inflicted upon him severe punishment. And the court-martial was right. It is a crime against others to be a discourager. These ten men brought disaster upon their whole nation. They started a panic of fear among the people, the result of which was a revolt. The people even went so far as to organise for a return to Egypt, intending to depose Moses and put a new captain in his place. The penalty for this sin was the shutting of the gates of the promised land upon all that generation. For nearly forty years the people wandered in the wilderness, until all the men who rebelled that day had died.

The lesson should not be lost upon us. We never should be discouragers of others—we should always be encouragers. Emerson says: "It is cheap and easy to destroy. There is not a joyful boy or an innocent girl, buoyant with fine purpose of duty, in all the streets full of eager and rosy faces, but a cynic can chill and dishearten with a single word. . . . Yes, this is easy; but to help the young soul, add energy, inspire hopes, and blow the coals into a useful flame; to redeem defeat by new thought, by firm action, that is not easy—that is the work of Divine men."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRAZEN SERPENT

Read Numbers XXI. 1-9

WHEN the time came at last for the people to go into the land of promise they found the way blocked. The Edomites refused to allow them to go through their country, which was the direct route, and they were compelled to make a long detour, going round the land of Edom instead of across it. Besides being long, this way was also very hard, being through sandy wastes. The people got discouraged, and hence the murmuring.

It certainly seemed a most unnecessary piece of journeying. A glance at the map will show us that from Kadesh-barnea over into Canaan was only a short distance, while the route the people had to take led them by a long and circuitous course. What made all this harder was that it was made necessary by the unbrotherliness of a brother. Edom would not allow Israel to pass through his country. Moses asked this favour courteously, offering to pay for everything the people used, but

the king refused, and in a very surly fashion, too, to permit them to pass through his country on any terms or conditions whatsoever.

Very often in the experiences of life this same thing happens; brothers are disobliging to brothers, refusing to be kind, and thus make their burdens heavier. There are many who constantly make life harder for others by their selfishness. This is not right. Life is hard enough at the best for most people, and it should be our desire and effort to bear one another's burdens, certainly never make burdens for others.

It is not surprising that the people "were much discouraged because of the way." "The Arabah was a stony, sandy, almost barren plain, shut in by walls on either side, and subject to sandstorms. It was not, however, merely the heat and drought and ruggedness of the route which depressed them, but the fact that they were marching directly away from Canaan, and knew not how they were ever to reach it." We cannot blame the Israelites for feeling discouraged because of the way. Yet we may say frankly that they should not have given away to the feeling. Nothing was gained by this. It did not make the way any smoother. It caused no flower to grow in the path. It spread no shelter over their heads to ward off the sun's fierce heat. It did not shorten the long road. It did not soften the hearts of the unbrotherly Edomites and make them relent. It only made the people themselves

less fit for the hard journey, less brave, less able to bear the strain.

When we find ourselves in hard conditions which we cannot ameliorate, the best way always is to face them with courage and energy. They have got to be mastered, unless we mean to consent to be beaten, and there is no use wasting time and strength in fretting over them. Beaten, defeated, we never should consent to be, and therefore the only right thing to do is to stand like a rock. Only those who overcome win the prizes of life. These lie always beyond battle lines. In the letters to the seven churches, in the Book of Revelation, only those who overcome reach the rewards and blessings of spiritual life. We need ever to be strong if we would be victorious. Discouragement does not nerve us with strength; it only makes us weak and less able to be overcomers. A discouraged man never can be a hero. The moment we allow ourselves to let discouragement into our hearts we have opened our fortress gates to a traitor who will betray us.

Besides, there never is any real need for discouragement. At least, there would not be if we could see things as God sees them. He never suffers any of His children to be tried above that which they are able to bear. The troubles are hard, but the grace is always sufficient.

The thing we think we cannot master we can conquer if we will. Nothing is impossible to one who is working with God. The difficulty or the

hardship that looks to us unconquerable we can put under our feet if we meet it in Christ's name.

We should learn to sing in the most disheartening conditions, in the dreariest ways of life. We should be absolutely undiscourageable. There will always be experiences in which we seem to fail. Jesus appeared to fail when He was arrested and led to His cross. But it was not real failure. The resurrection on Easter morning was the end of what seemed utter defeat on Good Friday. There is no need, therefore, in any experience for yielding to discouragement. The way may be very hard for us, but if we are God's children nothing can go really wrong with us unless we fall into sin.

We see in this story to what discouragement led. "The people spake against God, and against Moses." At first the discouragement was only a depressed feeling, but it grew until it became bitterness, bitterness against Moses and against God. Perhaps we have not thought of discouragement as a sin, or as leading to such sins as we find growing here as its ripe fruit. We think of it as a quite harmless mood, a mood into which it is quite natural and very easy to fall. Some people seem even to enjoy it, as if it were a luxury. They would rather be murmuring than singing, complaining than rejoicing. They begin early in the morning. They did not sleep well last night, they tell you at breakfast. They heard the clock strike every hour. The weather is wretched, too warm or too cold, too wet or too dry. The breakfast is not palatable. The

oatmeal is not cooked well. The cream is garlicky. The eggs are boiled too hard. The coffee is too weak or too strong. All day this monotone of murmuring goes on, now about things, now about people. Nothing ever goes quite right. There is a modifying "but" to every sentence of approval that is spoken. The clearest sky is spoiled by a speck of cloud which they find somewhere. Nothing that either God or man does is altogether satisfactory.

People who live in this way do not imagine that they are sinning. They think of themselves as deserving of compassion. They do not dream of their incessant complaining as being grievous wickedness before God. But so it is. It was to punish such murmuring as thousands of Christians engage in continually that God sent the fiery serpents. The evil all came, too, from yielding to the feeling of discouragement. Discouragement is sin. It is temptation yielded to. Here we see its baleful ripe fruit.

Punishment followed. The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and the serpents bit them. Of course, God does not always send fiery serpents when He hears any of His children murmuring. If He did, serpents would be rather numerous for comfort. Yet murmuring is no less a sin with us than it was in the wilderness, and murmuring always brings penalty in some form. It is sin, and sin is like a fiery serpent. Its fangs leave poison in the blood. Its venom proves fatal if there is no antidote found.

Discouragement has penalties of its own. It lowers the tone of the life in every way. It poisons the blood. The eye is less clear. The brain is less vigorous. The heart pulses less normally. The discouraged man is sick. He has lost his enthusiasm. His courage is gone, and he is timid and fearful. He is no more the force he was in the world. He is not the same man in his home. His wife misses the brightness and boyishness that used to make his presence such a fountain of gladness. She wonders what is wrong, and thinks he is not going to live long. His children miss the playfulness that used to make them watch so eagerly for his home-coming in the evening. They were sure then of a royal time in romp and frolic. Now he comes in wearily and without any of the old-time gladness. He is too tired now to play with them. He is even disagreeable sometimes, showing impatience and irritability. He is not the same man anywhere he used to be. He is not the same in business. Things are running down in his office or store or shop. Unless there is a change the end will be disastrous. In his Christian life, too, a similar tendency is apparent. The old-time enthusiasm is gone. He is no longer the joyous, optimistic Christian he was. He has given up many of his church activities. His voice is not heard in the meetings. He is missed from the services. He is no longer the force he once was in good works. He is a discouraged man, and his discouragement has

robbed him of the things that formerly made him a blessing in the community.

The many deaths from the bites of the serpents alarmed the Israelites, and they came to Moses with confession. Penitence wakes people up to a consciousness of their guilt. A great many persons go on in evil ways, never thinking of the wickedness they are committing, until they find themselves suffering the evils of their sins, enduring the penalties of broken law. Then they begin to cry for forgiveness.

Moses became the intercessor for the people, asking the Lord to take away the serpents. It is a good thing when one has gone astray, falling into sin, or when one has trouble, to have a friend to whom to go, who will listen to the confession or to the burden of sorrow, and then go to God in supplication. We need human helpers, and never can be thankful enough for them. But we have a greater Intercessor than any human friend could be. "If any man sin; we have an Advocate with the Father." Jesus Christ is our Advocate. He is human, and thus can enter into our experiences. He is Divine, and thus can reach up to God for us. We should seek always to have Christ as our Mediator.

It was a strange method of cure that the Lord provided—a fiery serpent, set up on a pole. Then everyone who was bitten, when he looked at the image of the serpent, was healed. This was the way God answered the prayer of Moses for the peo-

ple's forgiveness. He did not take away the serpents, but he provided a cure for their bite. They must lift up their eyes and look towards the serpent on the pole, thus exercising their faith. This illustrates the way of salvation. God did not take sin out of the world, but he sent Jesus Christ to be a Saviour of sinners.

Jesus made use of this strange incident in the wilderness as an illustration of the salvation which He had brought into the world. He said: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life." As the serpent was lifted up so high that it could be seen from every part of the camp, so Christ was lifted up on the cross, that from any part of the world, where a sinner becomes conscious of guilt, the Redeemer can be seen.

We can fancy the bitten people, in the agonies of death, when told about the serpent on the pole and how they could be healed, turning their feeble eyes towards the wonderful image, and at once feeling a thrill of life in their veins. So whenever a dying sinner turns his eyes towards Christ on His cross he feels instantly in his soul the arresting of the tides of sin and the beginnings of life eternal.

CHAPTER IX

MOSES' DEATH AND BURIAL

Read Deuteronomy XXXIV.

“MOSES the servant of the Lord died.” The death of Moses was a sore disappointment to him. He wanted to live longer. He thought his work was not finished. There is a story of a man who had wasted his years in sin. At last he came back to God and was saved. He rejoiced in the hope of eternal life. Yet he was unhappy. He longed to live. When a friend asked him if he was afraid to die, he replied: “Oh, no, I am not afraid to die. I know that I am forgiven. But I am ashamed to die. I have nothing but a wasted life to bring to God.” That was not the feeling of Moses. He had filled his one hundred and twenty years with noble service. But he longed to finish what he had begun. He had brought his people out of Egypt. He had given them their laws. He had trained them for national life. He had led them through the wilderness. He desired to take them now into the land of promise.

But this was denied to him. He besought God to let him go over to see the good land beyond the Jordan. But the Lord would not relent, would not change his purpose. "The Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and hearkened not unto me. . . . Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter." So he had to go away and leave his work incomplete—that is, as it appeared to himself. The people were ready at last to enter the land of promise, and he who for forty years had been training and leading them could not go over with them, could not share in their final triumph, could not enter into the joy of conquest. No wonder Moses was bitterly disappointed.

But when we think of it, no one ever leaves his work finished in this world. No matter how diligent we may be in duty, how careful we are to leave nothing unfinished, when we are called away our hands will still be full of things not finished. One sows, another reaps. One lays the foundation, another builds up the wall. Only one Man who ever lived could say He had accomplished all that had been given Him to do. A business man went home one evening, expecting to come back to his office in the morning to take up his work again. But he died that night. There was a letter on his table half written—indeed, it ended in the middle of a word. All about were things he had begun. It will be so with all of us. We will leave engagements unmet for the next day, plans that we have made which we cannot

carry out, hopes that have filled our minds and hearts, which we have not realised.

Moses was disappointed when he had to die. But there was more than disappointment—there was tragedy as well. It was sin that prevented him from taking his people over and finishing the great work of his life.

We turn back and read the story. It was at Meribah, in the Wilderness of Zin. There was no water, and the people became clamorous, grew angry with Moses and blamed him, wishing they had died back in the wanderings. The Lord bade Moses to take his rod and then speak to the rock that it might give out its water for the people. Moses obeyed, but he was angry and seems to have failed in the exactness of his obedience. He said to the people: Hear now, ye rebels; shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?" It was a pitiful sight. Moses was called the meekest man. His task in dealing with his people was a hard one. They were always complaining and murmuring. For all the forty years Moses did not once lose his temper with them nor say one impatient word. Now, however, in an unguarded moment, he lost his self-control and spoke impatiently, unadvisedly. He showed his passion also in his words: "Ye rebels, must *we* fetch you water out of the rock?" forgetting to honour God. He had been commanded also to *speak* to the rock. Instead, he lifted his rod and smote it—not once only, but twice, pounding it in his wrath. The Lord's anger was kindled against

Moses. Instantly the sentence was uttered: "Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

We may think this a small sin to be so severely punished. We must remember, however, that Moses stood for God, and it was his duty to bear with the people as God Himself did. God would not have lost patience and temper as Moses did, and Moses disappointed God. A Jewish Targum says that at the first stroke of the rod the rock dropped blood, showing God's pain and grief. We may not say, either, that any sin is small. And the holier the man and the more sacred his mission, the greater is even the least departure from right.

There is something startling, too, in the form of the punishment. The sin of Moses made him unfit to finish his work. Do we know that our sins may not leave their hurt upon us in such a way that God cannot depend upon us for the delicate work He had been expecting us to do? A great surgeon said that he did not drink—never tasted liquor—because he was a surgeon, and any moment might be called to perform some operation on which life depended. He had found that drinking wine, however moderately, made his hand less steady, and thus less ready for the work of a surgeon. So he never tasted drink that he might never be unfitted for his work. There are things that unfit us for our duty, and which we must scrupulously shun.

We do not know how many of us are living below our best because sin has hurt us. Sin means missing the mark—it means failure. The sin of Moses came between him and the completion of his work. It is sin that makes the work of so many of us so imperfect, that prevents us from reaching the fulfillment of our highest dreams. Tennyson teaches this in *The Holy Grail*. Sir Galahad saw the holy thing because his heart was pure. The other knights failed because there was sin upon their souls. This was the confession of Sir Percival:

“Then, every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, ‘This quest is not for thee.’”

“Moses . . . died there . . . according to the word of the Lord.” A rabbinical legend says he died by the kiss of the Lord. The thought is very beautiful. When it is said that he died according to the word of the Lord, one thought is that a word of God called him away. It is sweet to know that the death of no servant of God is accidental. No holy man dies while God wants him to live.

There are other things to notice in this account of the dying of Moses. He died alone. No one accompanied him as he went away from his people and friends—no one but God. We are inclined to pity him, thus lacking in his last moments the companionship of loved ones. Like pathos was there in the dying of Livingstone, in the depths of Africa,

in his hut at midnight, alone. It seems to us that death is robbed of much of its bitterness when loved ones sit by the departing one, holding his hand, hearing his last words, breathing their prayers and speaking their thoughts of comfort. But really every one of us must die alone. Our friends may sit round us, singing songs of faith, imprinting kisses of farewell, but there can be no companionship in dying. Dying is always a lonely experience.

“Not sweeping up together
In whirlwind or in cloud,
In the hush of summer weather,
Or when storms are thundering loud;
But one by one we go,
In the sweetness none may know.”

Never was there such another funeral as that of Moses. No such honour was ever given in burial to any other man. There have been funerals in which the world's pomp was magnificent, but never before nor since was there such pomp as there was when Moses was buried. No one saw it, and no one can describe it. The record is in a single line: “And He buried him.” God buried him. There are many legends. One says: “When he had gone up the mountain, he came upon three men, who were digging a grave. He asked: ‘For whom do you dig this grave?’ They answered: ‘For a man whom God will call to be with Him in Paradise.’” They bade him lie down in the grave, and it just fitted him. They told him to close his eyes, and he obeyed.

They talked to him longer, until at last he was gone.”

“He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” An old writer says: “God buried him and then buried his grave.” We think it a comfort to know where our loved ones sleep that we may go and stand by their graves and think of their beautiful lives, and that we may keep the spots where they sleep beautiful by our gentle care. But no pilgrim feet ever went to the grave of Moses, since no one knew where to find it. But his is not the only unmarked grave in the world. In soldiers’ cemeteries, on battlefields, are many mounds with no name on the little board or stone, with only the word “Unknown” to mark them. Thousands, too, have gone down in the sea, and countless others have perished on desert sands, and no man knoweth of their sepulchre. God buried these, too, and God knows where they sleep.

There was a wreck on the shore, and among many bodies gathered by gentle hands was that of a baby. There was nothing to identify the body. Its name could not be found. So they put it in a little grave and set up a little stone, on which they cut the words: “God knows.”

“By Nebo’s lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan’s wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab
There lies a lonely grave.

And no man knows that sepulchre
 And no man saw it e'er,
 For the angels of God upturned the sod
 And laid the dead man there.

“Oh, lonely grave in Moab's land!
 Oh, dark Beth-peor's hill!
 Speak to these curious hearts of ours
 And teach them to be still.
 God has his mysteries of grace—
 Ways that we cannot tell:
 He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
 Of him he loved so well.”

Moses died and was buried, but was not forgotten. “The children of Israel wept for Moses . . . thirty days.” No doubt their grief was sincere. When he was gone from them they saw how true a friend he had been to them, how he had loved them and given his life to them and for them. We cannot but remember, however, how they had treated him, how they had broken his heart many, many times while he was with them. We cannot help saying that it would have been far better if they had shown their love in obedience, gratitude and kindness when he was living and serving them, instead of in wailings of grief when he was gone. Let us not keep our flowers for our friends' coffins. Let us strew them along the rough paths on which they walk in life.

Moses died, but his work for the Lord was not interrupted. He grieved because he could not lead his people into the promised land. He thought that was part of his life-work. But it was not—that

was Joshua's work. We think the taking away of this or that person will prove an irreparable loss. So it seems, but God's work does not depend on men. "God buries the worker, but carries on the work." Moses died, but Joshua is ready, and as soon as the thirty days are over the people cross the Jordan. Let us do our little part of God's work faithfully and well—that is all we have to do.

Moses died, but he is living yet. No one knows where his grave is, but it is not a grave that enshrines a man's influence. Think how Moses lives in the world—in the nation that he led out of bondage, trained, educated and founded; in the laws that he formed and gave to the world; in the institutions that he established; in the influence of his life among men and upon them. No grave of Moses is needed to keep his name alive. Let us seek to make our lives immortal, not in shafts and monuments, not in riches and earthly honours, but by making the world better, by putting touches of beauty into other lives, by teaching and blessing little children, by encouraging the weary and disheartened, and by comforting human sorrow. Then we shall need no grave, with its marble memorial, to keep our name alive. We shall live in the things we have done.

Some day people will be talking of our death and burial. We need not dread the end. Let us live faithfully while we live. Let us be indeed servants of Jehovah, servants of Jesus Christ. Let us give our lives unsparingly, withholding nothing that we

have to give. Then it will not matter what day or what hour God calls us apart and tells us our work here is done and that we are wanted at home.

“Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me:
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

“Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark:
For though from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.”

CHAPTER X

JOSHUA ENCOURAGED

Read Joshua I. 1-9

THE work of Moses was done and he was laid to rest. Now Joshua is called to take up the unfinished task. We need not fret and vex ourselves over having to leave things half finished, if only we are diligent and faithful in doing our duty while we have it in our hands. We have only our allotted task, and when that is done it is another's turn. We should not concern ourselves about what we meant to do and could not. It was not our duty at all, this part that remains. God looks after His work, and always other workers are ready to take up the things which drop out of the hands of His servants when they are called home or set aside. All we need concern ourselves with is the doing well of our own little part while it is ours.

The character of the work done by Moses and Joshua respectively is suggestive. Moses represented the law, and Joshua the gospel. Moses could not bring them over and into full possession

of their country. The law can bring us only to the border of salvation, to the edge of the spiritual kingdom. It cannot give us the inheritance, it cannot bring us into God's family, it cannot give us rest or peace or home. Then Jesus comes, the true Joshua, and leads us into the fullness of the promise. We cannot be saved by the law; it is but a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It leaves us still outside the door when it has done its best. "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

The story of Joshua's life is full of practical interest, especially to young men who are eager to rise to places of honour. Joshua attained highest honour, though he began in a very lowly way. He worked his way up, step by step, and did it, not by trick or cleverness, but by simple faithfulness in each position he was called to fill. He began as a slave in the brick fields of Egypt. Then he became a soldier when the cause of his people needed service in war; and as a soldier he was valiant, brave and loyal. By these qualities he rose, proving by faithful and effective service in the lower duties that he was ready for higher responsibilities. At length he became Moses' adjutant. Serving faithfully in this position, he was promoted to the place of Moses when that great leader died. There was no luck in Joshua's success. It was by simple faithfulness that he rose. He filled well every place in which he was tried. If he had failed as a soldier or as a subordinate officer he never would have

been promoted to the higher trusts which at last were reposed in his hands.

This bit of personal history ought to have its lesson for the boys and young men who study it. There is an impression abroad that success in life can be achieved by smartness, by strokes of good luck, or in some other way than by honest hard work and simple devotion to plain duty. There never was a falser idea abroad. The only way to rise to success and honour and to the higher places is by starting where God puts us and doing with faithfulness the humblest duties of our lot. Success is a ladder, and we must go up step by step to reach the top.

“The man who wins is the man who works—
 The man who toils while the next man shirks;
 The man who stands in his deep distress
 With his head held high in the deadly press—
 Yes, he is the man who wins.

“The man who wins is the man who knows
 The value of pain and the worth of woes—
 Who a lesson learns from the man who fails,
 And a moral finds in his mournful wails;
 Yes, he is the man who wins.

“The man who wins is the man who stays
 In the unsought paths and the rocky ways,
 And, perhaps, who lingers, now and then,
 To help some failure to rise again.
 Ah, he is the man who wins!”

It was a sharp, startling call that came now to Joshua. Moses was dead, and the people were

mourning for him. It was right to mourn for so good and great a man, but possibly Joshua and the people were allowing their grief so to absorb them that they were neglecting their duty; hence this call came to arouse them. Sorrow is not a duty of many days—the Lord's work is waiting meanwhile. There is a lesson here for all who are called to mourn the death of friends. They are not to sit down in inconsolable grief and spend the remainder of their lives in tears. They are to arise and take up the work that waits for them. Our duties do not fall out of our hands when our friends die. Our grief is not to be allowed to break up our work. Ofttimes, indeed, the death of a friend puts upon us new responsibilities and new duties. When a father dies the son is called to take up the burden that the father has carried heretofore. The death of a husband lays on the wife new responsibilities which she must now assume. There is a very important lesson in the ringing call: "Moses . . . is dead; now therefore arise."

The command seemed hard to obey. Joshua was bidden to lead the people over the Jordan into the land which God would give them. The river was overflowing its banks. There were no bridges, and no ferryboats plied between the plain of Moab and the plain of Jericho. How could they get over? Still the command was: "Arise, go over this Jordan." The land of promise lay beyond, and they could not get possession of it without crossing the

swift-flowing stream. So always for us the promised land of peace and blessedness lies beyond the river. We may feel that we never can go over, but there is a country of promise on the other side, and unless we cross the stream we never can set our feet upon it. God puts many of the best things of life, His best blessings, beyond rivers and roaring streams, to try our faith and to see if we are earnest enough to cross to get them.

Then we may always be sure that where God bids us to go we can go, and what He gives us to do we can do. Duty is never impossible. No commission is ever given to us that we cannot fulfill. "With God all things are possible," we often quote, but we sometimes forget that the meaning is "To us with God all things are possible."

The land of promise was God's gift to the people. They did not have to buy it from the previous inhabitants. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." He gave Canaan to Israel, and yet they had something to do in order to obtain it. They must take possession of it. It was all for them, but they would really get only so much of it as their feet trod upon—that is, as much as they conquered and took possession of. This same principle applies to all blessings of Christian faith. We are children of God, and all things are ours because we are God's heirs. But we really get only the blessings and privileges which we claim and make our own by actual occupancy. Here is a library of good books to which young people have

free access. The books are given to them, but only such books really become theirs as they make their own by reading and research. God gives us the harvests of the fields, but we must reap and gather them.

The conquest of Canaan was not easy. Yet the promise is that no one would be able to stand before Joshua and his army. The reason was that God would be with them and would help them to overcome. We all have enemies to meet in our spiritual life, enemies who are stronger than we are, more skillful and more experienced in fighting. But this same promise comes to every young Christian who has set out with Christ. "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee." The reason is that Christ Himself is always with each one who goes forth in His name. He never can fail or be defeated who is fighting under the banner of Christ.

Why is it, then, that so many Christians fail in temptation and fall? Does the Master sometimes withdraw himself? Or is he not able to help them in their difficulty? No; the trouble is with ourselves. Our faith fails, or our obedience, and then we faint before danger. God's help is always conditional—we must believe and obey if we would get it.

It is important to study the counsel given to Joshua. He was bidden to be strong and of good courage. He had a great task to perform, and he could perform it only by summoning all his powers. Weaklings and cowards never win any sublime vic-

tories. Every young man should learn to take hold of duty with energy and to stand like a rock in the face of all opposition and in the presence of all danger. A young man must learn that it is not enough to be good—he must be good for something. Many a good man never amounts to anything because he has neither energy nor firmness. Joshua's life is the best illustration of the counsel here given to him. He had strength of character and he was firm as the everlasting hills. Therefore he succeeded.

God gave Joshua assurance of final and complete success. He told him that he should divide the country among the people for an inheritance. This vision of final success must have been very inspiring to Joshua as he set out. It was no mere experiment to which he was going. His dream of conquest was no vague, uncertain thing, like too many of the dreams of human ambition. God had pledged him full success if he would do his part faithfully. It must many a time have been a great inspiration to Joshua in times of discouragement, when he remembered that he was destined to finish the work. He could not by any possibility fail. Every Christian has the same assurance as he accepts Christ and sets out to follow Him, and as he enters upon any new duty assigned by Him. There are hardships, obstacles and enemies. But he has the assurance at the very beginning that he will not fail in the end if only he is faithful. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

This should be a strong inspiration with every Christian. The way may be hard, but the promise is sure that we cannot possibly fail. Every one of us has a mission in life, a mission on which God Himself sends us. If we accept this mission and go forth on it in faith and with earnestness and fidelity we cannot fail.

There were conditions which were made very plain to Joshua. The book of the law was not to depart from his mouth; he must meditate on it continually and follow it implicitly. These always are the conditions of a true life and of any worthy success. We must study the book of God to find out what the will of God for us is. Then we must do His commandments. Only those who do the words of Christ are building upon the rock. Only he that doeth the will of God shall abide forever. Any success or prosperity which is reached by dishonesty or disobedience is only a dream which will vanish away and leave nothing behind.

“He fails who climbs to power and place
Up the pathway of disgrace.
He fails not who makes truth his cause,
Nor bends to win the crowd’s applause.
He fails not—he who stakes his all
Upon the right and dares to fall.”

CHAPTER XI

CROSSING THE JORDAN

Read Joshua III. 9—IV. 7

BEFORE crossing the river, Joshua sent spies to enter Jericho secretly and learn all they could learn about the city. The Divine promise that Jericho should fall into the hands of Joshua in a supernatural way did not make it unnecessary that due precautions should be taken by the commander, that he should learn all he could about the city. God always requires human diligence and faithfulness on the part of his people when he would do great things for them. The result of the visit of the spies made the Israelites braver and more confident. They learned from Rahab that the inhabitants of Jericho were afraid of Joshua's coming. They had heard what the Lord had done for the Israelites in other places, and their hearts had melted. This information gave fresh confidence to the Israelites.

Before the people crossed the river, Joshua gave directions concerning their provisioning. For forty

years they had been fed with manna. The reason for this was that bread could not be procured in natural ways in the wilderness. No food supplies grew in that desolate region. Hence it was necessary that special provision should be made. Daily, all the forty years, the manna fell. But now they have come out of the wilderness, and it would be easy to get supplies of food in ordinary ways. God never works an unnecessary miracle. Joshua provides, therefore, for victualing the host before they cross the Jordan.

The day before they were to move Joshua called the people to sanctify themselves. To-morrow they were to cross the Jordan. God would open the way for them, but they must be ready. If we would receive God's blessings, we must prepare ourselves for receiving them. God is willing to work through us and to use us as His servants, but we must be in condition to be used. To sanctify means to cleanse. God will not send His gifts to others in unclean vessels. It was ceremonial cleansing which Joshua required. With us the preparation should be in heart and life. Every morning as we set out for the day's duties we have promises of help and favour, but these promises are dependent upon ourselves. We must be in proper frame of mind and heart to receive the Divine blessing. We must be right with God.

We must have pure hearts and clean hands if we would work for God. When we go to God in prayer we must be sincere. If while we pray we are cher-

ishing sins unconfessed and unrepented of, we cannot hope that God will answer our requests. Jesus said that if we bring our gifts to the altar and there remember that our brother hath aught against us we must leave our gifts unoffered on the altar and first go and be reconciled to our brother and then come and offer our gifts. In one of the Psalms we are told that if we regard iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. No doubt the secret of many unanswered prayers might be found in sins cherished, or in bitter, unkindly feelings in the hearts of those who pray.

The ark was to be carried before the people as they crossed the river. The ark was a symbol of God's presence, and the meaning of this act was that God Himself would lead them that day as they went through the Jordan into the promised land. God is always ready to go before us. Indeed, we never can go anywhere safely, wisely or victoriously, unless He does lead us. To go without Him into life's experiences, struggles, dangers or duties, is to fail. There is something very suggestive in the way Joshua put it. When he gave the people their instructions about crossing the river, he said: "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Therefore they must keep in sight of the ark, which would be carried in advance. The same may be said of every day's experiences. We have not passed this way heretofore. The path is new and strange. We have lived thousands of other days, yet each new day presents an unknown path to us, a way over which

we never have gone. We know not what new experiences it may bring to us. We may meet sorrows, sore temptations, sudden trials. It will have its own problems, its own perils, tasks we have never had to do before. It will bring us to face sudden surprises of duty, of struggle, of responsibility, for which we cannot at the moment make any preparation. The only safe thing to do is always to keep the ark in sight and to follow it implicitly in faith and obediently. Then whatever it is that comes we shall be ready for it. One of the invariable marks of true Christians everywhere is that they follow Christ. Christ's sheep know His voice and follow Him, and He goeth before them. Young people should learn in their earliest years that Christ desires to be their Leader, and that every morning they may put their hand in His for guidance for the day.

It is essential that we have God's direction at every point in life. Joshua called the people to come to him and hear the words of the Lord before they crossed the river. He then assured them that they would have God's presence with them. "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you." The miracle of the crossing would be a pledge of unfailing guidance and full and final victory in taking possession of the new land. The crossing of the Jordan is a fitting type of the beginning of the Christian life. We hear the Divine call and go forward at God's bidding, and as we go He opens the way for us. We stand then on the edge of our

land of promise. It is ours with all its riches and blessings, and yet it is held by enemies and must be won by our own valour and faith.

God promised Joshua and the people that He would not fail to drive out the Canaanites, but it must be before them—that is, through their courage and valour. God promises to give us the victory, but we must do the fighting. He will bruise Satan for us, but it must be under our feet. We sometimes say: "I never can conquer the giants of temptation which are in my path. I never can gain possession of the blessings and privileges which are offered to me." This is very true if we have only our own strength. But God never intended that we should go against our enemies unhelped. He means to fight the battles for us. God would drive out the inhabitants of the country; so always it is God's power that expels the enemy. The promise is that we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

But someone reads on in the story and learns that the people of Israel did not drive out all the inhabitants of the land, that many of them were left and for centuries plagued and troubled God's people there. Yes, but the fault was not God's. The people made compromises with the old inhabitants and let them stay. They failed to make the thorough work of extermination they were commanded to make. They made compromises with the enemies of God. In many a fastness fragments of old tribes were allowed to remain. These unde-

stroyed Canaanites are types of the evils in our own hearts and in the world, which we are bidden to vanquish and utterly destroy, but which are allowed to remain. If we will go forward with strong faith, making no compromise, not one enemy shall be able to stand before us. The trouble is, however, that too often we are willing to let certain pet sins stay, thinking we can live with them. But in the end we shall find that all evils which are tolerated will become troubles to us and will mar the beauty and comfort of our Christian lives.

The manner of the opening of the river for the people of Israel to cross over is suggestive. The promise was that when the soles of the feet of the priests should rest in the waters, the waters should be cut off. The river was not to be opened while the people were yet in their camps, or even when they had come down to the banks of the river. They were to walk by faith, not by sight. The priests must take up the ark and bear it down to the river's edge, even stepping into the edge of the flowing stream, before the way would be opened. The people, too, must break camp, pack up their goods, form in line to march, and move down to the very banks before the river would be opened. This required strong faith. If they had come down near to the edge of the river and then had stopped for the stream to divide before they would step into it they would have waited in vain. They must take one step into the water before the river would be cut off.

We should not lose the lesson that is here taught. We must learn to take God at His word and go straight on in duty, although we can see no way in which we can go forward. The reason we are balked by difficulties is that we expect to see them removed before we try to pass through them, while the promise is that they will melt away only before our advance. If we would move straight on in faith, as if there were no hindrances, the path would be opened for us. We fail in overcoming difficulties many times because of our lack of faith. We stand still, waiting for the obstacle to be removed, when we ought to go forward, knowing that God will remove every barrier in the right way and at the right moment.

For example, death. People often tremble with fear when they think of dying. The truth is, however, that when the Christian moves quietly forward with faith, without fear, there is no river to be crossed. Some people are anxious because they do not have what they call dying grace. They read of certain Christians who have passed through the experiences of dying triumphantly. They say: "I could not do that. I have not grace enough to meet death in that way. I fear I shall fail in the hour of trial." But why should they have grace for dying when death yet lies far on in advance? There was no occasion to work the miracle of Jordan for the Israelites when they were still staying quietly in their camp. We do not need dying grace for

to-day's active life, but rather grace for duty, for battle, for patience, for holy living. Then when we come to the door of death we shall receive the grace we need for the dying hour.

CHAPTER XII

THE FALL OF JERICHO

Read Joshua VI

THE city of Jericho was at the entrance to the promised land. The people had now crossed the river, but Jericho stood as a great iron gate into the good country, and the gate was shut. They could not safely go round the city and leave the hostile stronghold behind them. It was necessary, therefore, that Jericho should be taken before they could advance.

This is a parable of many situations in life. Each man's own natural heart is a Jericho which is the key to all his life and to his destiny. Nothing can be done in the conquest of the man until his heart has surrendered. So long as Satan holds the key even Christ cannot reach any part of the man's being. Hence God asks always first for the citadel of our life. "Give Me thy heart," is His call. When He has this, all the life is open to Him.

It was a strange military procession which marched out of camp one morning and moved round

Jericho. We can imagine the people of the city looking at it from the walls with wonder. They could not understand the movement. Probably they laughed at the unusual procession—a few soldiers, then some priests with rams' horns, then more priests carrying a chest on their shoulders, then a few more soldiers. This marching column made no attack on the city, did not try to batter down the walls, only walked round and then returned to their camp. It really was not a military procession at all. Yet there was tremendous power in it.

But what was the use of calling out the men to make this daily march about the walls of Jericho? Since God was to give the city into their hands without any fighting on their part, why should they be called to do anything at all? For one thing, by doing the seemingly idle thing they were commanded to do, they showed that they believed in God. If they had not marched about the city the walls never would have fallen, and they would not have taken Jericho at all. The Lord's part waited for the people's. While all blessings come from God, we have something to do before they can be given to us. God gives us harvests, but we must till the soil and sow the seed. God has given us salvation, but we must have faith in His promise and must show our faith by rising up and beginning to follow Christ. He will give us victory over temptation, but we must put on our armour and go against temptation, as if the victory altogether depended

upon ourselves. Every promise of God has its condition, which requires us to exercise faith.

The march about the city was in silence. That was about the hardest part of the command to obey—to keep perfectly quiet all the time as they marched about the walls. There was to be no conversation on the way, no noises of shouting, until the work was finished. There are several suggestions here. We should not do our exulting when we are only halfway through with our battle, still less when we are only beginning it. We would better save our breath for struggle, until the work is finished.

Some people talk so much at their tasks that they cannot do them well. Some people boast too soon when the victory is not yet assured. Then there is, in general, much value in training one's self to keep quiet. Words are good in their place, if they are fit words, right words, but there are times when eloquent silence is infinitely better than the most eloquent speech. The command to march silently also required self-control. The men must have wanted to talk a great many times as they went on, but their lips were sealed and they suppressed the words they were inclined to utter and controlled their speech. We ought to have our speech so thoroughly under control that we shall never say anything rashly. Then we shall be able to check the angry word that flies to the door of our lips so quickly when we are hurt in some way by another. We never can estimate the value of any

self-discipline which results in perfect self-mastery. It is for want of self-control that many of our battles are lost and many defeats are suffered. He who can rule his own spirit is greater than he who takes a city.

There was a meaning also in the trumpets which the priests carried. The blowing of these trumpets may fitly represent the utterance of the gospel message as the Church of Christ goes forth to conquer the citadels of sin. This spiritual army carries no weapons of earthly warfare. "Put up thy sword," was the Master's command to those who were fighting with the sword. His marching-order is: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Not by the thunder of cannon and the rattle of musketry will He have us subdue the fortresses of sin, but by the trumpet-blasts of the gospel of peace. The means ordained may seem inadequate to the end to be accomplished, but it is not by might nor by power but by the Spirit of God that the work is to be done.

There is something else to be noticed here. Close behind the priests blowing the trumpets came the ark of God. This was the symbol of God's presence, the real power by which the overthrow of the walls of Jericho was accomplished. God's hand did it. We have the same secret of power in all preaching of the gospel. When Jesus commanded His disciples to go out and win the world for Him, His promise was: "Lo, I am with you always."

We need not fear to go against the strongest powers of sin. We have only to utter our message and the power of God will break down the walls.

For six days this procession moved in silence about the city, going round the wall once and then returning to their camp. These daily marches put the faith and patience of the soldiers and priests to the test. There seemed no possible good in such idle circling about the city. There were no indications, either, of any results, as day after day passed. The fortified walls frowned down upon them no less defiantly than at the beginning. There were no suggestions of surrender from within, indications that the courage of the garrison was wavering or weakening. Some of the brave men in the lines must have longed to make an assault on the walls. They wanted to be doing something soldierly. It was hard to restrain their enthusiastic patriotism. This marching round the city seemed like child's play. Yet day after day they had just the same seemingly useless thing to do. At length, however, patience had its reward.

In all our Christian life we need to practise this lesson. There is a great deal of dull monotony in all duty. It is the same routine over and over again, not for days only, or weeks, or years, but for a lifetime. Then there are many good works which it requires a long time to complete. That is the way character is built. It is not the growth of a night. It is not the result of a decision, a choice, a determination. We cannot merely will

ourselves into a beautiful manhood—we can only grow into it, slowly, patiently. A genial author has given us a new beatitude, “Blessed be drudgery,” telling us that we get all the finest things in our character and life out of the dull routine of the drudgery we too often despise. At first there is no apparent impression made, no visible result achieved, and it seems vain to try any longer. But perseverance wins at length. Had the people of Israel wearied of the monotonous and unavailing march about Jericho, and at the close of the fifth or the sixth day given up, all would have been lost. The Divine command was that the city should be compassed about seven days, and anything short of that would not have received the promise, for it would have shown a failure of faith. Success depended upon continuance to the very end. So it is in all Christian life and work. We must continue unto the end. We must carry our work through to the close if we would succeed in it. Many things fail in our hands because we tire and give up too soon. “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” Spurts amount to but little; it is the steady stroke and the long pull that at length come in ahead. The strongest wall yields to the pounding that never intermits.

The silence was broken at length—on the seventh day. Of course, it was not the shouting that knocked the walls down. Joshua says plainly: “The Lord hath given you the city.” The shouting was part of the obedience of faith on the people’s

part, just as the marching round the city was. If they had not shouted the wall would not have fallen. They obeyed God, and He did as He had promised to do. Before the walls fell these Israelites shouted in rejoicing over a victory that God was going to give them.

The story of the saving of Rahab is very interesting. It is a story of faith. The spies had told her of the promise of God to the Israelites—that the country of Canaan should be given to them. Rahab believed what they told her and showed kindness to the spies; indeed, saved their lives. Then she asked a pledge from them that they would show kindness to her when they came to take the city. The men promised. She was to fasten in the window of her house on the wall the cord by which she had let them down that they might escape. They would know her house by this sign and would spare her and her family. The men kept their promise, and Rahab was spared. We find her name in the first chapter of the Gospel by St. Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus. Thus faith was highly honoured. Its splendour shines down through all these long centuries. Faith is always blessed and always honoured.

We may get a lesson from the devotement of the spoils of Jericho. Nothing was to be touched—everything belonged to God. It is a great sin to take what has been devoted to the Lord and apply it to our own use. An eagle swooped down upon an altar and carried off a piece of flesh, flying with

it to her nest. But a coal from the altar had clung to the flesh, and this coal set fire to the nest, consuming it. So was it when one took of the spoil of Jericho, which had been devoted to God. A curse clung to the stolen treasure, and it destroyed him who took it. So it is always when we appropriate to ourselves what should be given to God—we get a curse with it.

CHAPTER XIII

JOSHUA AND CALEB

Read Joshua 'XIV. 5-15

THE story of Caleb is interesting. He was a man of the heroic type. He was one of the twelve men sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve spies brought back an evil report. They spoke enthusiastically of the wonderful richness and fruitfulness of the land of Canaan, but they were discouragingly impressed with the warlike character of the inhabitants, their fortifications, their armour, their military equipment and the fierce giants they saw among them. The feeling of these spies was that the Israelites were not strong enough to conquer the country.

Two of the spies, however, made a different report. They said that they could conquer the Canaanites. They had faith in God, who had given them the land and would help them take possession of it. The two believing spies were Caleb and Joshua. The people of Israel were dismayed by what the spies reported. Ten men by their unbe-

lieving words alarmed and discouraged more than two millions and led them to rebel against Moses and to seek to return to Egypt. The result was the sentence of death on the whole generation, that none of those who had rebelled should enter into the promised land. Joshua and Caleb alone were excepted because they had believed.

It was now forty-five years after the return of the spies. A new generation had grown up. At last the people were in the land of promise, and the country was being divided among the tribes. Caleb comes to Joshua to claim the portion which Moses had promised him. He is eighty-five years old, but he is every inch a man and a hero still.

Forty-five years was a long time to keep a promise in remembrance, but the old man had a good memory. Not only did he remember the promise, but he believed it. He had no thought but that the word would be fulfilled. We should remember what God has promised us, and in its own time expect it to be fulfilled. Often we forget the things the Lord hath said concerning us. Indeed, some of us do not seem even to know that God has ever said anything concerning us—has made us any promises. How can we know if we do not look into our Bible and search there for what God has said?

The memory of a good act is a sweet comfort to one's heart in after years. Caleb had been faithful when sent as one of the spies, and that good and brave deed when he was a young man was a joy to

him all through his life and in his old age. It would have been very much easier at the time just to vote with the majority of the committee of search and not to stand out alone, as Caleb and Joshua did. But the easiest way is not always the best way—it never is unless it is the right way. “Nothing is ever settled until it is settled right.” Sometimes the majority is wrong, and then it is far better to be in the minority and right, however small the minority may be, than with the wrong majority. Doing right always makes happiness in the end. It gives joy to the conscience, and peace in the conscience sheds a holy benediction throughout the heart and life. It makes sweet memories, too, through the after years. Caleb never forgot that day when he made a true and loyal report to Moses, while the other spies were reporting their cowardly fears. Forty-five years afterwards he speaks of it with great satisfaction.

All young people are making now in their bright and happy days the memories amid which they must live in their mid-life and old age. If they do wrong things, if they do evil things because the right things are hard and would require sacrifice, if they go against their consciences, they are making bitterness for themselves by-and-by. But if they do the right things at whatever cost, if they follow the Lord wholly, though they go alone, if they do brave, noble, unselfish deeds, they will walk all their after days in the light of their early faithful-

ness, and their hearts will be blessed with sweet recollections. George Macdonald puts it thus:

“Be noble—that is worth more than wealth;
Do right—that’s more than place;
Then in the spirit there is health,
And gladness in the face;
Then thou art with thyself at one,
And, no man hating, fearest none.”

The good thing in Caleb’s noble act was that he “wholly followed the Lord.” That was a great thing to do. It cost much at the time—it almost cost Caleb his life—but he never was sorry for it. There are too many who follow the Lord only partially. They follow Him while it is easy, while the crowd runs that way, while no great sacrifices have to be made, and no dangers encountered. But the moment the first hard pinch comes, when something has to be given up, when friends have to be parted with, when scoffs and sneers have to be endured, they falter in their following, drop behind, even turn back. That was the way many people followed Jesus when He was on the earth. One young man ran to Him and kneeled down, eager to be His disciple. But when the Master said: “Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor, and come, follow me, just yourself, empty-handed,” the young man got up and went away sorrowing. He wanted to follow Christ, but he could not accept such a condition as that. The only true way is to follow Christ wholly, with all the heart, without question,

evasion, hesitation or faltering, without abating one jot or tittle from what He requires. Lowell says:

“The longer on this earth we live
And weigh the various qualities of men,
The more we feel the high, stern-featured beauty
Of plain devotedness to duty,

“Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise,
But finding amplest recompense
For life’s ungarlanded expense
In work done squarely and unwasted days.”

Caleb remembered God’s goodness to him in keeping him alive all the years, until the time came for the fulfilling of the promise. When the Lord promises to give a man anything in the future, He always keeps him alive to get it. Caleb could not have died in the plague when the other spies died, nor in the wilderness when death was so busy among the tribes, when six hundred thousand men of the nation sank down into early graves. God had promised that Caleb should receive as inheritance a certain portion of Canaan, and no plague, no sweeping away of a generation, no accident of war, could touch his life until he had actually taken possession of his promised portion.

There is a similar illustration in the promise of God to St. Paul, in the midst of a terrible storm at sea. He was told that he must stand before Cæsar, and therefore could not possibly be lost in the storm. The life of every one of us is as truly and safely in God’s keeping as was Caleb’s or St.

Paul's. The Lord has His purposes for us, blessings waiting for us, and missions for us to fulfill in the future, just as really as He had for these men; and while we are waiting for these purposes to ripen, for the time to come for the doing of these tasks or errands, there is no disease and no missile of death that can touch us. "Every man is immortal till his work is done."

If God has a piece of work that a boy of to-day was born to do fifty years hence, that boy will be preserved against all accidents, pestilences and other dangers, until the time comes when he can do the work assigned to him. If a young girl of to-day is, according to God's plan and purpose, to live in a certain place twenty years hence, found a certain society, or establish a certain orphanage or school—if this is God's plan for her life—she will be preserved alive to fulfill the mission which God has marked out for her, if only she is faithful in doing the Divine will.

Another good thing in Caleb was that he claimed the promise when the time came for its fulfillment. "Now therefore give me this hill-country, whereof the Lord spake in that day." If Caleb had not come forward and asked that the promise should be fulfilled, he would not have got his portion. We must claim the things that God has promised us and must ask for them. If we do not care enough for them to ask God to give them to us and then also seek to obtain them, we must not be surprised if we fail to get them. People are all the while miss-

ing blessings, too, which are theirs by Divine promise and intention, simply because they do not ask for them. In the express-offices many packages, sometimes valuable ones, lie for a long time, and then are sold because the persons to whom they are addressed do not come to claim them. Sometimes great estates are left to heirs who never appear to claim their inheritance. In the spiritual kingdom there are many similar cases. There are promises of great good addressed to those who never come to claim them. There are inheritances of eternal life, the heirs to which never appear to receive them.

Another fine thing in Caleb was that he was not afraid of hard tasks. He did not seek easy things. He did not ask for an inheritance in some quiet valley, out of which the enemy had been driven. He asked for a mountain which fierce giants still held, saying that he would drive them out. Though he was an old man and had done useful service, he did not ask that he should be given a pensioner's bounty, that his portion should be cleared of incumbrance and given to him without any effort on his part to get it. He was willing to drive out the giants who held it, and with his own hands prepare it for his home. This showed splendid courage in the old man. Some people think of old age as a period in which a man cannot do much. But Caleb's old age was really one of the best portions of his life. He did not have to be nursed,

coddled and taken care of. He never did better work than after he was eighty-five.

Young as well as old should get an inspiring lesson from Caleb's independence in wishing to win his own portion. He said he would drive out the giants. We do not prize things that come to us without effort, without cost. Besides, God would have us show our faith by striving after the blessings. It develops our own powers and graces to have to fight to get possession of our inheritances. God puts the gold deep down among the rocks that we must dig and search for it if we would get it. He gives a man a farm, but the farm has to be cleared and cultivated before it is ready to yield its harvest. He gives a young man the opportunity for a fine education, but he must study hard to get it. He gives a young girl splendid musical talent, but it is only a talent, and to get it developed into its possibilities she has to spend months and years in weary practise. God gives us great grace, holiness, likeness to Christ, power in Christian work, meekness, patience, but we must struggle long with our old nature to obtain these gifts.

CHAPTER XIV

CITIES OF REFUGE

Read Joshua XX. 1-9

THERE has always been need for mercy in this world. There has also been need always for law, for the protection of men from wrong and cruelty. But in the infancy of the race there were no institutions of any kind. Life was most simple and primitive in the beginning. There is special interest in the subject of the cities of refuge because the establishment of these refuges is one of the first suggestions of the institution of laws for the securing of full justice in the case of a man who had killed another by accident, unintentionally. Previous to this the "avenger of blood" smote down, without reference to the circumstances, without any effort first to ascertain the manner of the slaying, the man who had caused the death of his friend. The provision for cities of refuge was not intended to shelter crime; it was meant only to secure justice by ensuring a fair and impartial trial. This provision in the Hebrew code is the germ of the laws

now in force in all Christian lands by which a fair trial is assured to every man accused of crime.

In directing that these cities of refuge should be provided, the Lord taught the people and the world a great lesson in justice. While God hates sin He loves mercy. Then nothing is more abhorrent to Him than that the innocent should be punished. Human life is very sacred in His sight. The original command, Divinely given, was that "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Thus God built a strong wall round every life. But the nations had perverted that Divine command until all justice was lost sight of. It might have been by the simplest accident that a man caused the death of another, perhaps of his best friend. Yet he was struck down by the avenger as mercilessly as though he had slain the other in cold blood. This new provision was appointed to ensure security against the occurrence of such fearful wrong and injustice.

We should notice that this merciful provision originated with God Himself, and was not a mere kindly thought of Moses. It was in the heart of God, also, that a thought of a refuge for the sinners of a lost and guilty world had its origin. It was because "God so loved the world" that "He gave His only begotten Son" to be the world's Redeemer. God loves to forgive. No words that rise to heaven from earth find such welcome as the cries of penitence. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." We find

the shadow of the same mercy in the heart of human fathers. A writer puts it well in these lines :

A child came to her father yesterday,
Wet-eyed and trembling-lipped, yet unafraid,
And pardon for some wrong deed sweetly prayed.
"I am so sorry," low we heard her say;
"Father, I did not mean to disobey."
Quickly the sorrowful father bent and smiled,
And drew her to his breast. Then, reconciled,
The little girl went singing on her way.
So, dearest Father, I, so old in years,
And yet a child in that I blindly do
Wrong deeds that hurt and grieve You every day,
Come, unafraid, yet trembling and in tears—
"I am so sorry I have troubled You.
Father, I did not mean to disobey."

Yet Divine mercy is not indiscriminate. We must notice carefully that these refuges availed only for "the manslayer that killeth any person unwittingly." They were not meant to shield the guilty. The heathen nations of those times had their temples, groves, altars and even cities, to which offenders might flee for protection. But in these no distinction was made between the guilty and the innocent. Even willful manslaughterers, murderers, might hide within the gates of these *asyla*, and there was no way to bring them to justice.

But there was no such indiscriminate and unregulated protection provided in these cities of refuge. They were designed to shield only the innocent manslayer. He who had killed another intentionally might flee to one of them, and the avenger could not then strike him down until he

had been tried; but when it was shown to the judges that the slaying had been a murder, premeditated, deliberate and intentional, the murderer was at once given up to receive just punishment. The intention of the whole arrangement was to shield the innocent and secure a fair trial to all.

In Christ there is the same mingling of justice and mercy. The refuge in Him is open for all sinners, and there is no one who ever can justly claim to be innocent; yet only those whose guilt has been washed away in the blood of the Lamb can find shelter even in Christ. No mercy is promised to those who continue impenitent. It is only to those who confess their sin and repent of it that forgiveness is assured.

There is an "avenger of blood" pursuing every one of us in this world. Conscience is every man's personal avenger—one we cannot get away from. There is no power anywhere so terrible as that of an accusing conscience. With its condemning voice it fills the boldest with dismay.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us."

The law is inexorable in its demands. There is no escape from its penalties. In a poem by Victor Hugo, Cain walks thirty days and nights after the murder of his brother, until he reaches the shores of the sea. "Let us stop here," he says, but as he sits down his face turns pale. He has seen in the

mournful sky the searching Eye. His sons, filled with awe, try to erect barriers between him and the Eye—a tent, then a wall of iron, then a tower and a city—but all is in vain. “I see the Eye,” still cries the unhappy man. At last they dig a tomb, and the father is put into it. But

“Though overhead they closed the awful vault,
The Eye was in the tomb and looked on Cain.”

Men hide for a time or may evade punishment for a season, but they cannot escape from the avenger. It is when we understand the terrible meaning of this truth that we are prepared to appreciate the glad word that announces a refuge from sin and from guilt. Christ is our refuge from the avenger.

The person who had killed another by accident had something to do to secure safety. “He shall flee unto one of these cities.” It would not do for him to stay just where he was, depending upon his innocence to protect him. He must flee, and flee with all his might, for he would find no protection until he had passed through the gate. If the avenger outran him and overtook him on the way he could strike him down. The city afforded him no refuge while he remained far away from it or even close to it, yet outside the gates. He must flee into it. He must not loiter on the way, but must make all possible haste to get within the gate, lest the pursuer come upon him. Christ is a refuge,

with the door ever open to the sinner, but neither is He a refuge to those who do not flee to Him.

Everything was done to facilitate the safe and swift flight of the innocent manslayer to the refuge. Much is said in the old Jewish books about the roads which led to these cities. They were to be broad and good, and were always to be kept in the best order. There must be nothing in them to impede or obstruct the flight of him who would reach the gate of the refuge. Then they were to be plainly marked with guide-boards, showing at every turning and wherever there was any possibility of the fleeing man making a mistake which was the right way.

All this illustrates the great pains at which the Bible is to show the way to God, and to make it plain, so plain that no one, not even the smallest child or the simplest-minded and most ignorant person, can possibly err in seeking the right path. Jesus says: "I am the way." He does not say merely that He will make a way, or point out a way, but that He Himself is the way. He is the way to God, the road on which men may walk to God. "No one cometh unto the Father, but by Me." This way has been prepared at great cost, and is so easy and so perfect that the feeblest foot need not stumble in it. Every obstacle has been taken out of it, every rough place has been made smooth, every hillock has been levelled down, every valley has been bridged over. Then at every turn there is a signboard telling which way to take to the refuge.

No one ever can say truthfully that he could not find the road to Christ.

There are a thousand paths in this world, leading in all directions, inviting us to walk in them. Some of them are flower-strewn, some of them lead among thorns. There are paths to pleasure, paths to honour, paths also to sin. But there is only one path that leads to blessedness. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

"So many, many roads lie traced
 Where wanderers may stray—
 Roads twining, weaving, interlaced,
 Roads sorrowful and gay.
 Running through countryside and town,
 They climb the mountain steep,
 Through storied realms of far renown
 Unceasingly they creep.
 When silver moonlight floods the nights—
 O hard! across the sea,
 These roads, the wanderer's delights,
 Are calling you and me,
Singing their challenge sweet and clear,
 For wanderers to roam;
 But, all at once, I only hear
 The road that leads me home."

When the fleeing manslayer had stepped across the threshold of the gate he was safe. The authorities dared not now give him up for punishment until he had been fairly tried. The avenger could not pass beyond the gates of the refuge to touch a hair of the head of him who had passed inside.

Neither can the law lay a hand upon him who has fled to Christ for refuge.

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
The righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

Another of the provisions for safety was that the man, even though innocent, who had found refuge in one of these cities must stay therein. He must not leave it on any pretext. If he wandered outside in the green fields, and the avenger found him anywhere beyond the walls, he was at liberty to strike him down. He had forfeited his right to protection.

Here again the analogy is suggestive. Christ is our refuge, but only while we abide in Him. It is not enough for us to run into this refuge once and register our names and then go out again, at liberty to run whithersoever we please. We must stay under the shelter if we would be secure. This means that a life of faith and obedience must follow the first coming to Christ. We must continue in Christ.

The distribution of these cities of refuge throughout the country was such that at no point in the whole land would a man be at a great or impracticable distance from one of them. If there had been but one such refuge—for example, in Jerusalem—it would have been so remote from some portions of the country that no one could hope to reach it in case of danger. But wherever one might be so unfortunate as to kill another by accident he

could by an easy flight reach safety in some one of the cities.

This represents the nearness and the accessibility of Jesus Christ to sinners. He is never far off, but always nigh. In the Book of the Revelation we are told that heaven is foursquare, with walls, and that on each of the four sides there are three gates. From all quarters, north, south, east, west, heaven is easily accessible to him who desires to enter into it. No one has far to go to find a gate into the place of love and safety.

CHAPTER XV

JOSHUA'S PARTING ADVICE

Read Joshua XXIV. 14-28

It is a good thing to get safely to the end of one's life, to have done its work well, to have been victorious in its battles, and to have kept one's self unspotted from the world. The true time to judge of a life is at its close, when the work has all been done. We cannot be sure of the final outcome until the very end. The very last step may be a false one. The last day may mar all.

Joshua's career was one of great strength and usefulness. His parting words to the people were full of wisdom. He saw that they were in danger of drifting back into the old life through the influences that were about them, and he calls them very earnestly to make a new start and to continue to be faithful to God. Joshua's words, spoken when he was about to leave this world, must have made a deep impression upon the people.

He calls them first to a renewal of their devotion to God. Evidently they were not blameless in

their loyalty, since he calls them to put away the gods which their fathers served and to begin again to serve the Lord. They could not do the latter until they had done the former. They had been enamoured of the sensuous worship of the heathen people about them, and Joshua tells them that they must break away absolutely from all that they have been adopting from this worship.

This lesson is for all worshippers of God. It is not likely that there are images hidden away in any of our homes, as there probably were in the houses of some of the Israelites when Joshua spoke to them. Yet there may be idols, nevertheless. Anything which we keep in our hearts in the place which God ought to have is an idol, whether it be an image of wood or stone or gold, or whether it be money, or a desire for fame, or love of pleasure, or some secret sin which we will not give up. If God does not really occupy the highest place in our hearts, controlling all, something else does, and that something else is an idol.

Joshua put the case very plainly before the people, telling them that they must make their choice. He did not mean that it makes no difference whether we choose to worship the true God or a false god. It does make an infinite difference. To leave God out of our life is to lose all. To be a true worshipper is to be in the family of God, one of His children, and to inherit all the blessings of Divine love. What Joshua meant was that this is a matter which must be settled by us for ourselves.

God does not compel anyone to love Him and obey Him. Joshua required the people to make their choice of the God they would serve. If it seemed evil to them to serve the Lord, they were told they must choose for themselves the god who would be a better friend to them than the Lord would. There are some people who think that serving the Lord is not the best thing. They look upon the Christian life as the turning away from all that is bright, beautiful, joyous and inspiring, and the burying of one's self away in a life of gloom and shadow. They think it would be a great mistake to make a choice of such a life in preference to the happy, unrestrained life of this world. But is this true?

Think a little of the blessings which the service of God brings—pardon, peace, the sense of God's favour, Divine help at every point, precious promises for every experience, victory over every enemy, the Divine love and companionship. Set over against this inventory that which this world has to offer—a few pleasures, with thorns for a pillow afterwards; a few cups of indulgence, with bitter dregs at the bottom; a few victories which yield no permanent result; a few gains which leave the hands empty at the last; a life of unrestraint and license which in the end binds the soul in chains; a dark death-hour, and a hopeless hereafter. Of these two pictures, which is the evil one? It surely does matter whether we choose God or not, whether we believe or doubt, whether we go in

sin's ways or God's. William Dean Howells puts unanswerably the question "What shall it profit?"

"If I lay waste and wither up with doubt
 The blessed fields of heaven where once my faith
 Possessed itself serenely safe from death;
 If I deny the things past finding out;
 Or if I orphan my own soul of One
 That seemed to me a father, and make void the place
 Within me where He dwelt in power and grace,
 What do I gain that am myself undone?"

We must settle the question for ourselves—each one for himself—the question of how we shall live and what we shall do with God. No one can choose for us, not even God Himself. Joshua called the people to make choice then and there whether they would serve God or idols. Of course, we owe allegiance to God as our only rightful Lord and Sovereign, and we never can throw off this allegiance. We may refuse to recognise it; we may live on as if there were no God anywhere in the universe, giving Him no love, no obedience, no worship; but we do not thereby get clear of Him or of His claims upon us. We may disregard His laws, but we shall find ourselves at last fast bound in their penalties. In this sense there is no liberty of choice between God and Baal. Still we must make a choice. God never compels allegiance. He tells us what our duty is, what His claims are, what He desires of us, and shows us the blessings of obedience and the cost of disobedience. But we are free to decide for ourselves whether we will

serve Him or serve the world. We cannot serve both. It must be the one or the other.

It is only the devoted life that can go safely through this world's ways of temptation. The heart that is fixed with absorbing love upon God will not be attracted by the fascinations of the world. A Tamil parable relates how a father condemned his wayward son to carry through a crowded street a shell filled with oil. Following him were two men with drawn swords, with orders to cut off the boy's head if he let fall a single drop.

Upon returning, the father said: "What did you see, my son, as you went through the streets?"

"Nothing, my father."

"Why, this is our market day, with all kinds of wares displayed."

"Why, father," said the son, "my eyes were all the time on the oil in the shell."

It was this that saved the boy's life. Had his eyes wandered once, the oil would have spilled, and he would have been slain. It was Christ who said: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." If with all our heart and with intense earnestness we follow Christ, we shall not be greatly troubled by the evil things about us.

Example is always most effective in leadership. There is little use in our telling people to go where we ourselves are not willing to go, or to do what we are not ready to do. But Joshua asked no decision from the Israelites which he himself was not ready to make. He said: "As for me and my house,

we will serve the Lord." What he would do was not dependent upon the people's decision. If they all went in the wrong path he was going in the right path.

It is a noble thing to be able to stand up in the face of all the world and dare to do right, though all the world do wrong. This is a courage that every person needs in these days. "No matter what the crowd does I will do my duty. All the boys smoke, but I am not going to smoke. All the others go to evil places, but I am not going. All the others swear, but I will keep my speech reverent. The crowd is running after sin, but I am going to cleave to Christ though I am the only follower Christ has."

It requires unusual moral courage to be true when all others are false; to be honest when all others are dishonest; to keep one's life pure and clean when everybody else is drifting away into impurity, to be alone in our faithfulness. The true thing to do in all circumstances is not to ask what any other one is going to do, but to ask what God wants us to do, and then fearlessly do that.

We do not know, either, what our choice means to others. There is always somebody waiting and wavering in making his decision, who will decide as you do. Then you do not know the influence of your true, beautiful life in the world, in the midst of the evil and the blackness that are everywhere. It gives hope when hope is nearly dead. One was speaking of being almost driven to the belief that

no one is true, that everyone is false, and then there came under observation one plain, lowly life which in varied and most trying experiences proved sweet, lovely, true, keeping itself unspotted and never failing in any testing. This life saved the person from utter doubt. There was one who was faithful, and this one life restored faith in the power of Christ to save unto the uttermost. We do not know what it will mean to the world for us to be faithful and true.

“Sometimes the world seems black with shame and dole—
The grimy haunt of sin-smirched, evil men;
Then shines; the unstained whiteness of your soul,
And all the earth is clean and fair again.”

It is not easy to serve God. We cannot serve Him at all unless we come out and break with the world. Joshua said to the people that day: “Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God.” He meant to say that they could not serve God without giving up the idols which so many of them were secretly worshipping. We cannot serve God and keep our sins. We cannot serve God and the world.

Turning away from God always brings trouble. “If ye forsake the Lord,” Joshua said, “He will turn and do you evil.” We cannot keep our sins and enjoy the favour of God. He is always a God of love, but He is also a God of justice, and His attitude towards men is either that of mercy or of judgment, according to their attitude towards Him. If we are true to the Lord and do His will, we will

find in Him mercy and grace. But if we rebel against Him and serve other gods we shall find in Him wrath and severity. If we want the Divine favour and blessing we must do God's will.

The people were deeply impressed that day by Joshua's strong words and renewed their covenant with God. Then Joshua reminded them that they themselves were the witnesses of their own covenant. "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord." We all are witnesses against ourselves if we do not faithfully follow God. There will be no necessity of calling other persons to stand at the bar of judgment to bear testimony against those who have not obeyed nor served God, or those who have promised to obey Him and then have broken covenant with Him. Every man's conscience will witness against him if he has been unfaithful. It will testify that he knew his duty and did it not; that God called him again and again, and he heeded Him not; that he sinned against his own soul, resisting and crushing under his feet the sense of right that was in him. No one in a Christian land who is now living in sin needs any outside witness to condemn him. He remembers a mother's prayers and teachings, and all the gentle influences of a loving home. He remembers the family altar, where in childhood he daily bowed before God. He remembers his own promises, made in life's solemn moments, that he would yield his heart to Christ and follow Him. Such memories are witnesses against everyone now living in sin

whose youth was passed amid holy scenes and Divine impressions.

The outcome of this teaching should be the making or renewing of the covenant with God by everyone who studies the words. That is, we should choose at once, finally and irrevocably, whom we will serve—whether God, the God of love and grace and truth, or evil, with all its darkness and bitterness.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CURSE OF MEROZ

Read Judges V. 1-23

IT was in the days of the judges. The Israelites were suffering sore oppression under their ancient enemies, the Canaanites. Deborah was raised up as a deliverer. She called Barak, a brave general, to her aid, and an army of ten thousand men was gathered. With this host, Deborah and Barak went against the army of Sisera and were victorious. Sisera's horses and chariots were put to flight and his men slain in battle. Sisera himself, after playing a timid and unsoldierly part, was slain by a woman, who drove a nail through his head. Thus a great victory was achieved under Deborah's leadership of her people.

In this battle nearly all the people were loyal and enthusiastic. They "willingly offered themselves." But there were some that held back. One village, or hamlet, in particular, is mentioned which took no part in the effort to cast off the oppressor's yoke. When the call for men went forth over all the country, the call to patriots to arise

and come to battle with the foe, Meroz did not respond. In Deborah's song of victory after the battle occurs this solemn anathema: "Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

What was the cause of this curse? What had the people of Meroz done? They had not joined with the enemies of the country. They had not harboured the foe within their gates. They had not spoken disloyal words when the nation was in danger. They had only not come to the battle when the call rang in their ears. Almost the whole land responded. From north, south, east and west they came—the patriot Israelites—to help drive out the enemy and bring deliverance. But amid this universal outpouring there was one place from which no soldier came. The curse was for not doing.

The story is old, but the lesson is always timely. Every good cause is the cause of God. The battle is forever going on in this world, and the trumpet is evermore sounding, calling men to the help of the Lord against the mighty. It is not enough not to be against the right, the true and the good; God wants us to come to His help in every contest. Not to act for God is to act against Him. "He that is not with Me," said the Master, "is against Me."

"Stand upright, speak thy thoughts, declare
The truth thou hast, that all may share;
Be bold, proclaim it everywhere;
They only live who dare."

We are not told why the inhabitants of Meroz did not come to help in the battle that day. We may think of several possible reasons: It may have been from cowardice. Perhaps the men of Meroz feared to go to battle against such strong and cruel enemies. However it may have been that day, there is no doubt that the cause of the inaction of many men in the Lord's work in these times is moral cowardice. No man wants to be called a coward. It is an insult to his manliness. Yet moral cowardice is a great deal more common than most of us would like to confess. Too many people are held back by it from faithful service for Christ. Men are not brave enough to be peculiar, to stand out alone, to wear their colours where other people do not wear them. They do not take an active part in Christian work because somebody would laugh or sneer.

Or the inhabitants of Meroz may have thought there were so few of them that they could be of little use, and that it was not worth while for them to go up to battle. "We cannot do anything to help. We are not warriors. We could not add to the force of the army. We may as well stay quietly at home."

That is the way many Christian people talk about the Lord's work. They have no talents. They would be no strength to the good cause that lacks assistance. They are not talkers, or they have little money to give, or they cannot do any church work. So they stay in their tents and come not to the help of the Lord. Their conscious littleness is a burden

to them. It is a large tribe—this tribe of Meroz. We find them everywhere. They are not of any use to God, because they think they could not do anything, and therefore fold their hands and sit still.

Israel won the battle that day without the men of Meroz. But it might easily have been that the absence of a handful from the ranks had caused defeat and disaster. There are times when the failure of one person to do his duty in his place has brought disaster to a cause. Miss Havergal tells her experience in a girls' school at Düsseldorf. When she entered the school she discovered that she was the only Christian in a company of a hundred. Her sensitive heart shrank from confessing Christ there. What good could it do? One little voice for Christ could not make itself heard amid all the din of worldliness and triviality. Her second, better thought, however, was: "I dare not hide my religion. I am the only one Christ has in this school to represent Him among these girls, and I dare not hide my light. I must own myself Christ's friend."

No one can tell what a loss it would have been to the cause of Christ if this one young girl had not come to the help of the Lord in that school. Perhaps you are the only one Christ has at some particular point, where your failure to come to His help would cause irreparable hurt to His Kingdom, perhaps be the occasion of the perishing of a soul. You are the only one to stand for your Master in

your home, in your class in school, in the office or store where you are engaged.

In our schoolbooks we have read of the boy who, one evening at his play, found a little leak in the dike that walls the sea off from Holland. He stopped the leak with his hand till help could come, calling meanwhile as loudly as he could. But no one came, and all night the boy held his hand to the place and kept back the floods. Soon the tiny stream would have washed a wide break in the dike, and the waters would have poured over fields and homes. All night long there was nothing between the sea and the ruin of the people's homes but a boy's hand. Suppose the boy had failed? Suppose he had said: "I cannot do anything. I am not able to keep back these floods"? Who can measure the disaster that would have followed his failure?

Do you know that your life may not stand, any quiet day, and be all that stands between some great flood of moral ruin, and broad, fair fields of beauty? Do you know that your failure in your lowly place and duty may not let in a sea of disaster, which would sweep away human hopes and joys?

"One small life in God's great plan!

How futile it seems as the ages roll,

Do what it may or strive how it can,

To alter the sweep of the infinite whole!

A single stitch in an endless web,

A drop in the ocean's flow and ebb!

But the pattern is rent where the stitch is lost,
Or marred where the tangled threads have crossed;
And each life that fails of its true intent
Mars the perfect plan that its Master meant."

Or even if it would make no difference to the cause of Christ whether we do our part or not, it makes infinite difference to ourself. You remember the cost to the man with one talent of his failure to use his talent. He lost it! It was taken from him. Not using our gifts, however small, is the sure way to the losing of them. The penalty of usefulness is the loss of the power to be useful. Meroz was cursed because her people came not to the help of the Lord. The battle was won without Meroz, but Meroz never got again what it lost that day.

Or the inhabitants of Meroz may have stayed back from sheer indolence. They had their own little affairs to attend to—their vineyards, their gardens, their fields. They were comfortable in their pleasant homes among the hills. They were interested in the saving of their country. They hoped that Deborah would conquer and that the cruel yoke of the Canaanites would be thrown off. But almost everybody was going to the battle, and the people of Meroz felt sure that victory was certain without them. So they self-indulgently kept out of the conflict, stayed at home and looked after their own personal interests. They seemed to be saving their lives and sparing themselves much cost and loss and sacrifice. Yes, but when it was all

over, when the battle had been fought and the victory won without them, this curse rang out: "Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty." This was the outcome of the self-saving of Meroz.

No doubt if the thoughts of men's hearts were read it would appear that much of the uselessness of people's lives could be traced to this cause—self-indulgence, unwillingness to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. We are all the time in serious danger of living for self, of putting our own affairs first, of neglecting the duties which we owe to others, of withholding ourselves even from service and sacrifice for Christ. The centring of our thought and effort on self is always a fatal error in any life and brings a curse with it.

It is easy to allow self-indulgence to come to rule in our habits. Others need us, but we are busy with our own affairs and are not willing to put ourselves out to help them. That was the trouble with the priest and the Levite on the Jericho road. They did not want to give up their time and to be at the expense and pains necessary to assist the wounded man. Who does not oftentimes commit the same mistake? We see about us those who are in need, perhaps of spiritual help, perhaps of help for the body. But to do that which is required we should have to miss some engagement, some good time, some season of rest, to give up some ease or gain or comfort or pleasure of our own. There is a little strug-

gle in our heart, and then we decide that we cannot turn aside from our own business, or give up our own convenience, or make the self-denial. The result is that we come not to the help of the Lord. We have saved our life. We are spared the discomfort or the sacrifice. Our hands are not soiled with the rough work. We have our money still in our pocket. But as we go back to our self-seeking pursuits we hear the words ringing out: "Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord." We have saved our life, but we have failed God and received a curse instead of a blessing.

CHAPTER XVII

GIDEON AND THE THREE HUNDRED

Read Judges VII

GIDEON is one of the most interesting characters of his time. The days were troublous for the people of Israel. It was their own fault, too; they had sinned and thus had lost God's protection and help. Our first glimpse of Gideon shows us the condition of the country. He was beating out wheat in a hidden wine-press, instead of in the midst of an open field. He was trying to keep out of sight of the Midianites, for if any of them saw him threshing out his scant harvest they would steal it all.

One day an angel of the Lord was seen sitting under a tree in Ophrah. Whether Gideon recognised his visitor as a heavenly being is not clearly apparent. If he did he certainly was not startled by his coming to him as usually people were when they saw an angel. Gideon talked to this messenger very naturally. Perhaps the angel wore only a human form, although later he is spoken of as the Lord Himself. God is always coming to us, though

we know it not. William Cullen Bryant said he thought of everyone he met as an angel in disguise. We may go further and think of everyone who comes to us as God Himself. It would change the meaning of life and give a new sacredness to all our meetings with others if we did this.

The angel began his conversation with Gideon with a cheerful greeting: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Gideon was a modest and plain man who probably never had thought of himself as having any special ability. The best men are least aware of their own greatness. No wonder Gideon was surprised and abashed by the greeting. God always sees the best that is in us. He recognises the power that slumbers in our brain and heart. He knew the grandeur of character that was waiting for development in this sturdy farmer. The greeting of the angel was not, therefore, an idle compliment. Gideon was a mighty man of valour and the Lord was indeed with him.

Yet evidently Gideon was not happy that day. He was not in a cheerful mood. The troubles in the country had disquieted him. The angel's words, "The Lord is with thee," did not seem to describe his condition. "Oh, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then is all this befallen us?" There did not appear to be much evidence of God's presence or favour in the condition of things then prevalent in the country. The people were suffering grievously from the enemies who were doing them such harm. It seemed to Gideon that if God really

JUDGES VII

was the friend of His people He would show friendship in a more kindly way. He did not seem to be present with His people as He had been in former days. "Where are all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of? . . . Now the Lord hath forsaken us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midianites." This same question is often heard in our own day. If God is our Father, why do we have to suffer so much? Why do we have so many losses and disappointments?

Instead of answering his complaint, the angel spoke to Gideon a startling word, calling him to become his people's deliverer. "Go in this night, and save Israel from the hand of Midianites. Have not I sent thee?" This is oftentimes the Divine answer to our fears and questionings concerning our troubles. Instead of fretting over our disasters, it is ours to set to work to repair them. God does not want us to yield to what is hard or discouraging in our experiences, but to pray for courage and strength to rebuild what has been torn down.

It is a Divine Being that now speaks, and Gideon is awed. He shrinks from the call that has come to him. It did not seem to him possible that he should deliver his people. "Oh, Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Gideon's humility was commendable, but we need never fear that God has made any mistake when He calls us to a duty. It may seem too great for our powers, but it is not really so. He who calls

GIDEON AND THE THREE HUNDRED

shows what we can do. Besides, He never sends
alone on any errand. "Surely I will be with ^{thee}
and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one ^{man}
'

Now we see Gideon at the head of his men, en-^{camped}
circled by the spring of Harod, about to meet the ^{Midianite}
Midianite host in battle. "The people that are ^{with}
thee are too many," said the Lord to the com-
mander. If with such a force they were victorious,
they would boast of their own valour, and would ^{not}
give God the glory. One of the greatest dan-^{gers}
to which poor, vain human nature is exposed is
conceit. God takes many ways of making us ^{humble}
humble, for there is no human feeling that is more <sup>in-
sulting</sup>
insulting to Him than pride. Sometimes He al-^{lowed}
lowed us to be defeated—that is the way He cured ^{Peter's}
Peter of his amazing self-confidence. He let him ^{fall}
fall into the hands of Satan to be sorely beaten.
Peter never boasted again of his own strength and
his ability to stand. After that he was one of the

Many times God pursues precisely the same
course with us that he did with Gideon's army. He
weakens our strength until we are reduced to ab-
solute powerlessness, and then He gives us the vic-
tory. Jacob was lamed before he overcame the

wrestler and got his new name. But his lameness was his strength. It meant less of Jacob and more of God. The true secret of spiritual strength is a consciousness of weakness on our own part, leading to full dependence on the Divine help. When we get to this point God is ready to give us victory.

“The best men, doing their best,
Know peradventure least of what they do;
Men usefullest in the world are simply used;
The nail that holds the wood must pierce it first,
And He alone who wields the hammer, sees
The work advanced by the earliest blow. Take heart.”

It is interesting to study the way God thinned out Gideon's army. Though He wanted only a few men to fight the battle, He wanted the best. He would not show His power by giving the victory to cowardice and inefficiency. So the first thing He bade Gideon to do was to weed out the incompetent. There were twenty thousand cowards in that host, men who were willing to confess that they were afraid, and these were sent home. They would have been no strength, only weakness and peril. One coward may make a whole battalion cowards. The ten thousand men would be stronger alone than the thirty thousand with these timid ones still remaining. Many a church would be stronger if it were weeded out just as Gideon's army was. Its weakness lies in its great numbers, not because numbers necessarily weaken, but because there are so many half-hearted people on the roll, people who are not ready to make sacrifices, to en-

dures suffering and loss. One irresolute and vacillating man may make a score of other men irresolute and of little use as witnesses for Christ and the truth. Men of courage are needed, and there would be new strength in sifting out the ranks. There are too many in our churches who would withdraw if they could from the army of the Lord in the time when it is no longer easy to be faithful. They have lost their hearty interest, if they ever had any, and are indifferent, cold, without the spirit of true consecration, mere hangers-on.

A great commander tells the story of one of his men in battle. In the hottest of the fight this soldier saw a frightened rabbit running with all its might through the bushes. "I would run, too," the man cried, "but for my character." He would not be branded as a coward, and so for his name he stood at his post. It ought to make us brave in our loyalty to duty to remember that only by being faithful unto death can we win the crown of life. Even their character was not enough to keep Gideon's men from confessing that they were afraid to go into battle.

It was an amazing thing that the Lord said to Gideon after twenty-two thousand cowards had gone away. Certainly the army was small enough now—ten thousand to meet a countless host in battle. But the Lord said: "The people are yet too many." There were two reasons for this further sifting. God would remove the last ground for boasting from the people themselves. Then He

would still further sift the quality of the men, rejecting many who were brave enough but lacked other elements of the highest soldierly character. God oftentimes thins the ranks of His Church when he wants some great work done. Christ kept the number of His disciples small by continually presenting the hard demands of the service He required of His followers. He declared that he who would come after Him must take up His cross. He talked about the baptism with which He had been baptised, and asked those who proposed to follow Him if they were able to accept that. When ardent, enthusiastic men came, offering to follow Him whithersoever He would lead them, Jesus spoke of His homelessness—the Son of man hath not where to lay His head—and asked: “Can you accept that for your worldly expectation?” So it came at the last that he had only twelve apostles (and one of these turned traitor and sent Him to His cross), and a little handful of faithful women who clung to Him with loyal love. With that holy band He conquered the world.

The method of testing the men in this second reduction was remarkable and very suggestive. “Bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there.” The men themselves did not know that they were being tested. God is always trying us, trying us when we do not dream that He is. He never entrusts anything into the hands of anyone until He knows that the person will do it well. So He tries His servants beforehand in such

ways as will reveal their fitness or unfitness for the duties required. These trials are being made when we are doing our simplest duties, when we are quietly moving about in the common walks of life. Here the way the men drank water from the brook was the test of their fitness for the work of conquering the Midianites. It seemed to make the smallest difference in the world how a soldier might drink, whether by bowing down with his face in the water or by lapping up the water with his hand as he stood; yet it was a difference which settled the question of fitness or unfitness for the great work before the army, because it revealed an essential quality of true soldierliness.

It is in just such little ways and in just such matters of everyday and commonplace conduct and manner that God is always testing us and deciding whether we are fit or unfit for the greater works for which He wants men. By the way a boy lives at home, by the way he treats his parents, by the way he performs his duties at school, by the spirit he shows on the playground, by the diligence or want of diligence which he displays in the store or the office where he is first employed—by the way he acts in all these relations and duties, the question is being settled to what greater work or responsibilities the Lord will call him in after days. In a large business institution at the last New Year one young man missed his promotion because the timekeeper's records showed that he had been coming in a few minutes late a good many mornings.

He was one of the best young men in the place, did excellent work, had ability and skill, was trustworthy and faithful, but he had fallen into the habit of coming in frequently two or three or five minutes behind time, and it cost him his annual advance. He was angry, and talked about unfairness, but he had only himself to blame.

The testing goes on almost automatically in all life. A young girl, by the way she deports herself in her girlhood, at home, in school, at play, in society, and in all her experiences, is settling the place in life which she will fill in the days of womanhood and strength. God is always trying us and selecting the men and the women He wants for the important duties of life from those who stand the test well. This should make us careful how we live and act every moment, for we cannot know when these tests are being made, or what future honour and glory may depend on the way we do the simplest and most commonplace thing to-day.

“The man who wins is the man who stays
In the unsought paths and the rocky ways,
And, perhaps, who lingers, now and then,
To help some failure to rise again;
Ah, he is the man who wins!”

After all, the test at the brook was not a mere arbitrary one, but revealed the kind of men these soldiers were. Gideon was to watch how they drank and to choose only those who lapped as a dog lappeth. This showed alertness and watchful-

ness. They did not take time even to fall on their knees to drink. That might be a moment of surprise from the enemy which would mean defeat and disaster.

Little things test character, little things done unconsciously. Character is revealed in the way people walk, in their handwriting, in their handshaking, and in all the familiar actions of everyday life. A coarse jest tells of coarseness in the nature. Thoughtlessness anywhere shows a character lacking in noble quality. Carelessness in little things reveals a careless man. There are boys with a careless habit. They think they need not always watch. It will be a small matter if they omit one duty, if they trifle just one hour, if they waste one day. Yet the trail of the one neglect may follow them to the end.

"The day is done,
 And I, alas! have wrought no good,
 Performed no worthy task of thought or deed.
 Albeit small my power, and great my need,
 I have not done the little that I could,
 With shame o'er forfeit hours I brood—
 The day is done.

"One step behind,
 One step through all eternity—
 Thus much to lack of what I might have been,
 Because the temptress of my life stole in,
 And rapt a golden day away from me,
 My highest height can never be—
 One step behind.

"I cannot tell

What good I might have done this day,
Of thought or deed, that still, when I am gone,
Had long, long years gone singing on and on,
Like some sweet fountain by the dusty way,
Perhaps some word that God would say—
I cannot tell."

CHAPTER XVIII

RUTH AND NAOMI

Read Ruth I

THE Book of Ruth is one of the most delightful pastorals ever written. It is full of charm and beauty. It is related, whether on indisputable authority or not cannot be positively stated, that on one occasion when Benjamin Franklin was living in Paris as American Minister to France this pleasant incident occurred: One evening, so the story runs, there was a great gathering of distinguished literary people, at which Franklin was present. He was asked to contribute in some way to the enjoyment of the company. Drawing from his pocket a little roll of manuscript he explained that in a very old book he came upon a beautiful story, one which had greatly interested him. He said he would like to read this story to the company, if they were willing, as his contribution to the exercises of the evening. He then read the little story of Ruth.

There was not one of those present to whom it

was familiar, and no one had any thought of the source from which it had come. All were loud in their praise of the story, agreeing that it was the most charming pastoral ever they had heard, and all were eager to know the name of the book in which it had been found. When Franklin told them that the story was from an old book called the Bible they were amazed that a volume so despised should contain any piece of literature so delightful.

Some time during the period when the judges ruled, there was a great famine in Canaan. A man of Bethlehem, by name Elimelech, took Naomi, his wife, and his two sons and went to the country of Moab to escape the famine. Soon sorrow entered the home—Elimelech died. Comfort came again in due time. The two sons married. There may have been an element of bitterness in these marriages for the mother, for the wives were Moabitish girls, and the Israelite law forbade marriages with foreigners. Evidently, however, the mother quietly accepted the disappointment. Ten years of happy life followed, and then again sorrow came. Both the young men died. It was a sad home in which the three bereft and lonely women dwelt.

Then Naomi, hearing that the famine was over in Canaan, resolved to return to Bethlehem. Her heart still clung to the old home land, and now that none of her own loved ones were left to her she felt the loneliness in the land of Moab very keenly and longed to go back to the scenes of her

earlier days. Both Orpah and Ruth expressed their desire to return with Naomi. This speaks well for Naomi. She must have been a good woman to win her daughters-in-law to herself in such devotion.

The chatter of parlours and social circles is full of jibes about mothers-in-law. The newspaper paragrapher likes to write bright and cruel things on the same subject. A great deal of injustice is done to mothers-in-law by these flippant words. The impression is made that a true, sweet friendship between son-in-law and mother-in-law is impossible. The impression is most unjust and untrue. This relation is oftentimes one of sweet and tender affection. There are daughters-in-law who have no more faithful or unselfish friends than their husbands' mothers.

This story of Ruth and Naomi shows that there may be such holy friendship. It may be said that these were exceptional women. Naomi must certainly have been an ideal mother-in-law to win the heart of the young and beautiful Ruth as she did, and to hold her to herself so indissolubly. She must have been most discreet and self-restrained. We may be sure that in the sacred wedded life of her son and his wife she never intruded with her advice nor intermeddled with her suggestions. This is one relation in life into which even the gentlest and best beloved mother may not press her claim for confidence nor interpose her counsel. We are quite sure that Naomi was a most wise and unselfish mother-in-law.

Ruth, too, must have been an ideal daughter-in-law. She must have honoured and loved Naomi. She must have pitied her sorrow and brought to her in her lonely widowhood all that her sweet young life could bring of sympathy, of cheer, of patient thought and tender care, and of helpful kindness. She must have taken the unfilled place of an own daughter in Naomi's life, in all honour, affection, humility, confidence and dutifulness, bringing to her in her grief and brokenheartedness truest strength and comfort.

So warm a place had the Israelitish mother won in the hearts of her daughters-in-law that they could not bear to have her go away from them and were willing to break all their own home ties and to go back with Naomi to her old home.

At first both the young women set out to go with Naomi. They all went some distance together. Perhaps at first their thought was only to go with her a little way to see her off, as friends often do with one who is departing. But when the time came for them to return, they both declared they could not part from Naomi, but would go back with her to her own country. She told them what sacrifices they would have to make if they accompanied her. They must give up whatever there was beautiful, hopeful and joyous in their own home and country, and would have only poverty, desolateness and sorrow for their portion in the land of Israel, since Naomi had nothing to promise them. She was very honest with the two women. She would not

have them return with her thinking they would find wealth, ease and joy there.

Orpah hesitated. She had warm affection for Naomi and did not want to tear herself away from her. The memories of her dead husband also bound her to the noble mother-in-law. But as she stood there on the border and looked forward and back, her courage wavered. Behind her were country, home, hope, friends; before her were poverty, toil, sorrow in a strange land. She hesitated, she wept, she decided, she kissed the mother-in-law she had learned to love, and said farewell to her, turning back towards the old home.

We may take some lessons from Orpah while we watch her walking sadly back towards her own country. She illustrates much human friendship. It is devoted up to a certain point. So long as loyalty costs little it cleaves with fondness and tenderness. But it is not ready to give up pleasure or profit, so it turns back. You can get plenty of people who will be your friends while you have favours to dispense, and while attachment to you makes no draft on their money or their ease, nor breaks into their selfish enjoyment. But when friendship means forgetfulness of self, when it will cost something to cleave to you, they have only tears and regrets, and turn away and leave you.

Orpah also illustrates a class of professed friends of Christ. We see some of them in the story in the Gospels. There is one, for instance, a rich young

ruler, who came running, who was very eager and earnest in his desire to follow Jesus, but who did just as Orpah did. He was told that he must give up all, sell all he had and distribute among the poor, and then go empty-handed into a path of hardship, self-sacrifice and service with Jesus. He heard the conditions, he weighed the two alternatives—staying at home and keeping his money, his position, or going with Jesus and giving up all. The struggle was hard, for he loved the Master and wanted to go with Him, but he loved himself and his money still more. He stood hesitating, looking both ways, and then made his choice, and with tears said farewell to Jesus.

There are many such followers in every age. They want to be Christians. They have some conception of a better life. They have some love for Christ, and while no severe and costly self-denial is necessary they follow Him. But when they come to the borders of the old natural life, where they must give up everything and go out with their new Master on paths of toil, cross-bearing and personal sacrifice, like Orpah, with sorrow they go back to their gods and their possessions, while Jesus is left to go on alone.

The story of Ruth, however, is altogether different. She saw all that Orpah saw of the cost of going with Naomi to the country of Israel. She heard all that Naomi said about the sadness of her future—that she had nothing to promise her daugh-

ters if they went with her. Ruth knew well that she was leaving all, and so far as human eye could see was choosing only a life of sacrifice and sorrow. Yet she never wavered for a moment. She saw Orpah turn homewards, but her own resolution weakened not. She clave to Naomi.

Ruth illustrates true human friendship. Her strong and faithful love for Naomi caused her to cleave to her with an unwavering and unalterable attachment. She did not stop to count the cost of constancy and fidelity. She did not look forward to ask where her devotion to Naomi would lead her, into what sacrifice or loss. Her love for Naomi was such that she would cleave to her, though it should lead her to death.

All love is measured by what it will do or give or suffer or sacrifice. Ruth's love stood the sorest test. Ruth illustrates friendship for Christ. Orpah loved, wept and went back. Ruth loved, wept, and clung. Christ's true followers cling to Him, though He leads them into paths of poverty, trial and cross-bearing. They do not stop to consider the cost of faithfulness. They make choice of Christ without conditions, and where He goes they follow Him. Christian history is resplendent with the names and stories of countless friends of Christ who have followed Him at the cost of all their personal comfort, pleasure and profit.

Ruth's words of devotion are very beautiful. Professor Moulton sets them in the form of poetry:

“Entreat me not to leave thee,
And 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 I will die,
And there will I be buried;
The Lord do so to me,
And more also,
If aught but death part thee and me.”

This is a noble formula of faith for every friend of Christ. Wherever Christ goes we should go. We are to attach ourselves to Him so closely, so faithfully, so unalterably, that we shall never ask into what experiences He is taking us, whether it will be pleasant or not, whether it will be easy or hard. We must simply cleave to Him and follow whithersoever He leads.

We make choice, also, of Christ's people when we choose Him. We cut ourselves off from our old ties if they are not Christly, our old friendships if they are still in the old life, and we take Christ's people as ours henceforward. We enter a new family, with a new name, a new hope, a new home. If we follow Christ we must identify ourselves with His Church and friends, separating ourselves from the world. We must take God to be ours, giving up our idols and yielding our hearts fully to the Lord.

Naomi had many sorrows. When the people welcomed her back to Bethlehem their words were like mockeries on her ears. “Call me not Naomi, call

me Mara," she said, referring to the bitter things she had endured. The belief in those days was that when people had peculiar sorrows the Lord was punishing them for peculiar sins. "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me," she said. Christ brought better comfort than Naomi found. He assures us of God's love in our sorrows and teaches us not to be troubled. Those who have Christ for their friend may learn to rejoice even in their sorrows, finding blessing and good in loss and trial.

Dr. Whyte says: "The women are so delightful in this delightful little book that there is no room left for the men. The men fall into the background and are clean forgotten." Yet Dr. Whyte extols Boaz as a man who ought not to be forgotten and the lessons from whose life ought to be impressed and remembered. Boaz is one of the truest gentlemen who ever lived. He is courteous to his people and his servants. He is kind to the poor. He is as chivalric as any knight. He is hospitable and kind. There is no slightest blemish on his name.

When we read the story through to the close we have a revealing of the blessing and comfort which God brought to Naomi and to Ruth after all their sorrow. Ruth never was sorry for the choice she made and for her sacrifice in giving up her own country for Canaan. Choosing Naomi's people and Naomi's God, she found human friends, a home, an honoured place in the nation, and she herself

became a link in the ancestry of Jesus Christ. Those who choose Christ are exalted to high honour in the family of God in this world and also in heaven.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BOY SAMUEL

Read I. Samuel I. 1-28; III

WHEN you know a good man you will nearly always find that he had a good mother. Samuel had one of the truest and best of mothers, and we owe a great deal to her—we owe Samuel to her, and Samuel was one of God's best gifts to the world. Hannah did not have an easy life. It is never easy to be a wife and mother, with the cares of household life. But the hardness of Hannah's life was not caused by the toils and tasks of her home. Her husband had another wife—in those ancient days this was permitted, though never approved—this was one of Hannah's heavy crosses.

One can scarcely think that any woman could be a comfort to her husband's other wife. Even the utmost saintliness could hardly be expected to make two wives of one husband loving and congenial companions. But the other wife in Hannah's home does not appear to have been saintly or meek in any remarkable degree, and therefore Hannah did

not find much joy in her companionship with her. "Her rival provoked her sore, to make her fret." It grieved Hannah that she had no children. Her husband loved her deeply, but her heart cried out also for the love of children. It seems strange to us that the woman who had not the true gifts of motherhood, whose temper and spirit unfitted her for caring for children, should be entrusted with the responsibility of bringing up children, while the woman who was nobly qualified for caring for and training children should be childless. But this same condition prevails in all departments of life. We cannot understand it nor explain it, but we may trust the Divine wisdom and love.

Hannah's prayer was at length answered. We are ashamed of Eli's misjudging of the woman who was seen praying so earnestly near the tabernacle door. The old man lacked in tenderness and in spiritual perception. The intensity of her pleading was misunderstood. He thought she must be drunken and rudely told her so, speaking harshly to her. But she explained that she was not drunken, but only sorrowful. Then the priest gave her his blessing. Many good people are misunderstood and blamed for things as faults which really would appear as marks of honour and beauty if only they were understood. They accused Jesus of being of low and unworthy tastes, habits and life, because He showed a friendly spirit to publicans and sinners, while when rightly understood this was one of the very glories of His character.

Hannah, when she prayed that she might be the mother of a son, promised to give him to God. "I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." She did not forget her vow and promise when the child was born, but dedicated him to God for His service.

The story of the child Samuel is full of interest and beauty. It is a favourite with children. Samuel was given to God by his mother when he was born. That is what every Christian mother should do with the baby that is laid in her arms. It is God's child more than hers. The mother of Samuel not only gave her boy to God, but took pains to have him brought up for God.

For a time Samuel was kept under his mother's care in her own home. That was right. A baby could not have been properly nursed and taught and cared for in the tabernacle. He needed his mother then. The mother is the best teacher of infancy. While Elkanah's family went up devotedly to the feasts, Hannah stayed at home and took care of the boy God had given to her. It may be a mother's duty sometimes to miss the public services of the church that she may in her own home do God's work for her children. It certainly may be her duty to miss many social functions and to deny herself many public calls and enjoyments that she may do her mother's part well. Other duties may be partly hers, but her duties to her children are hers alone. She cannot excuse herself for failure to do them by claiming that duties of philan-

thropy, of charity, of education, of politics, or even of religion took precedence. Hannah never was sorry that she missed the great public feasts to be a faithful mother to her baby.

At an early age Samuel was taken by his mother and handed over to the care of Eli. That was part of what was implied in giving him to God. He lived in Eli's family, growing up in the tabernacle. There he "ministered unto the Lord." He may have lighted the lamps, opened the doors and closed them, swept the apartments and performed personal services for Eli. Children can begin very early to minister to the Lord. They do this when they live obediently and sweetly at home, doing the tasks that are there given to them. Those who do things for any of Christ's people in His name are serving Him. This makes it easy to minister to the Lord, for there always are people about us who need the offices of kindness and help, and even a child may find opportunities of doing many services of love in Christ's name. Jesus found His "Father's business" for thirty years of His life in simply helping at home.

Then there are other ways in which children can minister to the Lord. In most churches there are mission bands where boys and girls may learn to do things for Christ. They can minister also by bringing to the Sunday-school other children who do not attend. Then even the least and most commonplace kindnesses done in Christ's name are min-

istries, just as beautiful and as acceptable as the largest and finest things that great people can do.

At this time there were but few revealings of God to the people. "The word of the Lord was precious." It is not surprising that God chose a child to whom to speak. He sends many of His most sacred messages to us through little children. Parents train their children and teach them, telling them the words of God, and the story of Christ's beautiful and holy life. At the same time, however, the children teach the parents many things. A child's innocence rebukes the sin of those who are older. Its faith rebukes our doubt and our questioning. Its humility rebukes our pride. Its freedom from worldly ambition rebukes our ceaseless striving to be great before men, to secure social recognition, and to achieve rank and fame. Jesus once set a little child in the midst of His disciples and used the child as a text for a sermon to them. If we but listen we may oftentimes hear God speaking to us through a little child.

God's call to Samuel was unusual. The boy heard his name spoken as if by a human voice. The Lord calls every child at some time and in some way. Sometimes the call is from without, sometimes from within. In the mother's teachings, in the Sunday-school, in the minister's sermons, in the words spoken by a friend or written in a letter, in some book, in some startling event of Providence, as the sickness or death of a schoolmate or neighbour—in these and other ways the call of God

comes from without. Then there is a voice that speaks within the heart, which every child hears. If we listen to this voice and obey it, it will always speak clearly and will guide us right. But if we disobey it, it will fade out little by little, at last leaving us in the dark without a guide. It is a wonderful thing to have the Divine guidance in this world. We should be exceedingly careful that we do not refuse it or reject it.

Samuel did not understand who it was that had called him. When he heard his name he arose and ran to Eli, and said: "Here am I; for thou calledst me." So it is many a time with all of us—we do not know it is the Lord's voice; we think it is only a human call we have had. Indeed, many of God's calls and biddings come to us through human lips. God speaks through the mother, or the teacher, or through Providence. We think it is only the voice of human love we hear, and do not understand that the words are Divine though the tones are human. Children and young people may get a lesson here from Samuel. He instantly and cheerfully answered the call which he thought had come from Eli. Thus he showed how he would have answered if he had known He had called him. No duty is more important in children than that of habitual obedience—prompt, unquestioning, cheerful, full.

At first Eli himself did not understand that the Lord had called the child. As the call came again it dawned upon him that some supernatural voice

must have called the boy. So he told Samuel that if he heard his name called again he should answer: "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." Ofttimes our children come to us with their deep questions. They have heard new and strange voices, and they want us to tell them what the voices mean. Many of us never suspect that we cannot answer them. Would it not ofttimes be better if we said to them what Eli said to Samuel: "Go, and wait in quiet faith, in listening attitude, looking up to God and asking Him to tell you whatever He would have you learn"? We are in danger of meddling in the sacred intercourse that goes on between God and the souls of others. We assume too often to speak for God and to explain God's messages. There is no doubt that God often speaks to little children. A father writes touchingly of the death of a little child. In a children's paper that came to the home there was given a child's prayer for sick children:

"Jesus, with thy tender care
Bless sick children everywhere;
Keep them patient in their pain;
Make them well and strong again."

Very soon after the paper containing this prayer came, this little girl fell very sick. The prayer had already made a deep impression on her. She kept it in her mind continually. Her illness and suffering lasted a whole month, and over and over again in her pain she would repeat the simple prayer, evidently praying for herself with other

sick children. Her parents were so deeply impressed by Catharine's use of the prayer that it will always be sacred to them and ever associated with the memories of her last illness. The little paper that brought the prayer to the child just when it meant so much to her was heaven's messenger.

The attitude of Samuel to the call of God was very beautiful. "Speak, for thy servant heareth." He was ready to hear whatever God would say. This should be the response of every one of us when God calls us. We should be quick to listen to whatever our Father has to say to us, for it is always something worth hearing, something which it will be a great loss to us not to hear. Too often people turn away their ears so that they will not hear what God has to say to them. We rob ourselves as well as sorely dishonour God when we do this. We should be ready always to hear, and thus should put ourselves in the attitude of acquiescence, prepared to accept and obey whatever God has to say to us.

The message which God sent to Samuel was a startling one. Eli's sons, the Lord said, had brought a curse upon themselves and others, and the father had not restrained them. These sons had grown up among the most sacred influences. The very atmosphere of their home, the tabernacle of God, was ever fragrant with the perfume of incense and sacrifice. They were brought up also to assist their father in his priestly work. It would seem that with such a home, such a father, such

influences about them, and such employment at God's altar, they could not be otherwise than pure and holy. Yet how different is the picture we see! They grew up "base men; they knew not the Lord."

The truth taught in God's words to Samuel is that Eli himself was in great part to blame for his sons' wicked lives. He had not been firm enough in his home government. He had not restrained his sons when they first began to do evil things. He had let them alone, never thinking, perhaps, that they could turn out badly, being the sons of a priest and living in the Lord's House. Now, when they had become men, he could not restrain them, for they had got beyond his power. There was a time when he could have kept them from straying and directed their feet in right paths, but now he had lost his opportunity. No words of his, however urgent, could win them back to beauty and holiness.

Sometimes boys think their parents are too strict with them and restrain them too much. Here we see a father who let his boys do what they pleased, not restraining them when they were young; but what came of it? Any honest, manly boy can see that it would have been far better for Eli's sons themselves if their father had trained them strictly. No one ever regrets in mature life that his youth was well disciplined.

CHAPTER XX

SAMUEL THE JUDGE

Read I. Samuel VII. 1-13

SAMUEL grew up from very young childhood in the House of the Lord. The atmosphere was good in a way, although we cannot think of Eli as really a very good man to bring up a boy. The priest who could speak to a praying woman as Eli spoke to Hannah when she was pleading with God, we cannot think of as having a sweet and beautiful spirit. He certainly was lacking in gentleness and in all the elements of graciousness. Dr. Whyte thinks Eli never forgave himself for his hasty words to Hannah, and that the memory of his insulting language gave him lasting bitterness. Possibly, however, this made him all the gentler to the boy Samuel in the effort to atone for his unpardonable roughness and rudeness to the boy's mother.

Then Eli was not successful as a father in his own family. His sons did not turn out well. Indeed, they were wicked men. One hears a good many unkindly things said of ministers' sons, but

the truth is the majority of them grow up into worthy and useful men. Now and then, however, a minister's family or members of it are not what they should be. Eli's sons certainly did dishonour to their father's name. They were brought up amid the holy influences of the House of God, but "knew not the Lord." Writers, trying to account for this, say it was because their father was away from home so much, attending to his duties as judge, that he had no time to look after his own home affairs. It is bad when any father is so busy looking after other people's matters that he neglects his children. Eli was a failure as a father, and the result was most pitiful.

We might say that Samuel did not have a good chance for a godly bringing-up in such a home as Eli's. But there were other influences that counteracted what was wrong in Eli. Samuel's mother visited her son at least once every year, and no doubt instructed him. A good mother's influence over her boy is well nigh omnipotent. Then we know that very early Samuel was called by the Lord to begin his ministry as a prophet. So God Himself became Samuel's teacher. He trained him to be a prophet and established him in his place. He was a noble patriot, a wise ruler, a faithful friend, a true-hearted man.

When Eli was very old his people went to war against the Philistines, who had long been their enemies. This battle was most disastrous for Eli and the Israelites. When they were in danger of

defeat the leaders sent for the ark, hoping it might turn the tide. But it availed not. Israel was beaten, the people fled, there was a great slaughter, the ark was taken, the sons of Eli were slain. When the news was carried to Eli, the old man sat waiting. The messenger told the story of the disaster item by item—the defeat, the flight of the soldiers, the great slaughter, the death of Eli's two sons—but when he said: "The ark is taken," the aged priest fell backward, his neck broke, and he died.

When Eli was dead Samuel became the judge. He comes before us in a time of great trouble. The ark has been returned. Samuel calls upon the people to return to God. Samuel was a noble patriot, a wise ruler, and a true-hearted man. In the incidents of his life given in the history, Samuel appears often in the attitude of intercessor. He did much of his work as judge on his knees. It is a great thing to have a friend on close and intimate terms with God, to pray for us when we are in trouble or when we have sinned. We do not know what blessings come to us through human intercessors. Nor should we forget that we have another intercessor, our great High Priest, who in heaven makes continual intercession for us.

When Samuel called the people to return to God they began right—they said: "We have sinned against the Lord." The first step in returning to God is to make confession of our sins. Until we have done this we cannot be forgiven, and until we

are forgiven there can be no restoration to the Divine favour.

In the story of Paradise and Peri, in Lalla Rookh, nothing would open the gates of heaven for the exiled spirit until she found a weeping penitent, and catching a tear from his eye brought that to the angel-warder. The tear of penitence was the most precious thing on earth. If we have sinned, there is no gift we can bring to God that is half so precious in His sight as a penitential tear. It will open heaven's gates to us when all the gold in the world or all the good works of a hundred lifetimes would not cause it to move on its hinges.

No wonder the Israelites were frightened when they knew the Philistines were coming against them. They had suffered terribly in the past at the hands of these enemies. Their faith was yet weak in its new beginnings. But in their alarm they did the right thing—they turned to Samuel and begged him to cry to God for them. They knew that they could not save themselves from their fierce and cruel enemy, and that help must come from God. That man is a fool who is not afraid of sin. Especially if one has been long under the power of some sin and is trying to get away from its clutches is he a fool if he has no dread of it and thinks himself able to meet it in his own strength. We have no power of our own to break sin's power and to deliver ourselves.

Recently the papers told of a man who in some way stumbled into a swampy bog beside the sea,

when the tide was flowing out, and sank almost to his neck in the salt mire. It was night, and there he lay, his head merely above the surface, unable to extricate himself. For a time the waters continued to flow away, but by-and-by they turned and began to flow towards him. Weak, faint, bewildered and unconscious, he lay there through the darkness. Morning dawned and the tide was still rising. In a few minutes more it would sweep over his head and bury him forever in the fatal swamp. A workingman hurrying on his way to some early duty, walking on the railroad trestle, saw a man's head in the bog, with the water up to his chin. He hastened to his rescue, and with difficulty extricated him from his perilous position. Had not help come that hour the poor man must have perished in the swamp. He had no power to fight the mighty oncoming tides, with all the great sea behind them. Just as helpless is a human life in the grip of sin and temptation, with only its own strength to meet the enemy. The only hope is in God.

Samuel began with an offering. He took a lamb and offered it to God, and then prayed. The way to God is by the blood of the Lamb. Sacrifice comes before intercession and prepares the way for it. After he had offered the lamb, Samuel was ready to pray for help from God. When we seek help from the Lord in our dangers we do not need to bring a lamb to offer, for the one great Offering has already been made. Christ, the Lamb of God, has been slain, and His blood has been sprinkled on the

mercy seat. Now we need only to come in His name. Yet we must not forget that there is no other way of acceptance, and that if we do not plead the blood of the Lamb we cannot receive any help.

The Philistines had no thought of being afraid of the Israelites, knowing how weak they were. They did not realise that a reinforcement had come to them; that God Himself was fighting their battle that day. No earthly enemy can stand before God. The Israelites in their weak and broken condition could not have beaten the Philistines, but it was nothing to the Lord to defeat them. He heard the prayer of Samuel for them and sent help. He is the same God to-day, and is just as able to give deliverance now as He was that day. We need never be afraid of any enemy if we are abiding in Christ.

The victory was complete, and Samuel set up a stone, calling it Ebenezer, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." This was not only to mark the place, but to honour God, who had wrought the deliverance. It is well to set up memorials on the spot where God has done some great thing for us. Where was it that you first met Christ and formed with Him the covenant of life and peace? Where was it that you were delivered from the power of some great temptation? Should not all these places be remembered? It will keep alive the gratitude in your heart.

The conquest over the Philistines was complete

and final. This troublesome enemy was conquered, the captured cities were retaken, peace was made with other nations, also, because of the favour of the Lord that rested upon Israel. When one has truly repented and returned to God, as Israel did here, God gives blessing and favour. Old enemies have no more the power over them they once had. Temptations once mastered through the Divine help have no more the same terrible strength as before. Then, as he enters upon his new life, the victorious Christian gets back again the lost powers that sin had taken away from him in the days of his wandering. When God has taken an erring one back into His favour and fought the battle with sin for him and got the victory for him, it is easier for the man to live afterwards. He lives then on a new plane. He is no longer a weary, struggling, broken man, but a victor, strong, hopeful, courageous, with the power of God resting upon him, and the grace of God in his heart. It makes a vast difference in living whether we are the poor slaves of the Evil One or have him under our feet.

Samuel was the greatest of all the judges of Israel. His character was spotless. Dedicated to the Lord in infancy, he never departed from the Lord. Samuel was strong in his moral character. His left hand did not tear down what his right hand had built up. He was a manly man, courageous and firm, as well as good—

“A tower of strength that stood foursquare,
To all the winds that blew.”

His influence was not gained by the sword, but by the power of truth. He was a prophet and teacher, and taught the people the Word of God. He delivered them not by victories in war, but by leading them back from their wanderings to new allegiance to the Lord. Instead of weakly allowing idolatry to spread through the land, he made himself felt as a force against all idolatry, cleansing the land of its false worship and restoring the worship of the true God. Eli saw the results of his long life all swept away at one terrible blow; Samuel had the joy of seeing his work stand and the nation rise into noble power and influence under his rule.

CHAPTER XXI

ISRAEL ASKING FOR A KING

Read I. Samuel VIII. 1-22

It was when Samuel was old that the people began to talk about wanting to have a king. It takes a great deal of grace to grow old sweetly and beautifully. It is not always possible to carry the alertness and energy of young manhood into advanced years. There is much talk in our days about the "dead line," which seems to be set down at about fifty. It is not easy for a man who has crossed that line to get a position in business. Yet if we live wisely and rightly all our lives, old age ought to be the best of life. We certainly ought to make it beautiful and good, for our life is not finished until we come to its very last day.

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made;
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned;
Youth shows but half; trust God;
See all, nor be afraid!'"

We ought to be wiser when we are old than ever we have been in any former years. We ought to have learned by experience. We ought to be better in every way—with more of God's peace in our hearts, with more gentleness and patience. We ought to have learned self-control and to be able to rule better our own spirit. We ought to have more love, more joy, more thoughtfulness, to be more considerate, to have more humility. The man in us should be taller, stronger, Christlier. Old age never should be the dregs of the years, the mere cinder of a burnt-out life. One may not have the vigour and strenuousness of the mid-years, but one should be every way truer, richer-hearted, better. If the outward man has grown weaker, feebler, the inner man should be stronger.

We expect to see a good man's sons reproduce their father's nobleness and worth. They ought to walk in his ways. They ought to continue the life he has begun, to carry on the work he has started, to keep his name bright and add to its lustre. A father has lofty hopes for his sons. He dreams brilliant dreams. He expects his sons to be the true inheritors of all for which he has toiled and sacrificed. It is a bitter disappointment to him when they fail him, when they are not ready to be his successors, when the business he has built up passes to other hands because they cannot continue it. Samuel's sons "walked not in his ways." They had enjoyed every advantage. Their father had set before them a godly and consistent example. Samuel

was not like Eli. To the very close there was not a single stain upon his name. There is no evidence, either, that he had failed in parental discipline, as Eli did. Yet in spite of all these advantages and privileges Samuel's sons had forsaken the paths in which they had been brought up. Goodness is not hereditary; it does not necessarily descend from father to son. The fact that one has a good parent does not guarantee goodness in the child. A father may bring up his boys most carefully, and yet he cannot compel them to follow after God, and they may turn entirely away.

Samuel's sons loved the world. The record says they turned aside after lucre. It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup. Many young men who would have lived well in lowly places fail when they are promoted to positions of power. The sons of Samuel were not able to stand the temptations which office brought to them. Political positions are always full of peril. Many men who are upright in private life have proved unable to resist the temptation to dishonesty in official places where money passed through their hands. Money seems to have been the root of the evil which destroyed these sons of Samuel. Even in those rude times there were men who were willing to pay for legislation or for judicial decisions, and these men prostituted their offices to the love of gain and sold their influence for money.

It is pathetic to see Samuel's old age saddened by the corruption of his sons. The children of good

men owe it to their parents to live so as to bring honour and blessing upon them in their declining years. There are many ways of doing this, but the best is by living noble, beautiful lives, and being such men and women as their parents will be proud and happy to own before all the world.

There seems something most ungracious and ungrateful in the way the elders of Israel came to Samuel to tell him of the people's desire for a king. "They said unto him, Behold, thou art old." The elders meant that Samuel's old age made him incapable or inefficient as a ruler. It was a broad hint to him that he would better lay down his authority and let them choose some other ruler. They seem to have forgotten that he had grown old in their service; that he had given his whole life to the cause of the nation, and that they owed him whatever of grandeur or real glory there was in their land. Their conduct towards Samuel was ungrateful in the extreme. This fault is too common in our own days. We are lacking in reverence to the aged. We are too ready to ask them to step aside when they have grown grey in serving us, to make room for younger people to take up the work they have been doing. We ought to venerate age, especially when it has ripened in ways of righteousness and self-denial for the good of others. No sight is more beautiful than that of a young person showing respect and homage to one who is old.

Yet there is another view of the case that we may not overlook. Old men cannot always retain their

places. They must give way to others, who in turn shall take up the tasks they have done so long. The old ought not to be afraid of the young. The oncoming host should not terrify them. When we have done our part well we should be glad to surrender our places to those who may carry on the work we have begun. All any man can do is a little fragment of a great work, the laying of a few stones on the wall. We succeed others, and others will succeed us. The old must recognise this law of life and should neither grieve nor complain when they are called to surrender their places to make way for those who will come after them.

There are few severer tests of the Christian spirit than this, and the old need special grace and a large measure of the mind of Christ, in order that they may meet the experience sweetly. The lesson of gratitude and deference towards those who have served well is greatly needed, but so also is the lesson of submission and resignation in those whose work is complete. Sometimes an old man, after a life of nobleness and great usefulness, mars the beauty of his record by the ungracious way he leaves his place. If he is wise and recognises the Divine law for advancing age he will retire in such a way as to crown his work by the beauty of its closing and make the influence of his last days a holy aftermath, in which the best things of all his years shall continue to live in the glow and ripeness of love.

The demand of the elders was very explicit:

“Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” They wanted to be in the fashion. They were growing tired of their plain, old-fashioned kind of government, and longed for the pomp and splendour which other nations had about their government. At the bottom of it all, however, was a discontent with what God had given them, and a feeling that what others had was better. Besides, there was a worldly spirit which craved to be in the world’s parade and fashion. This same spirit is still alive. There are many professing children of God who look longingly at the world’s fields and sigh to get over the fence to try the world’s enjoyments. Many Christians are not satisfied with the spiritual things of grace for their portion, but crave to have what the world has. The hour was a very trying one for Samuel. He was displeased. Yet his conduct was very beautiful. This request of the people for a king hurt him sorely. It was a painful slight upon him. After all his lifetime of service they had asked him to step aside because he was getting old. Samuel knew also that they had made this request in a wrong spirit—that they were also slighting God and rejecting Him.

The natural thing for Samuel would have been to answer the elders sharply, and tell them in plain language what he thought of their request. But instead of this, notice how nobly he bore himself. He would give no answer at all until he had carried the whole matter to the Lord. When others hurt us by their sharp speeches, by their ingrati-

tude, or in any other way, or when they are about to do us harm by their acts, our first duty is prayer. God is far more deeply concerned in any matter that concerns us than we ourselves can be. We do not know what His will may be about it. Perhaps the things we think should not be done at all He may want to have done. Perhaps He wants us to submit to the wrong or the injustice. Perhaps our part in the work has been completed and God Himself would have another take our place. At least, we should always carry every such matter to Him and ask what His will is before we give any answer or do anything in return.

The example of Samuel in this case teaches us important lessons. The lack of gratitude and graciousness in the people and their elders did not affect Samuel's bearing in the matter. We must be Christians, however unchristianly others may have done their part towards us. Then God had far more concern in the change the people desired than Samuel had. They were setting Samuel aside, but they were also setting God aside. It often happens even in church work that persons have to be superseded. They are not altogether satisfactory, and it seems wise that a change shall be made. Or there is personal animosity in the desire. Whatever the motive, we should never resent such changes, if they apply to us, but should accept them sweetly and cheerfully as Samuel did.

The Lord bade Samuel to let the people have their choice in the matter of the king. They were

persistent in their demand, and God let them have their own way. The thing they asked for was not pleasing to Him, and yet it was granted. God sometimes grants men's prayers, even when what they ask is not really the best thing for them. He sometimes permits things which He does not approve. Even God, with all His omnipotence, does not compel us to take His ways. We can resist Him if we will. According to the prophet Hosea, God says: "I gave Israel a king in mine anger." It is not safe to make demands of God in prayer, to pray insubmissively and rebelliously. The thing we take as by force from God may not bring blessing.

The true way to pray is to lay our requests at the feet of God and leave them there without undue urgency. We do not know what is best for us. A pastor sat by the sick-bed of a child who seemed to be near death. Turning to the parents, he said: "We will pray to God for your child. What shall we ask Him to do?" After a few moments of silence the father said, amid his sobs: "We would not dare choose—leave it to Him." This is the only safe way to pray in such matters. The thing that seems to us most desirable may be in reality the very worst thing we could get. Life may not be the best thing for our child. We know not what would lie before him if he lived. The thing that seems to us most desirable may be in reality the very worst thing we could get. There is no wrong in our praying for money, but it must be in the spirit of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but thine,

be done." In praying for our friends we dare not dictate to God what they shall have, for we cannot tell what is best for them. Insubmissive prayers are always wrong. And God may sometimes let us have what we are determined to have, and the receiving may prove an evil rather than a good to us.

The Lord reminded Samuel of the wrong the elders had done to Him also. Thus the matter concerned God even more than Samuel. We should learn a lesson of patience and forbearance towards others from the way God bears with men's sins—perchance with our sins. The old story of Abraham and the fire-worshipper is in point here. Abraham welcomed the tired wayfarer to his tent and set bread before him. The old man began to eat without giving God thanks. Then the patriarch rose in his anger and thrust him away into the gathering darkness of night. Presently God called Abraham to ask where the traveller had gone. "I thrust him out," said Abraham, "because he gave Thee no thanks." But the Divine answer was one of disapproval: "Since I have borne with his unthankfulness all his life long, couldst not thou have borne with him one night?" God is very patient with the wicked in all their sins. Why should not we likewise be patient with them? We are not their judges; they do not have to answer to us for their sins. We should show them God's patience.

CHAPTER XXII

SAUL CHOSEN KING

Read I. Samuel IX., X

IT had been decided that Israel should have a king. How was he to be found? The story is graphically told in the Scriptures. There was a man named Kish who had a son, young and goodly. "There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." It would not have been worth while to put into the Bible the story of the lost asses, except that it was through this incident that Samuel came to meet Saul. Here we have an illustration of Divine Providence. The straying of some asses from a farm in Benjamin brings the future king of Israel to the prophet who was to anoint him. There is no chance in life. God is moving everywhere. The smallest events of our lives any common day may become important links in the shaping of our career. The coming of two prisoners from the palace to Joseph's prison one day prepared the way for the calling of Joseph to

be prime minister of Egypt, with all the great history that followed. The most casual meeting of two strangers in travelling or in a social way is often the beginning of some most important event. If the asses of Kish had not been lost, humanly speaking, Saul would not have met Samuel and would not have become king of Israel. God is always weaving the web of life for us out of the minutest threads, using even the pains and disappointments of our experience to help make up the beauty and the goodness of the finished fabric.

“With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lusted by His love:
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.”

It is beautiful to see how quietly and cheerfully Samuel goes about the preparations for the finding of the new king. It was hard for him to be set aside after his long, faithful service. It is not easy for any man to come from a high position which he has long filled with efficiency and honour and take a place in the ranks and go on serving, doing his duty just as well and as sweetly as if he were still in the exalted place. Some men, after being chairman of a committee for a time, are of little use afterward when they are back again in the ranks. But Samuel continued to be just as happy, as deeply

interested in the affairs of his people, and as active in promoting his country's good, after he had been asked to resign his judgeship, as he was when in the height of his power and at the zenith of his honour. He was as eager in securing the new king for the people as if it had cost him nothing to give way to the new ruler.

Samuel called a convention of the people together at Mizpah to have the new king take his place. It was not yet publicly known who the new king would be. Samuel knew it and Saul knew it, but the people had not learned of it. They were now called together to choose a king. This illustrates further the way of God's Providence. We go about in our daily duties and work freely, without restraint. We think we are making all our own plans and doing the thing which only we ourselves had purposed. But all the while we are carrying out the secret purposes of God.

Samuel began his address to the people by reminding them again that they had rejected God in demanding a king. He recalled to them the long history of Divine goodness which had marked their career from the beginning. Most of us are very quick to feel the hurt of the ingratitude of others. If we have befriended anyone and he returns unkindness for our kindness, we do not like it. We sometimes quote the fable of the serpent frozen by the wayside, which the benevolent passer-by took up and put in his bosom to warm, which returned his kindness by striking its deadly fangs into his

flesh as soon as it revived. We complain very sorely of lack of gratitude in those we have helped in trouble. Let us be fair towards God. Let us judge ourselves in relation to His mercies and favours to us by the same rule which we so inexorably apply to our fellow-men in their treatment of us. What has God done for us? What mercies and favours have we received from Him? From what troubles has He delivered us? Well, how are we treating this Deliverer and Friend? Do we recognise Him as our King? Or are we rejecting Him and giving our allegiance to another? It is well that we should sit down quietly while we are studying this part of our story and see whether we are free from the sharp blame which the prophet here lays upon these ancient people.

The people were to have a part in the choosing of their own king. The lot was used in those days as the means of finding out what the will of God was. It was regarded as a Divine ordinance. Its decision, therefore, was considered infallible. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." So it came that the lot pointed to the very man who already had been named and secretly anointed. How are we in specific cases to find out what the will of the Lord for us is? At one time when Henry Drummond was settling a grave question, he studied carefully the teaching of the Bible about the will of God and how to find it. The result of his study he summarised in eight maxims, which he wrote upon the flyleaf

of his Bible: "To find out God's will—1. Pray. 2. Think. 3. Talk to wise people, but do not regard their decision as final. 4. Beware of the bias of your own will, but do not be too much afraid of it. God never unreasonably thwarts a man's nature and liking, and it is a mistake to think that His will is in the line of the disagreeable. 5. Mean-time, do the next thing, for doing God's will in small things is the best preparation for knowing it in great things. 6. When decision and action are necessary, go ahead. 7. Never reconsider a decision when it is finally acted upon. 8. You will probably not find out until afterwards, perhaps long afterwards, that you have been led at all."

It will always seem to many people a mystery that Saul was divinely pointed out as the man who should be the first king of Israel. When we have read the story of his reign it seems to us that it was in many respects a failure and that his selection was a mistake. How then can we explain the fact that the Lord appears to have approved of his appointment? Several things seem clear. At the time Saul became king he was the fittest man among all the people for the position. He was physically qualified. He was brave and skillful. He had the capacity for kingship. He might have been a successful ruler. His failure came through his not accepting God's plan for his life and not obeying God's commandments. He was a disappointment to God, as Judas was to Jesus Christ.

Saul had many excellent things in his character.

He was shy and modest. He knew already what the result of the lot would be, and he hid himself out of sight so as to escape the ordeal which would be his when his choice became known to the people. True modesty is always a lovely trait. It is far better that we let honours seek us than that we should seek them. A man who tries to get himself elected to a position of honour and power is precisely the man who ought not to be elected. Saul had not sought to be king, and his conduct at the time he was elected cannot be condemned. This, however, is one of the "illusivè presages" of the opening of Saul's reign which failed to indicate truly the real character of the man.

In some way the matter of finding the hidden king was taken to the Lord, and it was learned that like a bashful boy he had concealed himself among the luggage. There are a good many young men in our own days who are hiding away from God's appointments and from God's call to service. They are not ready to take the place in life for which they were created or to carry out the Divine plan and purpose for them. Sometimes they are so engrossed in the world's business and pleasure that they cannot hear the Divine voice calling them to things that are higher and nobler. One young man whom Jesus called could not follow Him because he could not give up his money. The ideal life is the one that lives out the thought of God for it. Our Lord in one of His parables tells of a man, who if he did not hide himself at least hid his talent,

failing to use it. We need to be careful lest we fail to hear God's calls, or lest, hearing them, we fail to answer them.

Samuel altogether forgot himself and the treatment he had received when he presented the new king to the people. "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" Saul was a kingly man, at least in a physical sense. He had a magnificent opportunity. He was chosen of God for a high position, and if he had been faithful would have achieved great success. But we know that he missed all because he would not take God's way.

It is pleasant to contrast our King with this kingly man who stands before us. In Him every beauty of character blossoms out in perfection. He was the only perfect man who ever lived. All others have been only fractions of men, but in Him all loveliness, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, are found in perfection. Saul began well, but his glory soon became dimmed. The bright promise of his early years was not fulfilled. We read on a few pages, and we find him anything but a kingly man—selfish, ignoble, envious, full of murderous hate, willful, and then, as a consequence, forsaken of God. But there was no such sad and bitter disappointment in the after career of Jesus Christ. His star grew brighter and brighter as the years went on. Now He is the King of glory, and all the holy angels bow down to Him.

The great mass of the people accepted the new king with loyalty and enthusiasm. "There went with him the host, whose hearts God had touched." Not all the people were Saul's friends that day, but all the noble and worthy men seem to have rallied about him. It strengthened him to have this company of brave men gather about him in faithful friendship and devotion. At any time it is a great comfort to a man to have friends; but there are times when the value of friends is simply incalculable. We are not told that these friends of Saul's did anything for him, or gave him any real help. All that is said about them is that they went with him that day to his own home. Even this was a great encouragement and inspiration for him. They thus took their place on his side before all the people and avowed themselves his friends. One of the best things we can do for our friends is to stand by them, giving them honour. Our truest friend is not the man who talks most about his friendship for us, but the man we are sure of, knowing that whenever we turn to him in any circumstance of need we shall find him there.

There come times in the life of every man when simply to go with him is the greatest favour another can show to him. One writes: "Were you ever in circumstances when simply to go with you was the kindest and bravest thing any friend could do for you, including and pledging every other kind and courageous thing which there might yet be occasion to do? Then you can understand what it

was to Saul that day to see his band of men, 'whose hearts God had touched,' going with him to his home."

There were some of the people, however, who were not the new king's friends, who failed to give him their loyal support. "They despised him, and brought him no present. But he held his peace." Saul revealed self-control and wisdom in the way he bore himself at this time. It is a great thing to know how to be silent when silence is the first duty. Saul failed to show the same patience in the later years of his reign. Power spoiled him. Here, however, his conduct showed fine self-restraint. Amid the sneers and scoffs of these worthless fellows he was as though he were deaf. We are reminded of Jesus Himself, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.

We are too apt to resent insults and retaliate when others say or do evil things to us. The Christian way is either not to speak at all, or to give the soft answer that turneth away wrath. Not only is this the Christian way, it is also the way of wisdom. The quickest way to conquer an enemy is to treat him with kindness in return for his unkindness. Stopping to resent every insult keeps one continually in trouble, whereas ignoring slights and going on with our own duty quietly is the way to get the better of them. The best answer to sneers and scoffs and abuse is a sweet, quiet, beautiful life of patience and gentleness.

CHAPTER XXIII

SAMUEL'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

Read I. Samuel 'XII

IN all the narrative of Saul's election and coronation as king the character of Samuel shines out brightly. Though himself set aside by the election of a king to rule in his place, he yet made the great renunciation cheerfully, manfully, leading the people in each step in their new departure and guiding them with his clear vision and his steady hand. He did not sulk in his tent, as too many men do in such experiences. He did not withdraw from public life because Saul was made chief ruler, but continued to serve the people as prophet and counsellor, giving them still the benefit of the wisdom he had learned in his long and rich experience. The time came, however, when he must lay down the office of judge, delivering the authority into the hand of the newly-chosen king.

The farewell address of Samuel is worthy of careful study. He reminded the people again of the way in which the king had been given to them,

that they themselves were responsible for the change in government. He had listened to their request and had not resisted their desire nor stood in the way of their wish. He had keenly felt the reflection upon himself in their urgent demand, but he had set that aside in his wish to have that done which would be the best for the nation. He had felt the ingratitude and injustice to God in their wish, but God had overlooked their course and given His consent and sanction.

Samuel then referred to his own career as ruler, claiming that it had been honourable, and challenging them to show that even in the smallest matter he had defrauded or oppressed anyone. It is a great thing to be able to say at the close of a long or a short life what Samuel said at the opening of his farewell address. It is the ending of a life that tests it. How does it appear when it is looked back upon amid the gathering shadows of the grave? What kind of a dying pillow do its memories make? Samuel was able to stand up before all the nation and before God and say these words because his life, from beginning to end, had been upright, true and pure. There were no skeletons hidden away in any secret transaction of his life which could come up in after days to shame him. His words have a noble ring in them: "Here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a

ransom to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you."

Who does not want just such a life-ending as Samuel's? It is possible to have it, too, but possible only in one way. Only a noble and faithful life can give such comfort and satisfaction. Old age is the harvest of all the years that have gone before. What you sow in your youth and prime you gather when your hair is white and your steps are feeble.

Samuel reviewed the history of the people from the time of Moses, and then pointed to the king they had chosen and whom the Lord had set over them. He assured them that if they would be faithful to God He would show them favour. "If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and hearken unto His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and both ye and also the king that reigneth over you be followers of the Lord your God, well." This standing "if" precedes all God's promises of blessing, and conditions them. Everything of Divine blessing and good depends upon our obedience. If we will not walk in God's ways we cannot expect God to walk with us. "True statesmanship," says Dr. Gunsaulus, "consists in discovering the way God is going, and getting things out of the way for Him." This recalls the counsel of Prince Albert to the young men of England: "Find out God's plan concerning you, then bring yourselves into harmony with this plan."

There is a distinct indication of mercy here also—God is always willing to give us a second chance.

We may rebel against Him and take our own way instead of His, tearing ourselves by our willfulness out of His perfect plan; yet He comes to us again and tells us that He will still be our Father and will help us to succeed in the new course we have insisted upon taking if we will be obedient and faithful. The people of Israel had refused God's way for them, demanding a king. He gave them their demand and then gave them another chance with it. That is what God is always doing. What could any of us do if God never gave us a second chance, and a third, and a hundredth?

But while the people were assured of blessing if they would be obedient, Samuel assured them just as positively that disobedience would bring punishment. "If ye will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord . . . then will the hand of the Lord be against you." This is very plain. There can be no mistake about the meaning of the words. It is impossible to have God's favour and blessing if we are not faithful to Him. What an absurdity it is, therefore, to pray for favour and help when we know that we are living in disobedience and are willfully disregarding God's law! Mr. Lincoln was right when he said during the Civil War to a visitor who expressed the hope that the Lord was on the side of the North: "That doesn't trouble me; I only want to make sure that we are on the Lord's side." It may seem, indeed, that God is on the side of the biggest guns and the bravest armies,

but the indisputable truth is that in the end God is on the side of justice and right.

Samuel sought to make such an impression on the people that day that the lesson would never be forgotten. So he bade them stand still and see the great thing that the Lord would do before their eyes. The harvest-time was not the season for thunderstorms, but thunder and rain came, and the storm frightened the people. It gave them a glimpse of God's terrible power, which could destroy them in a moment. There are many people who are waked up from their indifference by some severe judgment, but who are not touched nor impressed by the Lord's ordinary workings. Yet really the everyday Providences are far more wonderful than the extraordinary things now and then that God does. A shower of rain sent out of season in answer to a prayer brings a whole nation down on its knees in trembling awe, while years and years of seasonable showers of rain, refreshing the earth and making it fruitful, produce no impression upon the same people. Yet this is infinitely more wonderful than that. It is neither superstition nor fanaticism that sees God in the unusual; but it is atheism that does not see Him as well in the usual. Every shower of rain, every morning's miracle of sunrise, every day's bread, should inspire in us loving adoration.

The people were alarmed and they said to Samuel: "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not." It is a great thing to

have a friend who lives near to God and is on familiar terms with Him, and has influence at the throne of grace. It is a great thing to have someone to whom we can turn with confidence, asking him to pray for us. Of course, we all can pray for ourselves, but many of us live too far from God to have the greatest power with Him. Samuel was a man of prayer and the people were sure that if he would pray for them God would spare their lives. At the last supper Peter wanted to ask a question of the Master, but he was down towards the foot of the table. John, however, was close to Jesus, his head leaning upon the Master's breast. So Peter beckoned to him to ask the question because he was so near and could whisper it into Christ's ear. Those who live nearest to God have easiest access in prayer, and if you are in sore trouble you are quite sure to want one of these to speak to God on your behalf. When you are dying you will not send for a companion with whom you have trifled and sinned, but for one who knows how to pray. Samuel did not try to lessen the people's alarm and anxiety because of their sins. We are always in danger of this weakness when our friends confess to us wrong things they have done.

The other day a man of the world made sport of the remorse and penitence of one who was under deep conviction, saying: "You are only frightened and morbid. Cheer up and come out with me for a drive, and your bad feeling will soon be gone." That was not the way Samuel talked to his people

when they were distressed because of their sins. He told them frankly that they had surely done the wickedness which they confessed. He would deepen in them the sense of unworthiness and the feeling of penitence. Then he told them also of the mercy of God. Though they had sinned, they need not despair. They must not give up trying to serve God because they had made such a failure of it. They must not turn away from Him altogether because they had turned away once. They must get back again to God and start anew. When a Christian has been overtaken in temptation and has fallen into sin, one of his dangers is despair, giving up. Many who fall once never rise again, never try again to serve God. They do not know God's mercy. Judas went out in despair after betraying his Master. Peter went out after denying Christ, weeping in bitter sorrow, but he turned to God in his grief and found mercy.

There is something very noble and beautiful in the way Samuel answers the people's pleading that he would pray for them. "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." The people had been most ungrateful to Samuel and had rejected him as their ruler; yet he would not on this account cease to intercede for them. He told them that it would be a sin in him, a sin against the Lord, for him to cease to pray for them. Love triumphed over the sense of injury and wrong. Samuel's case may often be paralleled in common experience. Those for whom we have

done much, who owe us honour and love, may turn away from us in ingratitude; but we must not on this account cease to love them and to do all in our power for them. This may become our temptation. We may feel that they do not deserve our prayers, that they are not worthy of our intercession. But we must remember that on His cross our Lord prayed even for His murderers.

This word of Samuel's shows us what an important duty of friendship intercession is—so important that it is a sin against God to cease to pray for others. We should always pray for our friends. That friendship does not reach its best which lacks intercession. No matter how much we may do for our friends in other ways, if we do not speak to God for them we are wronging them. Then we should pray for those who have hurt us or wronged us. The feeling of resentment, if there is such in our heart, should take the form of interceding. The Master's word is specific and definite that we should pray specially for those who persecute us and despitefully use us.

CHAPTER XXIV

SAUL REJECTED AS KING

Read I. Samuel XV

SAUL began his reign with enthusiasm. He had a splendid coadjutor in his son Jonathan. Jonathan was brave and popular with the people. The Philistines made an effort to crush the Israelites. They gathered in vast numbers against them. The men of Israel were afraid, and followed Saul tremblingly. Samuel had appointed a time to come to Saul at Gilgal to offer sacrifices before the battle should begin. But Saul became impatient of Samuel's delay and offered the sacrifices himself. Just as he had ended his offering Samuel came. Saul went out to salute him, but Samuel said to him: "What hast thou done?" Saul explained his action, but Samuel said: "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God." He said further to him that if he had obeyed his kingdom would have been established forever. "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord

hath appointed him to be prince over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

Samuel continued to be prophet and guide to Saul, and brought him a Divine message, commanding him to smite the Amalekites. Very definite instructions were given to the king: "Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." The battle was fought, and Saul's victory was complete. But Agag, the king, was spared, also the best of the sheep and oxen, and all that was good. What was vile and refuse was utterly destroyed, but what was choice and valuable was spared.

After the battle was over came Samuel with sharp reproof. Saul met the old man graciously. He was greatly pleased with himself and with what he had done. He regarded his victory over the Amalekites as a splendid achievement. He had already set up a monument to himself, perhaps a stone, to commemorate his victory. He heard that Samuel was coming to see him, and went to meet him with patronising words and manner: "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

He had indeed performed the Lord's bidding in a way, in his own partial and imperfect way, doing just as much of what God commanded as he had felt inclined to do, then leaving out such parts of the commandment as he felt disinclined to perform.

There are a good many people in every age who obey God in the same way. They render a general obedience, but pay no heed to the exact requirements of the Divine law. They tell the truth as a whole, but are not concerned about slight deviations from it. They are honest in a large, general way, but do not think that their little dishonesties count against them. Saul thought he had come near enough to what God had told him to claim to have been obedient and to merit strong commendation for his fidelity. What God thought, however, of Saul's way of obeying we learn a little farther on.

Just as Saul was telling Samuel how well he had done his errand for God, there came ominous sounds from some place near-by, and Samuel said: "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" According to the command, all the sheep and oxen of the Amalekites were to be killed. What then were these noises of sheep and cattle? We cannot hide our sins. We may think we have covered up our disobediences so deftly that detection will be impossible. Suddenly something tears away the veil and they are exposed to the gaze of the world. A man carries on a series of dishonesties and conceals them by expert bookkeeping, thinking he is safe from detection. But some morning he is startled to find that the stolen sheep have been bleating, and all the world knows of his speculations and embezzlements. It is the nature of sheep to bleat and

of oxen to low, and they have not sense enough to keep quiet when they are wanted to. Indeed, they are almost sure to make a noise just when they are expected to keep perfectly still. It is the same with sin. It is a poor friend. It professes well when it offers its solicitations, but when it has been committed it is a most unsafe confidant. It cannot keep a secret. It is sure to betray the man who depends upon it for discreet silence. In many people's lives there are some bleating sheep and some lowing oxen, which tell the story of the imperfectness of our obedience.

It is a good rule, when something goes wrong, in matters in which we are interested, to take the blame upon ourselves. That is the manly way, at least. But that is not the common way—it was not Saul's way. Saul said: "They have brought them from the Amalekites." Saul could not deny the disobedience now, with the evidence sounding in the prophet's ears, but he threw the blame on the people. "They brought these sheep and oxen," he said. The king thus showed a spirit of meanness and cowardice and want of fine manliness. Would the people have brought them if he, the king, had forbidden it? Had he not at least connived at their disobedience by his silence? A command had been given to him, and he was the responsible leader. Nothing is more contemptible than the attempt to throw the blame of our sins and mistakes on other people. Yet few things are more frequently done. Adam set the example at the beginning,

and many of Adam's children follow him. The true, manly way is to take the blame of our own sins. In God's sight—and that is the way always to look at our acts—everyone must bear his own burden of sin. If we have done wrong, let us be frank enough to confess it.

Saul went still farther and sought or invented a religious reason for what the people had done. "The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God." We do not know certainly whether this was a true statement of fact or not, or whether the reason given for the disobedience was only an invention of the king's to excuse himself. If the people had really planned the matter they probably thought that if they used the spoil, although disobediently spared, to make a great triumphal offering to the Lord, He would overlook the disobedience. That is, they would propitiate the Lord after they had broken His command by a generous sacrifice and by effusive devotion. What pitiful mockery! Let us be careful that we never repeat the mockery. We never can satisfy God for one failure in duty by extraordinary zeal in some other direction. We cannot appease Him when we have sinned by bringing to His altar the fruits of our sin. For example, God will not overlook a man's dishonesty if the man lays part of what he has made by the dishonesty on the collection plate or gives it to some holy cause. Men can play all manner of tricks with their own consciences, but not with God.

They utterly destroyed all the common spoil, but spared whatever was especially good. They kept all the fat, plump sheep and oxen and destroyed the poor, lean and worthless ones—"everything that was vile and refuse." That is the way with a good many people. They are quite ready to devote to God the things they do not care much for, but the things that are desirable for their own use they keep. This spirit is shown in the way many give to the Lord's service. The gold and silver and the banknotes they keep for themselves, while they put the nickels and the pennies on the collection plate. It is shown, too, in the way they treat their own vices and lusts. Those that they do not particularly love they crush out with amazing zeal, but their favourite vices and fat, rich sins they spare for their own indulgence. Men may go on and do as they will, but that is not the end of the matter; the Lord has something to say about their acts. If they could leave Him out of their life altogether and get clear of meeting Him, if there were no judgment, disobedience would not be such serious business. But they cannot eliminate God. He stands in their paths as they return from their sins and utters His Word and tells them what He thinks about them. We never can avoid meeting God after our sinful acts. We cannot go through life by any path so as to miss judgment. Indeed, the voice of conscience tells us at once, as God's prophet here told Saul, just what God has to say. If we are wise we will ask beforehand what God

will have to say and will then shape all our acts so as to have His approval on whatever we do.

Samuel was growing old, and he was a gentle, kindly man, but he never grew lenient towards men's sins. As he listened to the king's excuses for disobedience instead of frank and honest confession, Samuel's indignation grew hot, and he spoke to him with sternness: "Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said." He compels Saul to stop and listen to the rehearsal of the story of his sin. "The Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go, and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites." The evil things in us are our Amalekites, and we are to destroy them. Yet how many of us, like Saul, cut away at the little Amalekites and spare the big Agags? Do not some of us also see the story of our own disobediences and failures in the way Saul treated God and His commandments? He owed everything to God. He had been taken from a lowly place and exalted to high honour. He ought to have shown his gratitude in unwavering obedience. But his promotion, instead of making him humble, had turned his head. When Samuel asked him why he had not obeyed the Lord but had seized the spoil which was devoted to God, Saul still insisted that he had obeyed, repeating the assertion that the people had spared part of the spoil to sacrifice unto the Lord. The king showed anything but a submissive and docile spirit. He was willful, impenitent, haughty and insolent.

To Saul's words Samuel replied: "Behold, to

obey is better than sacrifice." In its reference to Saul's act the meaning of his words is plain. The king had not propitiated God in proposing to offer the fruits of his disobedience in sacrifice. Nothing would satisfy God but obedience. But there are other applications less obvious. Many people set a great deal more importance upon religious ceremonials than upon practical obedience. They will be very faithful in attendance upon all church services and very devout and reverent in worship, and yet in their daily life they will disregard the plain commandments of God. They fill the week with selfishness, with pride, with bitterness, with evil speaking and all manner of little deceptions and falsehoods, and then come on Sunday, with great show of devotion, to engage in the worship of God. When God tells a mother to care for her child, He is not satisfied if she neglect that duty in order to write a book or to look after a sick woman, or to go out on a temperance crusade. When God wants a man to help a poor family in some obscure street He is not satisfied if instead of that lowly service the man does some excellent thing which seems to bring ten times as much honour to the Lord. The supreme thing in Christian life is to obey God, and without obedience nothing else counts at all.

There is a story of a father and his child which illustrates Samuel's words, "To obey is better than sacrifice." They were living a little distance from a lake whose shores were lined with beautiful and

brilliant shells. The father was absent the greater part of the day, and had bidden the child never to go near the water while he was away, fearing that some harm might come to her. One day the little girl broke her father's commandment and wandered to the lake shore. She dreaded to meet her father in the evening, knowing that he would be very much grieved to learn of her disobedience. She thought, however, that she might appease him and make him feel less angry if she would show him some special kindness. So she gathered a basketful of the loveliest shells she could find and took them to give as a present to her father. When he came home she told him what she had done, and then producing the shells she gave them to him as a present, asking him if they were not very beautiful. With great sadness on his face he flung the shells away, saying: "My child, to obey is better than sacrifice." No gifts, however lovely, could please the father, since his child had disobeyed his command.

Saul understood now that his sin was a most grave and serious matter, and he made confession. "I have sinned." The same words have been spoken in such a way as to bring instant pardon. When David said to Nathan, "I have sinned," he heard the answer at once: "The Lord hath taken away thy sin." But in Saul's case there was no real confession in the words, no deep sense of sin. Saul was not sorry he had done wrong, but was sorry only for the consequences, the punishment which had been declared.

God is merciful and gracious, but Saul's sin could not be forgiven. A second time he had disobeyed the Lord when he was sent with specific directions on a definite duty. The doom was final and irrevocable. "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king." No one is fit for God's service who will not obey God's commands. If we would be employed as His servants, to work for Him, we must do what He bids us to do. Saul was thrust from the throne of Israel because he persisted in taking his own way instead of God's. May this not be a reason in many cases why men with great abilities do not rise to high spiritual influence and power? God will entrust His servants with responsibility only so far as they prove worthy to be trusted. When one fails in smaller trusts, the larger will not be given to him, and the smaller, too, will be taken away. If we want to be used in the work of the Lord we must learn to obey implicitly and unquestioningly. No other kind of servant can stay in the Lord's service.

CHAPTER XXV,

SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID

Read I. Samuel XVI. 1-13

SAUL had failed because he would not accept God's way for his life, but insisted upon having his own way. The result was that he wrecked everything. God set him aside. He continued to reign until his death, but he had God's help and blessing no more.

It was a sad hour in Samuel's life when the Lord sent him to anoint another in Saul's place. We see here another glimpse of the nobleness of Samuel. It grieved him to have Saul rejected. Some men in Samuel's place would have been quite well satisfied at Saul's failure. But Samuel had a generous heart. It should grieve us to see even the worst man do wrong and come under the Divine condemnation.

Samuel seems also to have been afraid. "If Saul hear it, he will kill me," he said. The Lord then reproved him for his hesitancy. "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him

from being king?" Our first duty even in sorrow is submission to the Divine will. When God renders a decision we should accept it as final, however it may cut into our hopes or plans. It ought to have been enough for Samuel to know that the Lord had rejected Saul. When God acts, His servants should be silent. It ought to be enough for anyone in private or public sorrow that the Lord has so ordered it. Grief is not unseemly, for Jesus wept; yet grieving may become sin. It is sin when it is insubmissive. Even when no ray of light can be seen, God's wisdom and love should be trusted. The best cure for grief and disappointment is found in promptly taking up one's duty.

"Labour is rest from the sorrows that greet us;
Rest from all petty vexations that meet us."

The Lord smoothed the way for Samuel as he went upon his errand. He sent him to Jesse, telling him He had provided a king among Jesse's sons. The choice of the king was not to be made public. Indeed, no one but Samuel himself knew the meaning of his visit to the Bethlehem home or of the anointing that took place. Samuel's errand to Bethlehem was an act of worship, a sacrifice, and a feast. Samuel was not to worry about how the matter would come out. One step at a time was enough for him to know. God usually does not show us all our way at once. He gives us our work piece by piece.

"The elders of the city came to meet him trem-

bling, and said, 'Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably; I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord.' The elders of the town were somewhat disturbed when the old prophet came to their town. They feared that his coming meant punishment to them for something they had done. Like these Bethlehemites, we, too, are sometimes terrified by the coming to us of God's messengers. They do not all wear gentle faces as they approach us; oftentimes they come in a garb of sternness or of pain. Yet they come always with a blessing for us. Sickness is one of those dark-visaged prophets. We cannot welcome it. Yet if we ask this messenger in our trembling: "Comest thou peaceably?" the answer is: "Yes, peaceably." Sickness always brings messages of peace, of blessing, of good, to those who will receive them, and the messenger should always be received with reverence and trust.

The same is true of all the hard things in our lot. We do not like to have to struggle and deny ourselves. Boys and young men who are poor oftentimes think they scarcely have a fair chance in life when they see the sons of rich men revelling in ease and luxury, with plenty of money and with no necessity to toil and save. Yet really the stern prophet of poverty who comes to the sons of the poor brings a holier message and a truer blessing than the smiling-faced, silken-robed messenger brings to the youth of the fine mansion. The best things in life can be drawn out only by work and discipline. Hence, whatever compels a boy or a

young man to toil, to deny himself, to depend upon his own efforts, is a blessing to him. The prophet of necessity comes, therefore, to him peaceably.

In all life it is the same. We never should turn away from our doors any prophets whom God sends, however stern they may appear. They all come to bring us some good, to give us more life, to make better men of us. "The beautifully grained wood that makes our finest furniture is not taken from the trees that grow in peaceful, sheltered situations, but from those that are in exposed places, beaten about by the storms. So it is that the noblest natures are those that have had to contend with many trials."

Samuel began at once to look at Jesse's sons, in order to discover the one who was to be the king. "He looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." Eliab was a splendid specimen of a man—just the man for a king. He was tall and majestic in his bearing. If physical strength was still to be the requisite for kingliness, no better man could have been found. But there are many men with splendid bodies who are far from regal in their souls. Intellectual capacity is also one of God's noble gifts, but many a man with a superb mind is most unkingly in his character. What could such men as Byron and Burns and Napoleon have been before God if they had not so prostituted their magnificent power? Neither physical beauty like that of the Apollo Belvedere, nor intellectual greatness like that of a Bacon,

makes a man great in God's eyes. God looks for moral and spiritual greatness, and many a poor cripple or hunchback is more kingly in His sight than the man or the woman whom people turn to gaze after on the street, attracted by beauty of person and grace of movement.

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” When soldiers are wanted, those who offer themselves are measured and weighed and their health is tested. When God wants soldiers He applies moral measurements. In these modern days a great deal of attention is paid to physical culture. Some of the boys would rather stand well in the games than in their classroom. They think more of fine muscles than of a fine mind or a beautiful soul. Physical culture is good—God wants us to take care of our bodies and make the very most of their strength, keeping them in health and vigour. It may be well, however, to inquire what really makes a man—muscle, or mind and heart. Eliab was a fine fellow in his body, but he was not the man the Lord chose when He wanted a king. Evidently his heart had not in it the kingly qualities. We do not know in what qualities Eliab was lacking. We know only that he was not a man after God's heart. God knows who has the ability for any particular task and whom He can trust with sacred responsibilities.

One by one Jesse's sons were looked upon by Samuel—all but one. But the one the Lord was looking for had not yet appeared, and Samuel asked

Jesse: "Are here all thy children? . . . There remaineth yet the youngest," said Jesse, "and, behold, he is keeping the sheep." The shepherd lad did not seem to his father of any importance. He was only a boy, while his brothers were fine young men. He could look after sheep well enough, and thus he was out of the way that day. It was not thought even worth while to call him in for the feast or for the religious service. Apparently he came near being overlooked. He would have been overlooked altogether if it had not been for Samuel. It is often the case that those the Lord chooses for important places in His Kingdom are the ones whom men have overlooked. The stones which the human builders have rejected God has built at length into the very foundations of the walls of His great temple. He knows the men He wants and He recognises their worth, though clad in shepherds' garb or in fishermen's plain dress.

There ought to be encouragement here for boys who are in lowly or obscure places. They may think they have no chance in life, that nobody will ever discover their talents and abilities, but God knows all about them. He knows, too, where He wants to use them, what place He made them for, what work is theirs in His infinite plan, and He will also find a way to bring them out and lead them to what He wants them to perform. This is our Father's world, and there is no danger that we shall be lost in its vastness, however little we may be.

"The world is vast and we are small,
We are so weak, and it so strong;
Onward it goes, nor cares at all
For us—our silence or our song,
Our fast-day or our festival.

"Beneath our feet as on we fare,
But, like a ball which children play,
God spins it through the far blue air:
We are His own: why should we care?"

The way to be sure of recognition and promotion to a higher place is to be faithful and energetic in the lowly place in which one begins. God will find you there when He wants you. He found Elisha plowing in the field. Jesus found His disciples fishing. The Lord found David keeping sheep.

It is interesting to know that God has a place for every life. We are not born in this world and then left to find our way through it into whatever place we may be able to scramble to. We are made by God, thought about before we are born and given the qualities that will fit us for the place we are meant to fill and the talents for doing the work that we are made to do. We ought not to have to scramble to get a place in which to live and make our career. If only we do God's will day by day we shall come at length to our place. David was born to be a king. Samuel found him caring for sheep. But he was led at length to the throne. We may trust God with guidance in the making of our career if we will simply let Him lead us.

When the one the Lord had chosen among Jesse's sons appeared, he was anointed. "Samuel took the

horn of oil, and anointed him . . . and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David." Thus the boy was set apart for God. The oil was the symbol—the real anointing was the coming of the Divine Spirit upon him. That is what we all need to fit us for our duty. Natural gifts and capacities have their place, but they are of no avail unless the anointing of God is upon us. Power must come down from above. The Divine Spirit alone can take these poor earthly lives of ours and make them ready for Divine service.

This lesson is very important for the boys who are keeping sheep or working on farms and in shops and factories and stores, or plodding on in school, sighing for places of influence and power. Bow your heads to the baptism of the Spirit of God, and His anointing will fit you for whatever place God made you to fill. Probably David did not then know to what God meant to call him. He knew only this: that he was now set apart for some service for the Lord. You do not know what God made you for. You may be sure, however, that it was for something very noble. Any place in God's plan is glorious. Then even the lowliest place, as earth rates places, is noble if it be God's assignment.

CHAPTER XXVI

DAVID AND GOLIATH

Read I. Samuel XVII. 1-54

THE story of David and Goliath is one with which every reader of the Bible is familiar. It is full of interest. It reveals much of David's character, and throws light on the training of the boy in his shepherd life. It is suggestive also for all of us, for we all have giants to fight, and we may learn from David how to meet them and conquer them.

David had been chosen to be king. Now he was to be trained for the great task. All the incidents and events in his life were lessons set by the great Teacher. The Philistines had gathered for battle with the Israelites, and Saul and his men were facing them. One day there stalked out from the Philistine lines a great giant, named Goliath, and proposed that one from Saul's army should come out and fight him, and that the issue of this duel should settle the conflict between the two armies. At first no one of Saul's men responded to the

champion's defiance. The king and his men were dismayed and greatly humiliated.

Then David came to the camp. He did not belong to the army. He was only a boy, and his place was at home with the sheep. His older brothers were with Saul. Jesse one day sent David to the camp with provisions for his brothers. For forty days, morning and evening, Goliath had been coming out and calling across the valley, demanding that someone from the Israelite army should accept his challenge. David had just found his brothers and was talking with them, when the giant made his appearance. The shepherd lad heard his haughty words. He learned also what had been promised by the king to the man who would kill the champion. David became greatly interested in the matter, but the boy's inquiries irritated Eliab, David's oldest brother, who spoke scornfully to him.

The king heard of the lad's interest and sent for him. David proposed to the king that he would fight the giant. Saul tried to dissuade him, but David persisted, and at length Saul consented. "Go, and the Lord shall be with thee." "Saul clad David with his apparel." He put upon him a special military dress, adapted for wearing with armour. David's simple shepherd's garb did not appear to the warrior king to be suited for the battle with the great giant, who was accoutred in all the toggery of a man of war. Saul thought David could not fight a soldier without a soldier's armour. He did not know that he was better armed as he

was than if he had helmet and coat of mail and greaves of brass to protect his body. David was clad rather in the panoply of God. The best protection anyone can have in time of danger is the garment of truth, sincerity and holiness. St. Paul tells us of the Christian's armour, which, he says, every follower of Christ should wear, the breast-plate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Life is a constant warfare if it is life really worth living. Not to fight is not to try to get forward and struggle upward.

"If life is always a warfare
 Between the right and the wrong,
 And good is fighting with evil
 For ages and æons long—

"Fighting with eager cohorts,
 With banners pierced and torn,
 Shining with sudden splendour,
 Wet with the dew of morn—

"If all the forces of heaven,
 And all the forces of sin,
 Are met in the infinite struggle,
 The souls of the world to win—

"If God's is the awful battle
 Where the darkling legions ride—
 Hasten to sword and to saddle!
 Lord, let me fight on Thy side!"

The king thought David should be armed before going out to meet Goliath, so he put on him his own helmet and coat of mail. But David told Saul he

could not fight in armour. "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." He tried to move about in Saul's heavy armour, but staggered under the weight. In a contest of arms—sword and spear and helmet and coat of mail—David would have been no match for Goliath; but armed with his sling the giant was no match for him. This was the one weapon which David had been trained to use to perfection. Stick to your little sling when you are fighting giants, and do not attempt to throw anything but picked stones out of the gospel brook. Too many of our modern Davids persist in fighting Goliaths in Saul's armour, and it is no wonder they are defeated. One who knows how to use the Word of God is more than a match for any giant in the world. That was the weapon Jesus used when He met the great Goliath, Satan, and utterly vanquished him.

"He took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his wallet; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine." We should remember that David's fine throwing that day was not accidental, nor was it by a miracle that the stone went so straight to its mark. David had learned in his shepherd life to do this thing easily and surely. He had practised with his sling until he could strike a hair's breadth and never miss. He had spent his leisure to some purpose while watching the sheep. He did not know then what splendid

use his skill would one day be to him, but unconsciously, in his pleasant pastime, he was preparing for the great crisis of that day. Wellington used to say he learned on the Eton playground how to fight the battle of Waterloo.

This teaches young people the importance of improving every moment, and taking every opportunity to acquire knowledge and skill. Someone may say to them that they will never find any use for this or that branch of study in the curriculum, and might as well omit it, but this is bad advice. Some day they will need all the knowledge and skill they can acquire. They will find need, too, for the particular bits of learning and knowledge they think they will never have occasion to use. David could not have met Goliath victoriously in that momentous hour if he had not unconsciously prepared for such a conflict in the quiet hours of his shepherd life.

Many a man fails in important moments in the critical experiences of life because he has failed to be diligent in his boyhood. If you would be ready for such occasions in your life you must prepare for them in the quiet days of boyhood and youth. If David had not been an expert slinger before that morning he could not then, in the hour before the giant came out, have prepared himself for the battle, nor could he have brought down the champion by any mere lucky stroke. Learn all you can in youth, omit no opportunity for acquiring facility in doing things, become skillful in whatever you do.

You do not know what good service your experience, even in little, homely things, may some day do you.

We should not neglect spiritual training. When Jesus met the tempter He fell back on the preparation He had made in His silent years at Nazareth. To each assault He replied with a word of Scripture. But He did not go to His Bible roll to get His text. He had the words of God in His heart, hidden away in the storehouse of memory. Some people have to take their concordance and look up the Scripture text they want, when any need demands it, either for their own use or in helping others. A concordance is a good thing to have, but it is better if we become so familiar with our Bible and have it so in memory that we can quote its words. It may seem to us that we do not need the Divine promises now, but some time we shall, and if we fail to learn them we shall not have them ready in the day of stress.

“When the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him.” He saw only a boy, unarmed, and scorned to fight with him. So the world disdains the Christian. It asks with contempt: “What can he do? What strength has he in his feeble hands? Where are the weapons he is going to fight with?” The giant saw only a shepherd’s staff in David’s hands; what was that against his own enormous spear? The world sees only a Bible in the Christian’s hand; what is that against all its philosophy and science and reason? Yet the

Christian is not so defenseless and powerless as he seems. His weapons are not of the earthly kind and do not appear formidable, but are really powerful, and, like David, he is able with them to subdue giants.

“Thou comest to me with a sword. . . . I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts.” The giant blustered, boasting of his own power and disdainng David’s littleness. He was angry that he had to fight with a mere boy. “Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?” Yet David was not scared by Goliath’s pitiful scorn of him. It was the Lord’s battle he was about to fight, and he knew the Lord would give victory. The law of the heavenly kingdom is, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.” There are a great many things that human power can do, but when we turn to the really essential things in life it is strengthless, and can do none of them. With all its boasted philosophy, science and wisdom, it cannot convert souls nor change hearts; it cannot lift up the fallen; it cannot overcome sin and Satan; it cannot comfort sorrow nor give peace to the dying. Not one of the really great things of life can it do. The Christian comes in the name of the Lord, and that name has in it the strength of omnipotence. Jesus said: “I have overcome the world.” He is Master of all things, and therefore is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

David talked very confidently to the Philistine, but not boastfully. He gave God all the honour of

the victory he was about to win. "I come to thee in the name of the Lord." "This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand." "That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." We can conquer only as we fight in the name of Christ. "David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth." So the believer in God may prevail over every Philistine that stalks out to meet him if he goes against him as David went that day against Goliath. The battle that wins the victory is the Lord's. If we go in His name we shall conquer. Paul said: "I can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth me."

There are giants in our own hearts, even after the most thorough conversion. Like the Philistines in Canaan, the Philistines of sin also are terribly hard to subjugate. Your besetting sin, whatever it is, is a Goliath. It may seem to you that it never can be vanquished, and it never can until David comes—our David—Jesus. Call for Him to come and slay the giant for you. There are giants in the world outside. Intemperance is one. Scepticism is another. Worldliness is another. These giants stalk out and hurl their defiance at the army of God's people, and there seems to be no one who can overcome them. Now is the time for faith in God. We must go out against these giants in the name of the Lord, not with philosophy, science and culture, but with the Cross, and then we shall prevail.

We should not fail to get a lesson on the importance of thoroughness in the conquest of evil from David's manner of dealing with Goliath. David was not satisfied with seeing the giant fall to the earth when the smooth stone struck him, but ran and drew Goliath's own sword from its scabbard and with it cut off his head. If he had not done this the old champion would probably have got up by-and-by and walked away, for he was only stunned, not killed, by the stone. David made sure that his work was completed. A great many of our attacks upon sin in our own hearts and in the world only stun and temporarily disable, but do not kill the evil. We walk away, thinking we have done a fine thing, won a splendid victory, and presently we meet the old giant again, stalking abroad as before. He soon recovers from our blow, and we have to fight the battle over again, and perhaps we fight it again in the same half way, and thus on and on to the end of life. Most of us have had just such experiences as these with our own lusts and passions. We overcome them often, and each time we think that we have entirely subdued them and that we shall have no further trouble with them; but they are soon active as ever again. We need to learn from David to finish our victories by cutting off the head of every giant we strike down. There is no other way of destroying our sins. The life is in the head, and the head must come off or the enemy will be facing us again in a day or two with only a scar on his forehead.

CHAPTER XXVII

DAVID AND JONATHAN

Read I. Samuel XVIII. 1-4; XX

THE story of the friendship of Jonathan and David is a Bible classic. As such it takes rank with the finest friendship stories in any literature. Without detracting in the least from the character of David, or from his part in all the delightful story, there is no doubt that it is to Jonathan the chief honour belongs. He was the prince of Saul's house, and therefore of rank far above the shepherd lad whom he loved. It was in Jonathan's heart, too, that the friendship first began. He recognised in David noble qualities which won first his admiration and then his affection. If there was a man in the whole nation who had reason to be envious of David it certainly was Jonathan. He was a brave and popular soldier, the son of the king, and here was another man whose one achievement made him the hero of the people. In ordinary men the feeling of envy would have risen in the heart when David sprang suddenly into such popularity. Jonathan was the

man, too, who had everything to lose by David's promotion, and yet he was ready to lose all, even to let David become king, because of the love he bore his friend.

Jonathan here sets a lesson for us in the overmastering fullness and richness of his love. Such generous friendship, it must be confessed, is rare in even the best men and women. Not many of us can experience such overshadowing in others, such winning by others of honour and affection which naturally belong to us, and keep our hearts sweet and our love for the one who is so honoured strong and loyal as ever. Such triumph of love is Christ-like. It is an attainment we should strive to reach. Self must die in us and love must reign, and then we shall have learned our lesson.

"Self is the only prison
That can ever bind the soul;
Love is the only angel
Who can bid the gates unroll;
'And when he comes to call thee,
'Arise and follow fast;
His way may lie through darkness,
But it leads to light at last."

Thus the first honour in this matchless friendship belongs to Jonathan. He loved David with a pure and disinterested affection, which stood the severest test and never failed. 'As time went on and David became still more the nation's hero, casting Jonathan himself in the shade, there was no envy or jealousy in Jonathan's heart. When at last he

knew that David was to be king instead of himself, his friendship faltered not. When his own father turned against David and sought to kill him, Jonathan risked all in order to save his friend's life.

The beginning of this friendship was very interesting. The young shepherd was brought into the king's presence after his victory over the giant, and as Jonathan looked on him, heard him speak and saw his beauty, his modest, simple bearing, his heart went out to him in a burst of affection, and from that hour "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Jonathan's friendship was based on the true and simple worth of David. It was not the fascination of a moment, but an enduring attachment, having its roots in the heart, a love that would stand the sorest tests and not fail. It was unselfish affection, ready for any service or sacrifice, telling of a princely spirit in the king's son.

True friendship has always its reserves. The best is not revealed at the beginning. We touch but the edge of its ocean fullness when we first taste its sweetness. We have to know our friend better to find the best of love that is in him. Jonathan's affection for David was wonderful in its first revealing, but the more it was put to the test the purer and holier it proved. Some friendships are emotional and soon burn out, leaving only cold ashes, but Jonathan's only increased in intensity as the days went on. So it should always be. Henry van Dyke says:

"I count that friendship little worth
Which has not many things untold,
Great longings that no words can hold,
And passion secrets waiting birth.

"Along the slender wires of speech
Some message from the heart is sent;
But who can tell the whole that's meant?
Our dearest thoughts are out of reach."

When the love of Jonathan for David is described it is said that he loved him as his own soul. There could be no higher measure of love than this. It was utterly unselfish. The whole story of Jonathan's friendship for David showed the most complete self-forgetfulness and self-abnegation. David in his eulogy on his friend after his death said that his love passed the love of women. Woman's love is wonderful in its tenderness, in its strength, in its devotion, but Jonathan's love for David surpassed anything in the love of women that David had ever known. The more carefully we read the story as it is told in fragments in the chapters in the Book of Samuel, the more noble does the friendship appear.

At the very beginning of their friendship Jonathan and David made a covenant. It was Jonathan who proposed this covenant, and it was because he loved David so intensely—as his own soul—that he did it. In this covenant "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." These

tokens of his friendship Jonathan gave as pledges of his loyalty and faithfulness. When David saw them they would keep him in mind of his friend and all that he had promised. When Jonathan was out of his sight these gifts would assure him that he was true, whether present or absent, as true in absence as in presence.

David sometimes grew discouraged when Saul pursued him so persistently and sought so bitterly to destroy him. Once David spoke to Jonathan of this. "What have I done?" he asked. "What is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" Jonathan assured David that no harm should be done to him by his father. "Far from it; thou shalt not die: behold, my father doeth nothing either great or small, but that he discloseth it unto me." David was still fearful. "Thy father knoweth well that I have found favour in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly . . . there is but a step between me and death." Then Jonathan, to reassure David, agreed to find out his father's feeling and let David know. "When I have sounded my father, . . . shall I not then send unto thee?" Jonathan's position was most delicate and difficult. He was loyal to his father, and yet while his father was determined to kill David, he was loyal also to his friend. To maintain these two loyalties in such circumstances required the greatest care. Yet Jonathan never failed in either.

"The Lord do so to Jonathan, and more also,

should it please my father to do thee evil, if I disclose it not unto thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace." Saul tried in every way to turn Jonathan against David, but Jonathan's affection for David wavered not. At last Saul discovered, or at least came to believe, that David was the one whom God had marked out as "the neighbour more worthy than thou," to be king in his stead. Surely now he could break up Jonathan's friendship for the young shepherd. So he told him that as long as David lived, he, Jonathan, could not become king. It must have required a terrible struggle for Jonathan to give up all the hopes of royalty and to know that his friend, not he, should wear the crown. But his friendship stood even this test, too. Instead of combining with his father to prevent David's accession he went out and tried to save David's life from Saul's rage. There could have been no severer test of friendship than this.

Jonathan showed his confidence in David's friendship for him at this point. "Thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the lovingkindness of the Lord, that I die not; but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever." Jonathan foresaw something at least of what was coming upon his family, and sought to provide for them so that they would not suffer. He committed them to his friend who was to be in the place of power, knowing that David would be kind to them. We see here two noble things—first, a father's love

for his children, seeking shelter for them in a great coming calamity; second, Jonathan's confidence in David's friendship. And David was equal to his friend's confidence. One of the most interesting incidents of his reign is his gentle care of the lame son of Jonathan, whom he took into his own household and cared for as tenderly as if he were his own brother.

The friendship that has a religious basis, where both the friends love God and serve Him, is doubly sacred and sure. Both Jonathan and David believed in God. Once Jonathan refers to an oath he and David had taken thus: "We have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord." Thus the friendship was sealed before God. They both loved God and trusted in Him, and it was as God's children that they had made their covenant of friendship. There is no sure and lasting friendship which has not a religious basis. In choosing friends we should choose only those who will be one in Christ with us, and whose companionship we can have in all the close and holy relations of life and also when this world is no more. The hope that cheered Jonathan here was that a friendship cemented in God could not be destroyed; that whatever might come they would still be friends and would meet again.

"I will shoot three arrows . . . as though I shot at a mark." There were no telegraphs in those days, no telephones, and that he might let David know at once Saul's attitude towards him, Jona-

than arranged a way of signalling which would not be apt to arouse suspicion. What seemed to on-lookers as only a bit of archery practise had a secret meaning which only the two friends understood. Jonathan was signalling to his friend in his hiding-place the result of his interview with his father. In this way he was warning David of his danger and bidding him flee for his life. It should always be the part of faithful friendship to give a friend warning of danger. There are many kinds of danger of which we should let our friends know. Most of us would give notice if we knew of a plot to assassinate our friend; but there are other dangers—from evil companionships, false friends, temptations, bad habits—and faithful friendships ought in some way to give quick and honest warning of these also.

These are but a few of the suggestions that come from this noble friendship of Jonathan's and David's. Such friendships are very rare. Yet every young man is better for having a strong, true and noble friendship. Young men have many temptations, and there is a wonderful restraining and constraining power in the life of one we love. We dare not do wrong in the sacred presence of a trusted friend. We all know how unworthy we feel when we come with the recollection of some sin or some meanness into the presence of one we honour. One writes of the hallowing influence of such a presence:

“Each soul whispers to herself: ‘’Twere like a breach
Of reverence in a temple; could I dare
Here speak untruth, here wrong my inmost thought.
Here I grow strong and pure; here I may yield
Without shamefacedness the little brought
From out my poorer life, and stand revealed
And glad and trusting, in the sweet and rare
And tender presence which hath filled this air.’”

CHAPTER XXVIII

SAUL TRIES TO KILL DAVID

Read I. Samuel XVIII. 5-16

AT first Saul was strongly attracted to David. David's valour that day in the conflict with Goliath, which won the friendship of Jonathan, won also the king's admiration. The noble service he had rendered in his victory over the champion aroused Saul's gratitude. But soon the evil nature in the man asserted itself.

It seems to have been soon after David's anointing that Saul fell under the influence of melancholy and became subject to fits of insanity. It was thought that music might be beneficial, and when one who could play well on a harp was sought for, the boy David was found, and he was brought to the king's court. When Saul saw David he loved him and made him his armour-bearer. When Saul's distress came on, David would take his harp and play before him, and the music soothed the king and drove away the evil spirit.

David did not remain continuously with Saul, for

he was at home at the time of the war with the Philistines and had come up from his father's house on a visit to his brothers when the incident of his duel with the giant occurred. After this David was again with Saul. "Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house."

David had had no military training or experience—he had been a shepherd lad in the quiet fields about Bethlehem from his boyhood. His heroic deed in meeting the champion brought him from his obscurity into the public eye. War was the business of the king of Israel, for on every side enemies were troublesome. Saul took David into his court and he began at once a soldier's life. Saul gave him a position of responsibility and sent him out in war's expeditions. "David went out whithersoever Saul sent him." It is interesting to follow the story of David's training from the time we first meet him. All his experiences were part of his preparation for the kingship. He was taken into Saul's household, then into the army and sent out over the country in military excursions. For years he was the object of the king's hatred and was hunted from place to place. All the while he was in God's school, however, and God was making of him the man who was to rule His people. God is always making men. He has a plan for everyone's life, and the events, circumstances and experiences of life make the school in which the man is trained.

There was something in David which won hearts for him wherever he went. He was popular everywhere. Whatever he did "it was good in the sight of all the people." He was a favourite from the first. He had a winning personality. His victory over Goliath made his name known throughout the whole country. The people were pleased, therefore, when he was honoured by the king. It is a great thing to have the power of making friends. It is the secret of many men's success. No doubt people naturally differ in the possession of this power. Winningness is in a measure a natural gift. But it can also be acquired and cultivated. It is told of a well-known English writer of books that in her early youth she was the homeliest girl in the town where she lived. She was aware of this and resolved that lacking physical attractions she would cultivate the qualities which give beauty to disposition and character. She became known at length as a very angel of kindness. She went everywhere on errands of love. She was the friend of the sick, the sorrowing, the poor, the troubled. Love grew to such sweetness in her disposition and spirit that people forgot her homeliness and saw only the beauty of her character. The only way to make friends is to be friendly. David loved people and the people loved him.

Great honour was shown to David when he returned from his victory over the Philistine. It would have been so in any country. Heroes are

always applauded. "The women sang one to another as they played, and said :

"Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."

It was natural that the women of the land should thus celebrate David's victory. Women always love heroes, and David had proved himself a true hero. Heroes are lauded everywhere. But the battlefield is not the only place where brave deeds are done. There are other heroes, and nobler ones, than those of war. Every man who loves truth and stands up manfully for right against wrong is a hero. Everyone who follows Christ through opposition and persecution, standing firm and unmoved in his loyalty, is a hero. The missionaries who died in the Boxer rebellion were heroes, and no less heroes were they who went out to take the places of those who had fallen at their posts. There are many heroes in common life, too, whose brave deeds pass unrecognised and unpraised. The songs of the women were sweet music to the young man in whose honour they were sung. It is always pleasant to have the approval of one's neighbours and friends. It cheers us and makes us braver and stronger, inspiring us to other worthy deeds, to hear the commendation of men. We wrong others when we withhold the words of appreciation which it is in our heart to speak, but which we do not speak. We ought to cheer each other on the way, for oftentimes the way is hard and the burdens are heavy.

Popularity has its disadvantages. David would have been happier in the end if the women of the land had not gone wild over his triumph. It always costs to be successful. "Saul was very wroth" when he heard the women sing the praises of the boy David. While the women sang his own praises, Saul was well pleased. But as he listened he heard another name, the name of David. And as he listened still more closely he found that the refrain ran :

"Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."

The first line was sweet to the king, but the second was bitter as wormwood to him. The women had ten times as much honour for David as for their king, and this made him very angry. All his former love for David changed to bitter hate. It takes a good deal of grace to hear others receive praise which we have been accustomed to receive. Some people cannot bear to hear others commended at all, even when it takes no honour from themselves. But it is harder still to see another coming into the place in people's plaudits which they have held before. "The bright day brings out the adder." There are many people who feel just as Saul did when others receive honour and appreciation, though they may hide their feelings better than he did. In contrast, however, recall how Samuel bore himself when he was set aside as ruler and Saul was made king, displacing him. He accepted the humiliation meekly and helped to find the king and

to put him on his throne. Recall how sweetly John the Baptist decreased as Jesus increased. All of us some time in our life will have occasion to try, in a smaller or greater way, whether we can behave any better than Saul.

“Base envy withers at another’s joy
And hates the excellence it cannot reach.”

The Bible tells us that man was made but a little lower than God. Yet man is capable also of descending until he is but little higher than demons. Whatever Godlikeness there was originally in Saul seems now to have been changed into fiendishness. The record says: “Saul eyed David from that day and forward.” That is, he set his heart on destroying David. Saul had a splendid chance to show a noble spirit when he heard David’s heroism praised above his own by the women. If he had joined in the honouring of the young man who had saved the day for the army and the country, if he had rejoiced in David’s success, he would have proved himself a truly manly man. But he lost his chance. The only secret of keeping bitterness out of one’s heart in such a case as this is to keep love in the heart. If we love on, no matter what comes, our hearts will never grow bitter.

But Saul did what so many other men do—he let the evil spirit of jealousy into his heart, and that drove out love. Evil spirits and bad passions are always watching, ready to enter into a man when they see a chance to make mischief. There is

no other time when one is so open to these malign messengers as when some bad temper or passion has possession of us. When envy or jealousy is cherished in a heart and allowed to stay, no one can tell what the result will be. The worst crimes start in just such dark passions. We know how it was with Cain. Abel had never done him any harm. The only thing Cain could ever say against Abel was that he was good and that his life pleased God. Yet that was enough to change love into hate in Cain and lead him to the dark crime of murder. Saul saw David honoured and heard him praised. David had done nothing against him. Yet Saul let the envy get into his heart and possess it and drive him into deeds worthy of a madman.

It is a pitiful story, this of Saul's bitter envy, as we follow it in its various phases. "Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand." This promotion was not made to honour David, but almost certainly was prompted by the hope that David would fall in battle and thus be taken out of Saul's way. Nothing would have pleased Saul better than to have David killed. This shows the depth of wickedness in his heart. If he suspected at all that David was the "neighbour" who the Lord said should be king in his place, then Saul's effort to destroy David was not merely to get a rival out of the way, but was also an attempt to defeat the Divine purpose.

Usually bitterness kindles bitterness, but Saul's cruel persecution did not stir the least measure of

vindictiveness or resentment in David's heart. "David behaved himself wisely in all ways; and the Lord was with him." The true thing to do when one has enemies and persecutors is to move right on in the path of duty, day by day, leaving to God the ordering of His steps, His protection from harm and the outcome of the whole matter. That is what David did. He did not meet plot with counterplot. He did not try to match stratagem with stratagem. He simply attended to his own business with courage and fidelity and gave himself no concern whatever about the king's wicked charges. The result was that Saul became afraid of David, and the people loved him.

David's self-control in all this matter was wonderful. He never lost his self-mastery. He had learned how to rule his own spirit, and this meant more to him than any of the achievements of his courage of which the women sang or which the men praised. He who has learned to be master of himself is the truest hero and the princeliest man. Everything in David that was beautiful made Saul's jealousy the more bitter. The secret of this feeling was his overweening self-love. He saw things only in their relation to himself. If he could have used David to advance his interests and to bring new laurels to his brow, he would have been quite content. But when he saw that David's advancement was drawing away the people's eyes and huzzas from himself, he determined to get him out of the way. We all need to be on our guard

against this pitiful perversion of life. We must learn to overcome evil with good. Thus did Christ Himself meet the hate of enemies. His heart kept its sweetness amid all the wrong and cruelty that He met.

“Oh, the hurt, the hurt, the hurt and the hurt of love!
Wherever the sun shines, the waters go.
It hurts the snowdrop, it hurts the dove,
God on his throne and man below.

“Thou knowest, O Saviour, its hurt and its sorrows,
Didst rescue its joy by the might of Thy pain;
Lord of all yesterdays, days and to-morrows,
Help us love on in the hope of Thy gain.”

Set side by side with Saul's spirit that of Jonathan, magnanimous, self-forgetful and large-hearted. We never can know what evil may come to self-adoration. It may be noticed here also that nothing came out of all Saul's scheming and plotting. He did not pull David down. He did not defeat the Lord's purpose for the kingdom. He only made himself wretched and brought shame and ruin upon his own soul. It is always so. Wrong done to others rebounds and hurts him who does it.

CHAPTER XXIX

DAVID SPARES SAUL

Read I. Samuel XXVI. 5-12, 21-25

TWICE at least David had Saul in his power and might have killed him, but each time he magnanimously spared him. On the former occasion Saul was seeking David in the wilderness of En-gedi, and entered a cave, not knowing that David and his men were that very hour hiding in the inner recesses of the same cave. When it was discovered that the king was in the cave, David's men tried to induce their master to take advantage of the opportunity and kill him. But David refused, only stealing up to the king and cutting off the skirt of his robe, that he might have evidence to prove to Saul that he had no hostile purpose towards him. When Saul had passed out of the cave David also went out and called after him, telling him that he must not longer believe that he was his enemy. He then held up the part of the king's garment in his hand to let him know how easily he could have

killed him if it had been in his heart to do so. Saul was deeply affected, and the two men then made a covenant of friendship. But Saul's kindly feeling, like all the good things in him, was transient only, and before long he was again hunting David among the mountains.

In this second sparing of Saul's life by David, the king and his men were pressing their relentless pursuit and lodged one night close to where David and his men were hiding. If Saul had known that David was near he would have sought to capture him. He had allowed his envy to drive all the love out of his heart. The lesson our Master teaches us is to bear wrong patiently, to forgive injury, to return kindness for unkindness, good for evil, love for hate. It is a fatal injury to his life when one allows himself to grow bitter, to cherish resentment, to let envy or any hurt feeling rankle in his heart. At last love is utterly driven out, and dark and malign passions take full possession. It was thus with Saul. Envy is one of the most perilous passions, and one which if cherished may come to a fearful growth.

When Abishai, who accompanied David on the visit to Saul's camp, saw the king sleeping within the cordon of waggons, and all his men asleep, it seemed to him that it was now time for David to put an end to his enemy's efforts to kill him. Abishai put his own interpretation on what seemed to him a clear Providence. He inferred that God would not thus have brought Saul into David's

hands if He had not meant that he should kill him. Many of us are too apt to interpret Providences in accordance with our own wishes. When we are desiring guidance in a certain matter, and there is one way we very much want to take, we frequently find what seem to us to be Providences which favour our preference. This incident shows us that we need to be careful in interpreting the meaning of events. We are not to enter every door that stands open. Opportunity does not always indicate duty. When you find in some trouble a person who has done you a grievous wrong, there is an opportunity to repay his wrong by refusing to help him. But does the opportunity justify the retaliation? The "Providence" in this case affords a test of character rather than a Divine commission to do wrong. In interpreting Providences we must remember that no opportunity to do anything in itself wrong must ever be regarded as a Divine leading. Abishai's inference was not justifiable. It was a misreading of the thought of God. An opportunity for revenge is never a voice of God commanding revenge. Our duty always is to be kind, to bear wrong patiently, to return love for hate.

"Just to be tender, just to be true,
Just to be glad the whole day through,
Just to be merciful, just to be mild,
Just to be trustful as a child.
Just to be gentle and kind and sweet,
Just to be helpful with willing feet.
Just to be cheery when things go wrong,
Just to drive sadness away with song,

Whether the hour is dark or bright,
Just to be loyal to God and right,
Just to believe that God knows best,
Just in His promises ever to rest,
Just to let love be our daily key,
This is God's will for you and me."

David's temptation to give heed to the words of Abishai was great. Saul had been pursuing him with cruel hatred, with no reason whatever. His life was continually in peril. It would be easy to listen to Abishai and end it all. The suddenness of the opportunity also made it harder to resist the impulse. "Nothing is more critical than a sudden opportunity of indulging an ardent passion. With scarcely a moment for deliberation, one is apt to be hurried blindly along, and at once to commit the deed. With all his noble nature, Robert the Bruce could not refrain from plunging his dagger into the heart of the treacherous Comyn, even in the convent of the Minorite friars."

But David refused to listen for a moment to the voice that counselled the destruction of the king. The plausible suggestion that God had put Saul into his power in order that he might smite him had no influence upon David. He buttressed himself in his refusal upon the sacredness of the person of the king, the Lord's anointed. "Destroy him not; for who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" In this heroic rejection of the temptation David showed admirable self-control. He restrained himself, and he restrained his hot-headed men. He would not put

forth his own hand to touch the king, and he would not suffer any of his followers to do it. In the first instance David may have hoped to soften Saul's heart by sparing him, but this second time he could cherish no such hope. He acted here purely on principle, from regard for the sacredness of the king.

One feeling which must have been strong in favour of David's destroying Saul was that he would thus open his own way to his place as king. He knew that he was to be Saul's successor. He seemed now to have a short, quick way to the throne—it was necessary only to take advantage of his opportunity and kill Saul. But David would not dare take the throne until God gave it to him. This is a very important lesson. There often are things that God intends to give us, but which we must wait to receive in God's way. Short-cuts in traveling often bring us into trouble. Short-cuts in life's paths are always hindrances in the end. Jacob's mother knew that Jacob was to have the blessing of the first-born, but if she had waited it would have come without being stained, as it was by her own and Jacob's deception. Young men are ambitious, and their ambition may be pure and right, but sometimes they are in such feverish haste to reach what they wish that they take the short-cut of dishonesty or selfishness to get sooner to the coveted place. But it never pays. It was far better that David should wander on in exile for a time longer and then reach the throne by a clean path.

It is pleasant to see young men get on in life, but we must always ask how they get on before we can know whether their elevation is really an honour or not.

David practised here also long before Christ came the teaching of returning love for hate, kindness for unkindness. "Would it not be manly to resent it?" said one who had received an insult. "Yes," was the reply, "but it would be Godlike to forgive it." David did the Godlike thing. He had a chance to avenge himself. He had his cruel and relentless enemy in his power. The opportunity was most favourable. One stroke, and Saul never would have troubled him any more. His life would then have been safe. He would have become king at once. His men were urging it. Yet he overcame the temptation and allowed Saul to pass out of his hand unharmed. He listened to the voice of God speaking to him in his own conscience and restrained the impulse to avenge himself.

No lesson is harder to learn than that which David's example teaches us. The first impulse, even of a child when wronged or hurt by another, is to seek revenge. Sometimes older persons encourage this spirit in children by telling them to whip the chair or rocking-horse by which they have chanced to be hurt. In older people, too, the desire for revenge is natural and can be repressed only by the higher law of love which Christ teaches. The lesson to learn is that the punishment of injustice or wrong done to us does not belong to ourselves,

but must be left in God's hands. "Vengeance belongeth unto Me; I will recompense, saith the Lord."

"The Lord will render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness." There are apt to be wrong views about bearing injuries. People ask: "Is there to be no justice in cases like David's? Must we quietly bear wrongs, and must the person who does the wrongs never receive any punishment?" Our sense of right is sometimes so outraged that our souls cry out in remonstrance when we are told that we never should resist, but should turn the other cheek when one cheek has been smitten. We are not the judges of other men and their actions. There is but one judge, that is God, and we must leave in his hands all the right and the wrong in our lives. Our clumsy hands are not skillful enough to adjust such delicate matters as these. We are not required to say that a certain person's treatment of us was beautiful when it was outrageous; that no wrong was done to us when we know there was infamous wrong; that the person deserves no punishment when it is clear that he deserves severe punishment. But we are to recognise the truth that that is God's matter, not ours; that we are to be patient, meek, and non-resisting, leaving the whole matter in God's hands. We have the example of our Master. When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. We may commit into God's hand,

as David did here, all the matter of the wrongs or injuries others have done to us, and leave it there with perfect confidence. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

"Thank God that God shall judge my soul, not man!

I marvel when they say,

'Think of that awful day—

No pitying fellow sinner's eyes shall scan

With tolerance thy soul,

But His who knows the whole,

The God whom all men own is wholly just.'

"Hold thou that last word dear,

And live untouched by fear.

He knows His own hand laid

On each the mark of some ancestral stain.

Not souls severely white,

But groping for more light

Are what Eternal Justice here demands.

Cling to that sweet word 'Just,'

All's well with thee if thou art in just hands."

CHAPTER XXX

DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN

Read I. Samuel XXXI.

THE story of the last days of Saul's life is very sad. God had departed from him, and he had no heavenly guidance. He was drifting like a crippled vessel on the ocean. In the great crisis, when he must fight his decisive battle with the Philistines, he turned in his despair to superstition and imposture. He had cried to heaven, but no answer had come.

Saul had been most fierce and zealous in driving from the land all those who claimed to know the secrets of the future and of the invisible world. He did not dream that the time should ever come when he would search the country for one of this class for himself.

The account of the king's visit to the witch of En-dor is most pathetic. The Philistines had gathered their forces together for battle against Israel. When Saul saw the great host that he must meet, consternation seized him. In numbers they were

far beyond his own army. In his fear he went to God, but only in formal ways. His heart was not penitent, but in a mechanical way he tried the means that were in common use to get guidance and help from God. "But the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." This may seem strange to some readers when it is remembered how gracious God is and how He loves to answer prayer. The trouble was with Saul himself. God had not failed, but Saul's heart was so hardened that there really was no true prayer made by him to God.

When Saul had gone under cover of the night to En-dor, he found the woman and implored her to bring Samuel to him from Sheol. She had no power to call anybody from the dead, but, to her amazement, Samuel appeared before her. God seems to have sent him in a supernatural way to tell Saul of his awful doom. Saul heard the hopeless words from Samuel's lips, and then, with despairing heart, went back through the darkness to his tent. When the battle was on next morning, Saul led his army to defeat and disaster, because he had sinned and lost the Divine favour. It is idle and useless to fight against God. Then it is just as idle and useless to try to live without the Divine help. The battle went against Saul from the very beginning. "The men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa." The hottest fight was against the king and his sons.

"The Philistines slew Jonathan." We cannot but

grieve at this sad record. We have learned to love Jonathan, as we have seen in him so much that was noble and beautiful. It adds to the pathos of Jonathan's death, too, to remember that he was dragged down by his father's sin. Had Saul proved himself a true and worthy king, Jonathan would have been his successor on the throne. But on account of his father's failure he lost the crown, and not only this, but died in the disaster in which his father fell. The sins of parents may cut off and destroy the hopes of their children and rob them of their birth-right honours and blessings. There are thousands of children whose lives are blighted, sometimes for both worlds, by the evil ways of their parents. In this case, the brave, noble, manly Jonathan perishes in the calamity brought on by his father's persistent disobedience. The guilty father drags down with him his pure, noble and blameless son. No man can go on in a sinful life without involving his family as well as himself in sorrow.

Saul's sons appear to have fallen early in the battle. Saul became the centre of the assault. "The battle went sore against Saul, and the archers overtook him; and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers." There are few sadder pictures in all history than this of Saul on Mount Gilboa rushing on to his doom with the madness of despair. Judgment will surely come to those who persist in sin. Saul wrecked his own destiny. God's plan for him was that he should be a worthy king. He was the goodliest man in all the nation. His mis-

sion was to lead his people to victory over all their enemies. Instead of this noble record, however, the story of his life is one of defeat and disaster. The reason is not far to seek. God made no mistake in naming Saul as king. He might have been all that was in God's plan for him. The failure was his own. He would not accept God's guidance, and thus he failed to fulfill the Divine purpose for himself. Many years before this time the doom of Saul had been pronounced upon him by the prophet. Judgment lingered, but did not fail in the end. Men may live in sin and no disaster come to them. God may seem to be taking no account of their evil deeds. The sun may shine brightly over them, the rain may fall gently upon them, prosperity may continue to follow them. But let them not think that God has forgotten to be just.

"He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck
Shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

When Saul saw that there was no hope of retrieving the battle, he knew that he must soon fall into the hands of the Philistines, and he knew also that they would inflict upon him all the insults and indignities they could possibly devise. Terrible as war always is, its horrors have been greatly mitigated by the advance of civilisation. Prisoners are now treated with as great a measure of kindness as is possible in the circumstances. Prisoners taken in war in ancient times suffered untold tortures and humiliations. On Assyrian monuments, for in-

stance, are found representations of kings compelled to carry the heads of their own sons, or pinned themselves to the ground by stakes driven through their hands and feet, or being flayed alive. If the Philistines treated captive kings as the Assyrians did, it is no wonder that Saul had a horror of being taken alive by the enemy. It is no wonder, perhaps, either, that he resorted to suicide to save himself from the hands of the Philistines. First, he besought his armour-bearer to thrust him through, and when the armour-bearer refused, he took his own sword and fell upon it.

Suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment. Human life is sacred in God's sight, and to touch it is a crime. Life is the gift of God entrusted by Him to each one of us, and it is to be cherished and preserved until He Himself calls back His gift. Suicide is unfaithfulness to this trust. We are required to use our life in the work assigned to us, and cannot without gravest sin lay it down until the time God has appointed. Even a heathen philosopher said: "We should not abandon the station or post of life without the orders of our Commander—that is, God."

Suicide is also an act of moral cowardice. It is committed usually, as in Saul's case, to escape meeting some other trouble or danger. Saul killed himself rather than fall into the hands of the Philistines to be tortured and humiliated. A man commits a crime, and, rather than face his deed before men, he takes his own life. He forgets that in

doing this he is rushing into another Presence far more terrible than the presence of man. Saul escaped the cruelty of the Philistines that day, but went, stained with this last crime of self-murder, to meet his God.

It has been said "Saul had really prepared for himself this wretched death. He had disregarded the prophet, and so was without consolation. He had killed the priests, and so was without sacrifice or intercession. He had driven away David, and so was without the help of the best soldier in the nation. He had lived, in his later years, at least, like a madman; and like a madman he threw himself on his sword and died. As a man sows, so shall he reap. As a life is shaped by its own deeds, so is the death determined. One lives a selfish life, hardening his heart against appeal and reproach, and his doom is to lose all power and experience of sympathy. He passes through the world winning no love, and he passes out of the world leaving after him no regret."

The defeat of the Israelites was complete and overwhelming. In the humiliating treatment of the bodies of the king and his sons we have a hint of the cruelty the Philistines would have practised upon Saul if they had taken him alive. Saul's head was cut off and put in the temple of Dagon, his armour was hung up in the house of Ashtaroth, and his body was fastened to the wall of Beth-shan. The bodies of his sons were treated in the same barbarous way.

There is only one incident in all this terrible story of the death of Saul which has any brightness in it. This is what is told of the men of Jabesh-gilead: "And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard concerning him that which the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan; and they came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under the tamarisk-tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days." It was a brave and noble thing which these men did. It is especially beautiful because of the motive which inspired it. Once, when Saul was just beginning his reign, he did a great kindness to the people of Jabesh-gilead. Now, when Saul was dead, forsaken, without friends, his body mutilated and dishonoured, the memory of this kind act revived, and under the spur of gratitude these valiant men, at the risk of their own lives, did this heroic deed.

The worst men always have someone to mourn them. Never was there a tyrant who did more crimes and cruelties than Nero. One would say that he was incapable of kindness to anyone, and that no one mourned his death. Yet it is recorded that on the morning after he was buried amid universal execration, some unknown hand strewed flowers upon his grave. There was one person, at least, who remembered Nero gratefully. When we read of the kindness of the men of Jabesh-gilead to

their dead king, we cannot but recall another instance of a King who hung dead on a cross, when two friends, long secret and silent, came forward to do honour to the torn and dishonoured form. It was a brave and noble deed, and it saved that sacred body from being cast away with the bodies of common malefactors, giving to it, instead of such dishonour, most honourable and loving burial.

Saul owed all the honour he received in his burial to one kind deed which he had done many years before. Had his reign continued as it began he would have had the gratitude of a whole nation when he came to die. One of the most pitiable things in history is the terrible failure which Saul made of his life. We should try to live so that we shall be remembered with gratitude, and leave behind us a memory of good deeds. This is one lesson.

Another is that we never should fail to show gratitude to anyone who has conferred a favour upon us. Then let us be sure that we so live as to obtain honour from God when we come to the end of our life. If we miss that, earth's most brilliant honour will be failure and mockery. The way to get the crown from God's hand at last is to do God's will always here.

Amid all the sad things in the story of Saul, the incident of his kindness in his early years to the people of Jabesh-gilead lives like a rose in a field of thorns. It is told of a noted criminal that once in his young manhood days he had caught a run-

away horse in the street and saved the lives of a woman and her child in the carriage the wild animal was dragging after him. His life was a long list of evil things, with nothing in all its years that could be commended. But when waiting in his prison for the death penalty, his mind would revert continually to the memory of the one heroic kindness done in his youth, finding in this a gleam of hope. So does Saul's one brave kindness shine in the dark story of his life. We should seek to fill our whole life with deeds of love, and then we shall have glad memories to give us comfort in looking back over our life. One of the sayings of Lincoln suggests a noble aim for life. "Die when I may," he said, "I want it said of me, by those who know me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow."

CHAPTER XXXI

DAVID BECOMES KING

Read II. Samuel II. 1-10

SAUL was dead. David was out of the country when the fatal battle on Mount Gilboa was fought. Indeed, he was with the Philistines when they were preparing for the battle. He had been dwelling in their country as a place of refuge from Saul, and when the Philistines were gathering at Aphek David seems to have intended to go with them to fight against his own people. But some of the princes of the Philistines objected to the presence of David and of his men in their army, mistrusting them, lest they might prove adversaries in the day of battle. The king apologised to David for not allowing him to remain to join in the battle, and then sent him away.

We can scarcely understand how David could in any case have gone with the Philistines to war against his own people. It certainly was well that he did not go, when we consider the results of the battle. There seemed also a Providence in his re-

turn to Ziklag, for he was just in time to go to the rescue of his family, who had been carried away in his absence.

David learned of the death of Saul from an Amalekite stranger, who came to him with his clothes rent. The story the Amalekite told concerning his own part in the tragedy of Saul's death seems to have been fabricated for the purpose of winning favour with David. "In wandering over the field of battle he had found the corpse of Saul and stripped it of its ornaments. With these he hastened to David, and invented his fictitious story in the hope of securing an additional reward for having with his hand rid David of his bitterest enemy and removed the obstacle which stood between him and the throne." But he had made a grievous mistake in his estimate of David. David may or may not have believed the man's story, but he took him at his word and visited upon him instantly the penalty of his impious crime.

David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan is full of tender words. Not a breath of bitterness against Saul is found in it, and David's love for Jonathan is beautifully expressed. Dean Stanley says of this elegy: "It is needless to dwell on the poetic beauty, the chivalrous loyalty, the tender love, which characterises this most pathetic of funeral odes. Saul had fallen with all his sins upon his head, fallen in the bitterness of despair, and, as it might have seemed to mortal eye, under the shadow of the curse of God. But not only is

there in David's lament no revengeful feeling at the death of his persecutor, . . . but he dwells with unmixed love on the brighter recollections of the departed. He speaks only of the Saul of earlier times, the mighty conqueror, the delight of his people, the father of his beloved and faithful friend; like him in life, united with him in death. Such expressions . . . may fairly be taken as justifying the irrepressible instinct of humanity which compels us to dwell on the best qualities of those who have just departed."

For many years David had been waiting to become king. He had waited very patiently and had made no effort to hasten the Providence of God. Now Saul was dead, and David knew that the kingdom was to be his. Still he shows the most obedient and patient spirit, not taking even a single step until he had inquired of God concerning his duty. We get a good lesson here. We should always wait for God, never hurrying His Providences. We should ask for guidance continually, not entering upon any course until we have sought the Divine direction. There is a Bible word which counsels us to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, promising that if we do this He will direct our paths. We should move reverently through this world, praying continually, "Show me the way." In even the smallest matters we ought to seek to learn God's will, and then we shall be sure of blessing.

The Lord commanded David to go up to Judah, and with his family he went to Hebron. "And the

men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah." It takes a long while to make a good man. It is interesting to think of the training of men for important positions. The making of Peter or John or Paul occupied a long while, and the process was by no means easy. It is especially interesting in this connection to think of the making of David. God was a long time in preparing him to be king. He was anointed by Samuel, and thus set apart for his office when only a shepherd lad. He was not then fit to be a king. He knew something about taking care of sheep, but nothing about governing men. It was necessary that he should be trained. Soon came the challenge of Goliath, when David showed his skill and courage. Then he was taken into Saul's court, where he learnt much about men and the ways of kings.

The friendship of Jonathan brought a new experience into David's life, an experience which proved most enriching. The envy of Saul seemed a bitter and cruel thing to break into such a happy career as David's. It seemed to set him back in his preparation and to block his way to success. But no doubt this, too, had its place in his training. It taught him many lessons. He learnt from it patience in enduring wrong and injustice. He learnt self-control, one of the most important lessons anyone can learn, for if one cannot control his own spirit he cannot be a leader of men, nor can he ever make the most of his own life. Saul's bitter

enmity drove David away from luxury and refinement, where his experiences were rough and hard. He hid in caves and on the mountains. He learnt how the common people lived, and was taught sympathy with men in their hardships and trials. No doubt David was a better king afterwards because of his long years of persecution and exile. He learnt also the art of war through his experiences during this troublous period. Living constantly in danger, he was trained to watchfulness and alertness. He became wise and tactful also in dealing with men, and was thus fitted for the place he afterwards filled as king of a great nation. In all this and in other ways was David made ready for his duties as king. Then, at last, God called him to the throne.

We must not think it strange if we are called to endure trials, disappointments, hardships, temptations and sufferings in our earlier years, for it is in this way that God would train us for noble character and for large usefulness. The life that is all ease and luxury, with no hardness, no strain or struggle, no trial of endurance, no wrong or injustice, may be the most pleasant, but it is not being most effectively trained for beneficent service.

A deed of heroism and loyalty stirs the people to patriotic admiration wherever it is wrought. Evidently the people were proud of what the men of Jabesh-gilead had done. David was not long in hearing of it. "They told David, saying, The men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul." We

have already learnt that when the Philistines found the bodies of Saul and his sons on the battlefield of Mount Gilboa they carried them away and hung them on the wall of the town of Beth-shan, exposing them to public gaze. This was their way of exulting over their victory. Jabesh-gilead was a town east of the Jordan, which Saul had once helped in time of trouble, delivering them from cruel enemies. The people remembered this old-time kindness, and now, when they heard that the bodies of the king and his sons were exposed in such an inhuman way, they determined to rescue them from this dishonour. Accordingly, they entered the enemy's lines, and removing the bodies from the wall, took them away and burnt them to save them from further indignity and dishonour, and buried the ashes under a tree. We should keep ever warm in our hearts the memory of kindnesses, and never should fail of gratitude to those who have done deeds of love for us. It would make this a sweeter, happier world if all men were mindful ever of the kindnesses they have received from others.

When David learnt of the kindness the people of Jabesh-gilead had shown to the bodies of Saul and Jonathan, he was very glad. So he sent messengers to say to them, "Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul." This encomium upon the people of Jabesh-gilead showed a noble spirit in David. We must remember how Saul had treated him, trying to kill him, hunting him among the hills as if he

had been a wild beast, driving him from the country, and compelling him for seven years to live as an exile. Yet through all these years David had never shown any resentment towards Saul. He had never once retaliated nor sought in any way to do harm to Saul. Twice, at least, he had spared the king's life, refusing to injure him when Saul was in his power. Through all his bitter experience, David's heart remained gentle, free from resentment or bitterness. Now, when he learnt of the honour which had been shown by the people of Jabesh-gilead to Saul's dead body, his heart was glad, and he was deeply grateful, as if the kindness had been shown to his own father. All this is evidence of a noble and magnanimous spirit in David. It is the very spirit which Jesus a thousand years later commended as that which belongs to the kingdom of heaven. The problem of true living is to keep the heart always sweet, whatever the circumstances and experiences of life may be. We all need to cultivate generosity and large-heartedness. Nothing reveals finer nobleness of character than such a spirit shown to one who in his life had been a bitter and relentless enemy. Yet it is not natural to endure wrong without resentment, to return love for hate, kindness for unkindness. Only those whose hearts are under the influence of Divine grace are capable of such love.

“Let your hands be strong, and be ye valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.” Thus David

took the opportunity to say a word of cheer to the men who had proved themselves so loyal to their king, exhorting them also to continue to be brave and strong for their country. That was good counsel to give to the people of Jabesh-gilead. It is good counsel to give to the young men to-day, for courage is one of the finest qualities in true manhood. Thomas Hughes puts it down as the first element of a manly character. Neither do we need to wait for war to give us opportunities to be valiant and courageous. There is a higher courage than that which shows itself in brave deeds on the battlefield. It takes courage to be true amid the world's many temptations to be false. It requires courage to do what is right when all the people about us are doing things that are wrong.

It requires courage to confess Christ before the world. It is not hard to rise up in a company of Christian people and be received into their number as a church member. All about the young confessor, then, are those who are in full sympathy with him—his friends, and other Christians who love him and are ready to help him, to cheer and encourage him and stand by him in all his life. The hardest test, however, in confessing Christ is out in the world, where sympathy is wanting, when upon every side are those who have no care for spiritual things, and often are openly hostile to the religion which they represent. We all need to have our hands strengthened continually, even for common life and service, but much more for duty and faith-

fulness in the face of opposition and enmity. When human encouragement is lacking we are sure that God will stand by us and make our hands strong by His own strength. We are set to fight the battles of the Lord. We have victories to win against evil, against wrong. It takes courage to be a true man, a true woman, in this world. But God will help us if we trust Him and lean upon Him in all our weakness and need.

David did not find an unobstructed way to the throne. Saul was dead, but there were those who were not willing that his dynasty should perish with him. Abner was the captain of Saul's army, and, besides, was a relative of the king's. After the fatal battle on Mount Gilboa Abner took Ish-bosheth, and under military power made him Saul's successor. "Now Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, had taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; and he made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel." In a sense the crown belonged to Ish-bosheth. He was the natural heir to the throne. If Saul had been a good king the throne would have continued in the family. Thus we see how Saul wronged his own children by his unfaithfulness to God. Every parent has a large responsibility for the good, the success and the honour of his children. He should pass down to them the privileges and blessings which he himself has enjoyed. If he fails to do this he has sinned against

them. It was not God's plan that Ish-bosheth should be king, since, on account of Saul's disobedience, the kingdom was taken from him and given to David. It was the ambition of Abner, the general of Saul's army, that sought the promotion of Ish-bosheth against the Divine will. He was fighting against God in trying to continue the house of Saul. The true King in this world, the only one who rules by Divine right, is Jesus Christ. All who reject His sway are in rebellion against God. All who try to advance any other one over Christ are resisting the Divine government and sway. We must bow to the Messiah and own Him as our Master and our Lord.

CHAPTER XXXII

DAVID BRINGS UP THE ARK

Read II. Sam. VI. 1-12; I. Chron. XIII

THE continuance of Ish-bosheth's reign was brief. It had no moral strength from the beginning, and was kept in existence only by the ambition of Abner. The story of the short years is one of battles, quarrels and assassinations. At length Ish-bosheth was murdered, and then the tribes over which he had reigned came to David and desired him to be their king. So the kingdom was again consolidated. David had reigned over Judah only seven and a half years; now he became king of all Israel. Jerusalem then was made David's capital. Until now this stronghold had remained in the hands of the Jebusites, although it had been attacked and partly captured before. At length David gained full possession of the noted citadel and made his home in it.

David prospered greatly. Hiram, King of Tyre, was friendly with him, and the two kings exchanged courtesies and favours. David won a great victory

over the ancient enemies of his people, the Philistines. Thus he was established in his kingdom. His fame went out into all the lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations.

When David came to the throne, he found the religious life of the kingdom in a discouraging condition. For a long time the sacred ark, the symbol of the Divine Presence, had been lying in obscurity in a private house. Those were dark and calamitous days for the nation. Disaster followed disaster. The neglect of religion always brings trouble. We may see it in a smaller way in a home where there was once a family altar, but where the altar is broken down, where the family gathers no more to worship God, where the voice of prayer is no longer heard. The members of the household scatter away in the morning without kneeling to commit themselves to God's keeping for the day, and in the evening they gather home to rest again, seeking not the Divine blessing for the night. There is many a home of which this is a picture. The world has come in and Christ has been driven out.

After David had become king of the whole nation and had fixed his capital in Jerusalem he called the chief men of the tribes and went to bring up the ark. He had already done many things to elevate the character and the standing of the nation. He had built a capital city and a palace of cedar for himself, and had instituted many reforms. Prosperity was coming, and all was hopeful. But something was yet wanting. Something is always

wanting when God is left out. An artist had invited a few friends to his studio for the first look at a new painting. The picture was beautiful, but all who saw it felt that something was lacking. There seemed to be a vagueness, an indefiniteness, a mistiness, something wanting. The artist himself saw the defect, and taking his brush, he put a touch of red upon the canvas. This changed everything. So it is when God is left out of anything in life. With the largest prosperity and the best material comforts, there is still a lack. What is needed is a line of red in the picture, the bringing of Christ with His Cross into the life of the individual, of the home, of the church, of the nation. The best blessing anyone can give to a land or to a community is to set up God's altar in its midst. Nothing else that David wrought for Israel in those days did so much for his people as his re-establishing of God's worship among them.

There is nothing else we can do for a place suffering from the waste and ruin of sin, that will mean so much for it, as to set up there the worship of God. Here is a community sunk in degradation. The people are idle and thriftless, without lofty ideals, without interest in each other, steeped in sensuality. One way of trying to lift them up would be to build them better houses and to put into their lives the refinements of civilisation. Something may thus be done for their improvement in temporal things. But another way would be to bring the gospel of Christ into their midst, to start

a Sunday-school, a preaching service, to send the Christian missionary into their homes.

The ark had been at Kiriath-jearim for a long time, ever since its return from the land of the Philistines. David desired now to establish religion in his kingdom, and planned to bring the ark to his capital. He prepared for this event with great enthusiasm. All the chosen men of Israel were gathered together. He consulted with his leading men. "Let us send abroad everywhere unto our brethren, . . . and let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we sought not unto it in the days of Saul."

The king had prepared for a very joyful time in bringing up the ark. He meant it to be a great occasion. He led the procession in person. Thirty thousand men of rank were present to take part in the ceremony. There were great choirs of singers, with musical instruments accompanying them. It was a grand fête day. It opened in splendour, but it closed in sorrow and bitter disappointment. The reason was that God can be honoured only by obedience, and this was lacking in the moving of the ark. The Lord cared nothing for David's brilliant pageant, so long as the Divine commandments were not regarded.

The whole business that day seems to have been done in a negligent way. The law required that the ark should be carried by Levites, but instead of this it was put upon a cart that was drawn by animals. The religious ceremonials prescribed had so

fallen into disuse that the Divine instructions seem to have been entirely overlooked. The carrying of the ark on a cart may have been regarded as a very small deviation from the prescribed way, but it was a deviation, nevertheless, and in God's sight marred all the great ceremony. We must worship and serve God in the way He has marked out for us, otherwise our costliest services and our most imposing ceremonies will be only an idle show in His eyes. We may do our right things in such a wrong way as to mar all the beauty of our acts by not doing them as God commands us to do them.

Uzzah was probably a Levite, and ought to have known the instructions concerning the care of the sacred ark and the manner of carrying it. The Levites were to bear it on their shoulders, but they might not come near it until it had been covered by the priests, nor touch it except with the staves provided for carrying it. The ark had been under Uzzah's care—perhaps he had come to treat it familiarly. "Uzzah put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and He smote him, because he put forth his hand to the ark; and there he died before God."

It was a natural thing for Uzzah to do. The road was rough, and it seemed as if the ark would fall off the cart. Uzzah instinctively and impulsively put out his hand to steady it. If the Levites had been carrying the ark—the only proper way—Uzzah could not have committed this sin. One

irreverence prepares the way for another—almost makes another necessary. The breaking of one commandment leads to the breaking of others. The first sin is like the little leak in the dike, which grows until it becomes a flood. If we would be safe from the final ruin, we must guard against the smallest beginning of evil.

David was greatly affected by the occurrence. At first he was angry because of the interruption of the ceremonies. The record says that he was displeased because the Lord had broken forth upon Uzzah. His second thought seems to have been one of awe and fear—that if the ark was such a holy thing, it was too terrible to have it near him. He does not appear to have thought of the sin which had been committed. Instead of penitence and sorrow, he showed wounded pride. He abandoned at once the taking of the ark to Jerusalem. He left it where it was and hurried away home.

We never should blame God when we have been punished for our sins. We should not question His justice or love in any of His dealings with us. We should accept punishment at His hand with humility and contrition, seeking to learn wherein we have sinned that we may no more displease Him. Then we need never be afraid of God's holiness, nor reject any ordinance He has appointed because of the evil it may bring upon us to use it irreverently. Sometimes good people stay away from the communion, dreading that it may bring condemnation and not blessing upon them. But no ordinance

of God will ever bring hurt to those who receive it in humility and reverence. Instead of declining to take the Holy Supper lest we may not receive it worthily, we should come to it with penitence, repentance, faith and love, for then we will find in it only blessing and joy.

David would not take the ark to Jerusalem, as he had set out to do, and it was left in the house of Obed-edom. For the three months it remained there, special Divine favour came upon the man who sheltered it. It was the same ark which had wrought such disaster when irreverently touched that now brought blessing to a home in which it was received in meekness and love. Obed-edom was not afraid to have the ark taken inside his door, and the result was good and not evil upon his household.

This incident suggests to us the blessings of true religion in a home. Some people think religion is a hindrance to happiness. It stops some pleasures. It drives out some amusements. It interferes with some ambitions. But those who open their doors to Christ, the rejected and despised One, will always be rewarded. Religion in a home blesses it. It sweetens the home life, enriches the home affections, deepens the home joys, lightens and comforts the home sorrows. It brings true prosperity, for the blessing of the Lord maketh rich. It brings protection, for the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him. It brings comfort when sorrow has entered the home. Heathen

religions have no hope, no solace, no consolation, in time of bereavement, but Christianity lights the lamps of heaven in the gloom. When the home is broken up, religion gives assurance of a meeting beyond the grave, and reunion where there will be no separation forever. We should have the ark of God in our homes, whatever else we may not have in them.

Word came to David in due time that no calamity had come to the home in which the ark had been left, but that, instead, the Divine favour had been visited upon it. The king was surprised to hear this. He probably expected to hear of trouble brought to the family, like that which had stricken down Uzzah on the way. But, on the other hand, it soon became evident that Obed-edom was being greatly blessed.

Then David began to see that the trouble that day had not been with the ark, but with himself and the people. So his heart turned again to his former purpose. He would bring the ark to the capital. Then the procession which began one day and ended in calamity was finished another day, not many months later, in the midst of great rejoicing. So blessing came to the whole people as the ark of God was brought into the Holy City.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID

Read II. Samuel VII. 1-16

THE ark was in its place, and the worship of the Lord had begun. David had prospered greatly. He was living now in a palace of cedar. One day the king was sitting in his beautiful home, enjoying its comforts and luxuries, when suddenly he thought of God's House on the hill. David was startled when he thought of the contrast between his own fine palace and the weather-beaten tent which was the home of the ark.

Nathan, the prophet, came in, and David told him that he was going to build a palace for God. Nathan himself approved the king's thought. "Go, do all that is in thy heart; for the Lord is with thee." But that night Nathan was bidden to tell David that he should not build a house for God. There are several things to be noticed in this incident.

One is that the Lord does not reprove David for his desire to build Him a temple. It was an hon-

ourable desire. We should not make our own houses beautiful and luxurious and then let our churches be cheap and dilapidated. Five hundred years later the Lord rebuked the people through the prophet Haggai for living in ceiled houses and letting His House lie waste. Elsewhere we learn that God said distinctly to David concerning his desire: "Whereas it was in thy heart to build an house for My name, thou didst well that it was in thy heart." God approves of good intentions, even when He does not permit us to carry them out. This ought to be a cheering and encouraging thought to those whose plans God interrupts and sets aside. He is satisfied sometimes with the intention. If we are desirous of doing for God some service which, however good, it is not His will we should do, He is pleased with our wish to honour and serve Him, though He declines the proffer. We are better, too, for the desire. Every lofty wish lifts us nearer to heaven for the time.

There are other important suggestions in the refusal of the Lord to have David build the temple. One is that everyone has his own particular and definite part to do in the Lord's work. David was not to build the temple—that was Solomon's mission; but David had other things to do which were equally important. He had to fight the battles of the nation and subdue the strongholds. Then he had another work to do far greater than the building of the temple. Part of his mission was to be a hymn-writer for the Old Testament Church. The

influence of his songs in all ages has been most wonderful, and is going on yet, extending and deepening wherever the Bible goes. His mission was great enough, though he was not permitted to erect the temple. Solomon built the temple, but he never could have written David's Psalms. To every man his work.

There are things you cannot do. You have no skill for them. You see some other one do these things brilliantly, and you are grieved because you cannot do them. But they are not part of your work. There are certain things which you can do better than any other person in the world could do them. We need not vex ourselves because we cannot do everything. It never was God's intention that we should be able to carry the whole range of tasks and duties. David could write the Twenty-third Psalm, and Solomon could build a splendid temple.

Another thought here is that it is the part of some to plan and prepare, while others carry out the plans and complete the work. The temple was born in David's heart; it was one of his thoughts. Then he made costly preparations for it. He bought the site for the great building. He gathered gold and silver in vast abundance and stored them away for the work. Solomon, when he came, had little to do but to build the house; the materials were ready to his hand. Thus David's part in the temple was, after all, very large.

We are apt to undervalue preparatory work. It

is like the foundation of a house. It is buried away, and no one sees it nor admires it. Yet we know that there can be no house for men to admire and praise unless there is first a foundation strong and secure, laid deep in the earth and covered up. It is the part of many people to do only preparatory work. Others complete the pile and get the glory, while the foundation builders are forgotten. The same thing goes on continually. One sows, another reaps. One man gathers a church, another organises and builds it up. To each one his work. We should learn to be content with our own particular work, that which has been allotted to us, and not vex ourselves because we cannot have given to us the work of some other. Whittier's lines are suggestive :

“Others shall sing the song,
Others shall right the wrong,
Finish what I begin,
And all I fail of win.

“What matter I or they,
Mine or another's day,
So the right word is said,
And life the sweeter made?

“Hail, to the coming singers!
Hail, to the brave light-bringers!
Forward I reach and share
All that they sing and dare.

“I feel the earth move sunward,
I join the great march onward,
And take by faith, while living,
My freehold of thanksgiving.”

It is interesting to think of the kind of temples God really wants us to prepare for Him. He has never blamed us for not building houses of cedar for Him to live in. He does not care for houses of wood, even the finest. He dwells in heaven's glory, and no earthly building can ever be worthy of Him. It is right to erect churches in which we may assemble for God's worship, but God does not really dwell in these. He meets with His people there when they gather to call upon His name, but He does not live in any earthly structure—plain meetinghouse or splendid cathedral. He tells us that He has two homes—one in heaven and the other in certain people's hearts. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite." We need not trouble ourselves to build houses of cedar for God, but we ought to make our hearts such places as He will choose for His abode.

"I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, that thou shouldest be prince over My people." God reminds David of His thought and care for him through all his days. Our lives are plans of God. It will be interesting to the boys to remember that God thought about David when he was only a boy, that He chose him to be king of Israel when he was only a shepherd lad. God is always watching the boys in their work and in

their play, looking among them for men to fill important places in life. If a boy would be called to one of God's high stations and entrusted with a great mission when he is older, he must begin well and be diligent when he is young. God saw in David, out there in the fields, abilities and habits which he knew would make him a good king when the throne was ready for him. If David had been indolent, negligent, self-indulgent, unfaithful or unkind as a shepherd, he would never have been chosen to be the king of God's people. A boy who was not a good shepherd would not make a good king. The boy who is a good cash boy or office boy or messenger, or who shows promptness, good sense and fidelity on a farm, in a store, or in lowly duties anywhere else, God will put down for something greater by-and-by. We do not know when God's eye is upon us to discover whether He may entrust some great task to us.

"In life's small things be resolute and great
 To keep thy muscle trained; know'st thou when Fate
 Thy measure takes, or when she'll say to thee,
 'I find thee worthy; do this deed for me?'"

God is always an encourager. He speaks to David now as if He knows his disappointment in not being permitted to build a temple, and He gives him cheer. David would not build a house for God, but God would build a house for him. This would be a greater honour than the building of a temple would have been. He would be the founder of a

line of kings which would have no end. His throne would be established forever. David did not understand it—it was too glorious to be understood then—but the Divine promise included the Messiah and all the glorious blessings which have come from the Messiah—Christianity and all its wonderful triumphs.

We ask for some common earthly thing. God does not give it to us, but he says: "You shall have this in place of it." Then He gives us a spiritual favour which includes all heaven's glories. We may safely leave in God's hands the form of the answer to our prayers. He will always do for us what is best. Many times when we ask only for bits of tinsel, He gives us heaven's gold and jewels instead.

God's plans go on beyond the measure of any little life. David would soon pass away from earth, and he would see no temple built for God. But a son would be born to him who should build a house for the honour of God. Men pass away, but God's work goes on. One falls with his plans unfulfilled and his hands full of work; but another is raised up to perform the unaccomplished tasks. The succession never is broken in God's ministry. He has one great plan, which embraces all His servants from the beginning to the end. Our plans may be set aside, but it is because God has a work which is better. Nothing will fail if we each do but our own little part; another will be ready to begin where we leave off.

We live on in our children. They, if they are faithful to their responsibility, carry on the work their fathers have begun. In Solomon, David's house and kingdom should be continued and then made sure forever. As men read history this promise was not fulfilled. David's personal throne was not established forever. No one can find it now. Antiquarians are searching amid the ruins of centuries for the landmarks of David's and Solomon's reigns, but no throne is in Jerusalem to-day, nor has there been a throne there for ages. But Bible lovers know well that the promise has in reality been gloriously fulfilled. It did not refer alone to an earthly succession. Christ was the "seed" promised in its full and final meaning. His was the "kingdom," and His the "throne" that should be "established forever." So the line fulfillment passed from earth up to heaven. Christ came of the seed of David, and the throne which we would search for in vain in the city of David stands amid the glories of heaven, and all the redeemed worship and bow down before it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAVID AND ABSALOM

Read II. Samuel XV. 1-12; XVIII. 24-33

THE narrative of the rebellion of Absalom is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. The flight of David from his home, driven away by the rebellion of an ungrateful son, is most pathetic. The sin of Absalom stands in blackness almost next to the treason of Judas Iscariot.

“Absalom prepared him a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him,” and thus sought to make an impression upon the people and attract attention. The display he made was also intended to reflect upon his father’s plainness. David was too old-fashioned; Absalom would show the people what real royalty was like. He was a dashing young prince. There are many young men, not princes of the blood, walking in the same way. They look upon their father’s plain, quiet ways as entirely behind the age. The old man is too slow, does not know much about the world. Most people

who study this lesson will think of someone who fills out the picture of Absalom.

Possibly it is yourself. If so, you must not fail to read the story to the end. These splendid horses and chariots generally drive to about the same place.

Absalom rose early those days. Early rising is a good thing when one rises to begin a day of beautiful living and good to others. But when one rises early to do mischief and make trouble, to sow the seeds of sorrow, one would better stay in bed all day. Absalom rose early to do harm, to ply his art of treason, to poison the people's minds towards his father. Early rising for such purposes is not to be commended.

"Thy matters are good and right," said the false-hearted prince, "but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." Sympathy is a good thing when it is sincere. One can do no sweeter Christian work than to go among those who are overburdened and those who are suffering, speaking cheering and strengthening words to them. To take by the hand someone who is down, one who has fallen in some misfortune, and be a brother to him, helping him to rise, is a splendid thing to do. But such sympathising as we see in Absalom is anything but Christlike. He only pretended to be the people's friend that he might get their confidence, and then use them in his wicked plot to seize his father's throne. It was the flatterer's base art, not the friend's, that he used.

“Oh that I were made judge,” he said, “that every man who hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!” He poisoned the minds of the people towards David by making them think that their king was neglectful, and that they were suffering wrong and injustice through his neglect. Then he suggested how different matters would be if he were judge in his father’s place. Absalom cared nothing for the people’s real or imaginary wrongs. He had no true sympathy with them. He was the worst kind of a demagogue. He thought only of destroying the people’s confidence in David and winning them to himself.

There always are people, alas! who think of no way of getting up but by pulling others down. It is easy for any of us, by careless words, even unintentionally, to disparage others by indirectly suggesting how much better we would perform these duties if they were ours. It requires a noble heart and most watchful care to be always loyal to others.

“So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” When we see a young man rising in the world we have a right to know by what means he is rising before we can admire his success and approve it. Is he getting up honestly, or dishonestly? Is his prosperity fairly and legitimately won, or is it won by treachery, by deceit and falsehood? For such advancement as Absalom’s is as a palace built on sand. Before any man follows Absalom’s ex-

ample he would better ask what became of Absalom's fine palace in the end.

On this matter of stealing hearts we should linger also a little. To steal is to take something which is another's to which we have no right. We have a right to make friends, but not to steal hearts. We steal a heart when we get a person to be our friend by influencing him against another person, and making him think we will be a better friend to him than the other. We have no right to interfere with the friendships of others to get people to love us. We need to guard against doing anything dishonourable to win friends.

"Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow." He stole the people's hearts and induced them to care for him more than his father. Then he stole the garb of heaven to hide his treachery. He must get away from Jerusalem to sound the signal of revolt, and the best way to get off would be on a religious errand. He easily fabricated such an errand. He said he had made a vow when he was in exile—would his father permit him now to go and pay that vow? He knew this would please his father. David would think that Absalom was growing penitent and that soon he would be a better man. There is nothing baser possible in this world than such a use of the name of religion.

"With Absalom went two hundred men . . . in their simplicity." Absalom had attached these men to himself, no doubt, by flatteries and favours. Now

he invites them to go with him to Hebron, and to be present at the princely feast he would there give. It was a high honour. The men were complimented by the invitation. All Jerusalem would envy them. They had no thought of Absalom's real design, and yet, without intending it, they seemed to enter with him into the rebellion.

This is an illustration of the way in which men still try to lead others into evil. They cover up their real object, and under the profession of friendship draw the innocent and unsuspecting into their schemes. When the true nature of their design is disclosed, it is too late to withdraw. Compliments from bad men or women should be accepted charily, for oftentimes they have some evil design behind them. We ought never to allow ourselves to be led blindfolded into any wicked scheme. We need to be ever on our guard against designing persons—plausible flatterers, professing friendship, but insincere in their profession.

The story of Absalom's plot is told in much detail. David seems to have been utterly unmanned when he was told of his son's treachery. He lost his courage. He arose at once and fled. There is none of the old-time heroism in his conduct. Each incident in the flight is described. "All the country wept with a loud voice." The route of the fleeing king was over the Kedron, the same path over which a thousand years later David's greater Son passed on the night of his betrayal.

The priests and the Levites came with the ark,

but David bade them return to Jerusalem. "David went up by the ascent of the mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered, and went barefoot: and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up." The story of those terrible days is most pathetic. At length David reached Mahanaim, over the Jordan, and preparation was made for resistance. The army was organised and the day of battle came. David would have gone to the field, but his officers suffered him not to imperil his life. "David was sitting between the two gates." Never did ruler watch more anxiously for news from a battlefield than David watched that day. It was not only his kingdom that was imperilled—the fact that the rebel leader was his own son terribly complicated the issue. Either defeat or victory would bring anguish to his heart.

Children who go away in sin never know with what bitterness loving parents at home think of their evil courses. There are parents who pace the floor many long nights, and look out at their windows into the streets, watching for the return of those who are dearer to them than their own life. If children knew how they crush the hearts of devoted fathers and mothers by going into sin, they would never choose such a life.

All David could do that day was to sit between the gates and wait and watch. He could put forth no hand to save his son. He could only sit there in

utter powerlessness and wait for the tragedy which would end the sad story. Years ago he might have prevented this terrible catastrophe, but now it was too late.

At length a messenger came. The king said: "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The king was lost in the father. David's interest in the safety of the country was swallowed up in his anxiety for the fate of his rebel son. He heard of the victory of his army, but that availed him nothing unless he knew that Absalom was safe. There is a story of a Lacedæmonian mother, hearing of the coming of a messenger from the battlefield. The woman hastened out into the street to ask him what news he bore. With gentle words, so as not to add to her sorrow, the messenger said: "Your five sons are dead." With a look of withering scorn, she replied, crushing down in her heart her own personal grief: "I did not ask you of the welfare of my sons. I asked if the country is safe." Patriotic feeling was stronger in her than parental love. In David it was the reverse. Yet there were reasons in David's case for this difference. His son's name was dishonoured, and, besides, David knew that Absalom's ruin was, in part at least, his work. This added to his bitterness.

The one question that persisted that day on the king's lips was: "Is it well with the young man?" We may put other names in the place of Absalom's, and ask the question concerning young men we know: "Is it well with the young man?" It is

never well with the young man if he is not living right, if he is not following Christ. This is a world of danger. Every young man must meet countless perils. Storms sweep the sea and the wrecks go down, bearing noble lives beneath the waves, and there is sorrow in the homes when the missing ones come not. The battle rages and many a brave soldier falls to rise no more, and there is grief in the homes where the cruel blow strikes. But there are fiercer storms raging than those upon the sea. Our noblest young men are exposed to these. There are more terrific battles than those history records. "Is it well with the young man?" We mourn for those whom death claims; should we not mourn for our living, when we remember to what perils they are exposed?

They tried to have the news broken gently to the king. The first messenger, Ahimaaz, told the story so timidly that the king seems not to have grasped the worst. Then came the blunt Cushite and told all with terrible plainness. "The king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept." We see in this picture of the weeping king a glimpse of the father's heart. Some might say that long before this David would have ceased to love such a son as Absalom had been, and would not have been so affected by his death. But no one who knows a parent's heart will say this. This intense love which had loved on through such a history of crime as had darkened Absalom's name is the same kind of love that all true fathers and moth-

ers have for their children. It never unclasps its arms. It loves unto the uttermost. David's love also gives us a glimpse of God's love for His children. Even their worst sins do not change His love. In David's grief over his lost child we see how our Heavenly Father feels when we will not be saved. Christ weeping over Jerusalem shows this phase of Divine experience. He wept because the people He loved and had come to save had rejected Him and His love and refused His mercy.

"Would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" No doubt David would gladly have died for Absalom, as he said. In a burning mine, when there was room for no more in the car that was starting up on its last trip, one brave lad stepped off and gave his place to another lad, saying: "He is not ready to die, and I am." David would have taken Absalom's place for the same reason, but it was impossible. If David had lived for Absalom more faithfully, when his son was younger, he might never have had this terrible sorrow to bear. The time for parents to show their love for their children most effectively is when they have them in their hands in tender youth, and not when they are dead. No doubt the bitterest element of David's grief was the thought that if he had lived differently himself this might never have happened.

There is a story of an old wrecker whose son had long been a wanderer on the sea. One night the father set his false lights on the coast, and a ship came ashore on the rocks. As the old man

went along the beach, gathering up the booty, he came upon the body of a sailor washed up by the waves. One glance told him it was his own long-lost son. It was his son's ship coming home that the wrecker had lured upon the rocks. His anguish was indescribable. Some such feeling must have been David's in his pathetic grief that day.

In our sympathy with David in his grief, we must not lose the lessons from Absalom himself. He had splendid gifts and opportunities, but he threw them all away. He gave loose rein to his passions, and was carried headlong into ruin. He was a type of what are called "fast young men." We need only to study Absalom's story through to the end to see the outcome of all such lives.