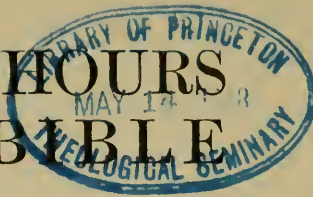


DEVOTIONAL HOURS
WITH THE BIBLE



SOLOMON TO MALACHI

BY

J. R. MILLER, D. D.



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DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

By J. R. MILLER, D. D.

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FROM THE TIME OF SOLOMON TO
MALACHI

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 today. It brings us face to face with God, and its teachings are meant to guide us in all our ways.

J. R. M.

PREFACE TO THIS VOLUME

IN the limited number of volumes planned for in this Devotional Series, it is not possible to give more than a very few Scripture passages, with the readings upon them. The present volume covers a great scope of history, from the time of Solomon to the close of the Old Testament era. From some of the books not any selections have been made, from others only one or two have been chosen.

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CHAPTER I

SOLOMON ANOINTED KING

Read 1 Kings I., 28-39

THE life of David was troubled to its close. The tragic death of Absalom ended his rebellion against the king, but David found little of that love and restful quiet which make old age ideal in its peace. There were continuous strifes and dissensions in his kingdom. In his own home also there were jealousies and quarrels. David incurred the divine displeasure by numbering the people, and had his choice of judgments. Three days' pestilence was followed by the king's setting up an altar and offering sacrifices in the threshing floor of Araunah when pestilence ceased.

When the king was very old another rebellion was plotted by Adonijah. Bath-sheba, aided by Nathan, the prophet, aroused David to have Solomon declared king at once, before Adonijah could be crowned. It was a strong appeal which was made to the king. "Is this thing done by my lord the king," demanded Nathan, "and thou hast not showed unto thy servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?" David replied: "Call to me Bath-sheba." And she came into the king's presence.

The mother was very deeply interested in the future of her son. She was ambitious for him. What true mother is not interested in her boy's career, and ambitious for his success? No mother wants to see her boy make a failure of his life. It is a part of mother-love to wish great things for her children. They need not always be things that are great in this world's estimation. Indeed, the mother who has the truest aspirations for her children cares far more that they may live worthily and grow into noble character—into "whatsoever things are true, . . . whatsoever things are lovely"—and fulfill God's purpose for their life, than that they may win high places in this world. Yet every mother has lofty yearnings for her children. The mother of James and John craved for her sons places at the right and left hand of Jesus in His kingdom. Bath-sheba wished to see her son crowned a king. As we think of these longings in the universal mother-heart we need not be surprised at Bath-sheba's eagerness and earnestness in this matter. She was quick to have Solomon's right to the throne protected. The boys do not know what great things their mothers dream for them, and how they strive and toil to have them win honor and attain lofty and worthy things. It ought to be every boy's aim not to disappoint his mother, but to become what she wishes him to be.

David had sworn to Bath-sheba in the past that Solomon, her son, should reign as king. He now

declares to her that his oath will be sacredly kept. He would not disappoint her. We should learn a lesson here on the sacredness of keeping engagements and promises. Whatever we have solemnly pledged ourselves to do we should do at any cost to ourselves. One of the marks of the man who shall abide in God's presence, we are told, is, "That he sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." Many people's conscience needs toning up in this regard. There is altogether too much carelessness in keeping promises. Too many persons find it very easy to "forget" to do what they have solemnly said they would do. Pledges sit very lightly upon their conscience. Vows are thoughtlessly made, and just as thoughtlessly broken. We ought to learn a lesson from David's assurance to Bath-sheba. He had made an oath to her, and now he declares to her that he will certainly do what he has sworn to do.

The solemnity of an oath should not be needed, however, to make an engagement sacred and inviolable. One's simple word should be held irrevocably binding—just as binding as one's most sacred oath. We should be absolutely true. To speak anything but the truth is a degradation of our whole nature. Forgetfulness is no excuse for failing to keep a promise. We have no right to forget things that we promise. If our memory is defective we should put down our promises in writing, and keep them so before our mind that it will be impossible for us to forget them. We

ought to be so careful in keeping our word even in the very smallest matters that people shall learn to trust absolutely every lightest promise we make. One who can be implicitly relied upon, who never fails those who trust in him, is like a fragment of the Rock of Ages.

David's assurance to Bath-sheba must have given strong comfort to her. It was a great thing to succeed such a man as David. Indeed, it is a great thing, a high honor, for any boy or young man to be the successor of a good and worthy father. Many young people who study this lesson have fathers and mothers who have lived nobly, who have brought to them a rich inheritance of blessing—a good name, honor, influence, if not money. It is a high honor to a son to be a successful father's successor in business. When a father dies, and the son is called to take up his work, it is as if a crown had been put upon his head. Every son should seek to be a worthy successor to his father. We may profitably compare Adonijah and Solomon, two sons of the same royal father. Adonijah sought to be his father's successor in place and in power, but sought it in such a way as to make himself a criminal in the eyes of the world. On the other hand, Solomon was thoughtful, studious, faithful to all duties as a young man, discarding the vices that his brother Adonijah loved, and striving after the true, manly virtues.

So far as we know, Solomon himself made no

claim to the throne and made no effort to get it. He was God's choice for David's successor. Whatever we may say about his later life, he certainly began well. He was worthy to take his father's place. We find these two types of sons in a great many homes. We find those who desire to profit in a father's inheritance, but have no desire to wear the garments of a father's worthy name and character. There are too many prodigal sons who demand their portion of the father's substance, but have no intention of succeeding their father in character, in moral principle, in his place in the Church, and in the doing of good. A young man who would be a worthy successor to a good father must remember that he has his father's name to bear and to keep unsullied before the world, as well as to share his father's patrimony. The responsibility of being a good man's successor is very great. We have a sacred trust committed to us which we must guard with sedulous care.

David showed his old-time spirit and energy in the way he carried out his determination regarding Solomon. He called Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, and commanded them to make Solomon king. "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel."

The old fire in David's heart burned up into

brightness again. Although he had been so feeble, when he now saw his throne about to be seized unlawfully by his prodigal son, all the man in him awoke—the old warrior, the brave master of circumstances. We must admire his promptness, his firmness, his courage, and his unfaltering purpose. He knew it was God's will that Solomon should reign in his place, and he was eager to carry out God's thought for Solomon. No nobler ambition could be in any parent's heart than so to lead his child that the child shall fulfill the plan of God for his life. A great many parents are ambitious for their children without asking what God would have them to do. David's example is better. He was swift in duty, although so feeble, because he knew what God's will was, and he was determined to carry it out. He was ready to make a sacrifice of himself, giving up the throne in order that Solomon might be crowned at once.

The swiftness of David's course probably saved him and the country from a repetition of the experiences which marked the time of Absalom's rebellion. If he had lingered a little longer Adonijah would have been declared king, and probably would have had a great following among the people. David might have been driven away from his palace, Solomon might have been killed, and the future of the empire imperiled. But the promptness of David saved the country from this danger and himself from humiliation and sorrow. Many men lose all the best opportunities

of their life for want of promptness. They dally till it is too late to do anything. Then they wake up and try to do their duty, but the time is gone. They might as well sleep on now and take their rest.

The men whom David had charged with the duty of anointing Solomon lost no time, but carried out the king's commandment instantly. "And Zadok the priest took the horn of oil out of the Tent, and anointed Solomon."

The oil was the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The anointing was a type of the anointing of the Spirit. The meaning of the ceremony was that, as men anointed the young king with oil, so God would anoint him with divine grace, setting him apart as king and gifting him for His service. Something like this is the sacrament of baptism, when water is used. The water has no power to cleanse or change a heart, but it is a symbol of the Divine Spirit. As we baptize with water, we pray that God may baptize with His own grace. When Jesus was being baptized He prayed, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Thus He was anointed for His ministry as Redeemer of the world. God anoints every one of us, as we wait at His feet in consecration, giving us His Spirit to fit us for His work.

Solomon must have felt a new responsibility in his soul as the holy oil touched his brow. New duties were his now. He was separated from his fellows and set apart for a new life. It is related

of a Russian prince that he was in Paris, having for his companions certain rich young men who passed their time in reveling. One night they were feasting, and in the midst of their revels a sealed message was handed to the prince. He opened and read it, then, rising, said to his companions, "I am emperor now." He then turned away and left them, separating himself forever from his past life. When we are called to any new duty we should break with whatever in our past life has been unworthy.

CHAPTER II

SOLOMON'S WISE CHOICE

Read 1 Kings III., 4-15

SOLOMON began well. He evidently desired to be a good king, to perform faithfully the duties of his position, and to lift up his kingdom to nobleness and strength. He was deeply impressed with the sense of his responsibility as David's successor, sent to carry on the work which his father had begun. He was also conscious of the inadequacy of his own wisdom for ruling, and his need of divine help. There is no doubt that this vision at Gibeon came in answer to the longings of Solomon's heart. He had gone to Gibeon to hold a great convocation of the heads of the people. The occasion was an urgent one. He offered on the brazen altar a thousand burnt offerings. The night following he had this dream, that the Lord appeared to him and asked him what He should give to him. "Ask what I shall give thee."

God comes to every one in youth, if not in such a dream as Solomon's, at least in some other way quite as real. The question the Lord asked Solomon is one that every young person

hears. Some one may say, "If God came to me and gave me my choice out of all the things people desire, I would try to make a wise choice, too." But God really does give to every one in youth the same privilege—the choosing of things to live for. Christ says, "Ask, and ye shall receive." But we do not avail ourselves of the munificence of His offers of good things to us. The days are like messengers sent to us from God, and we do not know what treasures they carry in their hands. Emerson says of the hypocritic days:

"Muffled and dumb, like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
To each they offer gifts after His will—
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
Took a few herbs and apples, and the day
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn."

"But why must I make a choice?" some one asks. "God is far wiser than I am. He knows what are the best things in all the world for me. Why does He not choose for me, giving me that which is best? Why must I, in my ignorance and inexperience, choose for myself?" One of the conditions of living is that we must make our own choices. Even a mother cannot choose for her child. She may advise, persuade, and urge, but she cannot decide. Even God does not choose

for the feeblest of His children. To every one He comes, saying, "Ask what I shall give thee." And what we choose to take, He will let us have.

Solomon's heart was full of gratitude. He thought of God as the Giver of all his blessings. He was thinking of what he owed to his Father. Those of us who have or have had good parents never can repay our debt to them. That is one reason why we ought to choose good things. Think of all a godly parent hopes, dreams, plans, longs for, asks for in prayer, for a child. Then think of the bitter pain and disappointment when the child grows up and makes a bad choice. Solomon felt under obligation to live and rule worthily because of the favor which God had shown to his father.

We talk about the responsibility of parents for their children—we should think sometimes also of the responsibility of children for their parents. A child may make a father's life a failure. Before David died he gave Solomon this counsel: "I am going the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; . . . that Jehovah may establish His word which He spake concerning me." That is, the fulfillment of God's promises to David for the success of his kingdom would depend upon Solomon's faithfulness. What David had done was but the beginning; it was Solomon's mission to take up and continue David's work until it was complete. Many a son wrecks all his father's

hopes and tears down all that through years of toil and sacrifice and sore cost his father has built up. An honored parentage is a good heritage, but it puts one under a tremendous burden of responsibility, for its blessings are a sacred trust, and must be kept unsullied and then accounted for at last.

It is a grave and serious moment in a young man's life when his father dies and the care of the family and of the business passes into his hands. It tests his character. If he is true-hearted it makes a man of him. If he is weak and without strong principle he breaks under the burden. Solomon realized that now the responsibility was his, and he resolved to meet it like a man. Suddenly there had been set upon his brow the crown of a great kingdom. From a careless, light-hearted youth he had suddenly become a man, with a man's burden on his shoulders. There comes to many young men such a moment some time in their life. A new duty is suddenly put into their hands. They are called to face a new responsibility. On the last day of the old year one wrote, "I dread the new year." What should we do when we find ourselves before new responsibilities?

There is a great deal of beauty in the humility of Solomon as we see him that night before God. "I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in. And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great peo-

ple." We need not take these words literally. The tradition that Solomon was only twelve years old when he began to reign, probably came from a misunderstanding of Solomon's meaning here. He was almost certainly older — eighteen or twenty. Still he was but a little child.

That was a holy moment in Solomon's life. He saw his duty in all its largeness, and he saw himself in all his littleness. He was only a child in knowledge, experience, and wisdom. He knew nothing about the duties of a king, and he was aware that he knew nothing. We call Solomon the wisest man; he never showed greater wisdom than that night at Gibeon, when he felt the pressure of the crown upon his brow and realized his own inability. Not always do young people experience such self-distrust as they take up new responsibilities. Sometimes they have too much self-confidence and realize no need of help. Such a beginning is always fraught with danger.

Then Solomon made his prayer to God. "Give Thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge Thy people." There is a fine ring in these words. Solomon wanted to be a good king and to rule wisely and justly. He did not want to dishonor God, to do God's work negligently or mistakenly, to be a failure as a king. So he looked up into God's face and said: "Thou hast made me king. The work is great, and I am but a little child in preparation for it. Give me wisdom to be a good king." That was Solomon's

choice. That should be the choice of every young person starting out in life. We should want always to do our work well, whatever it is. Some persons fail to understand that all life is sacred. They think there is great responsibility in being a preacher or a Sunday-school teacher. Men must answer to God for these things. But they do not think of the responsibility of being a carpenter, a shoemaker, or a plumber. In the story, Hiram Golf was an old shoemaker, and he told the young preacher that his shoemaking was just as religious a business as his pastor's preaching. If he should mend the shoes poorly, and the boy should catch cold and get pneumonia, and die, he would be responsible. "I can not afford, as a child of God, with the hope of heaven in my heart," he said, "to put poor work into that job, for much depends upon it. I would not like to meet that boy up yonder and have him tell me he had died because I was not a faithful shoemaker."

The old man was right. All work is sacred, and we need God's help in the commonest experiences.

The answer showed divine approval: "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked for riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding." God was pleased with the choice Solomon had made. He had not chosen long life. Long life is not the most desirable gift from God. There

are people who have lived seventy years and would better not have lived at all. The truest, completest, most perfect life ever lived on this earth was only three and thirty years in length. Let no one choose to live long, but rather to live well. Riches was another thing Solomon had not chosen. Some people seem to think that money is the best of all possessions. No doubt, if the choice were offered, many men would choose riches before anything else. But it would be a sad, impoverishing, fatal choice.

There is a Russian story of one who entered a diamond mine in search of gems. He filled his pockets with the precious stones and then, as he went on, he would throw away those he had already chosen, to make room for the larger ones he had now found. At length he became very thirsty, but there was no water. He heard what seemed the flow of waters, but when he came to them they were only rivers of diamonds. At what seemed the sound of a waterfall, he hastened forward, but only to find a cascade of precious stones. With all this marvelous wealth round him, he was dying of thirst. All the riches within his reach would not buy him a drop of water. This is a true parable of the seeking of wealth. It is not life's best choice. It will not give men true blessing. Another thing Solomon had not asked for was the life of his enemies. This would have been a most selfish choice, indeed. The law of Christ is love, and hate never can be the best thing.

The Lord was pleased with Solomon's choice, and gave him his request—a wise and an understanding heart, that he might be a good king and rule well. Then He gave him also more—riches and honor. Riches are a blessing when one has the wisdom to use them rightly. Honor is a blessing when one knows how to use it for Christ. When one's heart is right, God loves to give him this world's good things to add to his power for doing good. As we read the words of God to Solomon, we think of the words of one still wiser, "Seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Money and honor are not the first things—the first things must always be God and good. But when we make God and His kingdom our first choice, God gives us besides, other good gifts to add to our power of usefulness and service.

CHAPTER III

BUILDING THE TEMPLE

Read 1 Kings V., 1-12

THE temple was David's thought. He was not permitted to build it, however, because his work was conquest, the establishing of the kingdom. But his thought was not rejected; it was approved and commended. He was allowed to make vast preparation for the work. He purchased the site for the building and gathered gold and other materials for it. In the fourth year of his reign, when Solomon was secure in his kingdom, he began to build the temple. He entered upon the work with great enthusiasm. He was a lover of magnificence, and spared nothing in making the sacred building the most splendid in the world.

Solomon received help from the king of Tyre. It was more than a commercial league that existed between these two kings—there was also a close personal friendship between them. So when work on the building was about to begin, Hiram sought an opportunity to assist. This is another of the blessings which came down to Solomon from his father. Hiram had been a lover of David, and he wished to continue with David's son

the friendship which he had maintained so long with the father. A father's friends become the inheritance of the children. This is a rich legacy when a man has lived a true and worthy life and has made good friends.

Of course every one really has to win his own friends. No son can go very long on his father's friendships. He must make them his own by a true life, by worthy conduct, by an unselfish spirit. But those who have been the father's friends are disposed to be friendly to the son. He can make them his if he will. They are ready to become his friends for his father's sake. The "good will" of a long-established business is the result of a man's wise, liberal, and honest dealing through his lifetime. He has built his own character into it. This the son may make his own if he will maintain his father's character and principles and continue his father's honesty and truthfulness. So in all life it is a great thing to have a good and worthy father, and the son may enjoy the benefit from the friendships his father has formed, unless by his own lack of worth and worthiness he flings away his blessings.

Solomon reminded Hiram that David had desired to build a temple to the Lord, and told him that now, since peace had come to his kingdom, he was going to build it. This rest from war and strife made the present the time for the work. The temple could not be built in time of war. Times of quiet and restfulness in one's life should

not be idle times. There is other work to do then besides rushing activity. These are days for temple building. True living is not all struggle, conflict, conquest, gathering money, toiling with one's hands. Building of character is the great work of life. This goes on best in the quiet. A man who had been himself occupied in business for a great while, with scarcely a day's rest or pause, was stricken down with a partial paralysis. He was compelled to lie still for months. His mind was clear and active, while his body was inactive. One day he said to his pastor, "I have grown more in these quiet months than I did in all my long years of rushing activity." He was now really building up the temple of God in his own soul. Ofttimes days of suffering, or pain, or sickness are one's very best days. We ought not to wait for necessary inactivity to compel us to be still; we should get the quiet into our life even in our busiest times. We should train ourselves to it. We should teach our hearts to be still amid all possible confusion. Only thus can we be ready for our best work. We must have a restful spirit if we would build up the inner temple of our lives. There should be "silent times" in every day's life. The secret of Daniel's noble character, while carrying a great part of the burden of the kingdom of Babylon, was that he never forsook the quiet place of prayer. Not even the threat of the lions' den could make him neglect the season of devotion. There is no other secret

of a true and noble life amid the world's strifes and trials. We must keep quiet within, that we may build up in our hearts the temple of God.

Solomon told Hiram of the work he had in hand for God. He purposed to build a house for Him. He knew what God's plan for his life was, and he purposed now to realize it. He knew that God wanted him to build a temple, and he set about building it. We should all seek to know our duty, and then do it. God has a plan for every life. For every child that is born in the world there is some purpose in God's thought, something which He wishes that child to do, some place He wishes it to fill. But how can we ever find out what God's plan for our life is? Solomon knew what God's plan was in this case, for God had told David, and David had told his son. But most of us do not have such direct revealings of our duty. How then can we know what God wants us to do? The answer is, that if we will quietly follow Christ day by day, He will make known to us what His plan for us is. He may not tell us at the beginning what He would have us do years and years hence. But as we go on, doing each day the things that He gives, we shall in the end accomplish all His plan.

God's purpose begins with the little child. He found David when he was only a boy, keeping sheep. It was a long while before David would be a king, but every day of his shepherd life was a part of God's plan in his preparation for being

king. So we need not worry about what God wants us to do; we may simply do each day the things He gives us to do, and then at the close of our life, if we have been faithful all the while, we shall be able to say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." We may not know in advance what we shall have to do any day, but as we go on we shall know. Doing God's will as far as we know it, we come to know more and more of it, and thus finish it at last.

Solomon sent to Lebanon for cedar trees for the temple. Why did he not use the trees that grew in his own country? The reason was that the cedars which grew on Mt. Lebanon were the finest woods that could be found anywhere in the world. Solomon was determined to put into the temple nothing but the best. He must have the finest stones, the best timbers, the purest gold, the richest precious stones, the most beautiful works of art in all departments. The temple must contain in its materials the best things the world could furnish. Nothing imperfect, nothing poor, nothing unworthy must go into that noble building.

We get a lesson here for ourselves. In the building of our character, nothing that is not beautiful, that is not the best, should be used. We should read the best books, so as to build into our life-temple the greatest and noblest thoughts in the world. Nothing stained or unholy should ever be used. Our friendships have very much to do

with the making of our character, and we should have only good, true, and worthy friends. Unworthy companionships build blotched stones into our life temple. Above all we should read the Bible, for it contains God's thoughts and God's words, which make the best building material. They are all white and of the purest marble, and there is no blemish or flaw anywhere in them. Then above all companionships we should have that of Christ, for He is the truest, the most inspiring Friend that any mortal can have. Let us be sure that we build only the best things into our temple fabric. We should put into God's work that we do in other lives—only the best. We should never give a touch to any character, through word, or disposition, or act, or influence of ours, that is not clean enough to appear before Christ's holy eyes.

The laborers of Hiram brought the trees from the mountains of Lebanon to the sea. Thus the men of Tyre and Sidon became helpers in building the temple. It is interesting to notice that not only were many of the materials brought from heathen lands, but much of the work was done by heathen builders and artists. This suggests to us that in the great temple of God that is rising in heaven, men of all nations do their part. God loved the world and gave His Son to die for the world. To-day the missionaries are carrying the gospel to all parts of the earth, to every nation under heaven, and many from heathen lands are

at work on the walls of the great temple. It will be seen at last that there has been no nation under heaven which has not furnished some souls for heaven's great family.

Solomon devoted himself with enthusiasm to the work of building the temple. He did what God gave him to do, and then God gave him wisdom for each new duty and responsibility. God always keeps His promises, but His promises depend upon our obedience. If we will not do our part, neither can we have God's promised blessing. The lepers were cleansed "as they went." That is, they obeyed Christ's command to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they departed, healing came. God promises us guidance in all our life's paths, but to get the guidance we must go on, taking each step as He shows it to us. The guidance comes only as we obey. God promises us strength according to our day, but to get the strength we must do the duty which the day brings. The strength is not given in advance, but it comes only as it is needed. If we will not go forward in the way of God's commands, we must not expect to get God's help. There is a promise which says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." But if we would get this wisdom we must do our part. Wisdom is given only as it is used. The lesson is one we should never forget, that all God's blessings depend upon our obedience and faithfulness.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEMPLE DEDICATED

1 Kings VIII., 54-63

THE temple was seven and a half years in building. It rose silently. The stones were dressed in the quarries and all the timbers were made ready in the shops, so that no ax or hammer was heard in its erection.

“No workman’s steel, no ponderous axes rung;
Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung.”

Thousands of workmen were engaged in the construction of the temple. The building was magnificent, with its terraced courts, its marble cloisters; then within all this mass of splendor the temple itself, rising above all, a pile of marble and gold. Then came the dedication. It was a great day,—

“A day in golden letters to be set
Among the high tides of the calendar.”

All that vast and costly building had been erected for a definite purpose. It was not to be a great place of meeting for the people, like a

Christian cathedral, or a modern church. While the people came to the courts of the temple, none ever entered the temple itself save the priests. The temple was built expressly to be the home of the ark of God. It would have had no meaning but for that little wooden chest, with the golden lid, surmounted by the cherubim. So the first thing when the building was finished was to carry the ark from its old dwelling place in the tabernacle, which Moses had made for it, to this new abiding place now prepared for it. We are to be temples of the Holy Spirit. Our lives, however beautiful, cultured, and worthy they may be, do not reach to their real glory or the divine purpose in their existence until God is enshrined in them. This is the object of our creation and redemption. If we miss having God in us, we have failed in our highest purpose.

A great sacrifice was offered. That was the way they worshiped God in those days. The offerings told of praise and rejoicing in the people's hearts. It was a great day, not only for the king who had built the temple, but for the people who had watched its rising. The offerings also spoke of the divine holiness and of the expiation that must be made for sin. We know that there was no real spiritual efficacy in the sacrifices that were offered at that service. They had no power to put away sin. They did not cleanse the temple and make it fit to be God's dwelling place. The Lord did not draw near to the people because of

the many animals offered up by them in sacrifice to Him. Yet these offerings had their meaning. They declared that "apart from shedding of blood there is no remission."

We know, too, that they had another meaning—that they prefigured the great all-availing sacrifice—"the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." There came another day, a thousand years afterwards, when upon another hilltop close by, the Son of God offered Himself without spot to God as the Redeemer of the world. In His sacrifice He actually opened the way to God for all who will come to Him. The sacrifices which Solomon and the people offered that day had their fulfillment and their real meaning in Christ's sacrifice when on Calvary He gave His life a ransom for many.

After the offering the ark of God was brought in and taken into its place in the inner sanctuary. This holy apartment was not open to the people. Indeed, no one of them was ever admitted excepting the high priest. This was not meant to teach that men were really shut away from God; God is merciful and has always welcomed sinners to Him. The exclusion of men from the Holy of holies taught that God was holy and that sin could not dwell in His presence. It taught also that access to God can be had only through the Great High Priest. Heaven's gates are wide open—they are never shut; but we can enter only through Christ. "He is able to save to the utter-

most them that draw near unto God through Him.”

“The cloud filled the house.” This was the Lord actually taking possession of the house which had been built for His dwelling place. It was not an ordinary cloud at all, as we understand the use of the word, that filled the house that day—it was the sacred symbol of the divine presence. It was an expression of the wonderful condescension of God that He should actually accept an earthly temple as a dwelling place. It showed His love for the people of our race. We understand, too, its remoter meaning. This coming of God into the temple was the prefiguration of the Incarnation, when the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us. Christ was the true temple. Thus God came down and dwelt with us in very truth.

There is still another fulfillment which is to be realized only in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is pictured for us in the Revelation, where we read, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.” In another place in the Revelation we have a glimpse also of the same glory: “Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the

sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

It was a wonderful prayer that the king offered that day at the dedication of the temple. He asked God to accept the house he had builded and make it His dwelling place. We have a temple to dedicate to the Lord. It is a great deal more wonderful building than the house Solomon erected. It is in our own heart. The king asked, “Will God in very deed dwell on the earth?” We know that God wants to dwell on the earth, not in houses of marble and cedar and gold, but in human hearts. He has two homes, “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” So we may have a home for God in our heart, which we can dedicate to Him, to be used by Him as a temple. If we have not yet dedicated it to Him, why should we not do so now? Then God will come into our heart.

It is said of the king: “He arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling . . . with his hands spread forth toward heaven.” There are three things in Solomon’s attitude in prayer which are suggestive. He prayed before the altar. The altar was the place of sacrifice, and sacrifice meant atonement. All our prayers should be made before the altar; that is, in de-

pendence on the atonement of Christ. That is what we mean when we ask for blessings and favors for Christ's sake. To pray anywhere but "before the altar" is to pray at unopened doors. We must come in Christ's name if we would gain access to the mercy-seat. "No one cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

The second thing to notice in Solomon's attitude is his posture of kneeling. This indicated reverence, humility, submission. Kneeling is always a fit posture before God. He is infinitely greater than we are, and infinitely holy and good. Kneeling also implies submission. A conquered prince kneels to his conqueror, thus indicating surrender, the laying down of arms, and a full allegiance. Whatever may be the attitude of our body in prayer, our hearts should always kneel before God.

The third thing to mark in the king's praying is the spreading of his hands forth toward heaven. Holding out the hands open and empty toward heaven implies that we expect blessing from God and are ready to receive it. This, too, should be part of every true prayer—sense of need, confidence that God will give us what we desire, expectancy, emptiness to be filled.

In the building of the temple Solomon saw the fulfillment of a promise which God had made to Moses hundreds of years before. He praised God for this and testified that not one word of all His good promise had failed. We can say now just

as confidently as the king did that day, that in all these centuries since not one word of all God's good promise has failed any one of His people. No one has ever leaned upon a divine word and have it give way under him. No one has ever trusted the word of God and had it fail of fulfillment. The most real and sure things in this world are the words of God. In every one of them God's own almighty hand is gloved; we clutch them and find ourselves clutched by Divinity out of whose clasp we never can fall, nor can any one ever snatch us. We lean upon these words and find ourselves encircled and upborne by the everlasting arms. We pillow our heads in weariness or sorrow upon God's words of love and comfort, and find ourselves drawn close to our Father's heart and held in His warm bosom and soothed by His tenderness, which is greater and gentler than a mother's. So all through life in every experience we may trust the promises of God and commit all our interests to them, and not one of them ever will fail us. We may trust them, too, in death, and we shall find everything just as God has said—the divine presence in the valley, dying but going home, and absent from the body being at home with the Lord.

It is a fit prayer to be always on our lips—that God may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments. Our hearts are prone to wander and need divine keeping. Fenelon's prayer was: "Lord, take my

heart, for I can not give it to Thee; and when Thou hast it, O, keep it, for I can not keep it for Thee; and save me in spite of myself." God will never compel us to be good and obedient, but He will incline us, persuade us, draw us, help us. We need continually, therefore, to pray Him to throw over us the mystic influence of His own Spirit, that we may desire holiness and may seek to walk in God's ways.

Solomon asked that God might not forget his prayers, that they might be kept before Him day and night. Many prayers are for more than one answering. When a mother pleads for her child she would have her petition kept before God day and night. She would have God keep His eye ever on her boy, wherever he may be, whatever his danger may be. It is a precious thought that we do not need to be always reminding God of our desires for our friends, but that our prayers stay before Him, are not filed away and forgotten, as are so many requests we make in places of power, but are always remembered. Even if sometimes we forget to pray, God does not forget, for He knows our love and our heart's wishes, and will do more for us than we ask or think. Our prayers are kept in heaven. We are told that God keeps our tears in His bottle—that is, He remembers our sorrows, and our cries are sacred to Him.

CHAPTER V

GOD'S BLESSING UPON SOLOMON

1 Kings IX., 1-9

THERE is a measure of moral safety in work. While Solomon was busy with all his great plans he was in less danger of being led away from God. At length, however, his magnificent projects were all completed and he was ready to enjoy the ease and the fame which he had earned in his twenty-four years of wonderful activity. Instead, however, of being a time of security, this was Solomon's time of danger. There is peril in popularity. It brings adulation, which oftentimes becomes almost adoration. This is apt to turn one's head. One who is honored so by the world does not always remain humble and lowly.

Then Solomon's greater leisure since his buildings were finished also brought danger. We are more open to temptations when we are idle than when we are busy. Work is always a means of grace, and idleness brings peril. Luxury also has its dangers, and often saps the spiritual life of its vitality. In all these ways Solomon found himself now in danger. He was unconscious, however, of his peril, and this made it all the worse. We think

that seasons of trouble, sorrow, and hardship are the times when people need sympathy and help; but really they need the grace of God most when they are in the midst of worldly favor and prosperity. A saintly man said to his friend, "If you ever see me beginning to get rich, pray for my soul."

The Lord appeared to Solomon when he was beginning his reign, when he was making his choice of objects in life. Then all was bright. He appeared to him the second time because he was in danger. He saw that the world was throwing about the king its glittering charm, and He came with earnest warning. Warnings are always blessings, or are meant to be blessings; if we heed them God will save us. Not many people are afraid of prosperity. They do not think of it as dangerous. They do not pray to be kept from harm in it. Yet our Lord gave no warnings more solemn and earnest than those which He gave against the perils of riches and prosperity. It is sad to remember that even after this divine warning Solomon did turn away from God. Even God's appearing to him in person and speaking to him did not save him from going after the gods of the heathen. Warnings, too, make the sin of our failing all the greater. Forewarning ought always to be followed by forearming.

God had accepted Solomon's work and had blessed it, accepting at his hand the house he had built. No privilege that could be granted to any

one in this world is so great as that of being used of God—of having God accept something of ours. For example, one writes a hymn, like the Twenty-third Psalm, or “Rock of Ages, cleft for me,” and God accepts it and uses it. Thousands sing it, putting their hearts into it, and are lifted by it nearer to God. Or one writes a book and dedicates it to Christ; Christ accepts it and allows it to carry blessing to many of His people, giving comfort in their sorrow, strength in their weakness, light in their darkness, guidance in their perplexity. To be thus honored of God puts upon one new responsibility for living worthily. Instead of making one proud to be thus honored and used, it should make one humble. Especially should he walk softly and carefully now, for God’s seal is on him. He is Christ’s, and dares not turn away to the world. That is what God meant when He said to Solomon that He had heard his prayer and had accepted the temple which he had built, putting His name there, and taking it into His heart. He meant that the acceptance of this, Solomon’s work, put the king under new obligations to be faithful, made his life sacred thenceforth forever.

The Lord promised Solomon that if he would be faithful his kingdom should stand. God will build true prosperity only upon one foundation—righteousness and truth. This is true of the individual, and is true also of nations. The Bible is full of promises of goodness and mercy, but every one of them rests upon a condition of faithfulness

on the part of those who claim them. We have an example of this in Joshua, where the Lord gave His servant a clear explanation of the foundation of all true success. "Only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest have good success whithersoever thou goest." Success can be reached only in the doing of God's will. Anything else that men may call success will only be a failure. It is built upon the sand, and the floods will sweep it away by and by.

"But if ye shall turn away from following Me, . . . then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them." Here is another "if." The first told of blessing if they would obey God's commandments. This second showed a dark picture of those who will not go in God's way. The end of this path is destruction. A distinguished writer, referring to a voyage over the ocean, says, "No man can find himself over the abyss, the floor of which is paved with wrecks and white with the bones of the shrieking myriads of human beings whom the waves have swallowed up, without some thought of the dread possibilities hanging over his fate." Life is a great deal more perilous ocean than the Atlantic. Think of the human hopes which have been lost, the innocence, the purity, the holy aspirations and desires, all the possibilities of noble spiritual life; think of the wrecks of

all these precious things which lie at the bottom of the great sea.

When we think of the temptations, the sorrows, the trials through which we must pass in living, it is enough to alarm us. People talk much about the terrors of death, but life has far more and far greater terrors than dying. In the poem a child asks, "What is life, father?" and gets the answer that life is a sore battle, where many fail and yield; and then asks, "What is death, father?" We are not surprised that when she hears that death is the rest which comes at the end of the strife, she says, "Let me die, father; I fear to live." But the wise answer is, "You must live first, and win your crown on the fields of life."

Life is indeed full of perils, but they need not affright us. If we pass through them safely we are sure of the crown, and those who fight the hardest battles and get the noblest victories are those who shall receive the highest reward. St. Paul gives to us the assurance that even life, with all its dangers, can not separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. We know that if we trust in Christ and rest in His hands, nothing can snatch us out of His clasp. We see here very plainly how we may go safely over life's wild and tempestuous sea. If we keep the commandments of God we shall get the blessings of victory and honor. But if we disobey God and break away from His commandments we shall wreck all our hopes upon life's ocean.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAME OF SOLOMON

1 Kings X., 1-10

SOLOMON'S fame spread widely. Everywhere flew the stories of the splendors of his kingdom and his great wisdom. It was not the fame of his piety and goodness that men heard, his generosity and kindness, his courage and heroism. His fame was rather that of the material splendor of his reign than of fine personal and moral qualities. He sought to do brilliant things.

We are not to understand that Solomon did not contribute in any way to the good of his kingdom, that all his work was sensational. He did a great deal that was substantial. He gave his people a place among the nations which they had never dreamed of attaining. He made Jerusalem a great city in its beauty, its wealth, its brilliance. His wisdom, too, became famous. Wonderful stories of it were told near and far. From other countries people came to see Solomon and his great buildings, and to hear his words, and to pay homage to him.

Of all his visitors the queen of Sheba seems to

have made the greatest impression. She was a much more important personage than the kings and princes of the near-by tribes or nations who came to see Solomon. She came from far, from "the ends of the earth." She came in great state with a barbaric splendor that excited much attention. She had heard the strange stories about the Israelitish king, and came to see for herself what foundation there was for them. "I wonder if these reports are true?" she began to ask. She would go and see for herself. The distance was great, but her curiosity and eagerness overcame all thought of the hardship of the journey. Jesus taught us one use to make of this story, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here," He said. He referred to Himself. In every way He was greater than Solomon. He was the eternal Son of God, Solomon's Lord. His wisdom infinitely surpassed Solomon's. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are attributed to Solomon. There is a great deal that is practical in these books. Proverbs contain much that is helpful in common life. But the wisdom of Christ's teachings far surpasses the best that Solomon ever spoke. Christ's ability to enlighten and help excelled Solomon's, as divinity excels humanity. If, then, one woman came so far, at such cost, to see Solomon and hear his wisdom, the whole world should come to see and hear Jesus.

We have ever fresh illustrations of the same lesson. In every age, in every country, there are

men and subjects that attract attention and draw people from far and near to see and study them. Yet all the while there stands One among us whom many men know not, nor desire to know, who surpasses in interest and wisdom all the objects of attraction in the world. People throng to see and hear the scientist, the novelist, the explorer, the discoverer, the orator, or the singer, but only a sparse few gather about the blessed Divine Teacher. Men are interested in the questions of the day, in politics, in railroads, in inventions; but how few sit down to study the profound and eternal truths of Christ's redemption! They think these things suited only to children and women, and to the old and the dying, forgetting that they are the things which the "angels desire to look into."

The queen of Sheba came with "spices, and very much gold, and precious stones." Solomon need not in any sense be regarded as a type of Christ, yet this visit of the queen furnishes an illustration of the way we should come to Christ our King. We should bring presents to Him. A tourist in Southern California tells of looking with much admiration at the wonderful flowers which grew about a fine residence. The lady of the house, seeing the visitors, came out and spoke to them very cordially, asking them questions about their home and their tour. Then taking a pair of scissors, she snipped off a fine handful of flowers, which she gave them. They noticed, how-

ever, that the flowers she cut were all past ripe, and when they turned away they gently shook the bouquet, and the petals nearly all fell to the ground. That is the kind of gifts too many give to Christ. But we dishonor Him when we bring Him our fading flowers. This queen did not give trifles of little value, but the richest things she could find in all her kingdom. We should bring to Christ not the poorest and least things we can find, but the best—the most precious hours of our time, the finest gold of our youth, the sweetest fragrance of our heart's love. Nothing less than the best is worthy of Him. Thus the wise men when they came from the Far East brought their treasures and laid them at the feet of the new-born King. Thus Mary brought her alabaster box of precious nard, broke the box, and poured the ointment on the head and feet of her Lord. So should we all do.

The queen of Sheba brought spices, gold, and precious stones as a present to Solomon, and "behold, a greater than Solomon is here." Solomon was rich and did not need the queen's gifts, yet he accepted them. Christ is infinitely rich; He owns all things, the gold of the mines, all the gems of the world. Yet He gladly accepts our smallest gifts. Even the poorest things, if they are our best, and if given with love, He will receive with joyful acceptance. The widows' mites He takes from the offerer's thin, wasted hand with blessed words of recognition. A gentleman worth

his millions accepted a bunch of withered flowers from a ragged child in a mission Sunday-school, and could not have manifested more real pleasure if he had received from a jeweled hand the choicest flowers from the conservatory. Thus our blessed Divine Lord accepts our poorest gifts if they are prompted by true love for Him and are indeed the best we can bring. He wants our best, however, and is worthy of our best. The queen brought spices and much gold and precious stones to King Solomon. We should bring to Christ the sweetest fragrance of our heart's love and the richest jewels of our life.

The queen of Sheba brought to Solomon all her questions, her problems, and he answered them all. "She communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions." She seems to have had many questions to ask the wise king. Some of them may have been mere silly puzzles with which she sought to test his wisdom; others of them may have been real questions, concerning which she wanted information. To every question she asked, Solomon gave her patient and satisfying answer.

We should learn to take all our questions to our Heavenly King. No matter what it is that troubles or perplexes us, whatever we can not understand, we should carry it to Him. Nothing can be too small and nothing too great to lay before Him, for He condescends to our least affairs and

has wisdom for the greatest. Perhaps we are too formal and restrained in our secret prayers. It is better that we should break away from all forms and just talk to God as a child talks to its father or mother, telling Him everything that is on our mind or heart, all our worries, our wants, our temptations, the things that vex and try us, the matters that are strange to us and hard to be understood, the questions that arise in our reading and conversation and thinking—in a word, we should commune with Him of all that is in our heart and take His counsel about everything. Then He will always tell us all our questions. He will do this in different ways. Some of our questions He answers in His Word, and we have to search there for what we seek to learn. Some of them He answers through wise, loving, human friends, whom He sends to us to counsel and advise us. Sometimes our difficulties are met by words that we hear, or by books that come into our hands. Some of our questions He solves in His Providence by opening or shutting doors for us, if we quietly go on in duty. He will always find some way to tell us our questions, if we will do His will as it is made known to us and wait His time.

“I believed not . . . until I came, and mine eyes have seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me.” Here again we have an illustration of the experience of those who come to Christ. People often doubt when they read or hear about

Him and His love, whether the reality can be so wonderful as they are promised it shall be. They think that at least His friends must exaggerate the greatness of the blessings which He bestows upon them. But when they come and see for themselves, when they have experienced the riches of Christ's grace and love, they learn that instead of the reports being too highly colored, the half has not been told. No one is ever disappointed in coming to Christ. We need never be afraid to say to those who doubt or question, "Come and see for yourselves." If they will only come and try Christ, accept His friendship, experience His love, let His grace into their hearts, trust His promises, they will find that the truth far surpasses the report. It will be the same also of heaven's glories when we come to enjoy them. We read wonderful things about the blessed home which Christ has gone to prepare for us; but when we reach it we shall find that the half was never told us.

The queen's witness to Solomon, as she concluded her visit and turned homeward, was very complimentary: "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, that stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who delighteth in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because Jehovah loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do justice and righteousness." It is a privilege to be among the friends of any good and wise

man. There are people whose close companions we may almost justly envy. They live near to the good, the great, the wise. They hear their words, they see their life, they have their friendship. We may think of the disciples of Jesus, who had the privilege of being with Him continually, hearing the wonderful words which fell from His lips, seeing the sweetness, gentleness, purity, and holiness of His life and witnessing the wonderful works which He did. What a privilege was John's—leaning on Jesus' bosom, and Mary's—sitting on a stool at His feet, listening to His teachings! It is a privilege to be a member of a good man's family, living in the midst of refinement and culture. It is a far greater privilege to be a Christian, a member of the Heavenly Father's family. "A greater than Solomon is here."

CHAPTER VII

SOLOMON'S SIN

Read 1 Kings XI., 4-13

THE religion of Solomon has been much discussed. It has been generally supposed that he was not as good a man as David. Yet David was not ideal in his religious character. He had grave defects. The ofttime quoted saying that he was a man after God's own heart probably had chief reference to his conduct as a king rather than to his personal moral life.

The name of Solomon was not stained by such crimes and cruelties as was David's. He began his life worthily, showing a sincere desire to please God. He delighted in the worship of God. In building the temple he showed devoutness. His prayer at the dedication of the temple ranks among the most remarkable "devotional utterances to be found in pre-Christian devotional literature."

Just when Solomon's apostasy began we do not know. "When he was old" is the only indication of the time in the Scripture. The nature and extent of his departure from the Lord are not

definitely defined. It is said that his wives turned away his heart after other gods. He loved many foreign wives, and these drew him from his loyalty to Jehovah.

A good wife is a great blessing to a man. Many a man owes everything to his wife. Many great men who have risen to honor and power and to noble character have said that they owed it all to their wives. But Solomon made two mistakes. First, he had too many wives. Any plural number is too many. One wife is "a good thing," if she is a faithful and true woman; but more than one brings a curse, and not a blessing. Solomon had many wives, and it is no wonder that they turned both his head and his heart. The other mistake was that his wives were not good women. He did not follow God's counsel in choosing his wives, but married heathen women. They did not convert to the faith of Solomon's house, but remained heathen in the holy city. They must have chapels and priests for their different gods, and in the very shadow of the temple the smoke arose from many a heathen altar.

At first Solomon only permitted these ceremonies, tolerating all religions; but later, as he grew older, he attended upon the rites, and his heart was turned away after heathen deities. These foreign wives were from the very tribes which the Israelites had been commanded to destroy utterly—women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. "Solo-

man clave unto these in love." Thus his religious life was wrecked. The lesson has its solemn warning for all young people, not to form intimate relations with those who are wicked. To do so almost surely leads to apostasy from God and to ruin in the end. It is pathetic to note that it was in his old age that Solomon was thus led away. Many men stand through their middle life and past it, and then in their advanced years depart from God and fall into sin.

His heart was turned away after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God. The trouble was in his heart. It was his heart that was turned away, not his head. It was not a change of theological views or opinions that led to his defection. His heart was not perfect in its loyalty. The life follows the heart wherever it leads. The heart determines the character, is the character, as God sees it. It is the heart, therefore, that needs keeping with all diligence. A perfect heart here does not mean a sinless heart, but a heart wholly devoted in its aim and motive to God and His service. None but Christ was ever perfect in character. David's heart is here referred to as perfect. Yet he was not free from sin. He was perfect in his loyalty to God. He never turned away after any other gods. He fell once into sad sin, but his deep penitence afterwards shows how true was the cleaving of his life to God. David had an undivided heart for God; Solomon had a corner in his heart for the Lord,

and then other corners for the gods of all the other nations.

The Master said: "Ye can not serve God and mammon." No one can serve the Lord and any other god. We need to be on our guard against this Solomonian religion. There is plenty of it all about us. It is very broad Church, and liberal. It abhors the preaching of the severe truths of God's Word about sin and penalty, and about holiness. It sends well-nigh everybody to heaven, and regards hell as a mere fable. It calls strict Christians puritanic or strait-laced, and finds no use for such psalms as the Fifty-first. It is not hard to see in this verse, however, which of the two kinds of religion pleases God the better and which leads to the better end. If what his religion did for Solomon is a fair sample of the outcome of that sort of religion, it does not appear to be quite satisfactory.

The turning of Solomon from the Lord was very serious. It was not negative merely. It did not end with a change of opinion. "And Solomon did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and went not fully after Jehovah, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the mount that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon. And so did he for all his foreign wives, who burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods." His apostasy was complete. He seems to have abandoned

the temple which he had built for the Lord. At least he built chapels and shrines for all the gods of his wives and worshiped in them, degrading Jehovah to the level of the idols of the heathen nations.

No wonder that Solomon lost the favor of the true God. All God's promises to him were conditioned upon his obedience and faithfulness. "The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the Lord." We must not forget God's uncompromising hatred of sin and His inflexible justice while we extol His mercy and love. It is utterly impossible for us to turn away from Him, and yet have Him remain near to us in His gracious, favoring presence. We can not leave His ways and hope to have Him walk with us. Holiness of heart and life is the unvarying condition of divine blessing. God does not withdraw His love from His children when they sin, but He does withdraw His approving smile, without which life withers; and the blessedness of His favor can be restored only when we come back to Him from our wanderings with penitence and renewed consecration to obedience and holy living.

The fact that the Lord had graciously appeared twice to Solomon is noted as an element of aggravation in his sin. Matthew Henry says: "God keeps account of the gracious visits He makes us, whether we do or no; knows how often He has appeared to us and for us, and will re-

member it against us if we turn from Him." Every such gracious visit to us adds to our responsibility for obedience and holy service. The more we know of God and the greater the favor He shows us, the sorer is our sin if we forsake Him and go back to sin.

A sculptor had a vision of Christ, which he reproduced in stone. He believed that he had seen the Christ in his vision, and that the form he had chiseled in the marble was the very image of the glorious Person who had appeared to him. He grew famous afterwards and was asked to make statues of certain heathen deities. But he refused, saying: "A man who has seen the Christ would commit sacrilege if he were to employ his art in the carving of a pagan goddess. My art is henceforth a consecrated thing." When Solomon had seen the Lord in vision—not once only, but twice—he should have been forever a consecrated man. The eyes that looked upon the Lord should never have lusted after earth's pleasures. The hands that had fashioned a glorious temple for God should never have built chapels and altars for heathen deities. Solomon's sins were far greater because of the special favors God had granted to him. Have we seen Christ? Has He appeared to us in His Word, or in prayer, or at the holy table? Let us not forget that having seen Christ should set us apart forever for His service and for holy living.

The Lord appeared again to Solomon in some

way; at least He spoke to him in solemn warning: "Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant." God will not leave His work in the hands of those who will not obey Him. The vessels that He employs must be clean. He tries men with trusts. If they prove faithful He continues the trusts in their hands, and adds others. If they prove unfaithful and unworthy He takes from them the things He has committed to them. It is personal obedience that is here made the test. Solomon may still have been a wise king, a good administrator, but he was no longer a good man. His heart was not right, his life was not holy, he was disobedient to God's commands; and it was on account of this personal unholiness that the kingdom was to be rent from him. In these days there is a great deal of talk about public and private character in men who aspire to office. Some contend that the people have no right to inquire into a man's personal character; that they have to do only with the questions of his statesmanship and general ability for government. Very clearly it was Solomon's private and personal character that brought upon him the divine wrath. God wants men with pure hearts and clean lives to represent Him in places of power and authority.

The Lord was still gracious to Solomon. He would rend the kingdom from him, but not until

his life was completed. "In thy days I will not do it, for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son." Lives are woven together, and the influence of one falls upon another. A good man transmits blessings to his children, and one who turns away from God robs his children of blessings that ought to be theirs. David's good life kept from Solomon the visitation of the full consequence of his sin. There are many of us enjoying blessings on thoughtless, reckless lives because we had pious parents who walked in the ways of God and pleased Him. Their prayers form a shelter over our heads that shields us from the consequences of our own sins.

But there are many people who, just like Solomon, live so as to rob their own children of the honors and privileges that they might and ought to transmit to them. Solomon's son did not receive the kingdom of all Israel, getting but a fragment of it, and it was Solomon's fault. The man who, by drunkenness or stock gambling, or indolence or extravagance, wastes the fortune God has given him and transmits beggary to his children, is guilty of like sin. Many children suffer sorely for the sins of their fathers.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED

Read 1 Kings XII., 1-24

THE golden age of Israel closed with the death of Solomon. His empire was great, extending over wide limits. His revenues were very large. Everything in his kingdom was on a grand scale. He "made silver and gold to be in Jerusalem as stones." The palaces and public buildings were magnificent in their splendor. Yet the seed of decay was in the heart of it all. The rabbins say that while Solomon walked about in splendor a worm was eating at the heart of his staff. This is another way of saying that the elements of corruption were in Solomon's kingdom. There were reasons. His heart had been drawn away from God by his heathen wives. At the same time the magnificence of his kingdom and the extravagance of his reign made it necessary to extort oppressive taxes from the people. Many of them also were drafted for forced labor. No wonder that they grew restive under these hard conditions. When Solomon died they were ready for the outbreak which followed. If Rehoboam had been wise there might not have been an immediate

rending of the kingdom from him, but in his folly he drove the people to the extreme of rebellion.

Solomon largely outlived his fame. His reign became excessively burdensome to the people by reason of the heavy taxes they had to pay. His character also lost much of its charm through his departure from God. His aims were not lofty as they were at the beginning. He was called in his earlier years the wisest of men, but his later life was characterized by folly. His kingdom was no longer secure and strong as it was when he received it. Indeed, it was ready for disruption, and Solomon himself was responsible for its condition. It was a pathetic ending of his record that, notwithstanding the glory of his reign and the great things he had done, no word of commendation of him is given. All that is said of the close of his life is that he "slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead."

Solomon did not leave behind him when he died a sweet, fragrant memory in the hearts of his people. When he was gone the people came to Rehoboam, asking him to lighten their oppressive loads. Rehoboam promised them an answer in three days, and then sought advice.

First he sent for the old men, and they advised him to grant the request. Experience had made them gentle. "Show yourself their friend," they said. "Listen to their grievances. Take a kindly interest in them. Think of their good. Speak to

them affectionately. Give them the relief they seek, and serve them in any way you can. If you do these things you will win their love, and they will prove your faithful subjects.”

This was good advice, but Rehoboam was not satisfied with it. The old men were too slow for him. He turned to the young men of his own age, hot-headed fellows like himself, and sought advice of them. Rehoboam has many followers. “Crudeness,” says Dr. Marvin R. Vincent, “in most cases is a reproach. One wants ripe fruit on his table and seasoned timber for his house or his carriage. One does not trust a law student with the management of a fortune, nor put his child’s life into the hands of yesterday’s graduate in medicine. But in the matter of the moral conduct of life the experience of the men who have tried its dangers and struck on its shoals, and redeemed its mistakes only at the cost of maiming and tears, seems to count for little. Youth seems to prefer the route through the shoals and rocks to that through the open sea, to which ripened wisdom stands ready to direct it.”

When the people came to the king for his answer, Rehoboam, following the advice of the younger men, replied to them roughly. His answer, indeed, was insolent and brutal. Such words as he spoke would have kindled the flame of rebellion even if there had been no tinder dry and ready for the spark. We should learn the folly and wickedness of sharp, rude, and bitter

words. Any one sees how unworthy of a king Rehoboam's speech was, but such words are unworthy of any one's lips. They were insolent, contemptuous, haughty, unmanly, and cruel. We are all too apt, under provocation, to give rein to intemperate speech.

Destinies have been wrecked by following foolish counsel. Every young person needs a wise older friend to whom he may go with his life's serious questions. Happy is the young man or young woman who has such a counselor, and who will then accept the wisdom which comes of experience. But Rehoboam rejected the wise counsel of the old men. He answered the people roughly: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." The consequence of Rehoboam's harsh words was the wrecking of his kingdom. The people turned away, saying, "What portion have we in David?" It took but a minute to give the reply which Rehoboam gave, but the harm done by it never could be undone. Burke said, "Rage and frenzy will pull down more in half an hour than prudent deliberation and foresight can build up in a hundred years." We need not go far nor seek long to find other illustrations. Many people lose noble, helpful friends, lose them beyond regaining, by the petulant, ill-tempered words of a minute. Many lives with splendid possibilities become utter failures through uncontrolled tongues.

When will men and women learn to put bridles in their mouths?

The matter of seeking advice is always a serious one. Some people too readily turn to others to ask them what they should do. We ought to learn to think for ourselves. Each man must bear his own burden. We never can get clear of the responsibility of choosing for ourselves. However, there are times when we may turn to others for advice. The young and inexperienced especially may receive valuable help from those who are older and more experienced. But in seeking advice we should make sure of the persons to whom we turn. Bad advice has wrecked many a life. Rehoboam had good advice from the older men, but rejected it. There are many who follow him in this regard—they receive good counsel from friends, from parents, from teachers, from godly men, from those who are wiser than themselves, and then ignore it. There are many who, like Rehoboam, reject the good advice and take the bad. There was One Rehoboam seems to have missed altogether in seeking advice—he did not go to God for counsel. We should always ask God what He would have us do; He never advises unwisely. No life was ever wrecked by taking His counsel.

One lesson we get from Rehoboam's undisciplined course is that those who would rule over others must have achieved both self-control and patience in themselves. Rehoboam had achieved

neither. He thought only of his own personal dignity—the last element that should influence one in dealing with others. He lacked altogether that spirit of meekness which Jesus said shall inherit the earth. We should keep self out of our work for God, out of all our work of love. Whenever self comes in, it mars everything. We should think only of our duty, not of the way our act may affect us. If Rehoboam had asked, “What course will be the best for the country and for the good of the kingdom?” he would not have acted so foolishly. He would have shown patience and kindness, and would have lightened the heavy burdens under which the people were bending.

Those who rule over others should love them and be ready to serve them. Rehoboam is an example of those who try to govern others by tyranny. If he had really loved the people and had been disposed to serve them, sympathizing with them in their burden-bearing and showing them kindness, they would have continued loyal to him. “Through love be servants one to another” is the New Testament law.

We all need to guard ourselves at these points. We are apt to be unloving and harsh in our dealings with others, especially when our dignity seems to be hurt. Even parents need to keep a careful guard upon themselves in this matter, lest their consciousness of having authority should make them unjust to their children. St. Paul exhorts fathers not to provoke their children to an-

ger lest they be discouraged. Teachers have like temptation in enforcing authority. So have all who are placed over others. It often happens that a man who has been very kind and brotherly as a fellow-workman, or as an equal among men, becomes tyrannical and intolerant when in a position of superiority. We should remember that all power is of God, and we represent Him in whatever place of authority we occupy. We should rule, therefore, in God's name, as He would rule if He were in our place. In all our dealings with those over whom we are placed in the Providence of God, we should be gentle, sincere, loving, that we may look into God's face without shame.

Life has its turning points for all of us. This was the turning point in Rehoboam's career. He had before him the possibilities of a prosperous and successful reign. All hinged, however, on one word. Should he say yes or no? If he had said yes, he would have won the people to himself and his kingdom would have been established. He said no, however, and he drove the people to madness and rebellion. Men are continually coming to turning points when all their future depends upon a single decision. Two paths lie before them. One leads to beauty, honor, blessing; the other leads to dishonor and sorrow. The decision of the moment settles for us in which of these two paths we will walk. Many a man or woman by a word throws away the hope of infinite blessing and good.

It is interesting to notice that while the kingdom of David had failed of its best through man's fault and sin, it was not altogether cast off. The vessel had not come out what the potter first intended it to be—it had been marred on the wheel, but he made it again, another vessel, not so fine as the first would have been, but still a good vessel. The kingdom had a second chance. From the seed of David came at length the Messiah. There is encouragement in this for all those who miss their first and best chance. They may try again, and their life may yet realize much honor and beauty. When we think of it, most of the worthy lives of good men in the Bible were second chances. They failed, and then God let them try again. David himself, and Jonah, and Peter, and Paul are illustrations.

CHAPTER IX

JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRY

Read 1 Kings XII., 25-33

JEROBOAM had a fine opportunity. He had come up from the ranks of the people through his own industry and efficiency. He was among the workmen engaged on the great public works of the nation when Solomon found him, his attention having been drawn to him by his industry and ability. He had risen, not through political influence, but by sheer worth, to a high place. Then he had been divinely pointed out as the man to be the king of the revolting tribes. The prophet had told him that the Lord would give him this responsible place. The people had also freely turned to him and chosen him as their leader. He had the gifts and qualifications for kingship. If only he had used his opportunity aright he might have become a great king and have built up a mighty empire.

But there was a condition, as there always is when God puts a trust into any man's hands. "I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto

all that I command thee . . . that I will be with thee, and will build thee a sure house, as I built for David." But Jeroboam threw away this magnificent opportunity, and wrecked the possibilities of his own life. He might have made a brilliant story of honor and blessing for himself and the new kingdom if he had been faithful to God.

Jeroboam was a good builder. Building had been his business. When he became king he set to work at once to build and fortify cities. "Jeroboam built Shechem . . . and built Penuel." What a pity it is that he did not stay at his building work all his life! We can not help thinking how different the history of God's people might have been if Jeroboam had not become king, or if, being king by divine appointment, he had walked in God's ways. A trail of sin, however, blotted every page of the nation's story behind him. He is known as "the man who made Israel to sin." Every time his name is mentioned this mark of dishonor is attached to it. He was put upon his throne with a holy mission. He was called to be a good king, and then was promised honor, divine blessing, and the perpetuity of his throne. But he proved a traitor to God, and failed to carry out the divine plan for his life. He not only wrecked his own destiny, but he dragged a nation with him to sin and infamy. It seems a pity that he was ever discovered by Solomon and promoted to a place of honor. Better if he had remained all his life in his lowly place. He understood build-

ing cities and strengthening fortifications; had he only built morally and spiritually as well as he had built in material things, he would have been a successful king. There are many people who do this world's part of their life-work well enough, but fail utterly of their higher mission.

We must do our common work conscientiously. We are sure that Jesus was a good carpenter and did the work of His trade most honestly and carefully. But He had a higher mission than carpentering. There are fine carpenters, who are neglectful of their spiritual duties. No life is a success which does not build for heaven. Bricks and stones and timbers will not make eternal habitations. It is right to do one's work well, but if one's work on the heavenly side is neglected meanwhile, the result will be disastrous in the end. The record of Jeroboam's enterprise is all eclipsed by the black spots of his great moral failure.

Jeroboam wanted to keep his people loyal and faithful to him, and set about devising ways of encouraging such loyalty and devotion. He thought he saw danger in the people's returning to the feasts in Jerusalem. He feared that if this were still permitted they would be drawn back to their former allegiance. He knew that they would not be satisfied without some system of worship. They had been accustomed to go to Jerusalem to the great feasts, and these observances had a tremendous hold upon them. If they had no place of worship of their own, they would continue to go

to the temple and would gradually drift back to Judah. "Jeroboam said in his heart, Now . . . if this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, then will the heart of this people turn again unto the Lord."

It is true that old religious faiths die hard. Religious ties are very strong. When bred in the blood and fiber, it is almost impossible to break them. Those who have been brought up with strong religious habits from their infancy can scarcely by any power be turned entirely away from these habits in later life. This is one reason why children should be trained from the cradle to obey God, and engage in His service. They may then for a time be drawn away from good paths by the world's temptations, but they will almost surely come back in the end. Jeroboam was right in his impression that the people would be apt to drift back to the old altars unless he provided something in place of what they had left. Yet this was no justification for the sin into which he led them. If he had been loyal to God he would have sought the counsel of some wise and good men, and have devised some plan to provide for his people religious worship which would have the divine approval.

The king's device to meet the danger was not God's way. "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel." Nature

abhors a vacuum. A human heart can not be left empty. When one object of devotion is taken from it, something else must be put in its place. The king knew that the only way he could keep the people from returning to the old worship was by furnishing some other worship for them. So he was not content to forbid them going up to the old national feasts; he set up new shrines and appointed new festivals.

The old missionaries understood this law of life. When cutting down the sacred groves where the people had worshiped idols, they used the wood to erect Christian chapels on the same spot. If we seek to drive out evil we must do it by getting something good into the heart instead. There is little use in merely urging people to stop doing wrong—they must be taught to do something in place of the wrong, and unless they are given something good to do they will continue to do the wrong things.

But while Jeroboam took advantage of this law of life, he erred grievously in the way he sought to fill the vacuum. Turning the people away from the worship of the true God, he set up idols and taught them to worship these. Only evil came out of it. "This thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan." The king's plan worked well, according to his purpose. The people took readily to his new shrines. They went even to the farthest off, to Dan, to worship. They do not seem to have had any de-

sire to return to Jerusalem. So Jeroboam had a religion of his own for his new kingdom, and thus one of the strongest ties of the old national life was broken and the separation was made complete.

Yet this is one of the saddest records in the Bible. It tells of the beginning of a departure from God, which in the end brought bitter sorrow and terrible ruin upon the people, blotting from the very face of the earth the tribes who were thus set going on a wrong path. The man who starts an error never knows to what it will grow. He who sets another's feet in a wrong path never knows whither it will lead at last. To teach one child falsely may be to hurt thousands of lives in the end. Those who start new enterprises open fountains of influence, good or bad, which will flow on forever. Jeroboam gave shape and character to the new departure, and the nineteen kings who followed him, all, with not one exception, walked in his steps.

There is an old story of an abbot who coveted a certain piece of ground. The owner refused to sell, but consented to lease it for one crop only. The shrewd abbot sowed acorns, a crop of which would take three hundred years to grow and ripen. Jeroboam's one sowing mortgaged the new kingdom for evil through all its two hundred and fifty years of history.

Jeroboam's evil work did not stop with the setting up of the calves of gold. He established a

full religious cult and elaborated a complete system of worship. He made priests, and ordained feasts and systems of sacrifice. We may trace the course of this man's sin as it works itself out in the after history. What were the consequences in Jeroboam himself? Trouble followed trouble. His hand withered at the altar. His child died. He was defeated in war. His kingdom was partially rent from him. He was smitten in his person and went to his grave in dishonor.

Then in all the ages since his name has been gibbeted before the world, branded with infamy, as the man who "made Israel to sin." But his sin did not stop with himself. He poisoned the springs of national life and led a nation into idolatry. The whole history of the ten tribes is one of disaster and calamity, ending in captivity and extinction. Commentators note the fact that in the seventh chapter of Revelation where the names of the tribes that are sealed in heaven are given two are missing, Ephraim and Dan, the tribes in whose territories the calves were set up. Is there no significance in this omission? The story of sin is always terrible. "Sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." Jeroboam's record is preserved as a warning for those who come after him. The red light of the story shines out as a danger signal. Which way are you starting? Are you facing light or darkness? As you start in youth you will likely continue to go forever.

CHAPTER X

OMRI AND AHAB

Read 1 Kings XVI., 23-33

THE story of Jeroboam's kingdom is terribly monotonous in its sin and tragical in treasons, stratagems, and insurrections. There is no relief in the dark picture. In Judah, too, some kings are evil, but now and then we come upon one like Asa or Jehoshaphat, who followed the Lord faithfully. In Israel, however, there is no break in the record of sin, each succeeding ruler being worse than his predecessor.

Omri had a taste for building. He showed his sagacity in the selection of Samaria as the site for his new capital. The location was central. It was easily defended. Springs of water abounded. The city he built became prominent and influential, and continued as the capital of the kingdom unto the end of its history. Men may do some fine things, may be public-spirited, and do much to improve and adorn their city or country, and yet in God's sight be very wicked. Heaven does not write biographies as earth does. Men look at what the eye can see; God looks within, at the

heart, and records the motives and affections. So it often happens that while this world extols a man for his achievements, heaven condemns him for his sins. It is better surely to have God's approval, though we remain obscure in this world, than to be lauded by men, and then hear heaven's condemnation.

The Scriptures paint life stories faithfully. They hide nothing because it is evil. Over against Omri's fine achievement in building we read, "Omri did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah." There is a legend of the Emperor Justinian which describes his zeal to build a temple for the Lord, and to build it entirely at his own cost and for his own honoring. Architects, masons, and carpenters were assembled and materials gathered, and the work went on. The emperor gave command that the inscription on the temple should be, "Built to God by the great Emperor Justinian." The day came for the dedication, and as the emperor entered the building he raised his eyes to look at the inscription, but his name was nowhere to be seen. Instead, he saw, "This House to God, Euphrasia, Widow, gave." The emperor was very angry, and asked what this meant. The architects assured him that the inscription he had written had been put on by the workmen, and was there plainly the night before. "Who is this Euphrasia, Widow?" asked the king. No one knew of such a person. He commanded that she be sought for and brought. At

last in a poor cottage there was found an old woman who bore the name. She was brought, trembling, into the presence of the king. What had she done in the building of the temple, he demanded. "Nothing," she replied. But on being pressed, she remembered that she had long lain very sick and racked with pain while the temple was building, and a linnet came every day and sang sweetly at her window. She was grateful to God for sending her so much comfort, and in gratitude she plucked some grass and strewed it on the sharp stones in the street before her cottage, over which the oxen were drawing the heavy blocks and columns for the emperor's temple. That was all she had done, but having been done through love, pitying the dumb beasts, the simple deed was worth more in God's sight than all the emperor's lavish expenditures for the glory of his own name.

Omri's great buildings were of no account in God's sight while in his heart he wrought evil. The real worth of our work is what it is worth in the eyes of the Lord. Human estimates are nothing, human adulations are mockeries, while God sees sin in the acts which men approve. One honest and lowly deed wrought in love is worth more than a lifetime's achievement wrought in pride and self-seeking.

It is said that Omri "walked in all the way of Jeroboam." Every man tracks a path on which other feet follow his. There is no one so obscure

but that if he looks behind him he will see some one coming after him, walking in his steps. This is true, both in good and evil. Some men, by reason of their prominence and influence, lead many others in whatever way they go. We may think of the continuous throng following after John, Paul, Peter, Bunyan, and such men. But bad men have followers, too. Jeroboam stamped his impression on all the dynasties and kings of Israel that came after him.

What sort of influence are you starting in this world? What sort of path are you making? Where would it lead those who follow after you? A man who had been going with bad companions, drinking and carousing with them, came home late one night, and bending over his two little children sleeping in their clean, white bed, kissed their sweet lips. That night he could not sleep. One picture haunted him all night long—himself hurrying toward ruin, and his two beautiful children clinging to his garments and drawn after him. He rose in the darkness, fell upon his knees by his children's bed, and gave himself to God for their sake.

It is startling to read after the story of Omri's wickedness, that all his acts which he did were written in the book of chronicles of the kings of Israel. Everything was recorded, even the smallest matter. Yes, and the acts of every one of us are also written in a book of chronicles. The record is made moment by moment with unflinching

accuracy. Nothing is omitted. Nothing is set down incorrectly. For "every idle word," the Master Himself said, men must give account; so for every thought and intent of the heart they must answer. What sort of a record are we making? The children at school are eager to have good reports to show their parents; what report is made of us in God's books day by day?

After Omri came Ahab. "Ahab the son of Omri did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah above all that were before him." That certainly was a bad pre-eminence. It is an honor to do good above others. Excelsior is a good word when it leads upward, to higher nobleness and sublimer achievements. But when it leads downward it is a dark and evil word. Yet that is the way of wrongdoing. In sin the disciple is apt to outdo his master. A bad father has frequently worse children. A man is only a moderate drinker and defends his practice as sensible and safe. His sons follow in his ways, and too often outstrip their father and become drunkards. God's children grow in grace; the devil's children grow in wickedness.

The wife a man chooses has a great deal to do with his career. One of Ahab's worst mistakes was in his marriage. "As if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam . . . he took to wife Jezebel . . . and went and served Baal." The woman he married was of the worst heathen stock, one of the worst women

known in ancient times. Her character has not a single beautiful, womanly trait, and her name stands unrivaled in history for cruelty, vindictiveness, and all manner of wickedness. Ahab married her, and then of course went over to the heathen with her.

There is no step in life which has more to do with one's future weal or woe in both worlds than one's marriage. If one marries "in the Lord," the event brings great blessing; if one is attracted by glitter or show and is married to a heathen, the result can be only misery. There is no other rock on which more lives and more human happiness are wrecked. Some people try to excuse Ahab for his wickedness by saying that he was weak, and that all the blame rested on his wicked wife. Possibly; but is any man to be excused on such grounds as these? Did he not sin, first of all, in marrying such a woman? Did he not sin also in allowing her to lead him into so much evil?

Still the record grows darker and darker as we read on. "Ahab did yet more to provoke Jehovah . . . to anger than all the kings . . . before him." It is strange how men dare the Lord and defy Him, doing the most heaven-defying evil before His eyes. The worst men will not commit their misdeeds in the presence of the officers of the law. No burglar would break into a house or commit a robbery with a policeman standing by. But men break God's laws right before God's face, and provoke Him to anger with impunity.

They think nothing of defying the mighty God and daring Him. Why is this? Surely it must be because they can not see God, and therefore do not think that He sees them. They do not believe that He cares, or that He will punish. "Thou God seest me" realized would make the worst men fear to provoke God to anger by doing the things which He forbids and condemns.

CHAPTER XI

GOD'S CARE OF ELIJAH

Read 1 Kings XVII., 1-16

ELIJAH was a remarkable man. His heroic and single-handed contest with Ahab and the Baal religion gave him prominence and power. He was the greatest man of his nation at the time. The fact that he was translated also sets him apart among men. Then the still further fact that he appeared nine hundred years after his translation, still living and active in the service of God, on the Mount of Transfiguration, gives to his name an interest which attaches to almost no other one of the Old Testament prophets.

His first appearance was sudden—he broke in upon Ahab, unheard of before, so far as we know, with a startling message. His origin is not clearly known. Probably he was a native of the mountain region of Gilead. If so, he grew up in solitude, amid wild defiles and rushing torrents. He was a sort of Bedouin in his dress, habits, and manner. He was startling in his movements. He knew no Master but God. He waited for the divine bidding, and then went, swift as the wind, to

obey it. He was a man of strong faith. He took God's word literally, believing that God meant just what He said. He never doubted, never questioned, never feared. To him God was intensely real. To many of us God seems little more than a dim, pale, far-away vision; but to Elijah no other being was so actual. We need more of the sense of God's reality to give us sturdier faith and more heroic consecration.

Elijah defines his relation to God in the phrase, "before whom I stand." He meant that he was God's messenger, always standing before God's face, ready to go instantly on His errands. He never sat down in God's presence, but always stood, girded and sandaled, ready for immediate running. Too many of us are slow in obeying. It takes us a long while to get ready to start on an errand on which God bids us go, and then we loiter or move languidly, as if scarcely half awake. In His commission to the Seventy our Lord commanded that they should salute no man by the way. He meant that there was not a moment to be lost, that His business required instant haste. Too many of us not only delay in starting, but dally on the road. Then when we come to the place of need we find the time has gone by for the duty which we were sent to do.

The announcement which Elijah made to Ahab was a startling and dismaying one. There should be neither dew nor rain in the land, but according to the prophet's word. This one man seemed to

have power to shut up heaven until he chose to call again for rain. This was because he lived with God and always did His will. We are told by James that it was in answer to Elijah's prayer that no rain fell during those three and a half years.

Elijah was sent into retirement while the penalty for the king's sin should be visited upon the land. He was hidden from human sight and divinely cared for. God is never at a loss to find a way of providing for His children. All things are His servants. The brooks, the water, the birds, the beasts of the field, the wings of ravens, the waves of the sea, all creatures, all things, animate and inanimate, belong to Him and are ready to serve Him at His call. Some people trouble themselves much about miracles, asking how God can interrupt the regular order of nature to do any special favor for a child of His. If we understand how completely all things are in God's hands, it will not be hard for us to believe that God can do what He will in His own world. He can not be the slave of His own laws. Perhaps none of us ever have been fed by ravens as Elijah was fed beside the brook Cherith; but in other ways, no less marvelous, God brings to us continually our daily bread. Railroad trains carry it across continents, or ships bear it round the globe, to bring it to our tables. We are too wise in these days, know too much science, to get the most perfect comfort from the promises of God.

Who ordained nature's laws? What is nature's fixed order but God's regular way of doing things? If our faith were but more simple, and if we let the Bible words enter our hearts without worrying about how God can keep His promises, we should have less anxiety and deeper peace.

Elijah, at least, had no trouble with his question of miracles. When he heard the divine command, "he went and did according unto the word of Jehovah." He did not say he could see no way of getting food down in that deep, dark gorge. That was not his business at all—that was God's matter. All the prophet had to do was to obey the divine command; God would look after the rest. We say we have faith, but when we read a promise we can not quite trust it unless we can see how it is going to be fulfilled. That is not faith—that is walking by sight. Faith is resting our head where we can see no arm; walking where we can see no path, but confident the path will be opened; trusting for bread when there is no visible supply, yet never doubting that the bread will be ready for us when we need it.

Elijah was cared for for some time in his first hiding place. But by and by, in the drought, the brook dried up. That is the way this world's brooks always do. At first they flow full and fresh; then they begin to waste, and soon they are dry altogether. This is a picture, too, of all earthly joys. But when the brook dried up, God had another place ready. "Arise, get thee to Zar-

ephath." God did not send Elijah to Zarephath while the brook had water in it. There was no need that He should do so then. It was a test of Elijah's faith to watch the stream growing smaller and smaller every day. "What shall I do when this brook runs dry?" he might have asked; at least, many of us would have asked this question quite anxiously, as we saw the water run lower and lower. But probably Elijah did not ask the question at all, for he knew that God would have something else ready when this supply was exhausted. One morning, however, there was no water at all in the brook, and the prophet had to eat a dry breakfast—only bread and meat. Still he did not worry. After his breakfast the Lord told him to move. We should never doubt God's care. No matter how low the supply gets, though we have to come down to the last mouthful of bread and the last cupful of water, and still see no new provision ready, we are to take the last loaf and cup with gratitude, believing that God will have something else in time for our next meal.

Elijah did not find the prospect very bright either when he came to Zarephath. He met there a very kindly woman, but one whose resources were almost entirely exhausted. Although a Gentile, she seems to have known Elijah's God. Then she had a generous thought for the stranger who came to her gate. She had faith also, for when Elijah told her that if she would provide for him her small supplies should not grow less until the

famine had ceased, "she went and did according to the saying of Elijah." That is, she took the little handful of flour she had, and the little oil, and made a cake for her hungry guest, and then another for herself and her son. It is only when we do God's bidding that He blesses us with His help. Until we fulfill our part, God's part will not be supplied. Had this woman not believed and obeyed, the wonderful two or three years' miracle in her house would not have been wrought. We must notice also the woman's generosity. She showed hospitality to a stranger. Blessings do not come to selfishness. If she had prepared a meal for herself and her son and had left the hungry stranger outside unfed, there would have been no miracle of increase. We must be ready to share our little with others who need, if we would receive blessings on ourselves.

"Is thy cruse of comfort failing?
Rise and share it with another,
And through all the years of famine
It shall serve thee and thy brother.
Love divine will fill thy storehouse,
Or thy handful still renew,
Scanty fare for one will often
Make a royal feast for two."

The woman was well rewarded for her faith and kindness. She and her son were fed until the end of the drought. If the prophet had not come to her door that morning, she and her household might have perished in the famine. Or, if

she had refused the prophet's request, saying she could not possibly spare anything for a stranger when she had so little for herself, she and her household would have starved before the rain came. The meal and the oil wasted not because she shared it with another. There is withholding that brings poverty; there is scattering that brings increase; there is giving that makes rich. The way to get blessing is to be a blessing. If your love is growing cold, go and help somebody that is in need, and your heart will be warm again. In human needs that appeal to us are folded up blessings which we can get only by ministering to those needs.

“The jar of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.” God did not prepare enough oil the day the famine began to last through the famine. Indeed, there never was more than a little handful of meal and a little oil on hand. But the supply never grew less. After each day's food had been taken out there was always another day's food left. Thus the lesson went on all the while—each day faith had to be exercised for the next day's supply. God wants us to learn to live by the day. Our Lord teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Enough for the day is all we are to ask for. If we have only one day's provision, and are doing our duty faithfully, we may trust God for to-morrow's food, and it will come when to-morrow comes.

CHAPTER XII

OBADIAH AND ELIJAH

Read 1 Kings XVIII., 5-16

THERE must have been a tender parting when the prophet went away from the widow's house. He had been there so long and his stay had been such a blessing to the little household that his departure must have caused great sorrow. It is good for us to make ourselves so helpful and such a blessing wherever we visit or tarry for a time, whether only for an hour or a night or for many days, that when we go away we shall be missed and pleasantly remembered. Not every one leaves fragrant memories, however, after such a stay; some fail to endear themselves to the household in which they are guests, and then their departure is a relief. It must have been a trial to the prophet, too, to go away from the quiet home where he had been so long, where he had been so kindly treated, especially since he was now to go into the presence of Ahab. However, he neither faltered nor hesitated in his obedience. Ease and

comfort had no attraction to hold him back from duty. It required courage, too, to go and face the king.

Ahab was a man of unscrupulous wickedness, and Jezebel, his wife, was one of the most dangerous women that ever lived. She had killed all the prophets of God she could lay her hands on. Elijah was especially obnoxious to the king and queen. They had been searching for him everywhere during the three and a half years of the famine, that they might destroy him. Yet there was no fear in the prophet. The divine commandments are always to be obeyed, and obeyed none the less promptly and cheerfully when they take us out of the warmth into the storm than when they call us from the storm into the warmth.

Obadiah, who appears in this part of the story, is an interesting character in his way. We are told that he "feared Jehovah greatly," and yet he was kept in a prominent position in the palace of Ahab. This certainly seems a strange place to find a godly man, a faithful servant of Jehovah. All were for Baal there. Baal's prophets swarmed about the royal residence. Jezebel was there,—the wicked, vindictive, Jehovah-hating queen. Prophets of the Lord had been killed, every one who was opposed to Baal. Yet Obadiah was kept there. We are surprised that he was tolerated. Then we are surprised that he, being a good man, stayed in such an ungodly place. Probably it is a testimony to Obadiah's value and use-

fulness that he was retained in the household of Ahab and Jezebel. We know that even bad men, when they want trustworthy servants, prefer good men. Obadiah may have been too valuable a person to be dispensed with, even though Ahab and Jezebel hated him. Yet ought Obadiah to have remained in that wicked court? The answer seems to be affirmative. That was the place where God wanted him to witness and shine as a light. Good men are wanted oftentimes in evil places. The good are to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. God needs them, too, as witnesses for Him.

The brief sketch of Obadiah given us here suggests several lessons. One is that it is possible to live a true, godly life, even amid most ungodly influences and associations. We need only to make sure we are where God wants us to be. If so, and if only we are faithful, our religion will not be obscured or extinguished by any adverse influence. The stories of Joseph, Moses, and Daniel also illustrate this. Some men are even better in a hard environment than in an easy one, just as some plants grow in the Arctic winter that would die in an equatorial summer. Obadiah seems to have been true to God in a place where all was false. He maintained his faith and his worship. He was probably the only one there who was not an idolator. We are told that he feared the Lord "greatly," which indicates a religion of a particularly positive and active kind. Yet we

can not help thinking that it must have been a secret faithfulness to God which he practiced. It is not likely that if he had been outspoken for Jehovah he could have remained there.

Another suggestion from the story of Obadiah is that God has different kinds of work for different men. Elijah had his work—to flash like the lightning, to deliver his startling messages, and then vanish for years. The work of Obadiah was to witness for God, not in speech, but by a good life in a corrupt court, and by his fidelity and courageous generosity to save alive a remnant of God's faithful ones. The only active service rendered by Obadiah to the cause of Jehovah, so far as we are told, was his saving a hundred prophets from the terrible persecution which Jezebel started. We may be sure that this was done secretly, for if Jezebel had known that a member of her own household was thus working against her, saving out of her hand a hundred of the men whom she wished to have destroyed, she would very soon have put an end to his life. Still the service was a good one, however defective it may have been in its spirit. It may have been that the divine providential reason why Obadiah was kept in the palace of Ahab was that he might save these men. We may not know why God sometimes leaves us in an unpleasant place, where there is danger and where all is uncongenial and hard for us, but we may always be sure that He has some purpose in it, that we have an errand there for

Him, that there is something, or there will be something, for us to do in that place.

We have a glimpse here of the great suffering which the famine brought upon the country. Famine is always terrible. In the three and a half years of this drought there must have been very great suffering. Beasts as well as human beings were in distress. Ahab and Obadiah were both engaged in a search for grass to save the animals. They had gone all over the country, seeking out every little spot in which there might be a bit of pasture. There is no evidence of penitence in Ahab at the close of the three years of famine. His heart had not been softened by it. There is not a word which indicates that he was bemoaning his sins and crying to God for the removal of the judgment which these sins had brought upon the country. We find him still cursing Elijah as the cause of the trouble.

Nor is there any indication that the sufferings of the people had revealed anything humane and fatherly in the heart of their king. As he appears before us in this incident he thinks only of his beasts—he does not want to lose his fine horses and mules. One writer says: “Strangely enough, Ahab at last begins to feel distressed and uneasy; but do you think it is for the myriads of his suffering people? No; but for the horses and mules, many of which have died; and the rest may soon perish, leaving him an impoverished king.” There are men and women, even in these modern

Christian days, who pet their horses and fondle their dogs and revel in their luxuries, but who have no heart nor ear for the sufferings of their fellow-men. In one of Miss Procter's poems these lines occur:

“It is cold, dark midnight; yet listen
To the patter of tiny feet.
Is it one of your dogs, fair lady,
That whines in the bleak, cold street?
Is it one of your silken spaniels
Shut out in the snow and sleet?”

“My dogs sleep warm in their baskets,
Safe from the darkness and snow.

.
Those are only the homeless children
Who are wandering to and fro.”

It was as Obadiah was searching for pasture or for water for the animals, at the king's commandment, that Elijah met him. Elijah needed the cheer and comfort which Obadiah gave him in telling him of the saving of a hundred of God's prophets. He had thought that he was the only one in all the land who believed in Jehovah, and it must have given him great encouragement to find Obadiah still faithful to God and to learn that there were at least a hundred others still living who were God's true followers. The meeting was, no doubt, a blessing also to Obadiah. It strengthened his faith and encouraged him in this time of distress to stand face to face with the great prophet.

Obadiah, however, was not ready for the errand on which Elijah wished to send him. He knew the bitter resentment of Ahab and was aware that for three and a half years he had been searching for Elijah that he might kill him. Therefore he feared the king's fury when he should learn that Elijah was near. He feared, too, that the prophet would again disappear, and that when Ahab should fail to find him he would kill Obadiah. Dr. Parker points out the inconsistency in Obadiah as shown in this incident. "Obadiah risked his life to save a hundred of the prophets of the Lord, yet dared not risk it without first receiving an oath for the greatest prophet of all."

At last, however, Elijah stood before Ahab. The king seemed glad, thinking that now, at last, he had the prophet in his power and could do with him what he chose. At once he charged him with being the troubler of Israel, the cause of all the distress which the people had suffered. That is the way always with such men as Ahab. They lay the blame of their sin on somebody else. But Elijah was not awed by the king's charge. He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou . . . in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah." It is the sinner who is the troubler, not the faithful messenger who comes with the warning. If Ahab had listened to God's warnings his troubles never would have come. We can blame only ourselves when our sins bring upon us woe and suffering.

CHAPTER XIII

ELIJAH ON CARMEL

Read 1 Kings XVIII., 36-46

ELIJAH challenged Ahab to a test of Baal's power. He demanded that the question should be settled whether the Lord or Baal was the true God. Baal's prophets were summoned, therefore, to meet with Elijah on Mount Carmel. On one side stood Elijah, alone, as the prophet of Jehovah, and on the other side the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal. All day, from morning until evening, Baal's priests had been about their altar, crying, dancing, and gashing their flesh, after the custom of their worship. But Baal had not answered, and, with mortification in their hearts and curses on their lips, they turned away in defeat. It is now Elijah's turn. Will Jehovah answer by fire and thus prove Himself the true God?

Elijah called the people to come near to him, that they might see all that he did, for there were no secrets in the worship of the true God. Then he repaired the altar of Jehovah, which had been broken down. Once the fires had burned on this altar, but it had been neglected, the people having

turned away to worship calves of gold instead of the true God. While this picture of the ruined altar is before us we may think of other altars that are broken down. There are homes where once the voice of prayer was daily heard, where the family bowed in worship. But now no longer does the morning and evening prayer ascend. There are those who at their mother's knees were taught to kneel, and who through infancy and youth continued to pray, but who no longer bow before God. All about us, everywhere, are these broken-down altars. The first thing the prophet did at Carmel that day was to rebuild the altar which had been thrown down. The first step toward blessing in prayerless homes and lives is to build again the old altar of God.

Elijah then made preparation for the great test. He prepared the altar, put the wood in order, cut the bullock in pieces, and laid it on the wood. That was all he could do; the fire must come down from God. Common fire would not do—it must be fire from heaven. It is the same in our sacrifices. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice” to God, is our part. God will never lift us up on His altar—we must lay ourselves there willingly. We present our bodies a living sacrifice when we yield our will and surrender ourselves to God with love and praise, ready for obedience and service. We can not change our own heart—Elijah did not bring fire from some furnace or smoking hearth to kindle the wood on his

altar; he prepared the sacrifice and then waited for God to give the fire. When all the preparations were made, Elijah prayed for God to send the fire. We get nothing spiritual from heaven without prayer. Prayerlessness receives no blessings. A day without prayer is a day unblest, unsheltered, and open to all disaster. If we are seeking blessing and are ready to yield our wills and affections to Christ we have but to cry to God, and He will send down the divine fire to consume the sacrifice which we have laid upon His altar. But we must always pray. "Ask, and ye shall receive." Mere dumb waiting is not enough—there must be supplication as well as consecration.

The form of Elijah's prayer must be noticed. "Let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel." The prophet was not seeking his own glory, but God's. He was not trying to work a miracle to show his power, but to show the people that Jehovah was the true and the only God. We should never think of honoring ourselves in doing God's work—our aim always should be to honor God. After anything we have done for God we should not exult in our own exaltation, but should thank God and honor Him. A king, when his army had won a great victory, bared his head in the presence of his soldiers and reverently repeated, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name be the glory." We should never concern ourselves about our share of the honor, about the reputation or the glory we are to get from any

work we have done, any duty, any sacrifice we have made; we should seek only that God's name shall be honored, that it may be known that He is indeed God.

All day the prophets of Baal had prayed in vain beside the altar, but the moment Elijah began to pray "the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt-offering." A god that can not answer prayer is not the God for needy, tempted, perishing, dying men. Baal had been proved no god. He was unable in that great crisis to give any answer. But the moment Elijah prayed, the fire fell.

The test of Carmel is being repeated every day in thousands of places on the earth. Our God is the Hearer of prayer. Burdened hearts are crying to Him, and He is answering their requests. Blessings are falling upon needy, suffering lives in response to earnest, faith-filled supplications. The fire of the Lord is always falling. It fell on the day of Pentecost on the praying disciples. It has fallen since on millions of heart altars, consuming earthliness and sin, and leaving the glowing flames of love, devotion, and holy service.

The effect on the people was tremendous. When they saw it they "fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, He is God." Jehovah had been forsaken and His worship abandoned. Jeroboam's sin had thus ripened into its full, terrible fruitage. Baal was now accepted as the god of the nation. Jehovah's prophets had been hunted

to death. So utterly had idolatry driven out the true worship, destroying or sending to hiding places the followers of the true God, that Elijah thought he was the only one left in the whole land who was loyal to Jehovah. Then came this test. It was a magnificent occasion—one man against king, prophets, people; but one man with God is more than a match for all the world against God.

This test is going on still. Baal's worshipers are yet prominent in the world, though known now by other names. What are the evidences of Christianity? What demonstration of power have we ever had which shows that Christianity is divine? We may point to the whole history of the Church in answer to this question. Wherever the gospel has gone through the centuries divine power has been with it. A little study of history and a little examination of the map of the world will show any one a thousand Carmels. Idolatry and false religions have done their best, but nothing has come of their experiments—no moral improvements, no lifting up of the people, no sweetening and purifying of homes, no building of hospitals and asylums, no regulating of lives, no saving of souls. Then Christianity entered with its simple story of divine love, its fire from heaven, the power of the Holy Spirit; and wherever it has gone all has been changed. Men have turned from their sins unto God. Evil hearts have been made good. Cruelty has given place to gentleness. Happy homes have been built up. Society has been transformed. As

we see these wonderful results of Christian life—the Carmel days over again—we can say with joy and triumph, “Jehovah, He is God.”

The victory was complete. The fire consumed the burnt offering, even the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that filled the trench. Baal’s prophets had been defeated and must die. They had been proved guilty of high treason as representing idolatry. Events moved rapidly. Elijah announced to Ahab the coming of rain. The prophet then went to the top of Mount Carmel, and we see him next in the attitude of prayer—praying for rain. Although God had promised the rain, yet it was necessary that Elijah should pray for it. “Ask, and ye shall receive.” Elijah’s prayer suggests to us also the importance of expectation. When we ask for things which God has promised, we should look for an answer. The prophet sent his servant to watch for the clouds. The picture is very beautiful. The answer did not come immediately, but the prophet continued pleading with God. ‘Again and again and again the servant went up and looked, but there was nothing to be seen, no cloud in the sky. At last a little cloud as small as a man’s hand appeared. The answer was coming. The prophet ceased to pray and set out on his journey to Jezreel.

CHAPTER XIV

ELIJAH DISCOURAGED AND RESTORED

Read 1 Kings XIX., 1-16

LITTLE wonder that Jezebel was furious when she learned from Ahab of the slaughter of her priests. She vowed vengeance upon Elijah. "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow." It was a trying hour for Elijah, and for once he quailed.

"So you intend to be a reformer, young man?" asked an old peer of young Wilberforce. "That is the end of reformers," he continued, pointing to a picture of Jesus on His cross. Those who would contend with error must always expect opposition, possibly persecution, possibly death. To be a bold confessor anywhere is to face enmity, sneers, reproach. Even Christian boys at school or at work will oftentimes have to endure petty persecutions if they remain true to their Master.

We have been accustomed to think of Elijah as a man who would quail before nothing. But we are disappointed this time in our man. "When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life." Pos-

sibly he did right. We are not required always to face danger. There are times when it would be foolhardy to do so, when we would only be throwing away our life. Jesus said to His disciples, "When they persecute you in this city, flee into the next." On several occasions, in the earlier days of His ministry, Jesus Himself withdrew from danger, because His hour had not yet come. There are times, of course, when we must stand, and not flee. At the last, when His hour had come, Jesus made no effort to escape from His enemies, but quietly yielded Himself into their hands. There are times in every life when to flee from danger would be cowardice and treason to the Master. But we have no right to sacrifice our life unless it be clearly in obedience to the divine call. We can not blame Elijah, therefore, for fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel.

In what followed, however, we can not defend the prophet. Not only did he flee, but he became panic-stricken. "He requested for himself that he might die." He was in a state of sad despondency. It was not fright that produced this condition of mind—it was discouragement. It seemed to him that all he had done, all the struggle at Carmel, had come to nothing. There are few things we need to guard against more carefully than discouragement. When once we allow ourselves to come under its influence we are made weak. Our hope and courage fail. In every line of life we find discouraged people, and the dis-

couragement takes away much of their power for work. It surely is a sad picture—this greatest and bravest of all the old prophets lying there under a little bush in the wilderness, begging to die.

There are many other illustrations of similar experience in good men. John the Baptist, lying in prison in the castle of Machærus, began to question whether, after all, Jesus, whom he had baptized and upon whom he had seen the Spirit descending, was indeed the promised Messiah. Luther, another Elijah in his bravery before rulers, once became so depressed that all joy left him. It is said that one morning, when he was in this mood, his wife came down to breakfast dressed in deep mourning. Luther looked up in amazement, and said, "Who is dead?" His wife answered: "Why, do you not know? God is dead." He reproved her for her words. "How can God die? He is eternal." "Yet," she replied, "from the way you are cast down one would think God must be dead." Then Luther saw what a wise woman his wife was, and mastered his mood.

Elijah was a man of prayer. He is mentioned in the Epistle of James as an example of a righteous man, whose supplication availed much in its working. Here, however, his prayer for death was not answered. It was well for Elijah, too, that the prayer was not answered. If he had died there, what an inglorious ending of life it would have been! As it was, however, he lived to do

further glorious work, to see great results, and instead of dying in the wilderness, missed death altogether. It is never right to wish ourselves dead. People are sometimes heard expressing such a wish, but it is always wrong. Life is God's gift to us, a sacred trust for which we shall have to give account. As long as God keeps us living He has something for us to do. Our prayers should be for grace to bear our burden and do our duty bravely unto the end. From Elijah's after-experiences. The things we think have failed us cast down into despondency by any discouraging experiences. The things we think have failed us are often only slowly ripening into rich success. Thus the night of discouragement passes away and the day of blessing follows. We have but to be faithful and to wait, and in the end we shall always rejoice.

It was only a little bush under which Elijah crept, and its shadow furnished but scant protection from the heat. Yet a blessing came to him there. He slept. "He giveth unto His beloved sleep," writes the psalmist. Sleep is a wonderful blessing. God hides us away in the darkness, and while we sleep brings gifts of life to us. He fills up again the wasted fountains of life, and we rise in the morning renewed and strong, ready for new service.

It was only a little juniper bush under which the prophet slept that day. There is another tree under which God's discouraged ones may find real

and true comfort—the tree of Calvary. Angels come there, too, with their sweet refreshment and gentle ministry. There food is furnished to satisfy the soul's deepest craving. There all blessings of mercy and grace are dispensed. A story is told of one who fled from a gathering storm, taking refuge under a great tree. He was both hungry and thirsty. On the tree he found fruit for his hunger, at the tree's roots a spring of water gushed out, and there he quenched his thirst. So under the cross we find not only shelter, but also food and drink. When we are in any trouble we should go and sit down in the shadow of the cross of Christ, and we will find there all we need of divine comfort and help.

When he had slept for a time an angel came and touched him, and bade him arise and eat. Here, again, we see God's loving gentleness. First, sleep, with its refreshment; then food. God did not cast off His servant because he was so discouraged and depressed. He followed him in his flight and kept watch over him all the way. There is great comfort in this fact for us. God is very patient with us in our weakness and failure. He gave Elijah sleep, and then food, until his exhausted nature was refreshed. Very much spiritual depression is caused by the condition of the body. Ofttimes the best cure for despondency is sleep and food until the nerves are quiet and the body is restored to healthy conditions.

The prophet was strengthened, and "went in

the strength of that food forty days and forty nights." When we have long journeys to take God prepares us for them. When hard experiences lie before us we are divinely fitted for meeting them. Whenever God sends us on any journey, into whatsoever desert it may be, He will make provision that we faint not by the way. Many persons whose lot in life is hard go through the days with cheerful, songful spirit because every morning, in prayer, God gives them food which makes them strong for the journey. Those who feed upon the Word of God

"Carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart;
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

While Elijah was in the cave in the mountain God came to him. This was still part of his work of restoration. Elijah was discouraged, and God would bring him back to his wonted gladness and hope. He came to him in the stillness and asked him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" When we find our friends in great sorrow, the best thing we can do for them oftentimes is to give them an opportunity to open their hearts. That was what God did here—He asked this question that Elijah might unburden himself. Of course, God knew all about Elijah's discouragement, but it did the prophet good to tell it. We need never be afraid to open our heart to God, telling Him every anxi-

ety, every care. He understands, and will never chide us. It will do us good to speak freely to Him, even if our fears are only imaginary.

Elijah had thought that he was alone in his loyalty and courage in standing for the Lord. He had thought himself the only loyal follower of Jehovah. No other one had had courage to come out and make himself known that day on Carmel. This made it all the harder for Elijah. It is easy to fight in company with other men, but to face the enemy alone is the sublimest test of a soldier's courage. The real test of a Christian life is not in church services, nor in a Christian home, but where the believer must stand by himself. The young man who finds himself the only Christian clerk in the bank or the office may find his duty hard. But this should only inspire him with fresh courage and strength. He is the only one Christ has in that place, and he dare not fail. Suppose Elijah had not stood for God that day, had quailed and fled, what would have been the consequence? We never know what may depend on our standing loyally and faithfully at our post, even in lowliest places.

The Lord continued to comfort His servant. He did it now in a wonderful parable in nature. A great wind rent the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind. An earthquake followed, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. "And after the fire a still small

voice," a sound of gentle stillness,—and that was God. Elijah had been discouraged by the failure of the startling work at Carmel, that it had not altogether crushed Baalism. The Lord shows him that noise is not the most stupendous quality of power, that it is not noise that makes the deepest impression. God works silently, without noise. It is the silent things, the unconscious influences of our lives, that make the deepest and most lasting impressions, and not the things which get advertised in the papers. Jesus was "a still small voice" in this world. He made no noise—did not strive nor cry, neither was His voice heard in the streets. He did not break a bruised reed, so gentle was He in His movements. Yet that one sweet, quiet life, pouring forth its spirit of love, wrought more than has been wrought by all the armies of conquerors since the world began.

The Lord then sent Elijah on to other duties. "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." Elijah was thus assured that other men in their turn would come upon the field, each one doing his part for the destruction of this terrible system of idolatry. No man's work is complete in itself. Elijah did a part, and then Hazael and Jehu and Elisha, each coming in turn, did a part,

until the destruction of Baal was completed. All we have to do is the little fragment of duty which God gives to us. Others have gone before us, and have done a part. Others will come after us and do another part. If we simply do our little portion in our own day we shall please God and bless the world.

CHAPTER XV.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Read 1 Kings XXI., 4-16

THE work of Elijah went on after the Lord had dealt so gently with him, restoring his courage. Elisha is found at the plow, and is called to go with Elijah as his disciple and friend. Elijah seems to have been deeply affected by the lessons learned at Horeb. He worked after that more quietly and patiently. He did not try any more to suppress Baalism by force, but sought to kindle zeal for the Lord, and then to wait for the slow working in men's hearts and lives.

In the incident of Naboth's vineyard we find again the old Elijah spirit in all its rugged energy. Naboth had a vineyard near Ahab's palace, and the king coveted it for himself. He was willing, however, to buy it and to pay Naboth a fair price for it, or exchange for it another vineyard. But Naboth could not legally sell his ground. Now a very unkingly quality in Ahab showed itself. "And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers.

And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." We see what a fool an undisciplined man, though a king, may make of himself. Instead of accepting Naboth's refusal in a manly way, Ahab acted like a baby. We would better look at the picture carefully, for sometime we may be tempted to act in the same way. Even in our modern Christian days full-grown men sometimes sulk and get sullen over a little disappointment. One would think, to look at Ahab pouting on his bed, that some great calamity had befallen him. But really the trouble was only this, that he could not have his own way in everything. There are people who have luxury, wealth, and honor, but are made unhappy in the midst of all their splendor because they can not get some little thing which they want. Discontent is the trouble. We may weave into this story St. Paul's words about contentment—that he had learned, in whatsoever state he was, therein to be content. He had learned to do without things which he would have been glad to have. Ahab had not learned this splendid lesson, and there are a good many other people who have not learned it.

Now Jezebel comes upon the scene with her sinister meddling. She wanted to know what was wrong with the king. She seems in a mood of wifely sympathy: "Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" Ahab answered, "Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto

him, Give me thy vineyard for money; . . . and he answered, I will not." Naboth had a right to say no to the king—indeed he could not have done otherwise without doing wrong. The property was his, but not to sell. Naboth was conscientious in refusing Ahab's request, and this ought to have ended the matter for the king. But he had no respect for the poor man's scruples. We learn that we have no right to interfere with the conscience of any other person. Even a king dare not command a subject to go against his conscience. No parent should ever compel a child to violate its conscience. We may urge reasons upon other persons, but we can have no right to make a person go against his own conscience.

Jezebel lacked conscience. She was angry at Ahab's yielding to Naboth's refusal. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread." A wife's influence over her husband should always be toward right things. Usually this is the case—men owe more to their wives than they ever can tell. But when a woman is bad, her influence over her husband is immeasurable in its evil. Jezebel was one of the worst women of history. What Ahab might have been if he had had a good wife we can not tell. But we know that the influence of Jezebel over him was malign and bad to the very farthest degree. Jezebel began here with a taunt. "You the king, and allow a poor subject to thwart you in any wish of your heart! You the king of Israel, and permit the

scruples of a man to stand in the way of your own desire!" Scorn is a terrible weapon when used as Jezebel here used it. That is the way many boys and young men are sneered out of the right path. "You tied to your mother's apron-strings! You keep on reading that old Bible! You go to church among hypocrites! You afraid to take a glass of drink!" Ahab had not the courage to answer: "Yes, I am a king, but might does not make right. I must respect the conscience of my humblest subject. I must not sin against the Lord." Many boys and young men also lack courage, when sneered at and twitted with their weakness, to reply: "Yes, I am afraid to dishonor my mother or disregard her command. I am afraid to despise my Bible and throw away my religion, and go against my conscience. I am afraid to drink and enjoy forbidden pleasures." This is the only true and manly way to meet such taunts and scorn. It requires heroism; but when one's soul is at stake it is an occasion for sublime heroism. To be laughed out of conscience is to be laughed out of heaven in the end.

Jezebel took the matter into her own hands: "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name." And Ahab said nothing. He let the wicked woman do as she wished. He let her take his seal and affix his name to letters, ordering a conspiracy against a good man's life. Yet Ahab thought he was a king! For one thing, we see the terrible

danger of allowing ourselves to fall under the influence of wicked people. Ahab was not the last man whom a bad woman has destroyed. Bad women are many times the devil's angels, to put chains about the necks of men and lead them away from all that is sacred and holy, straight down to hell. We learn also how unkingly, how unmanly it is to be led by another person into sin. If only Ahab had had the courage to rise up and assert his power and refuse to do the wrong thing that Jezebel suggested, how differently the story would have read to-day! The lesson is for us. We should allow no one ever to induce us to turn aside from the right way. There is one thing we can not give away—our conscience.

Most foul was the conspiracy against Naboth. He had not done anything that was dishonorable. He had only obeyed the law of the kingdom which forbade the alienation of any portion of an ancestral estate. He had not defied the king; he had only claimed that which was his by divine right. Yet this bad woman, assuming the authority of the king, plotted to have Naboth arraigned by his own people and by false witnessing condemned him to death. He had blasphemed God, the two perjurers swore.

When Jezebel learned that her conspiracy had succeeded and that Naboth was stoned and was dead, she went to Ahab and said, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money." So Jezebel had saved the king's money and got him

the vineyard for nothing. Having died, as was supposed, for blasphemy, his estate was confiscated to the crown. Jezebel seemed to be a good agent. It seemed an excellent bargain. It is good to have a prudent wife, provided she is honest and true at the same time.

But stop and count the actual cost to Ahab. Elijah said to the king, "Thou hast sold thyself to do that which is evil." So Ahab paid more for the vineyard than it seemed he was paying. He thought he had got it without cost, but really he had given his soul for that patch of ground. Many persons get even less for their soul than that. A young man sells his conscience, his scruples, his convictions, his hope of heaven, to get a place, to make money, or to have "a good time." A politician gets a high office, but he has sold himself—it has cost him his soul. Is not the price too great? A man gets rich by fraud. He lives in splendor, enjoying his wealth, but the price he has given is his soul. Does it pay?

Ahab eagerly hastened to claim his garden. "Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of the Jezreelite, to take possession of it." Ahab had not killed Naboth—possibly he did not know all that Jezebel had done. But now he is quite willing to accept the prize, without asking any questions as to the way it had been acquired. There are many people too weak to do mean or wrong things themselves, who would yet allow others to do these things, while they reap the benefits. Does any one expect to get clear of the guilt of

wrong-doing by allowing an unscrupulous wife or partner to do the wrong things for him? Does any one suppose that a merchant escapes the sin and penalty of dishonesty when he silently allows his clerks to do the cheating and lying while he pockets the results? Does anybody suppose that because the money is put under the legislator's pillow, and he does not know who put it there, he is not guilty of taking a bribe if he retains it and votes as the big corporation wants him to vote? There is no use shamming in God's presence. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." Letting others do the wicked thing for us does not free us from the responsibility. Ahab stood in that vineyard a conspirator, a murderer, a robber, a false swearer, a blasphemer, though he had not lifted a finger nor said a word in the whole transaction. It was fitting that when Ahab came down to take possession of the murdered man's vineyard there should meet him the shaggy old prophet, waiting to confront him and tear off the shroud which hid the ghastly skeleton of crime, and tell him what God thought about it and about him. Sin may be successful, but when we come to get the gains the Judge confronts us. Scathing indeed is the prophet's condemnation of the king and the pronouncement of his doom. His house shall fall. Dogs shall eat the carcass of Jezebel. The king's whole posterity shall perish, and their bodies shall be given to the dogs of the city and the fowls of the air.

CHAPTER XVI

ELIJAH TAKEN TO HEAVEN

Read 2 Kings II., 1-11

ELIJAH'S work was finished. The words of the record are very striking: "It came to pass, when Jehovah would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven." The words show how completely Elijah's life was at the disposal of God. The prophet himself had nothing to say as to when he should go or how. It would be when and how the Lord would take him.

The unusual manner of Elijah's departure would seem to have been a mark of divine commendation, a reward for his faithfulness. Yet we can not state with any positiveness why the prophet was thus lifted over death as he was. All we can say is that it was the divine will concerning his departure. In this way he would best glorify God.

The brief account opens another window, a window into the Father's house: "Jehovah would take up Elijah . . . into heaven." His departure was a promotion, an exaltation, a translation. We know he did not cease to live. We

have but to turn the pages over until we come into the New Testament to see him again, nearly nine hundred years later, living and active still in God's work. This is just as true of the Christians who die in our time as it was of the old prophet. The Lord takes them up into heaven, and they live on in blessedness and service forever. One cold autumn day I saw an empty bird's nest on a tree. It looked desolate and forsaken, but I knew that the birds which once sang there were living yet, away in the warm southland, beyond the reach of winter's storms, singing there the same sweet songs they used to sing here. There is an empty love nest in many a home, in many a heart, but we know that the dear one who has gone is living with God in blessedness.

Elijah's last day on earth was a busy one. He was sent from place to place, first to Bethel, then to Jericho, then to the Jordan. God reveals His plan to His children step by step as they go on. Elijah was faithful also to the very last moment, and went swiftly from task to task. It was to visit the schools of the prophets that he went to Bethel and Jericho. He wished to give his last counsels to these young students whom he had been training and on whom the religious work for the people would depend when he was gone. We should continue in our work until we come to the end. In fact, when we know that the time is short we should be all the more diligent and earnest, that nothing may be left undone. Some good men

think they may retire from active service when they get well on in years, living leisurely in the closing days. But the knowledge that we have only a little while to stay should make us eager to do all we can in the world where so much needs to be done. The shortening days should call us to intenser activity.

Elisha's friendship must have been a great comfort to Elijah. He came into his life that day in the field when the old prophet came upon the young man plowing, and called him. Elijah needed greatly such glad and cheerful companionship. Probably he had not known much of friendship. His life had been that of a recluse. His mission was stern and his work had been severe. Elisha had in him just the qualities that were needed to give comfort to Elijah in his advancing years. Elisha went with him everywhere, a constant help and cheer. He clung to him to the very last. "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," he said.

Again and again Elijah begged him to tarry behind. Just why Elijah sought to slip away from him we are not told. Perhaps he was trying to save him from the pain of parting. But Elisha would not allow Elijah to get out of his sight a moment. He owed everything to Elijah, and it was fitting that he should cling to him to the last and refuse to be separated from him. There are many young people who owe more than they know to older friends—parents, teachers, pastors, or

others—and it is fitting and beautiful that they should show their grateful love and interest to the end.

Notice, too, what Elisha would have missed if he had not clung to his master. He would not have seen the miracle at the Jordan or the glorious translation, nor would he have received the mantle of the ascending prophet. There are always rich rewards at the end of every path of faithfulness, and the harder and steeper the path the greater are the rewards. God always pays His servants well, and we do not know what we miss when we shrink from our duty in any way.

Elisha seems to have been much annoyed by the insistence of the young prophets. They kept asking him if he knew he was to lose his master that day. He said to them, "Hold ye your peace." The words seem harsh and ungentle, especially when spoken at such a time, in the midst of the sacred scenes which this chapter describes, yet the rebuke was merited. These sons of the prophets were impertinent chatterers, breaking in upon the solemn moments of most loving ministry with their thoughtless questionings. They had no conception of the sacredness of what was passing before their eyes. They had no appreciation of the grief of Elisha before which their hearts should have been awed. They needed to learn just the lesson which Elisha's sharp rebuke gave them.

Many of us need to be taught the same lesson. We like to air our little bits of knowledge and in-

formation, letting everybody know what we have heard. Especially is this true when the knowledge we have gained is something we have no right to know, or at least no right to repeat. When we meet one in sorrow we feel that we must say something about the trouble, and so we begin to chatter or to ask questions, when really we ought not to refer to the matter at all. There is a time to speak even in the presence of sorrow, but there is also a time to be silent. We would better be quiet always in time of grief than to speak the wrong words or to speak them in a wrong spirit. Impertinence is always a miserable offense, but it is most miserable of all when it flings its rude words upon a breaking heart.

Elijah warmly returned the love of Elisha. The deepest wish in true friendship is not to receive, but to give; not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Elijah desired to bestow upon Elisha all he could bestow upon him. He wished to leave behind for him not merely the memory of his love, but a blessing which should make his successor more ready for his work. So he said, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee." He knew he was about to depart, and his heart yearned for the young man who had been so true a friend to him, whom he loved so tenderly. He wanted to give him some parting blessing. We see illustrations of the same love oftentimes when parents are about to leave this world. Their affection for their children grows more and more

tender as the moment of parting draws near. This incident suggests also that our friends may often do more for us in dying than they could do even in the midst of life. They are nearer heaven than they ever were before, and have special power in prayer. Many of us are richer forever for the last benediction and prayer of some beloved one.

Elisha's choice in answer to the request of Elijah showed the nobleness of his heart. He did not ask for position or health or ease or honor, but for more spiritual power. He had watched his master in his work, in his zeal for God, in his intense earnestness, and he wanted to have a double measure of the same spirit. He desired most of all to be a better man, a holier man, more active and efficient in the Lord's work. Young people, in their Christian lives, should seek, above all things, the graces and beauties which make a noble character. The highest desire of a true-hearted man should be that he may be divinely qualified for the work he is called to do. That was the longing of Elisha, as he knew that his master was about to leave him and that the burden of his great ministry was then to fall upon him.

Elijah promised conditionally that Elisha should have the blessing he sought. He told him that if he saw him depart, the favor should be granted to him. Good men do not die out of the earth when they are taken up. Their influence remains. They leave part of their spirit in other

men's lives. Elisha received a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, because the work which the older man had been doing would pass into the hands of the younger. The true mother leaves much of the power and the beauty of her character in the hearts of her children. The teacher leaves his words in the minds of those he has taught. All persons, good or bad, leave their life behind them in influence when they go away. How important it is that we shall live well, that our characters be true, holy, pure, so that those upon whom any portion of our influence may fall shall be blessed by what they get from us.

The last scene of all was very glorious. "As they still went on, and talked, . . . there appeared a chariot of fire, which parted them both asunder." So the most devoted friends must sometimes be separated. This parting came very suddenly at the last. We walk on together talking for many days, not dreaming of separation, then suddenly, as the chariot is waiting, the one is taken and the other left. We should not overlook the certainty of ultimate separation in every friendship we form. Some day one of the two who are now walking together in love will be taken and the other left to weep by a grave and to walk on thereafter lonely and sorrowing.

The departure of Elisha suggests also that heaven is not far away. One of the chariots from the King's country came down that day and carried the old prophet home. Another came down

to the door of the house when your father, mother, brother, or sister passed away. We shall not leave the world as Elijah did, missing death, but we shall have the heavenly chariot for our freed spirits just as truly as he had. Jesus said that Lazarus, when he died, was borne by angels home to glory. We shall have angels to carry us up to heaven.

CHAPTER XVII

ELISHA SUCCEEDS ELIJAH

Read 2 Kings II., 12-22

No good man's work is ended when the man himself is taken from the earth. Every influence of his life stays among men. No one does more than a little fragment of the world's work in his short time on the earth. Elijah came into the world, did what God gave him to do, and then passed away, leaving an unfinished work behind him. Then Elisha came and took up Elijah's mantle, and went on doing his part of the work.

The cry of Elisha when he saw Elijah departing was first a cry of sorrow. "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Thus he extolled the value of Elijah to the nation, his greatness, the defense he had been. It is always a loss to a community when a good man departs. The country was protected by its horses and chariots. Elijah had been the defense of Israel. What the country owed to him, no one can tell. In his own measure every good man is chariots and horsemen to his own country and community. We should make our lives so

good, so faithful, so strong, so full of helpfulness that we shall indeed be chariots and horsemen to our community.

The falling of Elijah's mantle at Elisha's feet was the divine call to the young prophet to take up the work which his master had left. There was to be no break in the continuity of the service. The chariots and the horsemen were gone, but already the place was filled with new chariots and new horsemen. "The King is dead! Long live the King!" are the proclamations simultaneously heard when death has touched the royal heart. "God buries the workman, but carries on the work." We weep when one is taken away, and lament the irreparable loss, as it seems to us. Irreparable it is, in one sense. No one ever can take the place of the friend who is gone out of our life. But then his work was done. There really was no longer any need for him to stay. Elijah had done his part in God's great plan, and had done it magnificently. There was need for more work, but this was not Elijah's. Elisha was standing there to take up the mantle that dropped from his departing master.

We are continually seeing useful lives removed from earth. The loss seems to us irreparable. Their departure seems to us a calamity. But there are no accidents in God's providence. Every one's life is a plan of God, and no faithful servant of His is taken away until his particular part in the great plan is finished. Then his mantle

falls at some one's feet—yours, perhaps. The good father dies, and there is grief in the home. He will be greatly missed. Yes, but an older son stands by the coffin, strong and gifted, blessed with the blessing of the father's life and teaching. At this son's feet the mantle falls from the father's shoulders. He must take it up, and with it the burdens and responsibilities of manhood. He must become now his mother's protector and the shelter and defender of his younger brothers and sisters. A mother dies; and when a good mother is gone out of the sweet and gentle home which her own hands have built up, the loss indeed seems irreparable. But if there is an older daughter in the sorrowing group at the grave, the mother's mantle falls at her feet. So it is in all the breaks which death makes in Christian homes and communities. In every case the mantle falls at some one's feet.

With the coming of the new responsibilities upon Elisha there came also adequate power and wisdom. He claimed the fulfillment of the promise which Elijah had made. "He took the mantle . . . and smote the waters, and said, Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" His faith was simple and strong. The same God who had wrought so wondrously through Elijah would work now through Elisha. This is the law of grace with God. There is much comfort in this if we will accept it. Parents are sometimes most anxious about their children when they think of the

world's dangers and of the burdens they must carry when they go out to face life's struggles and tasks. Yet, if they would but remember their own life story, how the Lord had led them, protected, blessed, and helped them, and then remember that the same God is the God of their children, they need not be afraid. We read the story of God's providence in other people's lives, how wondrously He kept and guided them, and then we wish we might have like guidance in our lives. But have we not? "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?"

The young prophets saw what Elisha did at the Jordan, and they knew at once that he really had been appointed to be the successor of Elijah. They said: "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him." They saw Elisha smite the river with the mantle and the waters open to allow him to pass through. They bowed themselves then before him as their new master. Elijah's mantle, carried now by Elisha, would not itself have convinced them of his appointment, but the miracle wrought was sufficient proof. We can prove ourselves Christ's anointed ones only by doing the works of Christ. It is not enough for a young man to be ordained as a minister—he must show in his life and work the power of Christ. It is not enough to wear the emblems of official place in the Church—we must have in our lives the true marks of Christlikeness. In

these days the world cares little for the mere emblems of ecclesiastical authority. The only credential that will be accepted is spiritual power, shown first in beautiful living, then in victoriousness in the world's struggles, and then in a ministry of power and helpfulness.

At once Elisha became the messenger of God to the people. He began to do them good in many ways. We have an illustration of this in the healing of the springs which supplied the city of Jericho with water. The authorities came to the prophet and told him that, while the situation of their city was pleasant, there was one serious drawback—the waters were not wholesome. Good water is essential to the health and prosperity of a city or town or community. Bad water produces disease and death. But there are other kinds of evil fountains besides corrupt springs of water. There are springs of moral pollution which gush up in the heart of many a city and spread evil and deadly curse. Many a village or town, lovely for situation, with fair streets and bright homes, wealth and many advantages of religion, education, and culture, is blackened, its beauty ruined, by its liquor saloons, which pour their streams of moral death all abroad. Gambling places are also like fountains of curse in a town or city. There are places of sinful amusement, too, which send out deadly streams. In every town in our country there are springs whose "water is bad," causing sin and sorrow.

Elisha promptly responded to the request of the authorities of the city, and the water was healed. "He went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast salt therein, and said, Thus saith Jehovah, I have healed these waters." This is a parable of the work of the gospel in this world. Our hearts are the bad fountains, and Christ comes with the new cruse of the gospel and pours divine grace into the foul spring, and it is healed. All true reformation of life must begin within—at the spring of the waters. It will not do merely to change one's manners to get a man to stop swearing and lying. He must get a changed heart. Then the only salt that will make the heart's bad waters sweet and good is the salt of God's grace. If we would cure the fountains of evil in a town we must use the same new cruse and the same salt. Legislation has its place, but the gospel alone can change sin's curse into the blessing of holiness. Jesus said that Christians are the salt of the earth, but He said also that the salt must have its savor, else it will do no good. That is, the Christian people in a town must themselves be full of the Spirit of God, of the love of Christ, earnest, consistent, faithful, true. There are Christians enough in every town and city to save it and purify its fountains of sin if they all were active and full of the grace of God.

Stories from missionary lands give illustrations, continually new, of this little acted parable. The missionaries find towns and cities beautiful

for situation, but the "water is bad." They begin to pour the salt of the gospel into the springs, and at once the change begins. Every Christian should see in Elisha here, pouring salt into the waters, a picture of himself, pouring the grace of God into some foul fountain to sweeten it. Every one of us should make at least one spot in this world a little more healthy and pure. Of course, the healing is God's work, not ours; but it is ours to put the salt into the foul springs—and we must be sure that it is really salt that we put in.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WIDOW'S OIL INCREASED

Read 2 Kings IV., 1-7

ELISHA was greatly different from Elijah. We see him first plowing in the field. He was the son of a prosperous farmer. He must have been greatly surprised when he saw the old prophet coming to him in the field and without a word casting his mantle over his shoulders. Thus Elijah adopted him as a son and invested him with the prophetic office. The act was performed in silence, yet Elisha understood its significance.

Probably taking his mantle again, Elijah strode on, leaving the young man bewildered and amazed. In a moment, however, he recovered his self-possession, followed Elijah, and declared his acceptance of the call, desiring permission to say farewell to his father and mother. He was ready to leave all for the Lord's sake. From that time he was with the old prophet as a son, tenderly caring for him. Elijah's career was short; Elisha's was long and honored. Elisha was a man full of good works—a sort of New Testament man born before

his time. He was a kindly man. If he was not as great as Elijah, his life was no less useful. Elijah is remembered by his striking and highly sensational acts—Elisha wrote his name in countless hearts in letters of love. “Elijah began his career by predicting a famine in the land; Elisha began his by healing a spring, that there might not be from thence any more death or barren land.”

The story of the widow and her oil is a fair illustration of the long ministry of Elisha. The widow of a prophet was in trouble. Tradition says it was the wife of Obadiah who was thus in distress, and that the debt was for money which her husband had borrowed to provide for the hundred prophets whom he hid and supported in a cave during the famine, shielding them from the persecution. If this tradition is true, the appeal came to Elisha with special force.

Elisha had a compassionate heart. People turned to him instinctively in their trouble, knowing that they would find sympathy and help in him. There is no better indication of character than the way the tried and sorrowing in a community feel toward a man. When he is habitually good and kind it soon becomes known. His name is known everywhere as a strong tower into which they may run and be safe. The widow was sure that Elisha would receive her and listen patiently to her story. He was a prophet—her husband had been a prophet, too. That was a bond which

would count. Elisha had known her husband and had known him to be a good man, and that would strengthen her appeal. Her husband had feared God. That would count, too, with the prophet. In those days there were not many who were disposed to help the poor, but this woman was sure that Elisha would hear her story and not turn her away. We can not better serve God than by being kind to His other children, by being compassionate toward human sorrow and need. Our lives will be judged at last, Jesus tells us, by the way we have treated the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the stranger, the unfortunate. If we do not love people, we do not love God.

The widow was not disappointed in her confidence. Elisha did not refuse to hear her, did not turn a deaf ear to her. He showed an interest in her case and listened sympathetically to her story. At once he set about providing for her wants. She was in debt. The man of God did not tell her to repudiate the obligation. Debts should be paid. There are too many who are careless in this matter. It is a bad thing to go into debt if one can possibly avoid it, but when we owe another we should spare ourselves no effort to pay what we owe. Elisha wrought a miracle to enable this widow to pay the old debt of her dead husband. We are not likely to have our debts paid in this way. "Owe no man anything, save to love one another," is a New Testament exhortation.

It is interesting to note how the prophet helped

the woman to meet her obligation. He did not pay the money himself. He did not ask some rich man to pay it. He did not get up a fair or a bazaar to raise the money. He helped the woman to pay it herself out of her own resources. Thus he helped her to preserve her self-respect. We should think of this in assisting others in their troubles. If we can put them in the way of helping themselves with or without our co-operation, we have helped them in the truest and best way. It is thus that God does in blessing us. He uses what we have, and helps us through our own resources. Elisha learned what the woman had, and used this.

What she had in her house was so little that there certainly did not seem to be much hope of paying a large debt with it. She had nothing "save a pot of oil." Yet with this Elisha enabled her to pay all that she owed and to have a competence for herself and her family for time to come. We are reminded at once of the miracle of the loaves and fishes which our Master wrought long afterwards, using the little His disciples had with which to work.

The method of the prophet's helping is also worthy of study. He sent the woman and her sons out among the neighbors to borrow vessels—empty vessels. They were bidden to borrow not a few—all they could get. It seemed a strange transaction, this coming of the boys with empty vessels in their hands until the whole place was

cluttered with them. It must have started much talk among the neighbors. But the purpose soon became manifest. Elisha told the woman that when the vessels had been procured, she and her sons should go into the house and shut the door. This thing that was to take place was not to be done in the sight of the neighbors, to be talked about, to become the sensation of the village; it must be done quietly, behind closed doors, with only God for witness. That is the way Christ Himself did His work. He did not seek publicity. His voice was not heard on the streets. He bids His disciples not to do their righteousness before men, to be seen of them, and exhorts us not to let our left hand know what our right hand doeth. We are to shut the door when God and we have a work to do.

When everything was ready the woman was to begin to pour oil from the little pot into the empty vessels, setting them aside as they were filled. Strange to say, there was no exhausting of the oil. The pot with the oil became a fountain which flowed unintermittently until all the vessels were filled. Then the oil stayed—not a drop of it was wasted. No more was given than there was room to receive.

It is easy for us to take the lesson from this beautiful incident. The number of vessels sought and found measured the woman's faith. She did not dream that more vessels might have been filled if she had provided them. Probably she borrowed

all the vessels she could. At least the oil did not cease until every vessel had been filled. It is always so with God's blessings—they come to us as long as there is room to receive. God will give us as much grace as we can take into our hearts and lives and work out in helpful ministries. The forgiveness which He bestows upon us is as full and deep and large as the room we make for it in our own hearts. If we are unmerciful and unforgiving we can not get much of God's forgiveness. If we are full of mercy ourselves, then God gives us lavishly of His mercy. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Whatever the vessels may be that we bring to God for the receiving of His gifts, He will always fill every one of them to the brim. If we get but little it is because we have but little room for receiving. If only we would enlarge our capacity, if we had more faith, more desire, greater yearning, we should get more of God into our lives.

Another point is the use of the oil which has been thus provided. Elisha was not present when this miracle was wrought. He did not work it himself, but left it for the woman and God. But when every vessel was filled she hastened to him and told him what had been done. He then bade her go and sell the oil and pay the debt with the proceeds. After the debt was paid there still was money left, and this she and her sons were to use for their own support. Mark well that the first use to be made of the results of this miracle was to be

in paying what she owed. This should always be our way. If God gives us money in any way while we are in debt we should not use it on ourselves until we have paid what we owe. Then we may spend what remains in caring for ourselves.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON

Read 2 Kings IV., 25-37

THE story of the great woman of Shunem is a delightful one. She was good to the prophet, showing him most kindly hospitality as he went back and forth on his prophetic errands. The little chamber on the wall was a fit resting-place for the man of God. It was a place of prayer, too, and blessing came upon the home through the prophet's intercession. The coming of a little child to the lonely couple brought great gladness.

But sorrow came too. The child stayed a while, and then was suddenly taken away. There are a few homes in which at some time a little child has not died. Many a mother reads this tender story as if it were a chapter out of her own life. Many children who read it remember the day when a little brother or sister lay dead in their own home. Longfellow says:

There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there;
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair.

In her first grief the mother thought of the prophet who had been such a friend to her. In all she did she showed strong character and good faith. She did not break down in her sorrow. It had come suddenly upon her, and it is always harder to endure grief that is sudden than that which comes with forewarning and expectation. It was a specially great sorrow, too, for this was her only child. Yet with all these elements of special bitterness the mother's faith did not fail. She seems to have had a hope that her child would be given back to her again. At least she trusted God in the whole matter and turned to Him at once for comfort.

Why did she go to the man of God? When we are in trouble, in sorrow, it is well to go to some Christian friend—pastor, teacher, or some one who is able to give us sympathy and counsel and to pray for us. We need no priest to come between us and God, but in time of great distress it is good to have wise and gentle human guidance. Not every one can help us in such a case. There are those who have been divinely prepared for being comforters of others. Happy is it for the man or woman in sorrow who has a friend who can be such a helper.

Elisha had a gentle heart. When he saw the woman coming far off he knew something was wrong. He did not wait until she came to him and had told him her trouble, but he sent his servant to meet her on the way. We should train our-

selves to sympathize with others who are in trouble. We should cultivate gentleness and thoughtfulness. Some people never seem to think of the trouble others have, and thus they miss countless opportunities of doing good. The true heart, however, instinctively recognizes grief or heart-hunger in others, and at once shows affection and kindness.

Elisha told his servant what to say to the sorrowing woman. "Is it well?" he asked. "It is well," she answered. But she hastened on until she came to Elisha himself. For some reason she could not open her heart to Gehazi. Perhaps he was cold and unsympathetic. His manner may have been harsh and forbidding. But with Elisha it was different. The woman trusted him, and in his presence there was no reserve. So she told him all her sorrow.

We all know people like Gehazi—persons to whom we can not open our heart when we are in trouble. In an old Church synod a rule was adopted forbidding ministers to keep dogs, lest the poor who came to their doors should be hurt instead of fed or helped. Christian people should never keep the dogs of sullenness, churlishness, and moroseness loose about their doors, lest those with sorrow or with burdened hearts who come to them, needing and craving sympathy, may be hurt or turned away. All who represent Christ should be like Him in gentleness and sweetness of spirit. Their very face and manner should have

such a welcome in them as shall draw sad ones to confide implicitly in them.

The woman seems to have chided the prophet for the blessing which had come to her through his prayers. "Did I desire a son?" Her words seem to mean that it would have been better if she had remained as she was, with no voice of love in her home, with her heart unblessed by love, for then she would not have had the sorrow which was now so hard to bear. She felt that it would have been better not to have had the child at all than to have had him given and so soon taken away. Many times good people have felt the same way when they have learned to love and then have been bereft. In their first grief it seems to them that it would have been better if they had never had the friend than to learn to love him so and then lose him. Yet,

"T is better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

We are blessed in two ways. The loving blesses us. It opens and enlarges our heart and enriches our life. Even if the one we love does not stay long with us, the loving does us good. Then the sorrow blesses us. The taking away of our dear ones does not rob us of the blessing which the love wrought in us. Even if this child had not been restored the mother would still have kept the impressions and the influences which the child in its brief, beautiful years had left upon her

life. If the owner lent you "The Angelus," and it hung in your parlor but for a day or two, pouring into your soul its marvelous beauty, you would never forget those wonderful days when you had "The Angelus" in your house. No painting is so exquisitely beautiful as the life of a little child, and though the child stays but a day or two and then is taken away, no true-hearted parent ever forgets the time it was there or loses the impressions made by its brief stay.

"Because the rose must fade,
Shall I not love the rose?
Because the summer shade
Passes when winter blows,
Shall I not rest me there
In the cool air?"

"Because the sunset sky
Makes music in my soul
Only to fall and die,
Shall I not take the whole
Of beauty that it gives
While yet it lives?"

Gehazi's effort to restore the child was of no avail. He laid the prophet's staff on its face, but life came not again. Perhaps the fault was in Gehazi. If he had had faith the miracle might have been wrought. However, the staff may illustrate the mere forms of religion. They are nothing unless there be true faith in those who use them. One writes: "Elisha's staff was a first-class instrument if it was in the hands of Elisha. In Gehazi's hand it was only a walking stick,

worth a few pennies. So it is everywhere. A few pebbles of the brook are invincible weapons of war if David slings them. The simple statement of Christ's death is the means of the conversion of three thousand people when Peter makes it. Everywhere, if the means are consecrated to God and used by consecrated men, they will be effectual. But the forms of the Church in themselves have no more value than Elisha's staff."

When Saladin looked at the sword of Richard Cœur de Lion he wondered that a blade so ordinary should have wrought such mighty deeds. The English king bared his arm and said, "It was not the sword that did these things; it was the arm of Richard." We should be instruments that the Lord can use, and when He has used us the glory shall all be His. Even the words of Holy Scripture laid by an unbelieving or cold-hearted teacher or minister on dead souls will have no more effect upon them than the prophet's staff on this dead boy.

When Elisha himself came to the house where the dead child was he moved promptly and solemnly. Mark two things he did. First, he prayed. He entered the room and shut the door. No one but God could help him, and all others must keep out. The picture is suggestive—the shut door, the agonizing prophet, the waiting, the importunity. Then the other act was important—the prophet stretched himself upon the child. He brought his warm body in contact with the child's dead, cold

flesh. God blesses souls through other souls that are warm with throbbing spiritual life. If we would have influence in helping others into better Christian experience we must stay near God until our own heart is warm and aglow. A gentleman in a jeweler's store was looking at some gems. He saw an opal which seemed lusterless and dead—no brightness, no flashing color. The jeweler took the stone in his hand for a few moments and then laid it down, and—behold! all the colors of the rainbow shone in it. It needed the warmth of the human hand to bring out the beauty. There are lives which need the touch and warmth of human love and sympathy to quicken them into life.

The woman was most grateful for the restoration of her child to life. There is a story of a Scotch mother whose child was carried away one morning by an eagle, which soared high up among the crags with the little one. Nothing could be done—no one could scale the cliffs. The mother went into her lowly home and shut the door, and fell upon the floor in an agony of prayer. There she lay all the day. Meanwhile a sailor, used to climbing the masts, crept up the crag, found the eagle's nest, brought the baby down and carried it to the mother's home. Claspings the child in her arms she hurried with it to the minister to give it to God, saying God had given the child back to her from the dead, and she must dedicate it anew to Him before she embraced it. Thus it was that this Shunammite mother did.

CHAPTER XX

NAAMAN HEALED

Read 2 Kings V., 1-14

THE story of Naaman is interesting in several ways. It gives us a glimpse of the times. The country was subject to incursions from hostile tribes. In these raids not only was property carried away, but women and children were oftentimes taken as captives. Naaman himself was a great man in his country; he was commander-in-chief of the army of Syria. He was held in distinction by the king, who honored Naaman throughout the land. He had won great battles. He was a brave and valiant soldier. But all this list of honors was offset by one sad woe—he was a leper.

This story of Naaman is like many a rich man's life to-day. He has all that wealth can give him, but there is some dark shadow, an incurable disease, a secret sorrow, a domestic infelicity, a shame which nothing can blot out, and that spoils all the glory. No human life is altogether perfect. No human happiness is altogether complete. Leprosy meant sin—every one of us, however great, is a sinner. Leprosy was a terrible disease. It

was incurable. Its progress was slow but certain. It ate away the body joint by joint. In the land of Israel it drove a man from his home and friends, to live apart. Yet the leprous body is only a type of the leprous soul. We all have this drawback which Naaman had.

The incident of the little girl is instructive and yet pathetic. It was a cruel fate that had torn her away from her home in the country of Israel. Young girls will be interested in this little maid and will sympathize with her in her sad misfortune. She may have been ten or twelve years of age. She was carried off by a company of Syrian soldiers from her home and was held captive. She must have been greatly frightened as the rough men of war seized her and took her away with them. Her mother must have wept bitterly. Her father and brothers must have vowed some time to get the child back. But God had her in His keeping, and He used her while a captive to do good.

This is not the only Bible story of a captive child. We all remember about Joseph, who when but a lad was treacherously sold by his own brothers and carried off to Egypt as a slave. Yet he in his captivity proved a great blessing, not only to Egypt but to his own people and to the very brothers who had sold him. Daniel also was carried away when only a child into a heathen country, and he also did a great deal of good.

Sometimes children are put into places and cir-

cumstances of hardship, where they must suffer much; but wherever their lot is cast, and whatever the circumstances are in which they find themselves, they may do good. Wherever God allows us to be placed we shall find not only divine protection, but an opportunity for usefulness. God has something for us to do right there, or He would not have put us there. Some children find themselves living in hard conditions, without many pleasures, receiving unjust or cruel treatment, it may be; but they may trust God in the hardest circumstances. He will not forget them, and if they commit their lives to Him He will use them for doing good.

This little girl was thoughtful and sympathetic. Evidently she had been well trained, for she knew much about God and God's prophet. When she learned of Naaman's condition as a leper she expressed to her mistress the wish that he might be with the prophet who was in her country. It seems a little strange that this child who had been carried away captive by Naaman's soldiers, perhaps by Naaman himself, should have this kindly interest in her master. She had been cruelly wronged, torn away from her home, and carried to a foreign country. She was now a captive, working as a slave in Naaman's house. We would not have been surprised if the child had cherished bitter feelings toward the great captain. But instead of this she looked upon him with pity. She even interested herself so much in his re-

covery as to tell her mistress about the prophet who could heal him. We have a lesson here on the treatment of those who have wronged us or injured us. We should try to do them good.

Another suggestion from this part of the story is that even a child can do great good. But for this little maid, Naaman probably would have remained a leper, growing worse and worse, until he died. Her words to her mistress made her and Naaman also aware of the healing that was within reach. There is a Prophet greater than Elisha, of whom every Christian child knows—Jesus Christ Himself. We should tell those about us who are in sin or in sorrow of this great Healer, that they may come to Him as Naaman went to Elisha and find blessing. If this child had said nothing of the prophet, Naaman would not have learned of the healer.

We learn here also that there is no place in life without its opportunities for usefulness. We would say that this little child, a captive in a strange land, could not be of any use in the world, yet her simple-hearted kindness was the means of the curing of the great soldier. A boy may be in a very humble place—a cash boy, an errand boy, a messenger boy; or a girl may be only a little serving maid in some great house. Yet both of them may bear such witness for their Master in their lowly places as to become blessings to others.

Naaman quickly availed himself of the information which had come through the little slave

girl, and with a letter of introduction from his king soon appeared in the country of Samaria. But he went to the wrong place with his leprosy. His king had sent him to the king of Israel instead of to the prophet. And when the letter was read by the king it caused alarm. He knew that he could not cure the man of his leprosy, and at once he suspected that the letter from the king of Syria was part of a plot to bring about war. As he opened the letter he rent his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" Many people go to the wrong place with their troubles, their sorrows, their sins. The king could not cure Naaman's leprosy. There are some things which earthly power can not do. It is said that money will do anything, but there are many things which money can not do. It can not buy love. It can not give peace to a troubled heart. It can not purchase life. The queen's cry, "Millions of money for a moment of time," received no answer. Rich men in authority may have great power, but there are poor men who, by their prayers, by their teachings, or by their lives can bring blessings which no rich man could bring. It is better to have Elisha's power to do good than to be king.

Elisha helped the king out of his perplexing dilemma. When he heard that there was a man before the palace gate seeking to be cured of leprosy, and that the king was powerless to give any

help, he sent, saying, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." It was a splendid cavalcade that waited before the prophet's humble dwelling that day. Although Naaman was a leper and had come to implore help of a lowly servant of God, he kept up all his grand style. There was no sign of humility. Indeed, he expected to be cured in a grand way, and then to pay for the healing with a princely sum. He was not there as a poor suppliant, and no doubt he thought he was conferring great honor upon this humble and obscure prophet in coming thus to him.

There are many people in these modern days who treat Christ's Church very much as Naaman wished to treat Elisha. They put on all their magnificence when they attend the services. They consider that they honor the Church when they accept its ministrations. They like to be called patrons of the Church. They show favor to it. Such people, like Naaman here, will find it necessary to get out of their chariots, to lay aside their trappings, to step down into the valley of humiliation, and to bathe in the fountain of Christ's blood, before they can find any real blessing at God's hand. There is no way to the favor and mercy of God but by the way of penitence and humility.

Elisha was not awed by the grandeur of the suppliant before his gate. He did not even come out to speak to the great man sitting in the chariot before his door. He showed not a shadow of ob-

sequiousness. He simply sent a message to him, telling him to go and wash in Jordan seven times. Naaman was very angry and turned away in rage. He was angry because Elisha had not shown deference to his rank. He was not there as one of the common herd, but as the great general of Syria. He had formed his own idea of the way he ought to be healed—in some grand way. There are people who in their pride and haughtiness imagine that God should treat them differently from common folks. The way of the cross is altogether too humble for them. They turn away with scorn and rage from it.

But we must not fail to notice how nearly Naaman missed being healed. Had it not been for the entreaties of his attendants he would have gone away a leper still, rather than submit to the prophet's lowly requirements. There are many people who fail altogether of salvation for the same reason. They come to the cross, but when they hear what they must do to be saved they turn away, keeping their sins and their leprous hearts, rejecting the salvation which can come to them only in Christ's way,

It is well that Naaman's servants were wiser than himself. They persuaded him to do as the prophet had bidden him to do. So he thought better of his course; he let the counsel of his friends influence him; he considered what it would mean to him to miss the curing of his leprosy. He let his rage cool down and returned humble.

He had a second chance. This shows the divine patience. Thousands of people reject Christ, and then, when they come, by and by, they find the way still open. They have a second chance. God waits long to be gracious even to the sinner who has often refused the invitation of mercy. Naaman did as he was bidden. He dipped himself seven times in the muddy Jordan, and his flesh came again as the flesh of a little child.

CHAPTER XXI

ELISHA AT DOTHAN

Read 2 Kings VI., 8-23

TWO GENTLEMEN—one a clergyman, the other a prominent business man—were conversing together about foreign missions. They were speaking specially of India.

“Doctor,” said the business man, “you can not convert India to Christ in ten thousand years.”

“Is n’t that rather hard on God?” asked the minister.

“O, I had n’t thought of Him,” said the business man.

No doubt the king of Syria was a wise commander and made good plans for his campaign. But there was one element which he did not take into account. He left God out. He had not thought of Him. He did not dream that God could do anything, that He would take any part in the struggle this people were making. Other men are doing the same thing continually. They go on forming their plans, laying out their schemes, but taking no account of God. They forget that He

has anything to do with the management of this world, that He knows what they are planning, or that He can interfere if He will with their schemes and their movements. They forget that there is an eye looking down upon them, an eye which sees all they do; that there is an ear, bending low, which hears every word they speak, and that there is a hand which can easily thwart and circumvent their shrewd designs. Many men live just as if there were no God, as if they could do just as they please, and then they wonder why their plans miscarry.

The prophet was the best friend and the best adviser the king had. By knowing the enemy's movements he was able to tell about them. He sent to the king again and again, warning him not to pass a certain place. There really are no secrets in this world. In war, commanders endeavor to keep their movements from being known by the enemy, and oftentimes they succeed. But there is a place where everything is known.

Nothing is hidden from the eye of God. We are told in the New Testament that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. Right here we have an illustration of this word. The Lord knew the plans of the king of Syria to entrap the king of Israel. He made known these plans to the prophet Elisha, and he in turn told the king of Israel of the ambushade, in order that he might save himself from the danger. The Bible gives us many such warnings. In such and such

paths it tells us it is not safe for us to go, for Satan walks there. Our own consciences also give us many a warning. There is a fable of a wonderful ring that a prince wore, which clasped his finger softly when he went in right ways, but stung his flesh sharply whenever he was in danger of going in some wrong path. That is what every tender conscience does. If only we heeded always the warnings of our conscience we should never get into danger save when duty calls us, and then we would have divine protection, for where God sends us He will take care of us.

The king was wise enough to heed the counsel of Elisha and thus avail himself of the information which was given to him concerning the movements of his enemy. He did not scout the warning nor sneer at the prophet's words as timid fears, and then go quietly into the trap. He saved himself by heeding the warning. Too many people, however, disregard divine warnings of danger in this or that place. They do not believe what the Bible tells them. There are no enemies in the place pointed out—so they proudly say—or if there are, they are not afraid of them. So, disregarding the friendly warnings, they rush straight into danger. But the king of Israel was wiser. When the prophet told him that in this or that place the enemy was hidden, waiting to ensnare him, he avoided those places. He saved himself by keeping away from the peril. That is what we are to do when warned of spiritual danger. Has

not God promised protection—that His angels will bear us up in their hands, that He Himself will be our keeper, and that no evil shall befall us? But it is only when we are walking in God's ways and obeying God's commands that the promise avails. The divine way of delivering us from any danger is by warning us of that danger, that we may avoid it.

As soon as the king of Syria heard how his actions were being reported by the prophet he determined to put an end to his opposition. He did not propose to be baffled and have his plans defeated by one man. He would have this man seized and brought as a prisoner to his camp. But men are very foolish to try to fight against God. We are told in the Second Psalm that when enemies plot against Him, the Lord, sitting in heaven, laughs at their efforts and has them in derision. The Bible is full of illustrations of this. His enemies killed Jesus and put Him into the tomb. Then they rolled a great stone to the door, sealed it, and had a guard of Roman soldiers sent to keep watch. They supposed they had put an end to Christ's work, but we know how God in heaven laughed at these attempts. It is insane folly to try to outmatch God and defeat His purposes. Horses and chariots and great armies amount to nothing when the Lord is on the field.

It was a serious condition of things which Elisha's servant found one morning when he arose. An armed host was encamping round the

town. We may criticise this young man and blame him for being timid; but would not you have been frightened, too? We are all very much alike in our temper and spirit. We have God's promises assuring us of divine keeping, but these seem to make life very little safer for us. Let us try ourselves by the test to which we bring the prophet's servant and see if our faith is much better than his.

There are two kinds of courage. There is one kind that puts on a bold face and is brave even in the presence of danger, without any clear ground for the courage. But the prophet was brave in a different way. His courage was based upon the real protection of God. The true secret of confidence and calmness in danger must always be the same—not in fancying that there is no danger, but in knowing that there is sufficient divine protection. Jesus taught the lesson thus: "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The great truth to be learned by all who would have true moral courage is the reality of God's keeping. We are told in one of the Psalms that the Lord is our keeper; then in another, that we may hide away in the secret place of the Most High and there abide safely under the wings of the Almighty. Men sleep in their camps in war-time with armed enemies surrounding them, and are not afraid, for they know that watching sentinels form a complete circle and keep a sleepless guard about the camp in the hours

of darkness. So in any dangers we may know that we are safe because God waits and watches and is keeping us.

In answer to the prophet's prayer the young man's eyes were opened so that he could see spiritual things. "Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." The prophet's prayer was not that God would send a host to guard him, but that the young man's eyes might be opened to see the host that was already there. We can not see angels encamping round our homes these nights or hovering above our heads, but nevertheless they are watching and protecting us all the time. This glimpse is meant not for this one young man that one night, but for every young man on every night in every time of danger. If we could see spiritual things we should behold such hosts about us every morning when we wake. Every child of God has a promise of angel-protection—better still, divine protection. We can not see Christ beside us, but He is always near—closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.

CHAPTER XXII

SAVED FROM FAMINE

Read 2 Kings VII., 1-16

THE city of Samaria was besieged. The famine was great. The people were suffering. The king blamed it all on Elisha and sought to kill him. Men often charge their troubles on God. They may be divine judgments; but if so, the reason for the judgments is to be sought for in the sins of those on whom the judgments are falling.

Elisha told the king that the famine was about over. "Elisha said, Hear ye the word of Jehovah." It is always well to listen to the word of the Lord. He always has something to say to us, especially in time of trouble or perplexity. When we are in sorrow He has something to say which will comfort our hearts, if only we will listen to it. When we are tempted and are about to sin He has something to say which will save us if we heed His words. When we read what goes before Elisha's answer we get a specially important lesson here. The king had been blaming all the trouble of the famine on the Lord and

complaining that He was too slow in sending promised help or relief. "Stop," says the prophet, "and hear the word of the Lord." We should never be quick to blame God when any trouble is upon us or when He seems to be slow in keeping His promises. We should learn to wait for the Lord. He knows best when to give the blessing we seek. We must not judge any unfinished work of the Lord. To-day He may give pain or disappointment, but wait till we see what He will give to-morrow.

Then Elisha foretold what change in the hard conditions in Samaria there would be almost immediately. "Thus saith Jehovah, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel." The king was complaining bitterly because of the famine, and this is the answer of God to his angry complaint. Even while the words of unbelief were on his lips the blessing of bread was at the very door. To-morrow provision would be abundant and cheap. We see how useless was the king's anxiety.

The king of Samaria is dead, but the lesson is for us. Do we never get discouraged and fume and fret and grieve God by our complainings when He leaves us without material help for a little time? We lose both faith and patience because the help we need is not given instantly or because the promise we find is not at once fulfilled. Faith is trusting when we can not see, believing God's promise when it is not yet fulfilled. We ought

therefore to be confident of blessing before it comes if we have God's word for it, and, no matter how long the delay, we should not be afraid. We must notice here also that the king's unbelief and anger did not cause God to withhold His blessing. The king had tried to kill the prophet, as if he were the cause of the famine. He had spoken most bitterly, too, of God. But the answer to all this was the announcement, "To-morrow there shall be abundance of bread." There is great comfort in this. If our unbelief and sin shut the doors of God's kindness and cut off the flow of His mercies and favors, we would never get much of good from the divine fullness. But it is not thus that God treats us. He is patient with our impatience, ingratitude, and unbelief, and blesses us in spite of ourselves.

But the prophet's words were not received with confidence. "Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if Jehovah should make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" There was a sneer as well as unbelief in the answer. The captain meant to say that such a thing was impossible. He made no account of the divine word spoken by God's prophet. He could see no way in which the thing could be done, and therefore refused to believe that it could be done.

We have many modern skeptics who are just as unreasonable. Indeed, they are more inexcusable, since now the evidences of God's power and

grace are so much greater. They refuse to believe anything they can not see or can not understand. They will accept nothing as true which can not be accounted for on natural grounds. They ridicule prayer and say it is impossible that any one hears requests made on the earth or that they can be granted. They do not believe that God ever helps anybody bear a trouble, or sends relief to any one in distress, or opens a way out of a difficulty. They sneer at all the old faiths that Christians cherish, and tell you such things are impossible.

We should take a close look at this old-time skeptic, for he is a fair sample of his modern followers. These latter refuse to believe, though evidences are abundant. They will not believe in Christ, though the evidences of His life and death and resurrection are abundant and incontrovertible. They will not believe anything they can not see or understand, though common life and their own experience are full of things they can neither see nor understand.

The answer of Elisha to the king's attendant was startling. "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." We have but to read on through a few verses to find that this word of the prophet was actually fulfilled. The things God says He will do He always does. The courtier saw the abundance of food, saw the prophet's foretelling fulfilled, but while the starving people were eagerly taking possession of the

provision God had given them, he was trampled to death in the gateway.

It is strikingly true that the same answer may be made to the modern skeptic. He also shall see the fulfillment of the divine promises and the Christian's hopes at which he sneers, but he shall have no share in the blessings. A man may make light of the cross of Christ and the salvation it brings, but when the day of judgment comes and all who have believed find shelter under it, he will find no place there for him. He shall see others saved, but he shall be left unsaved. A man may mock at the promises of God's Word, and laugh at the simplicity of those who trust in them; but the day will come when he shall see others realizing all the blessings of these promises, while there will be nothing in them for him. Unbelief may be fashionable, and skepticism may be smart, but there will come a time when the unbeliever and skeptic would give worlds for the Christian's hopes, and when worlds could not buy them for him. We must not forget that there is an "afterward" for all who despise their birthright.

In a strange way did the prophet's words come true. They were outcast men to whom it first became known. "There were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?" The story is a striking one. Leprosy was a type of sin. These four men were shut out of the city and from association with other men. They were most

wretched. The famine affected them, too. They were starving. If they stayed where they were they would die. If they went into the city the famine was there, and they could only perish there. There was one place, however, where there was plenty of bread. The Syrians encompassed the city, and they had plenty of provision in abundance. True, they were enemies, but these lepers said they could do no more than kill them, and they would be no worse off than if they died of starvation, as they must do if they stayed where they were. Then there was a chance at least that the Syrians might spare them alive. So nothing could be lost and much might be gained, they said, by going over to the Syrian camp. The lepers determined therefore to do this. They went, shrinking, fearing, and trembling, but when they got to the camp they found nobody there and no danger. However, they did find provision in abundance. So their lives were saved.

This story-parable needs no explanation. Un-saved sinners are in just such a state as were these four lepers. They are not lepers only, but they are in the camp of death. If they stay where they are they will surely perish. Their souls will starve. All round them, however, are those whom they look upon as enemies. The Church of Christ has its camps on every side. Here there is bread. At last, in their great need, they determine to go over to Christ's people. It can not be any worse, they say, than staying where they are. "I can

but perish if I go." So, trembling, shrinking, they move toward Christ's camp, to find no danger, no enemy, but only blessing, food in abundance, garments and riches, all they need. So the story has its rich spiritual lessons.

The Lord knows how to carry out His purposes of good. He always finds some way to defeat men's schemes. Here there was a siege about the town, and there was no human hope that it could be broken. The Syrians were strong. The people within the city were hopeless. In some way the besieging army was made to hear what seemed to them the sound of an approaching army. "The Lord had made the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host." It was a panic, we say, but it was brought about not incidentally, but in some providential way, and had its place in God's plan for the lifting of the siege and the relief of the city. It is a wonderful comfort to know that there are no chances even in the most perplexed days, with the worst confusion of events and circumstances. God knows what is coming; into His plan of love and goodness every event fits, having its part in the working out of some great divine purpose.

We see, too, that God has many ways of defeating His enemies and delivering His own people. He is not dependent on the largest guns or the best military strategy. In spiritual conflicts our enemies often seem too strong for us. We can never overcome them by any strength of our own.

In the open field they must defeat us. But let us remember always that God is on our side; the same God who made the panic here at Samaria and raised the siege is watching over us, and by a breath can scatter the hosts of foes that encircle us and give us deliverance. We need but to stand and wait when enclosed by such circumstances. God is on our side; He is our Leader, and through Him victory will always in the end come to those who are faithful.

“Then they said one to another, We do not well; this day is a good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, punishment will overtake us; now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household.” They were right about it, too. They would have acted very selfishly if they had eaten all they wanted and packed up for themselves all the valuables they could carry away. The people in the city were famishing and did not know that the enemy was gone and that abundant provision was lying close to the walls. Only these four lepers knew it, and they were bound by all the laws of humanity to make it known.

There is a great lesson here which should be remembered. Good things which fall to our lot we should not grasp and enjoy selfishly. Nothing is more beautiful in a child than the desire that others shall share whatever little luxury or pleasure it may have.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BOY JOASH MADE KING

Read 2 Kings XI., 1-12

IT is interesting to study and think of the influences that combine in the making of any man. When we begin to go over the story of our ancestors we soon lose ourselves in the vast number of them—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on, running back for generations. Yet every one of these passed down to us something which mingles in our blood and in our brains. We can not choose our ancestors as we may choose our companions, and therefore in a certain sense can not be held responsible for the make-up of our lives from this source. Yet, after all, we are responsible, for the Bible tells us how we may bring heaven down into our lives, to change the old nature into new divine beauty. Men sometimes blame heredity when their life has gone wrong. "I could not help doing this or that. It came down in the tides of my blood from my great-grandfather." Yes; but here is Christ, ready and able to come into your heart and change all this bad heredity into good grace. That is what the doctrine of new birth, the birth from above, means.

We are to study Joash, the boy king. What kind of ancestors had he? They could scarcely have been worse than they were. His grandmother was Athaliah, and there was nothing good in her that we are told of. Ahab and Jezebel were his great-grandparents, and history tells us of few worse people than they were. There certainly was bad blood enough in the veins of the boy king to have foredoomed him to a life of evil. His own father, too, was a wicked king. The story of his life is told in a sentence: "He walked in the way of the house of Ahab . . . for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab." With such an ancestry, what sort of character would one naturally have expected in Joash, the boy king? Yet he disappoints our fears. He seems to have had, at least in his early years, no inclination toward the wickedness of those who had gone before him. He led in noble reforms and brought the people back to God.

Athaliah wished to reign, and, that there might be no rival claimant to the throne, she determined to slay all the royal children. We are reminded of the cruelty of Herod in slaying the infants in Bethlehem in order to make sure of destroying the newborn King of the Jews. But, like Herod's, Athaliah's terrible massacre failed of its intention. It was necessary that the infant prince should live, in order that there might be no break in the line of David, for of that line the Messiah must come. No purpose of God can fail. He

knows how to deliver His children from peril. We think of the way Moses was preserved for his great mission, and Jesus for His work as the world's Redeemer.

In the case of Joash, the hands to help carry out the divine purpose were those of the good priest and his wife. The boy was snatched up in the moment of peril, rescued from death, and hidden away in some obscure apartment of the temple. It was easy to hide him in this way, for there were many rooms in the holy house. Besides, the temple had long been neglected and had also been broken up. For seven years the child was concealed there, and most tenderly sheltered and nourished. No doubt he was well trained, too, and carefully taught the laws of his people. The protection of this child was exceptional. He was specially dear to God because of the place he held in the line of the divine promise. Yet every child is a child of providence. The children's angels have instant access into the divine presence whenever they fly to heaven on any errand in behalf of those for whom they are caring. When God has a plan in the future of any life, He takes care that the man is preserved and trained, and at the right time led forth ready for its mission.

It was a great day in Jerusalem when the boy Joash was brought out and crowned as king. The secret of the temple had been well kept. Athaliah had no suspicion that a member of the royal family was still alive and in preparation for reigning.

She was taken utterly by surprise when she heard the people crying, "God save the king!" The Lord laughs at men's plots and schemes to defy or overthrow His purposes. Athaliah thought that her place on the throne was safe, that God had been driven from His kingdom, and that her heathen religion now had no opposition. But when she rushed to the temple and saw the boy standing there, wearing the crown, and surrounded by the guards, she was dismayed and could only cry out, "Treason, treason!" But it was not treason—it was the triumph of right against wrong, the defeat of conspiracy and plotting. She had tried to thwart God, and God met her at the turning.

The chronicles of those days seem to be only a record of sin, of departure from God, of plot and intrigue, of blood and shame. Why should we linger on the painful stories? What help can come to us from such Bible study as this? The answer is that even in the chapters which tell us these tragic things, if we read them closely, intelligently, and through to the end, we can see the hand of God moving, restraining, checking, overruling. Two things we may note specially:

For one thing, we see that sin can not prosper. For a time it may seem to succeed, winning its victories, overthrowing the good, setting up its throne. But we need only to wait a little while to see failure and ruin as the final outcome of whatever is evil. We need never fret when wrong

seems to prosper for a time, when wicked men seem to succeed. We have only to wait for God, and at the end we shall find that sin is always terrible failure and always brings irreparable ruin.

“Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceedingly small.”

Another thing we learn from these Bible narratives is that through all the records of men's crime and sin God's purposes of good to the world and blessing for His people go on unchecked and undefeated. It may not be easy to continue optimistic when we read the chronicles of these ancient kingdoms. But there is a white line running through all the disheartening history. God is preparing the world for the coming of Christ. The divine promise is never overlooked. God's hand is never off the current of events for a moment, even at most tragic moments. We must read the story, too, remembering that it is only part of one great cycle which stretches to Bethany and Calvary. God is redeeming the race.

We should interpret the history of our own times in the same way. God is still and always on the field. Evil is not on the throne. It is not chaos we see as we look out on the events of the world as they are chronicled in our morning newspaper. The divine purpose runs through all the story. Out of all that seems evil, good will surely come. God is leading the world to something better—to righteousness, to truth, to holiness.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOASH REPAIRS THE TEMPLE

Read 2 Kings XII., 4-15

JOASH was only seven years old when he was brought out from his place of concealment in the temple and crowned as king. It is evident that the influence of the good priest Jehoiada and his wife was an important factor in the reign of Joash so long as they lived. The record is: "Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." After that he lost much of his earnestness and energy in doing good. A great many people are dependent for their better moods and for whatever is really beautiful and noble in them on the influence of human friends. There are children who do well while their parents are living, but who, when these are gone, drift out into the world. Many a young man's departure from God dates from the day when he stood by the coffin of his father or mother. It is important that we seek always to keep ourselves under the most wholesome human influence possible, for our character

takes its color largely from that which touches it. But we should make sure always that we are also under higher influence than the human, so that when the human force is gone the divine may abide.

The great work of Joash was his repairing and restoring of the temple. This sacred building had been not only neglected during the days of the kings before Joash, but it had been robbed of its treasures and left in ruins. For seven years Athaliah had reigned—the only woman who ever sat on the throne of David. During that time religious worship was entirely abandoned. The very building itself was desecrated and broken up. Through the influence of Jehoiada, Joash early in his reign entered upon the work of the repairing of this sacred building.

The work of restoration was committed to the priests. They were to use all the holy gifts, consecrated to religious service, in the good work. They were bidden to go out into all the towns and cities, to gather money for the repairing of the Lord's house. They were also bidden to hasten the matter. With this money they were to repair the breaches of the house, mend the broken walls, replace the beams, and put the sacred buildings in proper condition. Some time had now passed since this order was given, and the work had not yet been done. No reason is given for the failure. We are merely told that the priests and Levites did not hasten the work. They were indifferent

to it. There is no intimation that there was any dishonesty on the part of the men. Perhaps the only reason was lack of interest.

The king called the priests, saying, "Why repair ye not the breaches of the house?" He chided them with their delay and lack of interest, and demanded of them why it was. God would keep us active and diligent in all our work. It is a sin to neglect any duty. We grieve Christ when we loiter at our tasks. Promptness is half of obedience. Children should be taught early the duty of swiftness and alacrity in all their work. Loitering is sin. It takes out of life much of its power for good.

"Lose this day loitering, 't will be the same story
To-morrow, and the next more dilatory ;
The indecision brings its own delays,
And days are lost lamenting o'er lost days.
Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute.
What you can do, or think you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated ;
Begin it, and the work will be completed."

A new plan for raising money was now adopted. Instead of the priests going about the country asking men for gifts, a chest was made and set beside the altar. A hole was made in the top of the chest, into which money should be dropped. The chest was kept locked, and the people were asked to put their offerings into it. In this way an entire separation was made between

the gifts meant for the priests' own use and the offerings made for the restoration of the temple. This gave definiteness to the giving—each offerer was sure that the money would be used for the purpose for which he gave it.

The contribution box should always be near the altar, so that when we come to pray we may also give. The angel told Cornelius that his alms as well as his prayers had gone up before God. We need to have both praying and giving in our devotions. There should be no religious service without an opportunity for an offering to God. Giving opens the hand, while praying opens the heart. "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" so he who receives only and does not give misses the better part of the divine blessing. We need the contribution box in our Christian life as well as the Bible, the hymn-book, and the altar of prayer.

Evidently the giving became very enthusiastic. In Chronicles we are told that "all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end." All the people gave. This is one lesson we should get here. The princes and people alike came to the contribution box with their offerings. Everybody ought to give to the Lord. The poorest can not afford to miss the blessing of giving. The humblest have their share of the responsibility of the work. The richest and greatest are not exempt from the obligation, and need the blessing

which comes to those who are ready to work with God.

There is a suggestion, too, in the way the people gave. No one knew what another put into the box. Thus even the poorest, who could give the least, would not feel ashamed of the smallness of what they could give. The money was given to the Lord, and He knew what each person gave, and He understood the circumstances of each one. It is very important in all of our Christian life and service that we give or do, not to be seen of men, but only for God's eye. Jenny Lind used to say, "I sing to God." She forgot the throngs who were listening to her, and thought only of God.

Another point to be noticed here is that the people gave gladly. There was no reluctant giving, no giving merely through a sense of duty, without heartiness. Everybody gave cheerfully, enthusiastically, joyfully. St. Paul tells us that the Lord loveth a cheerful giver, and it has been noted that the word rendered cheerful in St. Paul's phrase means hilarious—God loves a hilarious giver. Joy ought to be the incense rising from the altar when our gifts are laid there for God. He may use what men give reluctantly or grudgingly, and it may be made to do good to others, to advance the Lord's cause; but the giver gets no blessing from it. It is only what we give or do with joy that leaves benedictions in our own hearts.

The people responded so generously that the chest was soon full, and then the king's officers opened it, counted the money, and put it up in bags. We get a suggestion here on the importance of honest business methods in the Lord's work as well as in the common affairs of life. Those who are called to take charge of money in connection with God's Church should be exceedingly careful that every penny is accounted for. Young treasurers in Mission Bands and Christian Endeavor Societies should realize their responsibility and should keep most sacred charge of all money intrusted to them. Only the other day a treasurer of a young people's society, scarcely more than a boy, was called upon to pay out the money which had been collected and placed in his hands, and it was discovered that it had been used by him in some affairs of his own and could not be replaced. The amount was not large in this case, and friends quickly made it good; but the young treasurer was guilty of embezzlement of funds which belonged to God. His error was a most unhappy experience in his life. Whether it will prove a salutary lesson to him or the beginning of a career of careless money dealing can not now be known.

At last the work of repair and restoration began and went on vigorously and enthusiastically. In Chronicles the language is, "So the workmen wrought, and the work of repairing went forward in their hands, and they set up the house of God in its state, and strengthened it."

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEATH OF ELISHA

Read 2 Kings XIII., 14-25

THE story of Elisha has a fine charm about it. It contrasts with the story of Elijah. The men widely differed in their personal character, and the manner of their work differed quite as widely. We come now to the close of Elisha's ministry. The most useful life must come to an end. It is interesting while we stand beside this old prophet's deathbed to think of all that he had been to the country in which he lived. We saw him first as a young farmer, plowing in the fields one day, when suddenly behind him came the prophet Elijah in shaggy garments and threw over his shoulders a sheepskin cloak. Thus the young farmer was called to the ministry, as we would say.

From that time on his life was given up to God and God's service, for a while as the attendant and helper of Elijah, and then as the great prophet of Israel. He was a man of gentle mood and kindly spirit. His ministry was full of benedictions. We have but a few incidents of it re-

corded, but these show us the spirit of the man. The friend of the poor and the oppressed, he was also the counselor and helper of kings.

There is no time when a man's life and work can be seen quite so truly as from amid the shadows of his last hours. Then prejudices give way to honest appreciation, enmity dissolves in kindly sentiment, and criticism is changed to ungrudged commendation. We should live so that when the end of our life comes the world may speak approvingly of us. In order to do this we must live faithfully along the years—unselfishly, purely, thoughtfully.

The incident in one of Elisha's last days, recorded in our passage, is peculiarly interesting. The king came down to see the old minister. Joash knew well the value of the counsel of the old prophet. He was now in much trouble with enemies who were pressing upon him. He needed Elisha's wisdom. Perhaps this was why he came, rather than merely to pay tribute at the deathbed of the good man. The prophet could not come to him any more, and the king came to him with his questions, his perplexities, his anxieties, to get advice. It is a great thing to be set apart as a counselor and friend, one to whom others may come with their needs, their sorrows, their sins, and their troubles.

The king's tribute to the prophet was very beautiful. He spoke of him as his father, and indeed Elisha had been a father to him. He was an

affectionate man and, no doubt, had shown all of a father's interest in the king. He spoke of him also as "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." This was a tribute to the value of Elisha as a defender of the nation. It did not mean that the prophet had been a leader of victorious armies, for he never was so employed—he had not been a soldier—but that his wisdom, counsel, and love had been to the king of even greater value than his armies had been. Besides, the prophet's power with God had brought divine help to the nation in time of war. Good men are always a blessing to a community and to a country. Indeed, the world does not know the value of the saints who live in it, oftentimes neglected, overlooked, unrecognized, and yet the real deliverers and defenders of the people.

Elisha improved the occasion of the king's coming to see him to say some earnest words to him. He wished to teach him a lesson which might influence his course as a king. It was an ancient custom to throw a spear or shoot an arrow into a country which an army was about to invade. Thus it is said that Alexander the Great, arriving on the coasts of Ionia, threw a dart into the country of the Persians which lay before him. This was a formal declaration of war against Persia. Marcus Aurelius, when leaving Rome to go on one of his campaigns, performed a final sacrifice, and then, dipping a spear point into the blood of the sacrifice, he hurled it in the direction of the enemy.

This was in token of the war he was about to begin. That this custom prevailed at the time of Elisha and the kings of Israel, this incident of the arrows would seem to indicate. The king was bidden to draw the bow with his own hand. This showed that he was to wage the war. The battle was to be fought by him. The prophet then put his hand upon the king's. This signified that the Lord, whose representative Elisha was, would fight with the king in the battle against his enemies.

We are beset with enemies. Whatever we may say about the barbarity of war, there is no question but that every Christian is called to be a soldier and must fight even until death. Every blessing has to be won in contest. This incident has its lesson for us in our spiritual warfare. We should cast the arrow of God toward every enemy that stands before us—there should be no peace made with sin, no truce even with wickedness. Our own hand must be upon the bow, for we must fight our own battles. Even God will not fight for us while we lie supinely at our ease. He does not fight for us, but He will fight with us. We are bidden to be strong in the Lord. We are assured that God will bruise Satan under our feet. While the Lord does the bruising, it must be under our tread.

The Lord wants strenuousness and thoroughness in our warfare against spiritual enemies. The prophet taught his lesson in dramatic way.

He bade the king to open the window eastward, toward Syria, and to shoot. "The Lord's arrow of victory," said the prophet. Then he bade the king gather up his arrows and smite upon the ground. The king obeyed, but smote only three times. Elisha was angry and chided the king with his lack of earnestness and enthusiasm. The war against the Syrians was not to be a partial one, but should be waged until the victory was complete and the enemies were entirely subdued. This was God's plan for the war which Joash was commanded to begin. This was what God meant him to do.

The lesson is also for us. We should not fight any spiritual battle languidly. We should never make a compromise with sin in any form. We should smite our enemies until they are consumed. The trouble in the wars of God's people in Canaan was that they did not utterly exterminate their enemies. They left little handfuls of them here and there, parts of tribes and families, sometimes making alliances with them. The result was that these enemies became the plague of God's people in after days. We must do thorough work in our battle with temptation and sin.

"Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times," said the prophet. The incident of the arrows was not a mere bit of play. Without knowing it, the king was being tested. The prophet's anger was not unreasonable. The test had not been an arbitrary one. By the way the king smote

with the arrows he showed the kind of man he was. He smote indolently, carelessly, only three times. He showed no enthusiasm, no energy. His act was the telltale of his character. He did everything in the same way—half-heartedly, and not thoroughly. If he had smitten with all his might and persistently, he would have shown himself to be a man of unconquerable spirit, doing his work with energy. As it was, he had proved himself to be unequal to the responsibility laid upon him. Instead of smiting the Syrians until he had consumed them, he would gain only three slight victories over them and then let them go.

We are interested in this because it teaches us important lessons. Without being conscious of it we are always revealing our character by little things in our conduct and behavior. Even in his play a child shows the quality of his spirit and tells whether he is going to be a man of persistence and courage, or indolent, easily satisfied, half-hearted. Wellington said the battle of Waterloo was won at Eton. He meant that in the games and plays of his school days he had learned the secret of the power which made him a general. Children cannot be too careful in forming their early habits. These habits will almost certainly control the whole life.

CHAPTER XXVI

CAPTIVITY OF THE TEN TRIBES

Read 2 Kings XVII., 6-18

THE story of the ten tribes from the beginning was a story of mistake and disloyalty. There was a divine promise to Jeroboam that if he would be true to the Lord blessing would follow him. "It shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in My ways, and do that which is right in Mine eyes, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did; that I will be with thee, and will build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee." But Jeroboam paid no heed to the divine word. Almost immediately after the founding of his kingdom he set up places of worship at two points in his kingdom, with calves of gold and priests, and established a national feast, that his people might be drawn away from the worship at Jerusalem. Thus at the very beginning the new kingdom was characterized by a departure from God.

Starting thus in an open apostasy from God,

the history of the nation was from beginning to end a monotony of idolatry and all evil. There were no bright spots in it. The kingdom of Judah had its wicked kings and its periods of evil, but the Northern Kingdom had nothing but sin in its story. In all its career its course was downward. It had nineteen kings, but not one of them was a good man. At last the end came. The king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away. This was the end of the Ten Tribes, which are sometimes called the "lost tribes." Doubtless many of them lost their nationality by marriage with the heathen. Some of the better ones, no doubt, joined the Jews who returned to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah.

The ten tribes had warnings enough, but they disregarded them. Opportunities for salvation came, even down to the very last, but the condition always was repentance and a return to God, and the people would not accept the condition. So they went on from bad to worse and at last were destroyed. They fell into the hands of their enemies and were carried away as captives.

While this story is before us we may think of its parallel in the history of every one who persists in unbelief and rejection of Christ. Sin puts yokes upon men's necks and chains upon their limbs, binding them hand and foot and carrying them away into hopeless bondage. The fatal end of such sinning is illustrated in this carrying away of Israel. "There is no danger in my case," says

one; "I mean to be a Christian by and by when I have had a good time for a while." But meanwhile the little threads of careless habit, of sinful neglect, of pleasant wrong-doing, are weaving themselves into cords, and the cords are growing into cables.

A sailor reported to the captain during a storm that the water was gaining upon the vessel. The captain drove him away with angry words—he was too busy to give attention to the sailor's report. Again and again the warning was given, and each time it was unheeded. At last the barge was sinking and the men were ordered to the boat. There was not a moment to spare. A cable bound the boat to the barge, and the captain took his knife to cut it; but as he turned to do this his face turned pale with horror—the cable was an iron chain. This is the story of thousands of lives. Men do not know until the last moment, when it is too late, that they are hopeless captives, passing to their doom in chains which they can not break. The time to throw off such chains—the only time when it is possible to do so—is before they grow into strength.

The historian goes back and tells us the reason for the pitiful doom that befell these tribes. "The children of Israel did secretly things that were not right against the Lord." Secret sins bring ruin just as surely as sins that are open. Of course, one may keep a fair reputation among men when committing only secret sins, wearing the

white garments of a fair reputation while his inner life is spotted. But the sins themselves which are thus kept hidden work their ruin just as completely and inevitably as if they were open, public sins.

We must mark that it was sin that brought about this doom on the ten tribes. The historian may explain in natural ways the cause of the downfall of the kingdom. But whatever the political or other reasons may have been, the real reason was sin. Sin always brings calamity. Here is a man who grew up in a gentle, beautiful home. He had brightest prospects, finest opportunities. He was well taught, nurtured in an atmosphere of holiness, of purity, of prayer. Today he is a criminal, wearing chains, sentenced for twenty years for homicide. It is not an accident, a piece of "ill luck," that he is now where he is. All this penalty came for his sinning against the Lord. The homicide was not the first sin—it was the end of a long series which probably began in a boy's little disobedience of his mother one day.

A definite form is given to the charge against these tribes. "They served idols." Not only did they turn away from their own God, but they turned also after the gods of the heathen. It is always so. Idolatry is not an extinct form of evil. We may not worship idols made of stone or wood, but if we leave the true God we worship some idol. We can not keep our hearts empty. If God is not in them, some other god is in His place. These

people, instead of following God and His ways, took the ways of the heathen round about them.

We need to learn well the lesson against conforming to the world. Many Christian people seem to be on astonishingly familiar terms with this world. They are not hide-bound or puritanical Christians. They have been emancipated from the bondage of the old-time, strict Church life, so they boast. Yes, yes—emancipation, is it? So, no doubt, the Israelites talked as they indulged their heathen liberties. They were liberal Hebrews—but what came of their liberty in the end?

They were not left without warning. The narrator tells us that the Lord had testified unto them by the hand of every prophet, saying, “Turn ye from your evil ways.” They could not say they had not been warned of the danger toward which they were drifting. Prophet after prophet had come and with solemn words and severe threatenings declared to them God’s will, outlining to them the issue of their course unless they would turn away from it. Some of the noblest and most faithful prophets who ever spoke to men for God delivered their fearless messages to the kings and people of this nation. One of these was Elijah, who thundered his stern warnings in the days of Ahab. Another was Elisha, whose ministry was long-continued and was faithful and almost Christlike in its tenderness.

God always tries to save His children. He

never fails to warn them and tell them of the way of safety. But men may perish in spite of the divine faithfulness. Many have been lost in the midst of holiest privileges. There is only one way of escaping sin's penalties—the sinner must turn from his evil course and walk in the paths of God's commandments. No mere sentimental or emotional turning to God avails.

The charge is clearly made that the people persistently refused to obey God's commandments. "They would not hear, but hardened their neck." That is always the story. Men are not lost because of any want of goodness and mercy in God Himself. People sometimes say, "God is too good to punish sinners." Very true, in a sense. God does not desire to punish. But men persist in their sins.

We need not think of God as being angry as men are; that is, of raving in fury. Yet God is angry with sin and cannot endure it. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight." After all the pleadings and warnings, all that the divine love could do, this was the end. The same sad story happens in many a home. Father love or mother love never can save a child from sin if the child persists in his evil way. God cannot lift an impenitent sinner into the holiness of the heavenly kingdom without the sinner's consent.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ASSYRIAN INVASION

Read 2 Kings XIX., 20-22, 28-37

IN the opening portion of this chapter there is an interesting incident of a letter received by Hezekiah from his enemy, the king of Assyria. The letter was full of threatenings and insults, designed to terrify Hezekiah and lead him to yield up the city.

“Ha,” said the insulting letter, “do you know what I have done to the other countries and cities which have been in my way? Do you suppose you can withstand my army which has swept victoriously and resistlessly over all lands? The gods of those nations have not been able to deliver their people from me, and do you imagine that your God can deliver you?”

We are told that when Hezekiah had received this letter and read it, he took it into the temple and spread it out before the Lord. That was a beautiful thing to do. That is what faith should always do with any difficulty or perplexity—take it to the Lord in prayer. We may one day receive

a letter which will trouble us and which we do not know how to answer. It may tell us of some danger or some sorrow. It may be from an enemy and be full of unkind words. Or it may cause us perplexities in some other way. Now, the best thing to do with this letter is to spread it out before the Lord. We can not answer it ourselves. We can not defend ourselves against the danger, nor can we solve the perplexity; but God can take care of the matter, whatever it is.

Too often we may try to handle our own difficulties and to unravel with our own hands the tangles which we find. We would better put them all into the hands of the wise Master and keep our own hands off. Hezekiah prayed over this letter, asking God to bend His ear to listen and open His eyes to see. Then he besought God to interpose for His own honor and glory, that the Assyrian's challenge might be taken up and that all the nations might learn that Jehovah was the only true God.

The conduct of Hezekiah in this case illustrates well a counsel of St. Paul's in one of his Epistles. "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Prayer is heard—that is one great lesson. We may safely lay all the interests of our life, all our

dangers, difficulties, sorrows, and losses before God in prayer. The surest weapon we can use against any one who is trying to hurt us is to pray against him—not bitterly nor with resentment, but by laying all the hurt and danger before God, that He may take care of our interests for His own name's sake. There is proof here that Hezekiah's committing of the grievous trouble to the Lord was not in vain. Isaiah sent to the king this message. "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Syria, I have heard thee."

It is a great comfort to us to know that God has an interest in our affairs, that we may consult Him about them. It is good to know what God thinks of the things that fret us. Sometimes people imagine that they are being wronged and persecuted, when in reality it is their own fault. By their own irascible temper or by their own selfishness or willfulness they bring upon themselves the ill-will or the unkindness of others. In the Beatitudes the Master was careful to say that it is when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake—that is, for being good and doing well—that blessing is promised. It is when men speak evil falsely against us that the divine favor is pledged to us. Some people deserve injury and hurt from others; sometimes persecution is not because we are good, but is righteous punishment for evil doing. The Lord does not take our part against those who are seeking our hurt unless we are

blameless. We can not appeal to Him for help to cover up our sins or deliver us from them.

The little kingdom of Judah had no power of its own to make it secure or self-confident. In truth, it could not in its own strength stand against great and proud Assyria. But God was its refuge and strength. Omnipotence was encircling it like horses and chariots of fire encamping on every side. Thus surrounded, thus sheltered in God, the kingdom could easily rejoice in confidence, for God would care for it. Every Christian has the eternal God for a refuge. He can hide away in the secret place of the Most High and laugh at every danger. One of the most wonderful words of the Bible is that in which St. Paul says of Christians, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Verily, we can laugh at danger and at all enmity if we are in such a castle of hiding. We can look out at our windows and shake our head at the puny powers of evil which taunt us and threaten us. "The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn," said the Lord to Sennacherib; "the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." The words tell of the confidence which even the weakest child of God may have in the face of the haughtiest enemy when sheltered by divine love and power.

The Assyrian king had defied Hezekiah and spoken contemptuously of his small resources of strength. "Behold, thou hast heard what the

kings of Assyria have done to all lands." The Lord answers, "Whom hast thou defied and blasphemed?" It is a wonderful quality of divine love that it puts itself in the place of those it loves. He who harms a child of God smites God in the face. He who taunts a Christian for righteousness taunts God. He who does any unkindness to one who belongs to Christ treats God Himself unkindly. We have this taught very beautifully in the New Testament in the Lord's parable of the judgment, where we are told that he who gives food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, and who shows mercy and pity to the sick, the stranger, the prisoner, is showing the same kindness to Christ Himself; while he who passes by the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and the stranger without helping them, is passing by the Lord Christ Himself.

"The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand." But we need not worry ourselves over the question whether this angel was a bright being with a sword of fire, or whether it was a simoom rolling up from the desert with hot, deadly blast, or whether it was a pestilence breaking out suddenly and carrying off its host of victims before the morning. God uses all things as His messengers, for the earth is His and the fullness thereof.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RETURNING FROM CAPTIVITY

Read Ezra I., 1-11

BUT little is known concerning the history of the people during the seventy years except what we gather from the allusions of the prophets of that period. We know, however, that under God's providence the captivity wrought great good to the Jews. By severe discipline they were cured forever of idolatry. It has been noted as a remarkable fact, almost, if not altogether, without parallel, that the Jewish nation survived such a dislocation and dissolution of all local and social bonds as the captivity produced. One reason for this was the religious faith that bound them together. Besides, through all their humiliating experiences the hope of a return to their own land, according to their prophets, lived unquenchable in their hearts. A still further reason is found in the fact that the holy seed was in this nation, and it was therefore the object of special divine care. It is remarkable how even the genealogies of families were sacredly kept during the captivity. When it is remembered that the line of the Mes-

siah ran through the tribe of Judah, the importance of this is obvious.

The returning of the Jews was not an accident in history. The Lord's hand was in it: "That the word of Jehovah . . . might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." God never forgets a promise. When the end of the seventy years drew nigh He set in motion providential movements which prepared the way for the return of the people. Not a jot or tittle of aught that God has ever spoken can fail of fulfillment. Any word of His that we find anywhere in the Scriptures we may grasp and trust, knowing that He will make it good.

Notice the way the Lord brought about this return of His people. "Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." God can always find some way to reach men's hearts. It may be remembered that Daniel was still living and stood high in the government. Possibly it was through his intercession that the attention of Cyrus was drawn to the Jews in their captivity. Cyrus was a Gentile, but God's dominion is not confined to His own people. His authority extends everywhere. Heathen nations are under His sway. He uses all the powers of the world for the carrying out of His own plans. Men come on the stage of action and carry out their own little ambitions with no thought of doing anything for the Lord, unconscious that what they do is in any sense a fulfillment of a divine purpose. Yet without knowing

it they are really helping to execute plans of God made long before they were born. It is a comfort to us to know that the divine purposes are being carried out in all the world's life. Even wicked men's devices which appear to be destructive to the Church are overruled to the fulfillment of God's purposes of love.

Cyrus did much to open the way for the people of Israel to return to their own land. He sent forth the proclamation, "Whosoever there is among you of all His people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem . . . and build the house of Jehovah." The proclamation was addressed to all the Jews who were in the realm. All who would were invited to go to Jerusalem to help in the work, but there was no compulsion. There is another temple to be built for the Lord, and again builders are wanted. The proclamation comes now not from a heathen king, but from Jesus Christ Himself. Every one is invited to come and take part in this great work. The poorest and the smallest can do something.

The temple at Jerusalem on which these builders wrought has long since perished. But the temple on which God wants us to build shall stand forever, and everything any one may do on this building shall be eternal. But how can we build on the walls of the heavenly temple? By doing all we can in this world for Christ. Our own lives are parts of the temple, and we may seek to have our characters made good and holy. Then we can

strive to make other lives better, to bring other people to Christ, and to help build up in them a likeness to the Lord Jesus. The smallest things that we can do for Christ shall be like stones laid on the walls of Christ's house, which is rising within the veil, like ornaments—little touches of beauty on some part of the glorious building.

Cyrus became enthusiastic in his interest in the return of the Jews. He even sought to get his own people to help the captives in this. "Who-soever is left, in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him." There was opportunity for everybody to do something. Some of the people would work on the walls and some of them would help by giving money. There always are these two ways of doing our part in the building of God's temple. Everybody had a share in this work. Only a certain number of the people volunteered to return to Jerusalem, but many others encouraged and aided them. "All they that were round about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods." The people became enthusiastic. When it was known that certain persons were to return to rebuild the temple, there sprang up in many hearts the enthusiastic desire to assist. God influences even worldly men to help His own people in their work for Him. All the money in the world is the Lord's, and He can get it when He needs it. There is a pleasant suggestion also in

the words, "strengthened their hands." They were encouraged by the kindness of their neighbors. If we can not ourselves do much for the cause of Christ, even our little gifts encourage those who are carrying the heavy burdens. If we can not give money, we can at least give cheer, prayer, sympathy; and oftentimes such help strengthens men's hands even more than money would do.

One other notable thing Cyrus did. Nebuchadnezzar had brought away from Jerusalem the holy vessels of the temple. "Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of Jehovah, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put in the house of his gods." It was not the fault of Cyrus that these vessels had been brought to Babylon and profaned by being used in idol temples. But he found the vessels there, and now it would have been his fault if they had been left there. So he quickly provided for their return to their own place. As we go on our way through life we continually come upon evils that other people have started. We are not responsible for the beginning of these evils, but if we let them go on and do nothing to check them we will be responsible for their continuance. It is our duty to undo every wrong wherever we find it. If there are wrong methods in vogue in the business in which we become a sharer, we must instantly correct them.

CHAPTER XXIX

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Read Ezra III., 10 to IV., 5

THE story of the rebuilding of the temple is very interesting. There was much enthusiasm in the hearts of the people as they began it. The temple was sacred in the eyes and thoughts of all devout Jews. Its ruin and desolation touched every heart with feelings of sadness, and the opportunity of doing even the smallest thing toward its rebuilding gave great joy. Every one had some share in the work. Some were cutting down trees away in the forests of Lebanon. Some were bringing the timber in rafts down the seacost. Some were dragging great beams up from Joppa to Jerusalem. Some were working in the quarries, getting out new stones for the walls. Others were gathering out of the ruins the old stones which had belonged to Solomon's temple. Others were clearing up the rubbish, so that the building might begin. At last the foundations were laid, and the holy house began to rise.

The work which these builders did was the rebuilding of a temple, once beautiful and glorious,

which had been destroyed. The fire had swept over it, and all its splendor lay in ruins. Now it was to be rebuilt, that again God might be worshiped in its holy place. There is a great deal of rebuilding to be done in this world. Human lives marred by sin are temples of God in ruins. We all have the privilege, if we will accept it, of helping to restore ruined spiritual temples.

The work of rebuilding the temple was one of great joy to the people. They had come back from captivity with gladness, full of patriotic enthusiasm, and rejoiced at the privilege of restoring God's house to something of its former beauty. "All the people shouted . . . because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." That was a great day. While the builders wrought on the walls the priests and the Levites sang. In doing so they not only praised God, but also cheered and encouraged the workmen. There is always a place in God's house for those who can sing. We should sing as we work; that is, we should work cheerfully and with praising heart. It was said of a great artist that he carried a lyre in his hand as he wrought on his canvas. The music inspired him for his art. Those who can sing have a special mission in cheering and encouraging others as well as themselves. Music inspires us, quickens our pulses, makes us rejoice. Armies march better and fight better when bands of music are playing. Christian song has a wondrous power in inspiring to courage, hardship,

and heroism. David's harp drove away Saul's insanity, and music has been driving away many ugly moods and bitter passions ever since. Songs breaking upon despairing hearts have saved men and women from suicide.

People who can sing have a gift by which they can do great service for Christ. They can go in little companies and sing in prisons or in hospitals or asylums, and their songs will give cheer and courage, and perhaps carry a thought of God's love to sad, penitent, and weary hearts. They can sing in sick-rooms, and the sweet notes will be like angel voices. They can sing in their own homes as they work, cheering weary ones beside them. The ministry of consecrated song is a wonderful one and leaves untold joy and blessing in the world.

There is a charm about first things which is lacking in things that come after. There is never quite such a home to us as the home of our childhood. There is never any other Church with which we may be connected that is quite so dear to our hearts as the Church where we first gave ourselves to Christ and enjoyed our first communion. These old men did not find in the new building the beauty of the former one. "Many of the . . . men, that had seen the first house . . . wept." They wept because they thought the new temple could not be so beautiful as the old one had been. It was natural for them to feel so, and yet we cannot praise their conduct. There

are some people who always find the discouraging side of life, not the happy, cheerful side. Their eyes seem to have a peculiar faculty for seeing defects, blemishes, flaws, and faults.

This is a very unhappy peculiarity. These people miss the lovely features in every landscape, in every garden spot, in every bright scene. Where others see roses, they see thorns. While others are filled with rapture, they go about in gloom. While others sing, they murmur and complain. The world is all wrong for them. Then not only do they spoil life for themselves by this pessimistic way of seeing things, but they spoil it for others. Instead of adding to the happiness of those about them, they mar their pleasure. Any one who has fallen into this miserable habit should instantly and determinedly begin to get away from it. It is worth a fortune to be able to see all life through happy cheerful eyes, and to see habitually the bright, lovely things instead of the gloom, shadows, and thorns.

There is a tendency also among some older people to think that nothing is quite so good now as it used to be in their early days. Distance lends enchantment, and sometimes old people are saddened by their loneliness, possibly, too, by their infirmities, and have not the bright spirit of their earlier days. Besides, the old people's eyes are a little dim and misty, and see far-away things in a glow which does not belong to things that are near. Then what we find anywhere, in any per-

son or place, really depends upon our own mood. Our hearts make our world for us. It is not wise to say that the former days were better than our own. Of course, many things are different, but in the truest sense the present is the best time the world has ever seen.

“Life holds no hour that is better to live in ;
The past is a tale that is told ;
The future a sun-flecked shadow, alive and asleep,
With a blessing in store.”

The people of the country, the Samaritans, who had been there since the Israelites were carried into captivity, were excited by what was going on—the return of the former inhabitants and their efforts to rebuild their old temple. The Samaritans were a mixed people, made up of colonists who had been brought by the Assyrians from Babylon, Cuthak, and other places, and placed in the cities of Samaria which had been emptied by the carrying away of the people as captives. They had brought their national gods with them. One of the captive priests was sent to teach them how they should fear the Lord. They adopted the Jewish ritual, but their worship was not pure.

Perhaps the Samaritans were sincere in wishing to unite with the Jews in the work of rebuilding the temple. “Let us build with you,” they said. More likely, however, they wanted to be allowed to help that they might hinder. They professed to be loyal to God, but almost surely they

were not. They did not want the temple to go up again, for they knew the holy worship would be resumed with the holy teaching. This would interfere with their sinful lives. They wished, therefore, to get their hands upon the work that they might keep it back, or at least make it harmonize with their own evil desires. That is what the world is always trying to do. It dreads and hates holiness, and tries to leaven it with worldliness, so as to make it less objectionable to itself; that is, less true and holy. Religion always has this temptation—the world wants to be taken in.

The answer of the builders was: “Ye have nothing to do with us in building a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build.” Some people would call this narrow-mindedness, bigotry. Why did they not accept the help of these well-to-do neighbors? It would have put the work forward rapidly. But it looks as if the refusal of this help and co-operation was really a noble and patriotic thing to do. These were the world’s people, not true lovers of God. To accept their fellowship and aid would have been to compromise with the world. We need to take the lesson. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. In our religion we must not accept the world’s companionship and the world’s spirit. The world may be very willing to come with us in part of our work for God, but it would corrupt, degrade, and vitiate our service.

CHAPTER XXX

DEDICATING THE TEMPLE

Read Ezra VI., 14-22

THERE was much delay in the building of the temple. There was bitter opposition from the inhabitants of Samaria. "The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them." They wrote to Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to protest against the building, maligning the Jews and alleging that Jerusalem had been a rebellious and bad city. The work of rebuilding was thus interrupted for a time. Under Darius, however, the decree of Cyrus was again found and the work on the temple was resumed and finished.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people. They probably would not have finished the work at all if it had not been for the cheer given by these prophets. We are all apt at some time in life to get disheartened. Things go wrong with us. The burdens are heavy, the way is hard, opposition is fierce. Many persons faint and give up in times of trouble because no one has a word of cheer for them. But if some

one comes with glad heartening they take fresh courage to go on to finish their work or fight their battle through to the end.

Haggai and Zechariah did not themselves work on the walls, and yet without their part the building would not have gone on to completion. You may by your good cheer be the means of accomplishing noble and benign results which would never have been accomplished but for the stimulating influence of your words. This is an important part of the preacher's work every Sunday. The people come to the services weary after their hard work. Sometimes the week has not been a prosperous one. Business had not been successful. Money has been lost. Labor has not yielded good returns. It has been hard to make ends meet. Or there has been sickness, and the loved one is not out of danger. Or some one in the family has not been doing well.

Or the discouragement may be personal. Temptation may have been too strong and the battle may have been lost. Duty has been too hard or too large. There is not a Sunday when the pastor does not face disheartened people sitting in the pews, needing his good cheer. If he speaks brave, hopeful words he will help many a weary one to a victorious week. This is part of his work quite as really as preaching the gospel of salvation and life. All of us, wherever we go, are continually meeting those whose hands hang down and whose knees are trembling, and it is

our privilege and duty to lift up the one and strengthen the other. Helping by encouragement is one of the very best of all ways of helping.

Thus cheered, the people wrought with energy and enthusiasm upon the building. They had both divine and human help. They had the commandment of God to impel them, and they had also the decrees of Cyrus and Artaxerxes to protect them and aid them. Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes did their part. Then there was Zerubbabel and Joshua, besides Haggai and Zechariah, with hundreds more whose names are not recorded. The obscurest helper helped in some way, and record was made of what he did. The man who felled trees in the forests of Lebanon, the man who worked in the quarry, the man who mixed the mortar and carried the hod—all did their part. Without the humblest helpers the most skilled workman and the greatest could not do their conspicuous portion. So it is in all the Lord's work in this world—there is something for every one. "The cobbler could not paint the picture, but he could tell Apelles that the shoe latchet was not right, and the painter thought it well to take his hint." Each one has something to contribute toward the Lord's work, and the lowliest thing done on God's temple is full of highest honor.

It is related—or there is a tradition—that a certain artist sought permission to do the ornamenting and adorning of the great doors of the English Parliament House. If this work could

not be given to him, he asked that he might be allowed to decorate one panel. If he could not have this privilege, he begged that at least he might be permitted to hold the brushes for the artist who should do the work on the great doors. Even that humble office, he felt, would be an honor worthy to be sought. The lowliest task in the building of God's great spiritual temple is honor enough for the noblest of mortals. To put one line or touch of beauty in a life is to work with God. To give a little comfort, cheer, or encouragement to a sad or weary spirit, thus helping a life heavenward, is better than to build a pyramid that never blesses anybody. The smallest ministry to a human life or even to one of God's lowliest creatures redeems a life from commonness and makes it divine.

“If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.”

At last every part of the work was done, and the time came for the dedication. It was a glad occasion when that completed building stood there on the sacred mount. It had risen out of ruins. It had cost great sacrifice and toil. It had been built up amid many discouragements and hindrances. Tears had fallen on many a stone as

it was lifted to its place. Things we do through cost, self-denial, hardship, and hindrance are far dearer to us and more sacred than things we do with ease, without feeling the burden or the cost. Churches built by poor, struggling congregations, whose people have to sacrifice, pinch, and deny themselves to gather the money, yield far more joy to their builders when finished than beautiful and costly churches reared by the rich. The former represent human love, life, blood, and tears. They are built out of people's hearts. The latter may be grander in men's eyes, but in heaven's sight the former shine in the radiant splendor of love. Our joy in doing God's work and in making gifts to God is measured by the real cost of the things we do and give. The more heart's blood there is in them the more precious they will be to us and also to God, and the greater will be their value to others. The truest joys of earth are transformed sorrows. The richest treasures of our lives are those which have cost us the most.

The dedication day was a day of great gladness. The offering consisted of a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs. The people were poor, but they spared nothing that day. They gave God the best they had. The animals in the great sacrifice were of no special worth in the services save as they represented love and devotion to God. They stood for the people's own lives. We are taught in the New Testament to present our bodies a living sacrifice

to God. That means that we are to dedicate our bodies to be God's temples—places for God to dwell in. The ancient sacrifices were killed,—it is a living sacrifice we are to present. This means that we are able to live for God in the very best sense, giving Him all our powers, keeping our lives unspotted and holy for Him, and devoting them to His service in all sweet ways. Too many of us give to God only the broken remnants of tired days, the fragments that are left over when we have served our own selfishness with the best. We need to learn to give Christ the best of everything we have.

Every one in his place and to every one his work, is the law of God's Church. The priests had their duties and the Levites had theirs, and when all were set where they belonged the worship could go on. In every Christian Church the same adjustment is necessary. It is the duty of one to preach, of others to be elders and deacons; of one to be superintendent of the Sunday-school, of others to be teachers, others secretaries and librarians. Thus to every member there is some allotment of duty and service. There is not a little child who cannot be of use in some way in Christ's work. A Church is complete only when every one is doing something, filling some place.

The services of the temple were resumed at once after the building was dedicated. The Pass-over feast was held again at the proper time.

The Passover was to the Jews very much like what the Lord's Supper is to Christians. It was in remembrance of the days when they were in bondage and when God brought them out. Now a second time they had been brought out of bondage, and it was especially and doubly proper that they should now keep the Passover feast. It was a memorial of their own release from captivity. There is a story of a stranger who appeared one day on the streets of an Eastern city. Passing where many birds in cages were exposed for sale, he stopped and looked with tender pity at the little captives. At length asking the price of one of the birds, he paid it and, opening the cage, let it go free. Thus he went on until all the birds had been liberated. Flying up a little way, they caught a glimpse of the mountains far off, which were their native home, and flew quickly toward them. When the stranger was asked why he had done this, he answered, "I too have been a captive, and now I know the sweet joy of liberty." We who have known the bitterness of sin's captivity and are now free, made free by Christ's deliverance, should gladly seek to open the prisons of other captives and let them go free.

CHAPTER XXXI

EZRA'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Read Ezra VIII., 21-32

EZRA is an interesting character. He was a priest and scribe who was commissioned to return from Persia to Jerusalem, and so took an active part in the civil and religious affairs of the Jews at Jerusalem. He led a fresh company of exiles back with him. A royal edict had been issued by Artaxerxes clothing Ezra with authority. He was the bearer of offerings for the temple made by the king and by the Jews. He led a caravan. He was influential in enforcing the Mosaic law among the people, who had become indifferent to many features of it. Before setting out he gathered his company together and spent three days in making preparation for the journey. The first thing he did was to seek God's guidance. He says, "I proclaimed a fast . . . that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a straight way for us." We should begin every new journey, every new undertaking, every new piece of work, by asking God to show us the way. The Bible very significantly begins with the words, "In the beginning God." At the beginning of everything God should be recognized and hon-

ored. No friendship ever reaches its best unless God be in it and God's blessing on it. No business ever can have the fullest success unless the hand of God be in it and God's guidance be sought. The things we cannot ask God's blessing upon we would better not do. The place into which we can not ask God to guide us we never should enter. Ezra asked the Lord to show him a straight way to Jerusalem. We need always to seek guidance of God, for only He can show us the right way.

Ezra is very frank in giving the reason why he cast himself so completely upon God. He was seeking the honor of God, and wished therefore, as far as possible, to be independent of human help. "For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way." He had told the king that the hand of God would be upon all them that sought Him for good, and he wished to give the king proof of this in his own experience. It was a dangerous journey upon which he and his company were about to set out. No doubt the king, with his kindly interest in the expedition, would have furnished an escort if Ezra had asked for it. But Ezra felt that this would be dishonoring God.

A life of faith is a life of dependence upon God. Part of our witnessing for God before the world is showing that our trust is not in human strength, but in God Himself. We say, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Do we

prove our faith in this confession? When need is upon us, do we show ourselves trustful because the Lord is our Shepherd? We say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We sing the words with a measure of triumph in our voices. But do we live as if God were indeed our refuge, as if He were indeed a very present help in all trouble? Many of us are too easily frightened in time of danger or trouble. With such a God as ours we ought to be ashamed to be afraid of anything. We ought not to turn to the world's help after we have declared so strongly that God is our defense and our refuge. We should show by the way we meet difficulties, dangers, losses, sorrows, that there is a divine reality on which we are leaning.

Ezra was taking up with him a great quantity of silver and gold and the sacred vessels for the house of God. He took special care for the safety of these treasures. "I set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests . . . and weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels." First, these were good men, honest and trustworthy, whom Ezra selected. This was important. Sometimes sufficient care is not taken in choosing those who are to be the custodians of money belonging to others. In this case the money and the treasures were all carefully weighed and the amount set down. Again, at the end of the journey, the men were required to account for everything they had received. Some people are very

careless about money matters. Young persons should learn that it is part of their religion to be strictly honest. If others put money into their hands for any purpose it should be accounted for to the last cent. In societies of different kinds there is money to be handled, and certain persons have to act as treasurers. Those who accept this position should realize their responsibility. No matter if only a few cents a month are to be handled, there should be the same careful putting down of the amount and the same accuracy in accounting for it at the end as if the sum were thousands of dollars.

The charge of Ezra to these men who were entrusted with the treasures is worthy of careful study. He said unto them, "Ye are holy unto Jehovah . . . and the silver and the gold are a freewill-offering unto Jehovah . . . Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them . . . at Jerusalem." The men themselves were holy; that is, they had been set apart to a holy service. The treasures entrusted to them were holy. The money and the vessels did not belong to any man, but to God. The men were now to carry them safely through all the dangers of the thousand-mile journey. They would be held responsible for their safe-keeping until they deposited them in the house of God in Jerusalem. Then the treasures would be weighed again, to see that they had been carefully guarded and that nothing, not even a fraction of an ounce, had been lost.

This was a very solemn trust. But every one is continually receiving trusts which he is to guard amid the world's dangers and deliver at last at God's feet. A Christian convert in a missionary country said of something he was guarding with special care, "It is God's, but I am in charge of it." This is a true statement of our position regarding many of our responsibilities. It is true not only of the religious funds entrusted to our custody, but just as really of money of any society or institution or corporation or business that may be intrusted to us. It is true of anything for which we may be responsible. Our own life is a sacred trust committed to us, for which we must give account. "Power to its last particle is duty," we are told. It is God's, and we are in charge.

There are many applications of this principle. Other people are continually putting into our hands the gold and silver of their love, their confidence, their friendship, trusting us with things which we are to guard and keep for them. Do you ever think, for example, of the responsibility of being a friend? One confides in you and comes under your influence. How careful must you be lest you harm the life that thus intrusts itself to you. We accept friendships and confidences eagerly, and sometimes perhaps thoughtlessly, not asking ourselves if we can care for them, guard them, keep them. We forget that we must answer to God for every touch and teaching and for every impression we put upon any other life. Our own

good name also is a trust committed to us to be kept unspotted. We must guard it and live so every day that no stain may ever fasten upon it through any act or conduct of ours, or any association with evil. So the good names of others are in our keeping. We must be careful never to tarnish another's name by any careless word we may speak concerning the person.

Ezra testifies to the faithfulness of God in caring for him and his company on the way. "Then we departed . . . and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy." At the beginning of his journey Ezra committed the care of himself and other pilgrims to the good hand of God. He was glad to say that without any help from the king, without escort of soldiers to guard them, they had come to the end of the long journey, through manifold dangers, yet without harm. We never know how much good we owe every day and every night to the good hand of God that guards us amid life's dangers. We think we are keeping ourselves by our own tact or shrewdness, or that we owe our safety in our journeys to the perfection of the railways and vessels on which we travel, or to some sort of chance that favors us. We leave God out too often when we are thinking of our safety, our protection, our comfort, the countless favors of our lives. Always the eye of God is upon us and the good hand of God is over us. This is our Father's world, and we have children's care in it.

CHAPTER XXXII

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

Read Nehemiah I., 1-11; IV., 7-20

NEHEMIAH was a captive. There is a tradition that he belonged to the royal family. Probably he had been educated in the land of captivity. At least he occupied a position of great importance in the king's court. He speaks of himself as the king's cup-bearer, but this title does not mean that he was merely a servant. The position was one of importance and of much influence.

Evidently Nehemiah was a man of strong character, who could not be swayed by the enervating influences about him. Mr. Robert C. Ogden tells of once discovering a wonderful little flower on the Rocky Mountains. In a deep fissure, one day in midsummer, he found the snow lying yet unmelted, and on the surface of it he saw this flower. Looking to learn where its roots grew, he perceived that a long, delicate stem came up through the snow. The root was in the crevice of the rock underneath. Like that flower in the cold snow are the lives that are found growing up in the midst of the world's temptations, and yet are

beautiful and true in spite of all that would naturally tend to destroy them. The secret is that they are rooted in the cleft of the Rock of Ages.

Nehemiah was in Shushan the palace; that is to say, at the very center of a great heathen capital. Yet it was while occupying a position there that there came into his heart the desire to honor God and help in restoring His land. Let no young man say, after reading the story of Nehemiah, that it is not possible to be a true and earnest Christian wherever God may place him. If he is compelled to live amongst the ungodly, exposed to all manner of evil influences, he can still be true to God. All he needs is to be sure that his heart is fixed upon Christ, and that the roots of his faith are kept alive through prayer, communion with God, and the study of God's Word. It is possible for a young man to rise in the world as Nehemiah did, to prosper in business, to win honor and influence among his fellow-men, and yet keep his heart pure, his life clean, himself unspotted from the world.

One day, while Nehemiah was engaged in his accustomed occupations, he was visited by his brother Hanani. Hanani had been visiting the Jews who had returned to their own land, and Nehemiah asked him concerning the condition of things at Jerusalem. Many people who are happily fixed themselves do not give much thought to their friends who are less fortunate. Nehemiah, however, though himself living in luxury,

did not forget his brethren, who were enduring hardship and suffering, nor did he cease to remember his country in its time of distress. This quality in Nehemiah should not be overlooked in our study of his character. In our days of prosperity we should not forget those who are in circumstances of suffering and need. That man cannot call himself a Christian who never thinks beyond the circle of his own little life. When one Christian suffers, all his fellow-Christians should feel the pain. The strong should help the weak. The fortunate should not forget the unfortunate. The well should sympathize with the sick. In the homes of gladness, with the circle unbroken, there should be deep sympathy with the household next door where there is grief. Nehemiah showed a brotherly spirit.

Nehemiah was greatly affected by what he had heard concerning the condition of things at Jerusalem, but his feelings led him to action. "It came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept . . . and prayed before the God of heaven." Some men weep easily—their tears lie near the surface; but these are not usually men of deep and strong nature. They are emotional, and often their emotions never become acts. Nehemiah was not a man of that kind—he was stalwart and strong. His tears, therefore, did not show weakness. It is not unmanly to weep when there is such cause for weeping as there was that day. Nehemiah wept over the sor-

rows of his people, over the calamities which had befallen them. Jesus Himself wept when He stood on the brow of the Mount of Olives and looked down upon that same Jerusalem over the report of whose desolation Nehemiah now wept. Country, cause, home, and religion are dearer to a true man than place, power, honor, and riches. A man who does not weep when his country is in danger is not a true patriot. We should be moved with compassion when we think of the lost souls about us.

But tears are not enough. Nehemiah at once carried the burden to God in prayer. That is what we should do with all our anxiety for others. Constantine, when looking at the statues of certain persons who were represented standing, said, "I shall have mine taken kneeling, for that is the way I have risen." The greatest achievements in this world have been made through prayer. The first way to help others is to pray for them. Until we have begun to pray we shall not do much for them. Yet praying is not always the whole of our duty. Nehemiah wept; then prayed; then set to work in behalf of his people. He left his luxurious place in the king's court, journeyed to Jerusalem, and took earnest hold with his own hands, giving of his influence and energies to the cause. More than tears or prayers are needed in our serving of others. Too many people weep over distress and pray earnestly for the relief that is needed, yet do nothing themselves. Nehemiah's

way is better—first sympathy, then prayer, then work.

There is something very noble in Nehemiah's prayer. "Let Thine ear now be attentive, and Thine eyes open, that Thou mayest hearken unto the prayer of Thy servant." Not only is God represented as listening to the prayers of His children, but also as looking in sympathy upon them in their need. His eyes are ever turned toward the earth, as if to see who is bending the knee or looking up with penitence and desire. There is no fear that God will ever fail to see any one who prays. No matter how dark the night may be, His eye beholds. No matter how lonely the place, He will not fail to catch sight of the suppliant bowing in penitence. One who was wrecked at sea and floated for many hours on a piece of spar before being picked up, said afterwards that the most terrible feeling he had ever experienced was the thought that in all that vast waste of waters about him there was no ear to hear his cry and no eye to see his condition. But he was wrong. There really was an eye that could see and did see, and an ear that could hear and did hear, even there on the wide sea, his cries for help.

Nehemiah prayed that God would direct him in his plea before the king. "Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Nehemiah did wisely. Before going to the king with his request he went

to God, asking Him to open His way with the king. Since so much depended upon the king's answer, he asked God to prepare his heart to listen sympathetically. In everything we undertake we should ask God to prosper us. We cannot do this if we are engaged in any wrong or dishonest business or plan. But when our heart is right and the thing we would do is part of God's will, we may freely ask Him to direct us. When our errand is for other people and its success depends upon their willingness to help us, we should ask God, before we go to them, to give us favor with them and to prepare them to be interested in our plea.

The prayer of Nehemiah was answered. One day as he was engaged in his duty the king noticed sadness in his face and, touched with sympathy, asked him what was troubling him. Nehemiah told him of the condition of his people, of the desolation of their holy city, and asked leave to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it. The king granted his request. Nehemiah's arrival encouraged the people. The new governor showed great energy and capacity. There were enemies outside who plotted against the rebuilding. Some of the people themselves were faint-hearted and became discouragers, finding fault. Hinderers also came in from the Jewish settlements outside.

Amid all this discouragement Nehemiah remained brave and confident. He also sought to encourage the people. "Fight for your brethren,

your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." The motive which Nehemiah suggested—fighting for one's home and loved ones—is among the strongest motives that can appeal to the human heart. Every man with a spark of manhood in him will fight to the death for his own. We are all so tied up together that this motive is always present when we are defending the right. We must seek the purity and the safety of the town in which we live, because our own family is in it, and peril to the population is peril to ours. We must seek a wholesome water supply and good drainage and clean streets for the city, because our children and friends live in it. So with the moral and religious influences in a community—the welfare of our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters is involved. In all movements for education and reform there is the same motive. A distinguished man was speaking at the opening of a reformatory for boys, and remarked that if only one boy was saved from ruin by the institution it would pay for all the cost and labor. After the exercises were over, a gentleman asked the speaker if he had not put it a little too strongly when he said that all the cost of founding such an institution would be repaid if only one boy should be saved. "Not if it were my boy," was the quiet answer.

CHAPTER XXXIII

READING THE LAW

Read Nehemiah VIII., 1-18

THE work of Nehemiah had been well done. In spite of opposition and all hindrance the walls had been rebuilt and the city had come into a measure of prosperity. Then under the divine direction Nehemiah gathered together the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that their genealogical records might be made up. After this there was called a great assembly to listen to the reading of the Holy Scriptures. The people came eagerly. They wanted to hear what God would say to them. We should be eager to respond to the call which summons us to God's house to a Church service. It is the divine command that we should do this. Yet there are reasons for the requirement. We need to hear continually the words of God, that we may not forget them. We need to look frequently into God's face to have a glimpse of His holiness as the ideal for our own living. We need to be reminded continually of our sins, then of our duties. Besides, we have sorrows, and we need the comfort which comes to us only through God's

Word. We have a Scripture injunction which exhorts us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

When the people had come together, Ezra the priest brought out the roll of parchment of the law and read the words to the people. Everybody was there that day. They came as one man. The men did not leave all the church-going to the women, as some men are disposed to do in our modern days. Nor were the children left at home while their parents went—they were there, too. The service that day seems to have been like a great Sunday-school. The law of Moses was the book used, and Ezra and the other teachers read it to the people and explained its meaning to them.

The Bible is the one book for all who want to know the essential things of life. There is no other book for the penitent sinner desiring to be saved, or for the sorrowing one seeking comfort. Other books have their message and may do very well when the joy is full, but in life's great crises there is only one book that meets all needs. There is no other book for the death. "Bring me the book," said Sir Walter Scott, when he was approaching the closing hour. "What book?" one asked. "There is but one book," replied Sir Walter. There were thousands of books in his great library, but there was only one book for that hour. The Bible tells us how to live, and then shows us how to die.

The people were eager to hear the Word of

God. Perhaps they had not heard it read for a long time, and now it was a joy to have it read to them again. There was silence in the great throng as the reading began and as it proceeded. "The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." The trouble with many persons, old as well as young, is that they are not attentive when the Scriptures are read. Some ministers complain that the people do not listen to the sermons they preach to them. Some teachers find difficulty in getting the ears of their scholars when they seek to explain the lessons. If only we would remember that it is God who is speaking to us when His Word is read, we would listen eagerly and attentively.

Ezra's sermon that day was very long—from dawn to noon; yet no one seems to have got tired. We read that in Wyclif's days, when portions of the Bible which he had translated into English and had written out with a pen were carried among the people, so eager were they to hear the Word of God in their own language that they would gather in groups round the peat fires and would listen oftentimes all night, drinking in the precious sentences. The Book is so common now and we hear its words so frequently that it has not the interest to our hearts it should have.

When Ezra unrolled the parchment all the people stood up. Thus they showed their respect and reverence for the Holy Book from which the good priest was about to read. The words to which

they were to listen were God's words, and they rose up to do God honor. Standing was a posture of respect. Men stood before a king. Angels stood before God's throne. A writer tells of witnessing the reception of a royal message by the Parliament of Russia: "As the messenger entered the hall and the royal seal was broken, all the people stood up. Officers, members, and visitors by one impulse rose up to hear the writing of their king. It was the usual testimony of respect for royalty." It is not a superstitious regard for the Bible that we should cherish. The mere honoring of the Book itself amounts to nothing. Some people wear a crucifix on their breast and yet show none of the humility and worshipful spirit of Christ in their lives. Some people handle the Bible with seeming reverence who have little of the Bible in their hearts, not following its teachings, nor heeding its counsels and warnings. True reverence for God's Word is not superstitious, but is sincere and earnest.

What Ezra and his assistants did that day is what all teachers of the word of God should do for those who listen to them. "They read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading." The business of the preacher and the teacher is to make the sense of God's Word so plain that those who hear, whether old or young, shall understand. People come together on the Sabbath to worship God, and part of this worship should

always be to hear what God will say to them. The teaching should be simple, clear, definite, and plain.

The effect of the teaching that day was uplifting and inspiring. Nehemiah said to the people, "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared." God loves to have us enjoy His blessings. We are to eat our food with thankfulness and with rejoicing. He wants us to get the very best we can from life—to eat the fat and drink the sweet. He would have us to be happy. Then He wants us also to share our blessings with others. When we have plenty, we should send a portion to those who have nothing. Our joy must not be selfish. Having a good time all alone is not the ideal of Christian gladness. When we are prosperous we should not forget those who are poor. When we are happy in our home of love, with unbroken circle, we should not forget the families about us that are in sorrow and bereavement. The good things which God gives us are not meant for ourselves alone—they are given to us to be shared. Only in the sharing do we get the best of them ourselves. People who eat the fat and drink the sweet in their own homes, at their own well-covered tables, and never think of the hungry and needy outside, are not the kind of children God wants His people to be.

The people were not to think about their sorrows that day, nor let their troubles cast a shadow

over the brightness. "Neither be ye grieved; for the joy of Jehovah is your strength." If we would be strong, we must have the joy of the Lord in our hearts. The sad heart tires in a little while. If we would be strong for service, for endurance, if we would always do our best, we must cultivate the joyful spirit. Some Christians are always worrying about something. If they do not have a real trouble they hunt up an imaginary one. They hang up on the walls of their hearts pictures of all the unpleasant things that happen, but not the pictures of cheerful and happy things. No duty is urged in the Bible more earnestly and more repeatedly than the duty of Christian joy. Of course, we must make sure that it is the joy of the Lord that we have. This world's joy is not enough to make any one permanently happy.

The joy of Christ is from Christ Himself. It is joy that comes from heavenly sources. It does not depend on the happenings of the hour, for then it would come and go with the changes in our circumstances. The joy of the Lord is from a deep well that is not affected by any sort of weather. Nehemiah wanted the people that day to rejoice because of what the Lord had done for them, and to put away all care and all anxiety.

The people caught the spirit of the great teacher and obeyed his exhortation. "All the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared

unto them." That is a fine illustration of what always should be the effect of teaching or preaching God's Word. The people understood the words and let them into their hearts. Then straightway they went forth to do as they had been exhorted to do.

We will always find new things in the Bible if we will read it over and over. No matter how many times we have gone through it, when we go through it again we shall come upon passages we have not seen before, or at least which have not fixed themselves in our minds at any former reading. On the second day of this great Bible reading service the Levites came upon the commandment appointing the Feast of Tabernacles. Evidently this command had been overlooked and this festival neglected. But it is delightful to find them entering at once upon the observance of the great Harvest Home. This was a feast of remembrance. They were to live in booths, recalling the years of their wandering in the wilderness. It is said that the Jews in these wonderful days made the branches of their booths thin so that they could see the blue sky and the stars through them. So should we build our houses, with roofs through which heaven's light will shine. Whatever hides God from us cuts us off from blessing.

CHAPTER XXXIV

HAMAN'S PLOT AGAINST THE JEWS

Read Esther III., 1-11; IV., 10 to V., 3

THE Book of Esther opens a window into Oriental life. It shows us also something of the sadness and debasement of woman's condition in those days. At first thought Esther seems to have had an enviable experience in being chosen because of her beauty to be the queen of Xerxes. But when we understand better what her position really was we see that she was not to be envied, but pitied rather. Esther's story in the light of Christianity is a sad one. Nor can we hold her up as an ideal woman. Yet there is value in the study of her story, as it shows by contrast what Christianity has done for woman.

The book in its introduction tells the story of the deposing of Vashti, the former queen. Our sympathies are with the wronged queen. We can have only condemnation and contempt for the king. We learn also how it was undertaken to find another beautiful woman to take Vashti's place. In all the provinces of the kingdom the fairest virgin was sought for the king. Esther

appeared to win a great prize, but no lowly Christian girl to-day would want to exchange places with her.

Mordecai is the real hero of the Book of Esther and the deliverer of the Jews. Not much is told of him. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a captive and lived in Shushan, or Susa, the Persian capital. Esther had been brought up by Mordecai as his own child. Yet Esther was forbidden to reveal in the palace either her relation to Mordecai or her nationality. Mordecai was in close communication with the palace. He discovered a plot against the king and defeated it, his name being recorded in the chronicles.

We do not know what Haman had done to win the king's favor. He was rich, and possibly had been liberal with his gifts to the king. For some reason, at least, the king wished Haman honored, and wherever he went every one bowed down to him—everybody but one man. Mordecai did no reverence to the proud vizier. Mordecai was a Jew and Haman was an Amakelite—hence probably the bitter enmity between these two men. All the attendants and courtiers did honor to the grand vizier as he passed backward and forward—all except this Jew, who refused to bend the knee to him. Haman, writhing under the insult continually repeated, determined upon revenge and conspired to kill not Mordecai only, but all the Jews in the realm. He obtained the king's signature to the decree, and it was promulgated and

the time fixed for the extermination of the hated race. Mordecai sent to Esther a copy of the edict, informing her of the plot, and charged her to go in unto the king and plead for her people.

Esther reminded Mordecai at once of the difficulties in the way. She referred to the custom observed in such matters. "All the king's servants . . . do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death." The only persons admitted to the king were those for whom he himself sent, and Esther had not been invited. "I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." The fact that she had not been invited to come for so long a time was disheartening. "There must be some reason for it," she thought. Esther would better not have stopped at all to think about these difficulties in the way. Considering the perils in our way is apt to make us grow faint-hearted. Ofttimes, as it proved in Esther's case, the perils will vanish if we go forward.

Mordecai was not disposed to release Esther from her obligation. So he sent a messenger reminding her that her own life was in bond in this matter. "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." She might meet death if she ventured into the king's presence; certainly she would meet death if she sat still where she was and did

nothing. She was one of those upon whom the sentence had been pronounced in the king's decree, and even the palace and the royal robes she wore would not protect her. Many people hesitate to come to Christ. They fear He will not receive them. They think it will be hard to live a Christian life. They count the crosses, the self-denials, the duties, and the long way of struggle and battle. But suppose they do not come to Christ at all—what then? Is there no danger in staying away? If you sit still where you are, will you be saved?

Sometimes silence is very costly. Often, no doubt, silence is better than speech. The old proverb says that while speech is silvern, silence is golden. Many times we will sin if we speak. But here is one time when it was a sin not to speak. So in every life there are times when to be silent is to fail in duty. We are to speak out on all occasions when the glory of Christ requires it. We should never be afraid to speak a word of warning to one who is in danger. We should never hesitate to speak boldly in confession of Christ when all about us are Christ's enemies. We have many cautions about watching our speech and withholding words that are not good, but we must beware of silence about the eternal things. We scarcely ever lack words when the themes are light and trivial; let us not fail amid the light and trivial talk to speak earnest words which shall not be forgotten.

Mordecai reminded Esther further that she was not God's last resort. "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall perish." If one messenger proves unworthy of the trust reposed in him, another is found, and the purpose moves on to its fulfillment, but he who has faltered is trodden down by the marching hosts behind him. The only safe way in life's thronging field is straight on in the path of duty. No danger of the battle is so great as the danger of halting and turning back. No duty, however hard, should be feared half so much as failure in the duty. We should never shrink half so much from responsibility which seems too great for us as from the shirking of the responsibility. In the end it is always easier and infinitely safer to do our duty, whatever the cost, than not to do it. God can get along without us, but we cannot get along without Him, and to fall out of the line in life's crowded pathway is to lose everything. To neglect opportunities is to throw away honors and crowns.

Mordecai went a step farther and reminded Esther that probably she had been born and raised up for this very task. "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Every one is born for something, some particular duty or task. Some one speaks of Stephen as having been born and trained that he

might make one speech of thirty minutes in length. God has His people ready in their place when He wants to use them. If we are true to God, doing His will day by day, we are always in the place where He wants us, and wherever we are He has some work for us to do. When we find ourselves in the presence of any human need or sorrow, we may say, "God sent me here just now to bring relief or to give help or comfort to this person." We sometimes wonder at the strange ways of Providence, by which we are carried into this place or that. Is there not a key here to this mystery? It certainly was a strange Providence that led Esther, the lowly, simple-hearted maiden, into the palace of the great Xerxes to be his queen, but there was a divine purpose in it. She was placed there because she would be needed there by and by. When God by some strange providence brings us into peculiar circumstances or associations it is because there will be some time a need for us just there.

At last Esther rose to the call of duty. She determined to go into the king's presence. "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." She took the risk. There are times when the best thing we can do with our life is to give it up. There are times when to save one's life is to lose it, when the only way to save it is to sacrifice it. Life that is saved by shrinking from duty is not worth saving.

CHAPTER XXXV

ESTHER PLEADING FOR HER PEOPLE

Read Esther VIII., 3-8, 15-17

THERE was great sorrow everywhere among the Jews. Mordecai rent his clothes and sat in the king's gate, clothed with sackcloth. He sent word to Esther, imploring her to go to the king and plead for her people. The story of her venturing is familiar to all. Her plea with the king was successful. Haman was made very happy by being present by invitation at Esther's first banquet, and went home exultant. That night the carpenters were busy erecting a gallows for Mordecai.

But the same night something else happened. The king could not sleep, and the chronicles of his reign were read to him. There the fact that the king owed his life to Mordecai was recorded, and the further fact that Mordecai's deed had not been publicly recognized. The picture of Haman conducting his enemy through the streets next day as the man the king would honor, is most striking. The tide had turned.

Haman was dead on the gallows he had set up for Mordecai, but the decree for the destruction of all the Jews still stood, and the terrible day was drawing near when all the Jews should be

slain. Unless the decree could be reversed or recalled they could not be saved. It was at the cost of life that Esther brought before the king the request that the decree should be revoked. We get a lesson on courage in duty. We learn also that we have a responsibility for others as well as for ourselves. Sometimes the best use one can make of his life is to sacrifice it, to give it up, that others may be delivered or helped. This is so when the engineer by losing his own life can stop his train and save the lives of the passengers. We learn also that God puts us into places and relations for the very purpose of meeting some need, performing some service. Esther had been brought into her place at this particular time that she might do just this particular service for her people. Think what might have happened if she had failed. Think what may happen if we fail in any time of duty.

Esther, unaware of the provision of the Persian law that no decree can be recalled, implored the king to reverse the letters devised by Haman, and learned that the reversal was impossible. Far more broadly than we may think this is true in life. We cannot recall any word we have spoken. It may be a false word or an unkind word, a word which will blast and burn. Instantly after it has been spoken we may wish it back and may rush after it and try to stop it, but there is no power in the world that can unsay the hurtful word or blot it out of the world's life. It is so

with our acts. A moment after we have done a wicked thing we may bitterly repent it. We may be willing to give all we have in the world to undo it, to make it as though it never had been. But in vain. A deed done takes its place in the universe as a fact, and never can be recalled. "Don't write there, sir!" said a boy to a young man in the waitingroom of a railway station, as he saw him take off his ring and begin with the diamond in it to scratch some words on the mirror. "Don't write there, sir!" "Why not?" asked the young man. "Because you can't rub it out." The same is true of other things besides those words written upon glass with a diamond point. We should be sure before we speak a word or do an act, that it is right, that we shall never desire to have it recalled, for when once we have opened our lips or lifted our hand there will be no unsaying or undoing possible.

Haman had built the gallows for Mordecai, but in the strange and swift movements of justice Haman was hanged upon it himself. Injustice and wrong recoil upon the head of him whose heart plotted the evil. "Curses, like young chickens, come home to roost." "Ashes fly back in the face of him that throws them." "If one will sow thorns he would better not walk barefoot." "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him."

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

The decree of the king could not be recalled or reversed. But another decree was sent out which in a measure counteracted the former. We have seen that life's words and deeds are irrevocable. We cannot recall anything we have done, neither can we change it. But by other words and deeds we may in some measure modify the effect of that which we cannot blot out. Paul could not undo his persecutions, but by a life to devotion to Christ's cause he could in a sense make reparation for the terrible harm he had done. We cannot undo the wrong things we have done, but we should strive to set in motion other influences which may at least compensate in some sense for the harm they have wrought. We cannot unsay the sharp word which wounds our friend's heart, but we can by kindness and loyal devotion yet bring good and blessing to his life.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ISAIAH CALLED TO SERVICE

Read Isaiah VI., 1-13

ISAIAH knew the very day and hour when he saw this wonderful vision. It was in the year that king Uzziah died. The vision had made such an impression on his mind that he never could forget it. It had meant so much to him as an experience that he could never cease to look back to the day as his spiritual birthday.

That was a memorable year. Uzziah was one of the greatest of Judah's kings. He had reigned fifty years with high honor, and then suddenly he was smitten with leprosy. He had gone into the temple and attempted with his own hands to burn incense. On his forehead appeared at once the white spot which was the mark of divine judgment, and the king was thrust out and dwelt till his death in a lazar house. The year in which king Uzziah died was therefore more than a date. That was the year of Isaiah's vision.

There are one or two dates in nearly every earnest life which are always remembered. Some-

times it is a loss or a sorrow which has made its indelible record. Sometimes it is the coming of a great joy into the heart—the first meeting with a new friend, for example. Sometimes it is the day when Christ was revealed. We may be very sure that Andrew and John never forgot the day when they first saw Jesus and when He took them to His own lodgings for a long talk. It is good for us to keep records of the great days in our life.

The prophet in his vision saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. It is a great thing when such a vision as this fills one's life. Too often it is this world which bulks most largely in a soul's view. Men see visions of wealth, power, fame, or pleasure, but see not a gleam of heaven nor a hint of the shining of God's face. But earthly visions do not exalt our life. They make us no better. When we have visions like Isaiah's, in which God fills all our field of view, we are lifted up in spirit, in character, in hope and joy. One who sees God is never the same man afterwards. He is set apart now for holy life and service. He is dominated ever after by a new influence. He has seen God—he must therefore be holy; he must walk softly and reverently; he must be true to God.

There is something unusual and very impressive in the description of the seraphim in this vision. "Each one had six wings." Wings are for flight—it is the mission of angelic beings to fly upon God's errands. The six wings would

seem to signify special readiness to do God's will. But they suggest here more than their normal use—to fly. The modern Christian would probably use them all for flying and would be intensely active. We live in an age when everything inspires to activity. We are apt to run, perhaps too greatly, to wings. But we should notice that two of the seraphim's wings were used in covering his face when before God—teaching reverence. Two of them also were used in covering his feet—humility. The other two were used in flying—activity. Reverence and humility are quite as important qualities in God's service as activity.

The song of the seraphim, as they veiled their faces and covered their feet, indicated praise, worship. One choir sang, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts," and the other responded, "The whole earth is full of His glory." What we owe to God always is holiness, for everywhere is His glory. Yet many people never see any of God's glory in the earth. They think of glory as something bright and dazzling, like the burning bush, the pillar of fire, or the transfiguration. But there is as much glory in a tree laden with sweet blossoms as there was in the flaming bush at Horeb, and as much glory in a face shining brightly with love as there was in Stephen's. We read of Christ's first miracle that He thus "manifested His glory." It was the glory of kindness, obligingness which this miracle showed. Everywhere God's glory shines in all nature, in all true

Christian living, in lowly homes where prayer is offered.

The prophet stood now face to face with God, and the effect on him was a sense of his own sinfulness. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." We do not know our own unworthiness until we have had a glimpse of God. In the light of the divine holiness we see our own unholiness. One of the most remarkable incidents in the Gospels is that in which Peter begged Jesus to depart from him. It was after a great miracle. Peter was awed by the manifestations of power in Jesus. Only a divine being could do such work. The effect on him was that he shrank away from the presence of such a holy being. He was not worthy to stand before Christ. "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When the light of God's face shines into our heart we see how unworthy we are. All pride and self-conceit vanish when we stand in the presence of the divine glory.

The mercy of God is ever instant in its response to human penitence and confession. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin

forgiven.” The act of bringing the coal and touching the prophet’s lips was very suggestive. The altar was the place of sacrifice. It was holy fire that burned there. All this must be kept in mind as we think of the meaning of this act. Not any common coal of fire would have done. It represented fire from heaven, the fire of the Holy Spirit. As the coal touched the lips of the prophet they were made white and clean.

No sooner had the prophet’s lips been cleansed than the call for service came. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” God is always wanting errand-runners. Angels fly swiftly and eagerly. There is not an angel in glory who would not gladly come to earth on any mission, however lowly. The Koran tells of one of the highest angels sent to earth one day with two commissions—to deliver a king from the power of some temptation and to help a little struggling ant home with its burden of food. The latter errand was done just as dutifully and joyously by the great angel as the former. But God wants men as well as angels for messengers in this world. He is always asking this question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Read Isaiah LII., 13 to LIII., 12

ONE picked up an old book and found it fragrant. The secret was that a sweet flower had been put in among the leaves by some one and its fragrance had permeated the whole volume. So the perfume of Jesus has saturated the Bible from beginning to end. We do not find the name Jesus until we reach the beginning of the New Testament, but the sweetness of the name is everywhere. We find it even in the earliest pages of the Old Testament. No sooner were the gates of Eden closed on our first parents than the gospel was given. True, the language was dim, not like the clear sentences of the Gospels; yet the promise is there, in the protevangelium, as the bud of a very lovely flower which, by and by, opens out under the increasing warmth of progressing revelation, until in the later prophets, especially in Isaiah, it appears in rare beauty.

No other chapter in the Old Testament has been a greater revealer of Christ than has the fif-

ty-third of Isaiah. Its words are almost as familiar as those of the Twenty-third Psalm. They are repeated at Communion services in thousands of churches and are read in secret by countless devout believers who love to sit in the shadow of the cross.

The best that can be done in brief space with the fifty-third chapter is merely to indicate a few of its truths. The first verse has a tone of discouragement. "Who hath believed our message?" That has always been the discouragement of the bearers of spiritual good tidings. If news comes that gold has been discovered in some far-away place, people believe it and flock by thousands to the spot. But when God's messengers deliver their messages, although they tell of the most glorious things, people are slow to believe.

The second verse reminds us that Christ's earthly beginnings were unpromising. "He grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." These figures are striking—a tender plant shooting up from a dry stem which seems dead, a root growing in a desert place. The field was not promising. But the root was not dry or dead, but living, and it grew into rich beauty. It became a great tree whose branches reach now over all the earth, with cool shade in which the weary rest, and rich fruits for men's hunger.

The description goes on. "He was despised,

and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The saddest thing about the life of Christ was that men despised and rejected Him. He came with a great love in His heart. He wanted to do men good, and save them, to draw them away from their sins, to make them love God, to lead them to heaven. He came, and men despised and rejected Him. It is the same yet. Men do not like to look upon suffering. They can see no beauty in it. Pain is ugly to the human sense. Anciently it was thought that sickness was a mark of divine disfavor. The weak were looked at with scorn. Even yet we have not learned to see blessing hidden in suffering. The Servant of the Lord came in weakness, and He was rejected. He came to the needy and the sinful, with treasures of life and glory, which He offered to all. But men paid no heed to His knocking and His calls, and He had to pass on with His blessings.

We learn the object of the sufferings of Christ. The ancients thought that when a man suffered he was being punished for sin. We have this thought here in the words, "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." That is the way Job's friends judged him. But here it is taught that not for His own sin, but for ours, was the Messiah suffering. "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." A Japanese Christian illustrated what Jesus did for sinners by this story: A mother was crossing a

great prairie with her baby in her arms. She saw the flames coming in the dry grass. She could not escape by flight, so swiftly were the fiery billows rolling on. So with her hands she speedily dug a hole in the soft ground, laid her baby in it, and then covered it with her own body. She was burned to death in the wave of fire that rolled over her, but the child was safe, unhurt. "So Christ gave Himself," said this convert, "to save us."

We have a picture, also, of those whom Jesus seeks to save. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The two "alls" in this verse are important. The first one tells us that all are sinners. Of course, we all believe this, or admit it in a general way. But do we really admit it as a close, personal matter? "Like sheep!" Sheep are miserably foolish. They are always straying away, going wherever they can find a tuft of grass to nibble at, until at last they are far from the fold and do not know how to find the way back again. Like sheep, we have all gone astray. Every one has turned to his own way instead of going in God's way, the way of truth and holiness. Then the other "all" has the whole gospel in it. The sin of us all was laid upon Jesus. So there is a redemption. God would have all men repent and be saved. The responsibility must lie on ourselves if we are not forgiven. It can only be be-

cause we will not accept the pardon which God so graciously offers.

The Servant of the Lord was a silent sufferer. It is not common for men to remain silent in pain. But here it is said: "He was oppressed, yet when He was afflicted He opened not His mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." One of the highest qualities in him who is called to suffer is silence in endurance.

Another quality in the suffering of the Servant of the Lord is its injustice. "By oppression and judgment He was taken away, and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due?" The forms of law were not observed. "By a forced and tyrannous judgment He was taken." Then they gave Him a convict's grave. They made His grave with the wicked, although He had done no violence, neither was guile in His mouth.

Such perversion of justice seems so terrible that men might ask, "Where is God, that this cruel wrong is permitted?" But the answer is, "It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him." In the Hebrew the word has not the harshness it seems to have in the English. God did not delight in the bruising, but His purpose was in it. "Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an of-

fering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand.”

Then we have a vision of the glorious outcome of the sufferings of the Messiah. “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” He is not sorry now that He endured the cross and all its shame. He does not regret His sufferings and sacrifices on the earth. The blessings which have come from His humiliation have more than satisfied Him. He sees countless millions of souls saved which must have perished forever if He had not gone to the cross to redeem them. The life of the Son of God seemed a tremendous price to pay for the ransom of a lost world, but it will appear in the end that the price was not too great. We do not know the worth of human souls, nor can we begin to estimate it until we try to understand how much Christ paid to redeem us.

You say that a certain professed Christian is a very unworthy one, with scarcely a line of spiritual beauty in him. “Christ will never have any comfort from him,” you say. “He will never make a saint.” “But wait!” says the patient Master. “My work on this man is not yet finished. He is very imperfect now, and I am not satisfied with him. But wait until My work on his life has been completed. By and by he shall wear the full image of My face, and I shall be satisfied as I see in him the blessed prints of all My sorrows and My love.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE GRACIOUS INVITATION

Read Isaiah LV., 1-13

THE Bible seeks in every possible way to make men know the divine love and mercy. A great novelist in one of his stories tells of a child that wandered far from her home. Every night when it grew dark a candle was set in the window of the old home and left to burn there all night, that the lost one, if ever she crept back, repentant, desiring to return, might see the light and know that it meant a welcome for her, that love's place was kept for her within.

The Bible is like a great palace standing on some mountain top in the center of a dark world. It has a thousand windows in it opening on all sides, and in every one of them a bright light shines, to tell earth's lost and weary ones, wandering in the gloom, of a home where they may find a welcome if they but come to its door.

The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is one of these Bible windows. The chapter opens with a call which falls on the ear of the lost like sweet music. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come!" There is a

story of a thirsty traveler wandering in the desert. He had a compass in his hand, but knew not whether its needle pointed toward a place of refreshment or to a spot in which he must lie down and perish. He was utterly in despair. Turn which way he would, he seemed to be only wandering farther and farther away from hope. He had sunk down in the sands of despair, when a little leaf came, wafted by a passing breeze, and fell beside him. He picked it up, and new hope took possession of his heart. The leaf told him of life. It could not have come far, for it was still fresh and green. At the place from which it came there must be water, shade, and food. He knew the direction, too, for the breeze had borne it. So with the little leaf firmly clutched in his feverish hand he rose and hastened in the direction whence the leaf had come, and soon was resting in the shelter of a green tree and quenching his thirst from the springs that gushed at the tree's roots. Like that little green leaf, dropping out of heaven, comes the call from God of the opening words of this chapter to those who are weary and thirsty in spirit. Where it comes from there must be water, food, and rest. It is divine love that sends it.

The call for attention, "Ho," is a call to life. It commands attention. It would arrest the most careless, those who are heedless and indifferent. It has a message, too; it is not an empty call. "Come ye to the waters, and he that hath no

money; come." The invitation is universal. "Every one." It is to the poor as well as to the rich. "He that hath no money." It meets the universal human want. It fits the actual craving of men. "Every one that thirsteth." Who does not thirst? Who has not deep needs burning in his soul? The blessing offered is precisely adapted to the need. "Come ye to the waters." What water is to physical thirst Christ is to men's spiritual needs. This world's things do not satisfy, but what Christ gives quenches all their thirst. Then there is more than water, more than refreshing. "Wine and milk." These are symbols of nourishment and exhilaration. All is free, too; "without money." Nothing has to be paid for these blessings. Indeed, no money could purchase them. Only baubles can be bought with gold or silver. Yet, although free, there is a very real sense in which these blessings of salvation must be bought. "Buy, and eat." Money will not buy them, but like the man who sold all he had to purchase the field with the hidden treasure in it, we must give up everything to get Christ. We must pay ourselves, our life, to win Him.

One of the saddest things in human life is the wild search for things which will not satisfy men's real needs. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" It does seem strange indeed that men never learn the folly of trying to find bread for their spiritual nature in what this world has to give. They have deep cravings and

they try to satisfy them with money, power, pleasure, or fame. But these things are not bread, and immortal lives cannot feed upon them. A hungry man is not satisfied by finding gold or pearls—it is bread he wants. What can money do for one who is in deep spiritual distress, or when remorse embitters his life, or when he sits in deep sorrow by the coffin of his dead, or when, facing death himself, he looks into eternity? Nothing but Christ will do in such moments. An angel cannot be fed upon earth's viands. A human soul finds no satisfaction in the possession of this world's possessions.

What the gospel offers is real bread, because it satisfies the heart's cravings. God's blessing comes to us through God's Word. "Hear, and your soul shall live." We are to listen to the invitations of divine grace. But there is a time when we must give heed to these divine calls or it will be too late. "Seek ye Jehovah while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." The candle burns now in the window, but it will not always burn there. "Whosoever will may come," runs the Bible invitation, but there will come a time when it will be too late to answer the call—a time when God may not be found, when He will not be near, when the door will be shut.

There is only one way of accepting the invitation. We cannot take it and keep our sins. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous

man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah." We cannot be saved and still keep our evil thoughts in our hearts and go on in our evil ways. God is very willing to take our sins, putting them away forever, but He will not take our sins without ourselves. We must give up our evil ways, even our wrong thoughts, and must serve God.

Men's hearts by nature are hard, like trodden fields. But even the hardest heart God's grace can soften. "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven . . . so shall My word be." We all know how the rain softens the dry and hardened ground. Its drops go to the roots of the withering grass and the fading flowers, and soon new life appears everywhere. So it is when God's Word falls upon a human life. It makes the life fruitful. Sometimes it lies like snow on the earth, not melting for a time. The results of holy teaching do not always appear at once. But as at last the snows melt and fill streams and rivers, so God's Word in a life will some day find its way down into the heart and bless it. Heavenly lessons have lain for scores of years, producing no effect; yet, at last, when the warm love of God touched the life it brought forth beautiful fruits.

CHAPTER XXXIX

DANIEL'S ABSTINENCE

Read Daniel I., 8-20

THERE is something very noble in the picture of Daniel which we have in the first chapter of the Book of Daniel. He was only a lad. He had been torn away from the godly restraints and influences of his own home. He was now at liberty to do as he pleased, so far as human control was concerned. He was among heathen people, and no one would blame him if he should disregard the rules of his home religion. Indeed, nobody there would know it. Besides he was a mere boy, with a partially formed character, at an age at which convictions usually rest lightly and when removal from the restraints of home frequently is the sign for the cutting of the moorings which thus far have held the life from drifting. All these considerations heighten the beauty and nobleness of Daniel's conduct. He knew what his duty was, for he had been instructed at home. This duty was the same in Babylon as in Jerusalem. Change of location and of surroundings

makes no change in the principles of right and wrong. What was wrong in the holy city, under the shadow of the temple, in the sacredness of a saintly home, could by no sophistical moral metamorphosis be made right in heathen Babylon. There was nothing uncertain about Daniel's attitude toward duty.

“Daniel purposed in his heart.” The heart is the place to settle all questions of principle. There was no long puzzling in Daniel's case about his duty. He did not go round asking advice of his friends. He did not try to find a back door out of the perplexity in which he was placed. He did not ask: “How will this affect my future condition here in this royal court? May it not interfere with my advancement? Will it not make it harder for me to get along as a captive?” He met the question on the grounds of moral right, and settled it instantly, and never reopened it. One who thus lives never needs to ask what others say or think, or how such and such a course will affect one's prosperity. It is a very heroic thing to be able to stand alone, to dare to be peculiar, not to do as others do. To be true to God oft-times requires us to stand entirely alone and even to be laughed at and sneered at by others. Decisions should always be made in just this way, and when made should be adhered to in spite of all opposition and danger.

One of the tests of character which came to Daniel in his captivity was in connection with the

food and drink allotted to him as a student. A daily portion of the king's dainties and of the king's wines was appointed for the young princes. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with these things. So the temperance question is quite an old question. Of course, it is easy to say that Daniel did not settle his course upon what we call modern temperance principles. It is easy to say that he was controlled by old ceremonial laws now obsolete, or by superstitious notions concerning what had been offered to idols. Nevertheless the principle remains the same. Daniel believed it to be wrong to partake of the king's dainties and drink of his wine, that he would be defiled by them if he touched them, and, so believing, he was firm in his determination not to use them.

"God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion in the sight of the prince." This was very important to Daniel's success. Had this officer been harsh or indifferent, the story would have been ended right here, perhaps in the martyrdom of the heroic boy. It is very important that we should act so as to win friends for ourselves. Sometimes people profess not to care what other persons think about them, but such indifference is surely very foolish. None of us know how much we owe to our friends, to the favor which we gain in their minds, to the kind words they speak to us, and to the influence they exert on our behalf. No one can ever rise in the

world to any important place save through the confidence and esteem of others. We see here also how God can make friends for one whom He wishes to promote. The Bible elsewhere tells us that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Again, we read, "When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with Him." So it is right for us to ask God to give us friends; but when we offer this prayer we must be very careful that we do our own part to be worthy of the friends whom we wish to win. One who is cross, selfish, and rude will have but few friends and, when the time of need comes, will find himself left alone, without human sympathy and help. Evidently it was not hard to love Daniel: his character was so beautiful, his disposition so gentle, his manner so refined. Boys who wish to win favor and rise in the world should cultivate the same qualities, and, thus making themselves attractive, they will win friends wherever they go.

The prince who was in charge of the young captives feared to go contrary to his instructions. He felt quite sure that the boys would suffer in their appearance from their abstinence from the rich food and stimulating drinks provided for them, and shrank from taking the responsibility of permitting it. Daniel showed his tact by suggesting a ten days' trial. "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink."

A good many people have about the same impression with regard to luxurious diet and drinks that this Babylonian prince seems to have had. They imagine that if they were to live plainly and temperately they would suffer in health or in brightness and sparkle. Probably in all such cases an abstemious diet would be very much better for them. There is a vast amount of gluttony as well as other intemperance in the world. Not many persons would suffer from coming down to plain fare, an orthodox Lenten diet, for a time. Certainly as regards drinks the experiment cannot fail to prove that abstinence is better every way for body, mind, and soul, than indulgence.

It is interesting to have the result of this experiment given. We are not to suppose that there was anything supernatural about this. No miracle was wrought to favor the use of the plain food and simple drink. The steward's fears were groundless. The countenances of the Hebrew boys were fairer and they were fatter in the flesh than those who had partaken of the king's dainties.

These Hebrew youths showed their superiority in other ways. "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom." God is able to help young people even at school. Of course, they were not helped save through their own industry and application. No doubt they worked hard as students, applying themselves diligently to every lesson. It will not do when the lessons are hard

just to pray God to teach them to us, and then go out on the playground and waste our time, expecting to be divinely helped. God's help is never meant to bolster up laziness. We are not to pray that God will do for us anything we can do for ourselves. But God gives help to those who earnestly help themselves. If a student applies himself with all diligence to the study of his lessons, he has a right also to pray God to help him, to make difficult things plain, to throw light upon obscure things, to make his mind alert and clear; and God will do it.

“Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.” For seventy years and more he held high positions in that heathen court. All that while his life was beautiful. He was faithful to God, noble in character, and loyal to truth. He began well, and never swerved from his purpose to follow God and do his duty. In Daniel's life we have a wonderful illustration of the value and of the power of home training and teaching. So well was Daniel taught, so deeply was the influence of that home impressed upon his heart, that when he was borne away as a captive to a heathen land no power of heathendom, no temptation, no threat of danger could make him swerve.

CHAPTER XL

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

Read Daniel II., 36-49

DREAMS have an important place in the Bible. There is no doubt that dreams were really means of divine communication, as in Jacob's ladder, in the dreams of Pharaoh, and in that of Nebuchadnezzar. The account of this dream and its interpretation is very interesting. The king's strange forgetting of it gave additional opportunity for the glorifying of the true God. Babylon's wise men could not tell the king what he had forgotten. Then Daniel came.

There is a suggestion in the king's forgetting. Does God never come to us with some revealing, some glimpse of His holiness, some lesson, some vision of truth, which we straightway forget? Some of us forget sermons before we get home from church; sometimes we can hardly even remember the minister's text. Sometimes impressions that are vivid and distinct at the time they are made pass almost entirely from the mind in a little while. The king could not recall any part of the dream which had troubled him so. He de-

manded of his wise men that they tell him first what the dream was, and then what it meant. When all his wise men failed to be able to do this, Daniel sent the king word that his God was a revealer of secrets, and that he would make known Nebuchadnezzar's dream. He then told him what the dream was, and afterward made known its message.

Daniel said, "Thou, O king, art king of kings, unto whom the God of heaven hath given the kingdom." The point to be specially noted here is that all earthly power is from God. He gives it to whomsoever He will. Kings are appointed to rule for Him and receive their authority from Him. The same is true of all who bear authority, of whatever kind. This gives a sacredness to power, whether it be the parent's, the teacher's, the magistrate's, the overseer's. It is God's power entrusted. We must use it reverently, in faithfulness, in love. Napoleon, when he became emperor, took the crown in his own hands and put it on his head, implying that he made himself ruler. Later he learned that power belongeth to God; that He puts one down and sets another up.

Daniel proceeded to indicate in detail the meaning of the vision. "Thou art the head of gold. And after thee shall arise a kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things." Thus history ever reads. One king-

dom gives place to another. The greatest are pushed aside and thrust down by the less. Not only among nations is this true; we see the same in families and among individuals. The rich of one generation are the poor of the next. The high in rank to-day are forgotten to-morrow. Thrones built by human hands crumble. God can humble the proudest when He will. He can destroy the head of gold, and crush the breast and arms of silver, and break the legs of brass and the feet of iron and clay. "The snowflakes of Russia humbled Napoleon's pride, and the raindrops at Waterloo sent him an exile to St. Helena."

Then Daniel went on to describe the element of glory in the vision, the setting up of the kingdom that never should be destroyed. "In the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Right in the midst of the glory of Rome came Jesus Christ, to set up the kingdom of His Father in this world. This kingdom differed in many ways from those world kingdoms which were pictured in the vision. It was not established by arms, by military conquest, but by moral force alone. Christ had no armies of soldiers marching forth with Him to crush opposition. He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. There is a story of an emperor in some part of whose realm there was

a rebellion. Certain of his subjects were in revolt. The emperor was about setting out to the scene of the uprising, and said to his nobles, "Come with me and see me destroy those rebels." But when he reached the province he showed only kindness to those in revolt. He treated them with gentleness and affection. The result was that they laid down their arms and became his most loyal subjects. His nobles reminded him of his words to them, "Come and see me destroy my enemies." He replied, "I have destroyed my enemies; I have made them my friends." This illustrates Christ's conquest and the way He extends His kingdom. It is set up not by force of arms, but by love; it rules our hearts.

There are four things said here about the kingdom of Christ. First, it never shall be destroyed. The world kingdoms have their day and cease to be. One destroys another. The strongest earthly kingdom has in it the elements of decay—clay mingled with its iron—and is thus doomed to disruption. Nothing earthly is indestructible. But the kingdom of Christ shall never be destroyed. Second, it shall never pass to another king. No one king long occupies any earthly throne. Human life is short, and no hand can long hold the scepter. Even dynasties are short-lived. But Christ is a King out of whose hands the scepter shall never drop; on whose brow the diadem shall never lose its luster. Third, this kingdom of Christ shall go on conquering until all earth's

kingdom's have submitted to its sway. Unto Christ every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He is the Lord. Fourth, the kingdom of Christ shall be eternal. When all earth's thrones have crumbled into dust, Christ's throne shall appear in the clouds, shining in glory.

The interpretation of the dream closed in a wonderful picturing of the glorious coming of the kingdom of Christ. "Forasmuch as thou sawest that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." The stone was Christ. It came from heaven, from God. Its origin was supernatural. "Without hands." It smote the image, and broke in pieces the iron, the clay, the silver, the gold. So shall the kingdom of Christ continue to grow and extend until it shall fill all the world and absorb all power. Whatever is wrong shall be broken to pieces, and holiness shall fill all things.

CHAPTER XLI

THE FIERY FURNACE

Read Daniel III., 13-25

EVERY child knows this story. It is one of the classics of Christian households. It were well if all modern children had the sublime moral courage of these "Hebrew children." They will never have to meet precisely the same trial of faith that these young men had to meet; but they need just as heroic a spirit in order to be faithful. Imposing images are set up even now in many a place, and people are expected to bow down to them, and woe to him who does not kneel. We all have chances enough to be heroic. The popular religion is probably inclined to limpness of the knees. We have grown wonderfully tolerant in these days. We bow to almost anything if it happens to be fashionable. It would not do any harm if our children and young people were to take a good lesson from the example of these Hebrews.

As Nebuchadnezzar grew great he grew proud. He knew no God. There was no one to whom he thought of bowing down. He exalted himself as God. He demanded that all men should pay

homage to him. That is the meaning of this strange story of folly. His people obeyed his command. "Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."

But there were some whose knees did not bend. Quickly the king was informed by anxious spies that certain Jews did not worship the golden image he had set up. "Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego." Here we see a great king in a very bad temper. That was certainly an unkingly mood. No man is fit to rule others who has not learned to rule his own spirit. Peter the Great made a law that if any nobleman beat his slaves he should be looked upon as insane, and a guardian should be appointed to take care of his person and his estate. This great monarch once struck his gardener, who took to his bed and died in a few days. Peter, hearing of the man's death, exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "Alas! I have civilized my own subjects; I have conquered other nations; yet have I not been able to conquer or civilize myself." There are Christian people who would do well to think a little of this matter. Self-control is the mark of completeness in Christian culture. It is the lesson of peace perfectly learned. Bad temper is always a sad blem-

ish in disposition and conduct. To get into a rage is a mark of lingering barbarism in the character. Self-mastery is Christlike.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were all young men; so the lesson is for young men. They were young men in peculiar circumstances. They were away from home, out from under the influence and restraints of home, and exposed to very strong temptation. They had now their choice between duty and the fiery furnace. Boys and young men should study this lesson for its example of heroic devotion to duty, regardless of consequences. Even yet the world's promotion is obtainable oftentimes only at the price of a trampled conscience. There are several things to note in these young men. There is their calmness; they displayed no excitement, no heat of passion. The peace of God ruled in their hearts. There is also sublime courage. They had a contempt of death. They feared only one thing—sin. There is also trust in God. They committed the matter utterly into His hands. What He would do they knew not; but they were sure it would be the right thing.

The king did not want to destroy these young men, and repeated his command. "Is it of purpose . . . that ye serve not my god, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and wor-

ship the image which I have made, well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands?" The king wanted to give them another chance, as he preferred not to burn such useful servants; but they told him there was no need for a second opportunity. They would have no other answer to give. They could make no possible change in their decision. The thing that was demanded of them was contrary to the plain law of their God, and that settled it forever. There was no room for discussion or for deliberation or for persuasion when it was the law of their religion that was concerned. They could burn, but they could not turn.

It would save many people a great deal of weighing, balancing, and discussion of fine points if they would act always on this principle—that the Word of God is final in all matters of duty. When a thing is forbidden, that should be the end of it. But too many people keep questions of duty open, waiting for new light, secretly hoping that by some logical process it may become possible for them to avoid making the sacrifice, and to do the thing that now appears to be wrong. So they parley with their tempter, and weigh the pros and cons, and wonder if they are mistaken in their sense of duty, and usually end in yielding. It is never safe to parley with temptation. There is no need for it. Duty is final, and no process of

reasoning can change it. There is no new light possible on a divine command. It would save many of us much trouble if we fixed it in our mind that God's Word settles some things, settles them finally and forever, and that we have no need to consider them, but should obey them without parley or question.

The answer of the young men was given promptly. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace." There is a wonderful majesty in these words. About the whole of the creed of these men was in the words, "Our God." God was theirs, and they were God's. He was taking care of them, and therefore they had no need to concern themselves about their own safety. It is a great thing to be able to call God ours, and to say, "God is our refuge;" "The Lord is my Shepherd." When we can really say this we are ready for anything. No danger can terrify us. It is not the assurance of personal safety that gives us confidence; it is the fact that we are in God's hands, that we belong to Him, and that He is taking care of us. We do not need to know just what He will do with us or for us, whether He will deliver us or let us suffer. The ground of the confidence is that we are in His hands and that He will do the right thing. It is not the highest trust that merely believes in being brought out of the trouble or being delivered from danger. Perhaps we shall not be delivered. God may per-

mit us to suffer. Very well; our trust does not depend on deliverance. It has no condition. It is simply trust without stipulation or suggestion. The highest confidence is that which suggests nothing, but lies in God's hands, and leaves to him the manner of the care and the blessing.

The next three words are almost equally important: "Whom we serve." There are plenty of people who like to cry to God in time of trouble or danger, but they have never been willing to obey or serve Him when there is danger. They even scoff at Him in the sunshine; but when the storm arises they fall down on their knees and pray to Him. These young men were not of this class. They could cast themselves upon God's protection in this time of danger without shame, because they had been God's loyal friends and had been serving Him before the danger came. If we want to be able to call God ours and commit ourselves to His care when trial or peril comes, we must not only believe in Him but must do His will. True religion is not all creed; it has also a very practical side, and we ought not to overlook this word "serve." We must serve God as well as trust Him. We must be willing to serve Him, too, even if it costs and hurts and burns. We must continue to serve Him though He brings no earthly deliverance. "The Christian who lazily looks for nothing but His personal comfort will never look at fiery furnaces with composure." So if we would be without fear in the day of

danger we must be God's loyal and faithful servants without condition.

Then comes the expression of the faith of these men. Our God "is able to deliver us." They did not say He would deliver them from the fiery furnace. They did not know that He would. They knew that He could, and that if it were best He would. There they rested the matter. God's power ought to be a strong comfort to us in trouble or danger. He is able to deliver us—there is no doubt about that. No combination is too strong for Him. He can do what He pleases. Men say there are no miracles in these days, but God can always find a way to work any deliverance He desires to work for His people. He is never handicapped in His own world. And since He is our Father, and loves us and is taking care of us, we should know that if it is best that we should be delivered He will surely do it. If He does not deliver us we should know that it is because it is better for us and for His glory that we should suffer. True Christian faith is willing to leave to God just what He shall do, confident in God's power and in God's love.

"But if not." They made no condition of loyalty to God. They would obey Him just as loyally if He did not deliver them. There are some people who call themselves Christians who never get above self-interest even in their religion. They believe it will be best for them in the end, if not just at present, to be Christians and to be faith-

ful to God. Their consolation in losses and sacrifices is that God will more than compensate them in some way. They like to quote, "To them that love God we know that all things work together for good." This is true. We shall never lose anything in the long run by doing right. God's service brings great reward. Yet even this should not be the condition of serving God. We should serve Him for Himself, even if we know that serving Him will bring loss that never can be made up to us.

There is a story or legend of one in the old times who walked the streets of Alexandria bearing in one hand a torch and in the other hand a vessel of water, crying, "With this water I will put out hell, and with this torch I will burn up heaven, that God may be served for Himself alone." It surely is not the highest kind of faith that thinks always of the benefit to ourselves; it is far higher if we say, as these men said, "Whether God shall deliver us or not from the furnace we will serve Him," or as Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

The king was angered by the quiet determination of the young Hebrews and commanded that no time should be lost, and that their punishment should be as terrible as possible. "Then these men were bound in their hosen, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." There are furnaces burning yet all over

the world, and faithful ones are continually being cast into them. There are furnaces of physical pain and suffering, in which saintly ones lie, sometimes for years. But they are not destroyed by the fire. The only result is that they become more saintly. The sin and the earthliness are burnt out of their lives and the pure gold remains. There are furnaces of trial, too, in which men suffer loss for being true and loyal to God. We must not suppose that a good life is always an easy one. Says Archdeacon Farrar: "God's judgments—it may be the very sternest and most irremediable of them—come, many a time, in the guise, not of affliction, but of immense earthly prosperity and ease." Another writer says: "Men talk of the mystery of God's providence—the mystery of darkness, of death, of loss. To me the mystery is in the giving, not in the taking away; in the life, not in the death; in the clear, blue sky, not in the darkness that hides it. We cry out to God when He takes away, but did we draw near to Him in thankfulness when He gave?"

CHAPTER XLII

DANIEL IN THE DEN OF LIONS

Read Daniel VI., 10-23

DANIEL was a wise man, and his wisdom and faithfulness made him a very valuable man in the affairs of the empire. When the new king appointed his officers he put Daniel at the head of those who were set to rule. This made the other officers envious. They could not bear to see Daniel so honored. So they determined to find some way to drag him down. First, they sought to find something wrong with his official record. If they could only discover some dishonesty or some injustice they would soon get him put down.

There still is envy in the world after all these centuries of Christian teaching and life. Those who excel in any line or department are sure to suffer in some way for their excellence. Dr. Watkinson has a very suggestive chapter in one of his books on "The Sorrows of Superiority." The business man who succeeds above his competitors almost certainly incurs dislike and sometimes is made to suffer. It is so in school and even in the home. Envy was the cause of the hatred of

Joseph's brothers. There are men in politics who are envious of those who have got above them, and this old Babylonian wickedness—searching into a man's record just to find some weak or questionable act in order to destroy him—is quite well understood. It is well when a man has lived so blamelessly that even envy cannot touch any act of his life. This same wretched work of envy is done too among boys and girls at school. Many times have efforts been made to hurt the record of the most successful pupil. Envy is a very ugly passion. Before we get through with this story we shall see that it usually harms most the person who indulges it.

When they failed to find anything to hurt Daniel in his record, they thought of his foreign religion, and decided to arrange a plot that could not fail to get him out of their way. So they prepared the decree that for thirty days no one should make any petition to any god or man, but to the king.

They asked the king to sign the decree, and in his pride and weakness he did as they wished. "And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Let us linger a moment at Daniel's window and watch him at prayer. His regular habits of devotion should be noted. He had set

hours for praying. This is the only way to maintain a life of prayer. People may sneer at clockwork devotion, but clockwork has its essential place in all good life. Habits are nine-tenths in business, in study, in friendship, in character. They are just as necessary in religion. One who has no regular habits of praying will soon not pray at all.

Notice, also, that Daniel paid no heed whatever to the king's interdict. Yet he was loyal and obedient to the king, never disregarding his commands. But there are some things with which the law of the land has nothing whatever to do. God's law is to be the first guide of our life, and if the law of a country requires us to deviate from that, we have only one choice. A law forbidding us to pray to God, or read our Bible, or meet with others for God's worship, would have no authority at all over us. It was on this principle that Daniel acted.

It might be said that Daniel did not need to pray before the open window. Was there not a little unnecessary bravado in this? But this is answered by the words "as he did aforetime." That was the way he had always prayed, and to draw a curtain that day would have shown fear and would not have been a loyal confession.

Daniel's enemies were watching, and when they saw the young Hebrew kneeling before his window in prayer they lost no time in reporting the matter to the king. The king was angry with

himself for having fallen into the trap set by Daniel's enemies. It grieved him that he could not save Daniel, but his courtiers reminded him that no interdict nor statute which the king established could be changed. He felt himself compelled therefore to have Daniel cast into the den of lions. "Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions."

An incident told of Palissy, the Huguenot potter, illustrates the position of king and prisoner here. Palissy was in the bastille for his devotion to the Protestant faith, and the king of France, who had a high regard for him, visited the prisoner in his dungeon. He told him of his friendship, but said that unless Palissy would comply with the established religion he should be forced, however unwillingly, to leave him in the hands of his enemies. "Forced! Sire!" replied the noble old martyr. "Forced! This is not to speak like a king. But they who force you cannot force me. I can die!"

The king was distressed that he had to cast his favorite minister and friend to the lions. He went to his palace, but could not sleep. "Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep fled from him." No wonder. How could a man eat or sleep after such an act? We see here, in the palace, what remorse does for a man. It turned the king's

royal bed-chamber into a chamber of horrors. By way of contrast we may look into the lions' den which was Daniel's bedroom that night. So far as physical surroundings were concerned the king had far the better of it—with his luxurious apartment, his rich furniture, his soft couch, with all that the world could give him of pleasures; while Daniel had only a dark, filthy cavern, with wild beasts round him. But while the king was wretched, consumed with remorse, Daniel was in sweet peace. We can imagine him sleeping in the den, amid the lions, as quietly as ever he had slept in his own house. The fierce animals lay about him, harmless as lambs, because God's angel was among them. This is a picture of the safety and peace which are the portion of those who trust God and do His will.

The king must have had a hope that in some way Daniel had been kept unhurt in the den through the night. His cry in the morning, "Is thy God . . . able to deliver thee from the lions?" showed that he knew of Daniel's religion and hoped that God had delivered him. "Yes," said Daniel, from within the den, "my God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me."

Of course, we are not to conclude from this that in all cases of much danger God protects His own children from bodily harm. Many times since that day Christian martyrs have been thrown to the lions and have been torn to pieces

by them. Yet this is no evidence that these were not good men, or that God was not able to deliver them. Sometimes the best use that can be made of a noble life is to have it offered to God for death, sacrificed for the truth.

The king's joy was very great. Then his thought turned to those who had brought about the attempt to destroy Daniel. "The king commanded, and they brought those men that had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions." We need not consider the question of right in this case. No doubt these conspirators deserved death, since they had deliberately and wickedly plotted against the life of Daniel. The point to be marked is the doom which comes upon envy. These men conspired against Daniel, securing an edict by which he should be torn to pieces by lions. The outcome of the conspiracy is that Daniel is preserved alive and is promoted to still higher honor in the kingdom for the remainder of his life, while the men themselves who envied him and sought his destruction, to get him out of the way of their own promotion, were themselves cast into the den they had prepared for him. The principle is that envy always brings back the curse upon itself.

CHAPTER XLIII

SIN THE CAUSE OF SORROW

Read Hosea X., 1-15

HOSEA was one of the prophets of the Ten Tribes, near the end of the Northern Kingdom. Most of his prophecies refer to the condition and destiny of his kingdom. Little is known personally of the prophet. The first three chapters of the book contain a history or parable of the prophet's marriage, in which the love of God for Israel is graphically depicted, and the treatment of Him by His people is shown in all its blackness. The remaining portion of the book contains prophecies against the people's sins.

In the chapter for our present study we are reminded of the splendid opportunities Israel had had, and of the reckless misuse or abuse of these opportunities. "Israel is a luxuriant vine, that putteth forth his fruit." The picture is of a vine that makes a great show in leaves, but in the time of fruit has no grapes on it. It represents a life of much religious profession, yet lacking in the fruits of righteousness, of character. We understand its meaning as referring to Israel in Ho-

sea's time. The nation made a great show of religion, but its religion was idolatrous. Possibly, too, we could find people or Churches in these very modern days that might have sat for the picture. It will be of more practical help to ourselves and a fitter use of the Bible if we make careful scrutiny of our own personal lives to see whether this vine with luxurious leaves and no fruit is in any sense a picture of us. We profess to be good people. There is a great deal of religious privilege and profession in our lives. We have had fine opportunities. Have we the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Have we the love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, which are given as samples of these fruits? Are we pure in heart, lowly in spirit, meek, peacemakers, as the Beatitudes paint the true Christian life? Have we the thirteenth of First Corinthians in our heart and disposition?

The secret of this failure in the true results of life is given in the words, "Their heart is divided." They thought they were very pious, with great show of devotion. But it was not really worship. They were only half-hearted, at the best. A divided heart is an abomination to the Lord. We remember what our Lord said about it. Indeed, what he really said was that a divided heart was an impossibility. That is, only part of a heart does not count at all with God. Unless the heart is His altogether it is not His at all. "No man can serve two masters." "Ye cannot serve

God and mammon.” There is room in a human heart for a great many things, but there is not room for two Gods. If one loves father or mother or son or daughter or anything else more than Christ, he is not worthy of Him. We need to look carefully into this matter for ourselves—not troubling ourselves much at present about the ancient Israelites. Are our hearts divided between Christ and something else? Is our worship sincere and spiritual? The ancient emblem of prayer was fragrance. The incense that was burned on the golden altar was rich in its perfume. God spoke of smelling a sweet savor from acceptable sacrifices. Does God find our worship fragrant? Is there love in it? Is there praise? Is there penitence?

A nation without God is like a ship adrift, without a rudder on the sea. This was the condition of the nation of Israel at this time. They were facing great perils and had no Pilot. They had cut themselves off from God by their own sin. They had a king in name, but what could their king do for them in their danger? He could not save them from their enemies. There are many people who give up God for a human friend, or for money, or honor, or place. But in time of sore trial, what can their friend, or their money, or their fame do for them? This world’s trusts are frail and poor dependences when sore need comes. They are refuges of lies, even the best of them. What could Israel’s king do to save

his people from the Assyrians? What can friend or gold or honor do for a human soul in time of great struggle, in temptation, in sorrow, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment? A man was found dead at the foot of a precipice. He had fallen from the top. In his hand, clutched tightly, was a dried blade of grass. In his fall he had grasped this, but of what help was it to him? Of no more use will earth's trusts be to him who in life's great and sore needs clutches at them. They will be only straws in his hand. It is a fearful thing to give up God.

They thought they had gods, but they were only calves of gold. They had a very elaborate ritual of worship, but it was all only an empty form. There was no might, no heart of love, no power to help in these calves. Indeed, they could not even take care of themselves, and the people were now in dread lest their enemies should carry away their very deities. "The inhabitants of Samaria shall be in terror for the calves." Instead of turning to their gods for deliverance in their danger, they were in terror lest the gods might be carried away. There is something even ludicrous in the picture the prophet here paints, yet it is so true that it has its startling lesson for us. Anything that can be carried away into captivity is not fit to be a god to an immortal soul. Israel's calf was to be carried to Assyria as a present to the king. Think of one's god being given as a present to one's enemy.

Toward the close of the chapter comes a call to repentance. God yearns over His apostate people with all tenderness. He pleads with them to do what is right. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Jehovah, till He come and rain righteousness upon you." It is never too late to repent. At least God never shuts the door this side of the grave. Here amid the predictions of ruin and sorrow the prophet breaks off to call the people to repentance and paints for them a vision of hope. Even yet God would have mercy upon them if they would but return to Him. But the returning must be sincere and real. They must sow righteousness if they would reap mercy. Mercy never can come to the sinner until he comes to God in the way of holiness. The fallow ground must be broken up before there can be any harvest. The hard heart must be broken with penitence to receive the good seed of the kingdom. "It is time to seek Jehovah." Surely it is.

The prophet reminds them of what their sin had brought upon them. "Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies; for thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," is as sure and fixed a law of the spiritual as of the natural kingdom. Those who sow righteousness shall reap mercy. Then it is just as true that they who

sow wickedness shall reap iniquity, and that they who sow lies shall reap a harvest of lies. No man need hope to live in sin, doing wrong things, and then have the reward of the good man, peace, joy, and blessing. No one need hope to be untruthful, false, faithless, and then have a name of honor, to be trusted and believed by others. One who forms the habit of lying must expect to be regarded as a liar in the community where he lives. We get about what we deserve of our fellow-men, as a rule, in the way of reputation. Especially in God's distributions we may be sure that sooner or later as we sow we shall reap.

The prophet warned the people of Israel of the doom that was coming upon them if they went on in their evil way. "Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed to pieces with her children. So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: at daybreak shall the king of Israel be utterly cut off." Thus the coming of the calamity was foretold. Judgment was sure. Judgment is sure likewise for every one who is living in sin. It may be delayed, for God is very merciful and waits to be gracious. But it will surely come.

CHAPTER XLIV

ISRAEL OFTEN REPROVED

Read Amos IV., 4-13

Amos probably was a Judean. He was a small farmer and shepherd. He cultivated a few sycamore trees whose fruit was lightly esteemed. He owned a little flock of sheep, sheep of a peculiar breed, ugly and short-footed, but which yielded an excellent kind of wool. He pastured his sheep in the wilderness of Judea.

Bethel, the ecclesiastical capital of the Northern Kingdom, was the principal scene of his preaching. "Come to Beth-el, and transgress," cried the prophet. Bethel was their place of worship, but every time they came there they sinned because their worship was sin. Instead of bowing before the true God and adoring Him, they bowed before idols and gave them the honor which belonged to God only. The more devout they were, therefore, the more they dishonored the Lord. Their great zeal, as shown in their sacrifices and tithes and free-will offerings, only multiplied their sin and heaped up sorer judgment against them. Their religion was all a farce, and the more there

was of it the more of an abomination it was unto God. God cannot be pleased with mere forms of worship and with ceremonials. The more we multiply these the more do we grieve Him if our heart be not in them. We may say we have no idols now in our temples; but are we sure of this? Do we truly worship God in our church services? When we sing the hymns, are our hearts fixed upon God? When we pray, are we really talking to God? When we confess sins, is the confession sincere? When we sit in God's house, are we truly in God's presence, breathing out our heart's love and worship to Him? If not, what or whom are we adoring, praising, worshiping? Forms empty of God must have some idol at the heart of them.

The prophet told them very plainly what was in their hearts. "This pleaseth you." You love this. You love to make a great display in your sacrifices. You love to proclaim the largeness of your gifts to the cause of your religion. This display of piety is just to your taste. You like to cover up your sins with forms of worship, appearing as saints before the world, though in secret cherishing and practicing all manner of wickedness. This is God's own picture of these ancient people. We need to look honestly at it to see if it is our picture. God looks at the heart. The things we like show what kind of persons we really are. No external appearances are of any value unless they be genuine expressions of what

is in the heart. Pirate ships carry reputable flags to cover their dishonorable character. Hypocrisy often puts at its masthead the colors of devout saintliness. But God cannot be deceived.

Some one told of past sorrows, sorrows which were sent with blessing, messengers bringing good in their hands, but which were rejected, turned away, resented as enemies, though they came as friends. When we sin against God He sends penalties—suffering always follows sin—but these penalties come to us really as friends, to save us from sinning again. God had sent penalties to the people of Israel, but they had not minded them. “And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.” The Lord had not let them alone in their sins. ‘He had not merely allowed them to go on in their evil ways without any effort to save them. In these verses we learn of judgment after judgment which God says He sent upon His people. First there was “cleanness of teeth”—famine, want of bread. Next He had withholden rain from their land. To make it yet more clear to them that the hand of God was in this withholding, He had caused it to rain in one place and not in another, so that while on one piece of ground everything was green and fresh, on another piece near by all life was withered and dead. Then He had sent blasting and mildew, hot winds and blight, to destroy what the drought had left.

After these He had sent palmer-worms to eat up the vineyards and gardens which were watered by artificial means and thus escaped the previous judgments. Having thus destroyed their gardens and crops and vineyards, He had then sent a plague upon the people themselves, sweeping away many of them. War had followed pestilence, and their young men had been slain. After all these terrible things earthquake had come, overthrowing and destroying many.

There are lessons here which we must not lose. We must not misinterpret God. No doubt some of these people, when pursued by trouble, said that God was hard and cruel and unkind, to send so many losses and sufferings upon them. So it seemed. But here we are permitted to look into God's heart and see a motive of love in all these sore troubles which He sent upon His people. They had gone far away from Him, and He would bring them back again. One affliction failed, and then He sent another and another and another. These sore troubles were all God's angels of love sent to try to save God's children. We ought to fix this lesson in our hearts, for some time we may need its light. One came to a pastor with sore complainings against God. He had been most unkind, even cruel, he said. The pastor listened to a recital of a long series of bitter experiences—disappointments, sufferings, hardships. It certainly seemed that if these were God's doings they were strange expressions of love. But

the pastor questioned a little further, as gently as he could, and he learned that his friend had not been living near God during the time of these troubles, and had not been brought nearer to Him through the things which had seemed so hard—had indeed been drifting farther away all the while, out into the wintry cold of unbelief and rebelliousness.

We may not interpret providences, saying that the history of this friend was the same as that of these ancient people, whom God had chastened to save, but who only went farther away from Him. Yet there is no doubt that the design of God in all His severe dealings with His children is the same—to bring back those who have wandered or to bring still nearer those who are already near to Him. It is always love, never anger, that comes in the messengers of divine chastening.

“Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” After each recital of judgment comes this sad refrain. God had sent famine to bring them back. “Yet have ye not returned unto Me.” He had withholden rain. “Yet have ye not returned unto Me.” He had smitten their grain with blasting and mildew, and the palmer-worm had eaten up their vineyards and gardens. “Yet have ye not returned unto Me.” He had sent pestilence and war, with terrible loss and devastation. “Yet have ye not returned unto Me.” Earthquakes had caused terror over the land, laying much of

it in ruin. "Yet have ye not returned unto Me." This recurring refrain is infinitely pathetic. It sounds like the sob of God's breaking heart. It tells of wonderful love in Him for His people in spite of all their sin, of love that forbears and waits and pleads and suffers on, never wearying in its efforts to save. It tells, too, of love's sorrow when the erring do not return. It speaks of divine disappointment when even sore judgments fail to bring back the sinning children. It is a wonderful revealing of the heart of God. No one who catches its meaning can ever again say that God is cruel or unkind in sending troubles upon His people. He wants to save them, not to hurt or destroy them. We learn, too, what we should always do when any chastening falls upon us; we should get nearer to God. No matter how holy our lives may be, there is yet a holier holiness, a nearer nearness, attainable. If we are conscious of specific sins we should put them away. We disappoint and grieve God when in any chastening we do not return unto Him.

God reminds the people of how mercifully He had dealt with them. "Ye were as a brand plucked out of the burning." This is a striking figure. In the overthrow, probably by an earthquake, some seem to have perished. Those who escaped were almost destroyed, coming out of the overthrow injured, barely saved. They were like a brand, a piece of wood, which has passed through the fire, and has been plucked out, not

burned up altogether, but scorched and blackened, partly burned, bearing the marks of the fire upon it. The picture is very suggestive. Sin is a fire. Wherever it touches it burns, scorches, wastes, consumes the beauty. Secret sin is like hidden, smouldering fire, which, unseen, yet eats away the life's substance and defaces the divine image that is on it.

What fire does to the trees when it sweeps through the forests, blackening them, destroying their leaves and all their greenness, sin does to the lives about which its flames flow. We all know lives, once lovely, now scorched and blackened by sin. If sin is like a fire, human lives are like trees which the fire consumes. Every one of us has been hurt by this fire. Unless plucked out by some hand of love our lives shall be utterly destroyed by the flames of sin which roll over all this world. But the brand may be saved.

A gardener saw one day in a pile of burning rubbish a piece of root that was blackened and scorched, partly charred. But he plucked it out and, taking it away, he planted it, and it grew. It proved to be the root of a valuable species of grapevine, and in a few years the vine springing from it covered a large arbor and in the autumn days hung full of rich purple clusters. Saved lives are brands plucked from the burning. Thousands of them shine now in blessedness, redeemed from destruction, clothed in beauty, covered with the fruits of righteousness and holiness.

CHAPTER XLV,

JONAH SENT TO NINEVEH

Read Jonah I., 1-4; III., 1-10

It was not by any means an easy task that was given to Jonah,—his mission to Nineveh. There was no Board of Missions behind him with ample funds. There were no comfortable missionary quarters in Nineveh to receive him. There were no fine railroads to carry him there. The journey was long, the duty was hard and full of danger. It is quite easy to sit in our pleasant rooms and criticise the prophet; but—would you have wanted to go if you had been in his place?

Jonah suddenly conceived a strong desire to go to Tarshish instead of to Nineveh. Distinctly it is said he did it to flee from the presence of Jehovah. Perhaps Tarshish needed a preacher too, but that was not where the Lord wanted Jonah to go at that time. It is never a question of where we want or do not want to go, but of where God wants us to go. A reason for Jonah's reluctance comes out later. He didn't believe God would destroy Nineveh; that is, he believed the Ninevites would repent and God would spare

them. The fact is, he did n't want these heathen people to be saved. He wanted God to destroy them. He was an Israelite with strong prejudices, and on principle did n't believe in foreign missions. He considered the heathen fit only to be destroyed, certainly not fit to be saved in the same company with him. We will call this a very unworthy feeling for a prophet to have—and surely it was. But does no good, clean, respectable, well-to-do modern Christian ever have a like feeling toward bad, dirty, degraded, good-for-nothing sinners? Just think out the answer, and don't look too far away from home for your facts.

“He found a ship going to Tarshish; and so he paid the fare.” He did n't want to go to Nineveh, so he thought he would go on a trip in another direction. It is a very sad piece of history. Was there never a young minister, just through the seminary, whom God wanted to go to some heathen country, but who did n't want to go, and made excuse to go somewhere else in place? Was there never a minister whom God called to some lowly, needy field among the poor or the outcast, but who had a “providential” call about the same time to a rich or a fashionable Church, which he took instead? Are there no good Christian men and women—not prophets or ministers—who have had “calls” to duties which were hard and repulsive, perhaps attended with danger or requiring sacrifice, which they did not accept—running off toward Tarshish instead? It is well enough to

look honestly at Jonah's sin, but we must not exhaust our vision on him. It is no doubt a great deal easier to be honest with other people's sins than with our own, but it is with our own that we have the chief business. None of us shall ever be punished for Jonah's sins, but for our own we shall be, unless we repent of them. The fact is there is a great deal more running away from distasteful duty than we dream of, and the condemnation strikes close home with many of us. Do we never shirk a task that we know in our soul we ought to perform? Do we never make errands for ourselves as excuses for not doing errands that God has assigned to us? Well, that was what Jonah did—he made believe that business called him to Spain, to get clear of going to Nineveh.

“The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time.” He had failed dishonorably the first time, but God gave him a second chance to do his work. This shows the divine patience with us. Strict justice would have left Jonah at the bottom of the sea or in the maw of the fish; but grace preserved his life and restored him to begin again. He had now gone through a discipline which left him submissive and ready to obey. This is the way God often deals with people in our own days. When they disobey Him He does not cast them off, but puts them under some discipline, sometimes sore and painful, to teach them obedience, and then tries them again. Many of

us have to be whipped to duty; but God is very patient with us. Most of us owe all we are to His disciplines. By these even our sins and falls become blessings to us. We should be very thankful to God, too, for these second chances that He gives us when we have failed to improve the first chance. Very few people make of their lives what God first wanted them to make. Then He sets them another lesson, that they may try again. Perhaps the second is not so beautiful or so noble as the first; still it is good, and if we are diligent and faithful we can find blessing in it and make something noble even yet of our life. Most of us have to be sent more than once on our errands for God. Happy are we if we go even at the second bidding, although it is far better that we go at the first.

The command to Jonah was very definite. "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." God knows just how He wants His work done. One of the first things in a servant is that he shall do precisely what his master bids him to do. We are too apt to be careless about exactness in obedience. A good many children err at this point in obeying their parents. They obey them perhaps, but they put very liberal construction upon their commands, and so their obedience is very inexact. They should learn the duty of precise obedience. In all business matters there is need for the same lesson. Railroad trains have been wrecked, with terrible loss of life, because a

telegraph operator or some other employé obeyed his order inexactly. Wherever we are employed we should train ourselves to do our work just as we are bidden to do it. One who would tell others how to be saved must preach just the preaching God bids His servants preach. Bad advice has wrecked destinies. Wrong teaching of spiritual truth has wrecked souls and souls' hopes. We are not to put our own construction on God's Word and give that to the people. We are not to talk carelessly about the divine thoughts and teachings. We are reverently and faithfully to preach the preaching that the Lord bids us to preach, without abatement, without addition, without change.

Jonah had learned his lesson and learned it well. This time he arose and went to Nineveh. We are not told where he was after his deliverance, but no doubt he had a quiet time for thought and repenting. He would go over the story of his willfulness and disobedience in the matter of going to Nineveh, and would be ashamed of his conduct. Thus he learned humility and was ready now to do as God might command him. Indeed, he would become eager for another opportunity to do the work which he had first refused to do. There is a story of a regiment of soldiers which in some war had dishonored itself in some way on a certain battlefield. In a later war the same regiment was again in the service, and at the first opportunity they displayed most heroic courage,

thus "burning out the shame" of the former field. So Jonah in his humility would long for another chance to go for God to Nineveh, that he might wipe out the dishonor of his former disobedience. When the command came a second time he would rejoice. So we see prompt obedience this time, no parleying, no quibbling, no running away.

He delivered his message. "He cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The doom was announced, and forty days' warning was given. God always gives time enough for repentance. He is loath to punish. He waits to be gracious. The Koran says that two angels guard every man on the earth, one watching on either side of him; and when at night he sleeps they fly up to heaven with a written report of all his words and actions during the day. Every good thing he has done is recorded at once and repeated ten times, lest some item may be lost or omitted from the account. But when they come to a sinful thing, the angel on the right says to the other, "Forbear to record that for seven hours; peradventure, as he awakes and thinks in his quiet hours, he may be sorry for it and repent and pray and obtain forgiveness." This truthfully represents the heart of God and His dealing with sinners. He is slow to punish and quick to forgive. "Yet forty days." Still it must be noticed that the time for mercy is limited.

The message was heard. "The people of Nineveh believed God." They believed what God said

through His prophet about their sins and about the destruction that was swiftly coming upon their city therefor. This is a kind of faith that is needed everywhere just now. God speaks very plainly in His word about the penalties and consequences of sin, but there are many who do not believe God. They sneer at the thought of judgment or eternal punishment.

The king and people entered heartily into the movement. "They proclaimed a fast." They called upon the people of the city to turn every one from his evil way. Their repentance was genuine so far as it went. They did not merely put on garments of sackcloth and mourning; they turned their faces to God and gave up their evil deeds. They humbled themselves; they confessed their sins; they cleansed their hands of the wickedness they had been committing; they cried to God, supplicating His mercy. It is along the same path that every one must walk who would find forgiveness and the turning away of God's wrath. Sins must be given up and turned away from. Bible mercy is wonderfully full and blessed, but Bible repentance is also deep and thorough.

"Who knoweth whether God will not . . . turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" The repentance of Nineveh was from fear and to escape the judgment pronounced upon them. That was as far as they could go—a mere dim hope that God might turn away from His anger if they would turn away from their sins. That

was all the gospel they had. No promise of mercy had been made to them on any condition, so far as we are told. They were not assured that if they repented the doom would be averted; they repented on the strength of the dim hope of mercy which their own hearts suggested. It is different with us. The same message which tells us of our sins, and the penalty which is sure to be visited upon them, points us also to the cross and proclaims eternal salvation and life to every one who will repent and believe on Christ. We are not driven to any such mere "perhaps" when we see our sins and desire to be saved. We know that if we confess our sins God will forgive them, that if we seek the Lord we shall be saved.

Mercy was revealed at once. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way." God is always watching the earth, every corner of it where a sinful soul is, and wherever there is true penitence He sees it. There is no danger that any one ever shall repent and weep over sin, and God not know it. There is joy in the presence of the angels when even one sinner repenteth. The most beautiful and precious thing on this earth in God's sight is the penitential tear. There is an illustration of this in "Paradise and Peri," in Lalla Rookh. The shut gate would open when the most precious thing on earth was brought by any banished spirit. It opened at last when a tear of penitence was brought.

CHAPTER XLVI

JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST

Read Zechariah III., 1-10

ZECHARIAH was a contemporary of Haggai. His prophetic career seems to have been brief. His mission was that of an encourager. The people in trying to rebuild Jerusalem had become greatly discouraged. A deep depression had settled on them. Zechariah sought to kindle hope in their hearts and to induce them to undertake the work of building. In visions which are interpreted by the angel the prophet gives his message.

Our passage gives one of the visions. "He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary." This is a strange picture—the high priest in his place before God, and Satan standing beside him. We understand at once that Satan is not there for any friendly purpose. He is never anywhere for a friendly purpose in behalf of a good man or for the good of the world. No matter in what guise Satan appears or what his profession may be, his real object is always sinister and wicked.

Probably if we could see spirits with these eyes of ours we should many times behold pictures like this,—good people in good places with good intent, and Satan standing at their right hand. When we go to church Satan no doubt keeps near us or has some of his messengers near us, not because he enjoys going to church, nor because he likes to be with us, but because he has some evil design on us. He is always our adversary, whatever he may profess to be,—never our friend. Life is full of insidious dangers. Ofttimes when we think we are safest we are in the greatest peril. Many of our gravest dangers are unsuspected because they hide in the sunshine of our sweetest blessings. Prosperity has its perils, which are worse in many cases than what we dread so in adversity or misfortune. Disease is more apt to lurk in a soft, dreamy atmosphere, balmy and pleasant, than in the sharp, chill, wintry air of January. More demons hide in luxurious conditions than in circumstances of hardship and honest poverty. So it is in spiritual things. Living in a church would not keep the devil away from one's ear. The minister in his pulpit or at the communion table is not sheltered from the assaults of Satan, the adversary. When the priest and the prophet stand before God, Satan always stands beside them.

While Satan was standing beside Joshua, so was the angel of Jehovah. That counteracted the danger. Satan could not harm the good priest

while the Lord was taking care of him. Satan will no doubt follow us wherever we go, even intruding himself into the holiest places. But if we are where duty calls us or leads us, we know that God is beside us as well as Satan, and that no harm can come to us so long as we trust in Him and are faithful and obedient. If in the picture Satan alone stood, unseen, beside God's priest, it would be full of alarm, for no mortal is a match for Satan. But while the Lord also is present there is a safe shelter into which the imperiled soul may flee. "God is our refuge . . . a very present help in trouble." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

The best way we can answer those who would harm us is to let God answer for us. "Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." The Lord is the friend of His people and will not stand by inactive when Satan is plotting against any one of them. He is the defender especially of the defenseless. This characteristic of the divine love is revealed in all parts of the Scriptures. God is the God of the weak. In the Mosaic laws definite provision was made for the widow and the orphan. Something was to be left for them when the harvests were gathered. The poor were put under special protection to shield them from the oppression of the rich and the strong. Every child of God is an object of peculiar divine care. The weakest of them all is as safe in God's keep-

ing, even amid the greatest dangers, as if already in heaven. In a great flood in one of the rivers of the West some men in a skiff saw an infant's cradle floating in the middle of the wide, turbulent river, and, rowing to it, found in it a little baby sleeping sweetly, in quiet peace, wrapped warm and dry in its blankets. No harm had come to the child in the wild torrent. So God holds His little ones in the midst of earth's wildest dangers. No harm can come to one of them while nestling in His bosom. The form of the rebuke here suggests that we may safely leave our defense in the Lord's hands when Satan assails us and when any one would do us harm.

It is probable that Joshua did not see his adversary standing beside him, and did not see the Lord nor hear His word of rebuke to Satan. This suggests that many a time when we are not aware of our danger the Lord has saved us from it by His own hand, delivering us from the hand of the adversary. The only true safety for us is in trusting in God, for oftentimes we do not know when danger is near, and if we have not God to care for us we must perish. True faith is simply doing our duty and letting Christ look after the keeping of our life.

“Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” A “brand” is a piece of wood, charred, almost burned up, but then snatched out of the fire. Though so nearly destroyed, it yet has wood in it and may be capable of noble uses. A “brand

plucked out of the fire” may seem hopeless, yet it may have in it the possibilities of great usefulness and beauty. This “remnant” of returned Jews was only a brand plucked from the fire of captivity, but it was not dead, and under God’s gentle culture it would become a nation and be great and strong. We know well what did become of this brand—the Messiah, and at length Christianity. We ought never to despise nor despair of any life that has immortality in it.

The vision was suggestive. “Take the filthy garments from off him.” This was an acted parable. We may read a good deal of gospel teaching into it, and yet not wrest the Scripture. The filthy garments were a true picture of Joshua’s moral condition in the eyes of the Lord God. The “adversary” meant to prove that the high priest was not a holy man. The Lord did not question this charge. But He commanded those who stood by to take off those filthy garments, saying then to Joshua, “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel.” So the change of raiment meant more than just that. It was a picture of what the redemption of Christ does for all those who trust Him as Saviour. It finds them clad in filthy garments. Satan stands by and accuses them. “They are not good,” he says; “not worthy of heaven or everlasting life. Look at their sins.” Very true in one sense. None are holy, none are worthy of heaven. But

Jesus died for sinners. He made an atonement for sin. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And He comes and strips off the filthy garments of the flesh, and clothes those who believe on Him in the beautiful raiment of righteousness. He says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel."

The parable is continued: "So they set a clean mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments." They put upon him the priestly dress. The mitre had a gold plate across the forehead, with the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord." This indicated the sacred character of him who wore it—set apart for God. It also signified that he on whose brow the words were shining was a forgiven man—unworthy in himself, but cleansed and accepted. The garments were also priestly garments, beautiful and clean. Christ's redeemed ones are a "kingdom of priests." When we are received by Him we are clad in mitre and bright apparel. We are to be holy. Every Christian life should be a transfigured life. Forgiveness means cleansing. The putting away of sins means not merely acquittal, the remission of penalty. It is the putting away of sin itself out of the life. This wonderful result is accomplished by the entrance into the heart of the Holy Spirit, who, making His dwelling place there, transforms the whole being.

A promise of honor and power is given: "If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep

My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I will give thee a place of access among these that stand by." The way to rise to higher places is to be faithful in the humbler places in which our lot is cast. All promotion depends upon faithfulness. Unless we do well the smaller things which God gives us to do He will not entrust greater things to us. The man who was faithful and diligent in the use of his two talents saw the two become four and found himself put in trust also with new responsibilities. The promise here that if this good priest would walk in God's ways and keep His charge, he should have influence and power in God's house and should stand among angels. This latter is a remarkable promise. It seems to mean that even on the earth those who are faithful in holy things shall have fellowship with angels. They may not be conscious of the companionship amid which they stand, but really they are working alongside spiritual beings continually while they wait upon God. The promise holds true also of the heavenly life. Those who serve God faithfully in holy things in this world will be received into the goodly fellowship of angels in the other world. Just now, however, we are specially concerned with the lesson that faithfulness in the common duties of the passing days is the one thing of life with us. We need not seek promotion, nor think of honor or reward; we should desire and strive only to be true and loyal to God and to the duty He gives.

Doing this, He will lead us step by step into the larger service or greater usefulness as He may find us ready.

The words take a prophetic turn. "I will bring forth my servant the Branch." Just now the Jewish nation was like the mere stump of a tree which had been cut down. There was no beauty and but little sign of life. The glory of David's days had failed. The nation was now in captivity. A few of the people had returned to their own old land, and there was a feeble effort making to renew the old national and religious life. But all this seemed very small and unpromising. It did not appear to human eyes that the ancient glory could ever be seen again. Yet here is a promise that out of this mere stump should come a "Branch," a shoot, which should grow into great luxuriousness of life, far surpassing the splendor of the original tree which once had been so noble and so fruitful. We know how this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who came of this lowly stock and whose life and glory now fill earth and heaven.

Prosperity should follow: "In that day . . . shall ye invite every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig-tree." This is a picture of peace—under the vine and under the fig-tree. It suggests quiet and security, joy and gladness. The gospel brings peace.

CHAPTER XLVII

POWER THROUGH THE SPIRIT

Read Zechariah IV., 1-14

THE visions of Zechariah all have a meaning. This one is of a candlestick supplied by olive trees. "The angel that talked with me came again, and waked me." It is a good thing to have any one wake us up. We ought always to be awake. We will miss a great deal if we are not. It is a good thing to be wakened up by an angel. An angel's touch is soft, gentle, and inspiring. It does not rouse us roughly and rudely. It was an angel that touched Peter and awoke him when he lay sleeping in the prison, between the guards, expecting to be called to execution in the morning. The angels awake us to joy, to gladness, to beauty, not to alarms, to sorrow, to pain, to anxiety.

This is a book of visions. We are not prophets, and God does not reveal His will to us as He did to Zechariah. But every earnest soul has visions, glimpses of better things, of nobler life. Whenever we ponder deeply some word of God there opens out in it a vision of spiritual beauty. Every time we read the biography of a noble life

we have a vision which should inspire us to longings for like nobleness. In good people we have visions of qualities of character, and acts of self-denying love, which are like visions. We shall be always seeing visions if we live as we may. Heaven lies about us always, close to us; we are on its borders, and we see the rarest beauty at every turn if we will. Really it is a matter of eyes—the beauty is always there, if only we have eyes to see.

“What seest thou?” asked the angel. We should learn to see things. The world is full of lovely objects which only a few people really see. There are those who will walk through gardens and over fields filled with flowers and plants, and yet never see any beautiful thing that makes appeal to them, never have their souls stirred. There are those who walk under the starry skies every night through the years and are never moved to any sense of wonder or any feeling of admiration, much less of adoration. Moses saw God in the burning bush and took off his shoes. Many people would only have seen a common bush. We should train ourselves to see nature in all its beauty of form and color, the highest beauty that is everywhere in God’s works.

When the angel waked the prophet he looked and at once saw something which caught his attention. “I have seen, and, behold, a candlestick all of gold.” Every Christian should be a light-bearer. God wants us to shine. The world is

dark, and we are to pour light into its darkness. There are many ways to do this. The first always is in our own life. Our character must shine. That means, to put it very simply, that we must be good. A pure, good, loving heart will make the light shine. Nothing but love shines. We are, therefore, to be obedient, trustful, and reverent toward God, and gentle, unselfish, kind, thoughtful, patient, and helpful toward others. The candle wastes, burns itself up, in shining. We must burn to shine. It costs to be unselfish, patient, thoughtful, and useful. We must be forgiving; we must bear injuries; we must do good to unworthy people; we must deny ourselves and make personal sacrifices; we must be gentle and kind when others are rude to us.

As the prophet looked the vision became clear and distinct. "There are seven pipes to each of the lamps . . . and two olive-trees by it." The meaning is that the lamps which burned brightly were supplied with oil without the help of human hand from the live olive trees through the golden pipes. The lamps themselves would not give light—they must have oil in them. They must also be continually refilled, so that they will continue to shine. Our lives are only empty lamps which must be supplied with oil from Christ's own fullness. That is, we must abide in Christ, so as to receive of His life continually. We can shine only when the oil of divine love and grace is in us.

The prophet wished to know the meaning of

the vision he saw. "What are these, my lord?" He was of an eager, inquiring mind. He was not content to let anything pass which he did not understand. This is a good rule for all of us. Some people get tired answering children's questions. They are annoyed by their desire to know what things are for. But children ought to ask questions. The world is all new to them. They have a right to learn what things are and why they are. We ought to encourage a child's inquisitiveness and take delight in telling it every new thing we can. Moreover, we should be children ourselves, all through our life, in this—the desire to know the meaning of every new thing we come upon.

The answer the angel gave the prophet contained the whole wonderful meaning of the vision. "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts." If the completion of the temple had depended on human might or power it never would have been finished. The people were few, poor, and weak, the work was great, and enemies were on every side. The temple never could have risen from amid the old ruins if it had depended on the human might that was in the field. But it did not. God's Spirit was in the work, and there is no power in the universe that can withstand God or successfully resist Him. He could do the work with small means or with

great. He could not be hindered by opposition of enemies, for He is omnipotent.

It is still true in God's world that it is not by might nor by power, but by the Divine Spirit, that things are done. God does not need human strength to work with Him; He would rather work with human weakness. When He sends us out to do anything for Him He will always provide the means and open the way, that we may not fail, if only we trust Him. God uses little things to accomplish His great purposes. At this time the people were discouraged. It seemed that their work of building the temple could not go on. Human power was faint. The vision was a revelation of God working with His almighty power to accomplish the work. The candlesticks drew the oil from the olive trees. Human agency was unnecessary. "Not by might, nor by power, . . . saith Jehovah of hosts."

Enemies were boasting, but their power would be as nothing before the strength of God. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Zerubbabel was God's chosen builder, and before Him all hindrances and obstacles would melt away. Zechariah was an encourager, and he was giving assurance of success in spite of all opposition. All mountains of difficulty which stand in the way of God's order shall be leveled down by faith's advance. When we go anywhere for God it is as if God Himself went.

CHAPTER XLVIII

LESSONS IN GIVING

Malachi I., 6-11; III., 8-12

THE prophet reproves the people for their lack of loyalty and faithfulness to Jehovah. He had treated them as a father, but they had not given Him a father's love and honor. "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is Mine honor? and if I am a master, where is My fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My name." Everywhere dishonor to parents is branded as a grievous sin. One who treats a parent unkindly or with neglect may have many virtues and do many things well, but the one sin dims and blots all. One of the papers tells of a woman at an old man's coffin. She kissed him and wept over him. She told the people how good he was. He was old and poor, and she was young and rich. She had ten rooms, but no room for her father. Yet he made room for her when he had only two. He was not educated. She was, and at his expense. He had fed and clothed and sent her to seminary and college until she grew refined and popular and married a rich man. Now she kissed him and cried by his coffin and buried him

handsomely. But everybody said this did not make up for her want of kindness in the years of his old age.

God is our Father. This revelation was made in all its fullness by Jesus Christ. We all love to say that He is our Father, and to talk of His wonderful goodness. Yes, but that is not all the honor we ought to give to such a Father. We ought to hallow His name, to advance His kingdom, and do His will. Does not God many times say to us, "If I am a father, where is Mine honor?"

The people presumed to contend with God, claiming that they had been true to Him. "Wherein have we despised Thy name?" Then we have Jehovah's answer, "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar." Still they deny to God that they have in any way dishonored His name or His service. "And ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee?" The answer is, "In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is contemptible."

We may as well look at our own conduct while we are hearing God's charges against His ancient children. That is true Bible reading which allows the words to search our own heart and life. We should never offer to God that which we would not use ourselves. Are not too many of our self-denials only the giving up of things which we do not care for? Do we not too often keep the best for ourselves and then let God have what we do not wish?

The priests had been offering on the altar of Jehovah sacrifices which were not worthy of His holy name. "And when ye offer the blind for sacrifice, it is no evil! and when ye offer the lame and sick, it is no evil! Present it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee? or will he accept thy person? saith Jehovah of hosts." The Jewish law required that every sacrifice offered unto God must be without blemish. No lame, blind, or diseased animal would be accepted. It was an insult to God to bring to His altar anything that was maimed, blemished, or worthless. Yet the people had been taking the best of everything for themselves, and then bringing the refuse, blind and lame animals, and such offerings to God. "Suppose you treat your governor thus," asked the Lord, "what would he think? Would he be pleased?"

Well, how is it again with ourselves? The object in putting this verse in the Bible was not to get us to condemn the people who lived twenty-three hundred years ago; it was to make us think whether we are doing this mean thing ourselves. Do we give God the best of all we have, our best love, our best gifts, our best service? Or do we take the best of all for ourselves, and then give God the blind, the lame? How many people in the church when the collection plate is passed, pick out the smallest bit of money, or a soiled or torn bill, or a coin with a hole in it, to put on the plate? We give our strength to our own work

or business, and then have only our weariness to bring to God. We do our first work for ourselves, and then have only things which are of no value for our King. What kind of service are we giving to our glorious Lord?

The Lord's answer to the arrogant defense of the priests is startling. "Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on Mine altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." People sometimes ask, with a sneer: "Is there any one to hear you when you pray? Is there any to accept the worship you bring?" The Lord says plainly here that there was no one to accept what these ancient worshipers brought. It is said frequently in the Bible, referring to offerings, that God smelled a sweet savor. That is, sincere worship is like fragrance to God. An old Jewish fancy is that an angel stands in heaven to receive the prayers of earth, and that they turn to roses in his hands. But God assures these ancient worshipers that He has no pleasure in them and will not receive the offerings they bring. This is because they bring Him such unfit and unworthy sacrifices.

What do we bring to God when we go through the forms of prayer, when we sing the sacred words of our hymn, when we make our offerings, when we have our "consecration meetings," when we sit down at the Lord's table? If there be only

words, words, words in all our acts of worship,—no heart, no love, no real presenting of ourselves to God, no laying of our best on the altar,—God has no pleasure in us and will not accept our offerings at our hand. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

In the third chapter the prophet prophesies the coming of the Messenger of the covenant and the beginning of His sifting work. The people were suffering from divine judgments. The reason for these was that they had not been faithful to God. They are asked to return, and they ask, “Wherein shall we return?” The Lord charged them with having robbed Him. “Wherein have we robbed Thee?” and the answer is, “In tithes and offerings.” It seems incredible that any one should rob God. It is terrible enough that one man should ever rob another man; and how can any one rob God? Yet the Lord said these ancient people of His had been robbing Him. How? They had not broken into heaven and stolen the gold, silver, and precious stones from the walls and streets. They had robbed God by keeping back from Him the gifts they ought to have brought to Him. They had not paid their tithes, they had not brought the required offering. Not paying what we owe is robbery.

Do we never rob God? Of course, we do not break open church boxes and steal money that has been given to God. But do we never fail to

give to God what belongs to Him? Think of all the promises we make to God in our hymns and prayers. Do we keep them all? We promise to obey Christ and serve Him always, cheerfully, promptly, lovingly. Do we do it? We promise to love our fellow-men and to be kind, patient, and helpful to all. Then we go among men with jealousy, envy, bitter feelings, keeping back the love and the ministry of love.

Perhaps we are robbing God even in the matter of money. Are we paying all the tithes, all we owe to God? Some one tells of a man who, speaking of the freeness of the gospel, said he had been a Christian for twenty years, and it had not cost him a penny. There are too many people whose religion does not cost them half enough. They rob God, keeping out of His treasury what is His and spending it on themselves.

Robbing God brings a curse. An eagle stole a piece of lamb off the temple altar and flew with it to her nest on the crag. But a coal clung to the meat and set fire to the nest and consumed it. So a curse clings to everything stolen from God or withheld from Him, and brings its penalty.