Notes on 1 Samuel

William Kelly

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1 Samuel

Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Earlier Historical Books of the Old Testament.

1 Samuel 1-8.

The first Book of Samuel (or of Kings as with some) brings before us that great change for which the Book of Ruth was a preparation, and in order to which the Spirit of God closed it with the generations until they come down to David. It is sufficiently plain to the simplest reader that Saul only came in by the way; for, in fact, the people's wish for such an one was a dishonour to God, although he might be used providentially, as God is wont to do for His own glory. But we find here, as everywhere else, that God, whilst He knows the end from the beginning, goes onward with astonishing patience and consideration of all things and persons; for He who is mighty despises not any, but acts according to His holy nature, and yet is slow to wrath. Nevertheless, as being the only wise God who has His own purposes of glory before Him, He brings in on every great occasion a distinct promotion of it, negatively or positively; but this too by slow degrees, marking the immensity of the change that we may take heed to what He is doing. This seems to be a principle throughout scripture. We must remember that it is not only what God does but the display of Himself, which always contributes — yea, insures — blessing to the soul. There is the fruit not merely of His power, but of His will, and His will is ever good and holy and acceptable. And if we only heed what He marks for our instruction — what our attention is drawn to, not only in the result, but on the road that

leads to that result — we shall not find ourselves without the blessing of the Lord.

There was a distinct and great change then in progress, and, as we have seen, a suitable and great preparation for it, the Book of Ruth as a whole being the preface to those of Samuel; but the first Book of Samuel itself only slowly opens to us that which was in the mind of God to introduce. Hitherto the people, as such, were the object of divine dealings. Nor is it that His people ever ceased to be an object to Him; but in the unfolding of His ways He was now about to establish a principle which should in due time prove the turning-point of stable blessing. And what is particularly to be remarked is this: it is the turning-point of your blessing just as much as of that which awaits the Jewish people, of all nations, and of the universe. Although it be a principle quite new in its present application, it is really the oldest of all. At first sight it might seem difficult to bring all these truths into a small compass or focus of light, if I may say so; but this is what God does. Need I say where that concentrating point of all blessing is to be found? Is it not in one single name — the name of Jesus? And who can adequately count up what varied blessings God has stored up in that one person — what infinite fulness of wisdom and of goodness? I shall endeavour to show how this applies to the present subject.

In the past we have seen the people of Israel, and in the midst of them one person more particularly who was the sign of the blessing for the people, and the means of maintaining their relationship with God. This was the priest. We are familiar with the shadow of the great high priest. But the time was now come for God to bring in another and a yet grander principle; but this, as is

always the case in this world, is invariably brought in by the failure of man, every successive step of it only manifesting God the more. The Book of Ruth prepared the way for this. The genealogy there had nothing to do with the priest; yet it was not by any man known distinctly (though it might have perhaps been gathered by an eye exercised in the things of God and versed in the prophetic word) that something greater than the priest was at hand. But I doubt much whether this had been actually understood by any until it became a fact. Nevertheless God had it from the very beginning before Him, as He later made it known in His word; and it is important for us to take notice of this. For we must remember that what happened to them is written for us — not written for them merely, but for us specially; and we can see from the very beginning that God had something more than priesthood in view for His people. Why otherwise did He particularly mention the tribe of Judah, of which nothing was spoken concerning priesthood? None the less was Judah to have a place of honour, but a singular one. So, if Christ takes up the function of heavenly priest, He for other reasons did not belong to the house of Aaron nor to the tribe of Levi. It pleased God that He should be born of Judah, and of the family of David, as all know, the true Son of David in Solomon’s line. Therefore was the genealogy given at the close of the preceding book; but in the beginning of Samuel we have not the direct preparation for the Christ, nor the family noticed of which He was to be born in due time, but rather indirect and moral circumstances that would make it necessary if God was to bring in glory and man to be truly blest.

Thus 1 Samuel presents a scene of transition. Here we have not a man of Judah, but first of all one who clearly belonged to a Levitical family. The interest however is on one of his two wives, childless to her great sorrow. What she was made to taste was that which the people of God should have known; if they felt not, she enters into the distressful condition in which they lay. The wife who had children knew little what it was to have sorrow. But Hannah whose heart was towards the Lord was the especial object not merely of deep affection, but of one too in which there was a divine element; and without this be assured that, as far as concerns the people of God, all else will be found to fail sooner or later. Is it meant that there should not be a genuine affection? God forbid! But there was more here than any bond of natural feeling. It is plain that Hannah looked to the Lord. And her faith was put to the test; and during the trial her way and spirit could not but win respect, as well as sympathy, on her husband's part. But the best of all was that she knew the secret of the Lord before the answer appeared.

Now Jehovah will yet bring down His people to this very state. For the question here is of His ancient people Israel. And we must remember that, although we may apply every principle of truth, and thus as Christians gather profit from this book as from all others in scripture, the great subject of the kingdom as a fact awaits them under the Messiah. This is no reason why we should not understand and enjoy this part of the Bible, using its light for our path. For assuredly it is a truth we can not too much ponder, that, no matter who the subject may be, the church or the Christian is entitled to draw near in communion with Christ, and

enter into the depths of God's wisdom as it were more deeply than the very persons who are destined to be the object of these counsels of God. The reason is certain, and simple enough. Christ treats us as friends, and makes us share His plans and mind. It is not the fact of being ourselves those who receive a particular blessing that ensures the deepest understanding. The true means of entering into the revealed counsels of God is, first of all, that Christ fills the heart. Where He is the object, the eye is single, and the whole body full of light. The Holy Ghost takes of His things, and shows them to us. This ought to be the place of the members of His body. To this end among others was the Spirit given.

Hence therefore we ought to know what is reserved for the people of God by and by in the millennium, even better in very important respects than the people themselves. They will behold and enjoy the fruits of that glory which will shine on Zion; they will be in the actual possession of its privileges. But the heavenly sources of it ought to be plain and clear to our souls as between the Lord and us now. It would be better understood if we valued more our relation to Him as the Bride of the Lamb, the confidant of His secrets, no longer hidden but revealed, if I may use such an expression; and indeed we have the mind of Christ, so that it is only unbelief that robs us of its joy and brightness. But if so, the Lord keeps back nothing from us. It is a part of His great love towards us, that He tells us what concerns all the earth as the sphere of His kingdom, and especially Israel, His earthly centre, and not ourselves only. For this is not the best proof of love. It may be and is necessary in the first instance; but it is not so much the communication of what we want that bespeaks intimacy, as the opening of

the heart to another about that which does not concern himself. You tell a servant (perhaps a stranger, if you are kind) what concerns his own duty or advantage; but to tell cut to another everything which is nearest to your own heart supposes the utmost possible confidence in and intimacy with that other.

Now this is the place that grace has put the Christian in; and therefore we can readily understand, as it appears to me, why all this becomes of real profit to our souls, though not by what people call spiritualizing, which is often really to lose the definiteness of the truth by the vain and selfish desire of appropriating everything to ourselves. Be assured that this is not the way to receive the best blessing from scripture, but by seeing its connection with Christ. It is only so that we can be sure of the truth, and apart from the truth there can be no real grasp of divine grace. Nor does it really take away anything, but gives everything solidly, though not all about us. At the same time we see that what is special favour to the people, the earthly people, is surely also intended to bring before our souls His grace generally, as well as that which the Lord has specially for us. If I know, for instance, the faithfulness of the Lord's love to Israel, am I not entitled to be very sure of His love to me and you? Does the revelation to us of His name as Father take anything from the grace He is showing to ourselves?

Hannah then, conscious of her desolation as a wife without a child (which we know to a Jewess was an immense loss, and by her justly felt as such), was led by grace to cast her care on the Lord without judging Him hard towards her, and spreads her soul's desire and grief before Him. And so it was that this came out in the

presence of God where the high priest saw her. Others went to worship there with their thank-offerings; she drew near with her tears, and there too she felt none the less the provocation of her adversary. But the remarkable feature of the tale is, that God calls our attention to the fact that the high priest himself had not the communion of His mind. He that ought most of all to have entered into the greatest difficulties of the people of God was certainly in this case among the last to appreciate the case. I have no doubt that Peninnah, bad as she was, knew more of the secret of Hannah's grief than Eli; certainly even she did not think her a drunken woman as the high priest did. It was clear therefore that what God lets us see at the starting-point is the failure of him who up to this moment was outwardly the appointed means of communication both from God to the people, and from the people to God. At least such the priest was meant to be, and such he was officially. Here was the fact. Nor was this the only feature to be deplored in the priesthood then, as we shall find afterwards. But here it suffices to draw attention to the first patent fact — the sorrow of a righteous one in Israel — the absence of that which she might normally have looked for from the Lord, the lack of which He caused her to feel in order to spread it before Himself at the very moment when she was misjudged by him who above all in Israel ought to have pleaded for her, bearing up her cry as her intercessor before Jehovah. At length, convinced by her meek endurance of his reproach, Eli bids her go in peace, with the prayer that the God of Israel might grant her the petition she had asked of Him. In due time the answer came from Jehovah, who remembered her. "And it came to pass, when the time

was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel."

It will soon be apparent that great importance attaches to the birth of Samuel, and to the function he was called to fulfil in Israel as contributing to the great object of the Spirit of God in this book. And Hannah goes up in due time when the child was weaned — not till then — and told her husband, "I will not go up until the child be weaned; then I will leave him that he may appear before Jehovah, and there abide for ever." Here was a true heart. To such an one blessing from God was only the occasion, as it was the means, of returning that blessing to Him. Jehovah was the object of her soul. Who can suppose that there was any lack of affection for Samuel? Samuel to her was clothed not merely with all the affection her heart could give a child, and a child so born, but with a special sense of what the Lord had proved Himself to her in respect of him. Well she could gather (and she was right; for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him) that such a child was not born for nothing — that hers was a son given for the purposes of God in Israel. Faith sees clear, and always in the measure of its simplicity; and the only thing that secures this is Christ before us as we rest on His work. Then the power of the Spirit of God delivers us by grace, but in self-judgment. Thus do we see clearly.

"When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him into the house of Jehovah in Shiloh: and the child was young. And they slew a bullock." There was openness of heart: did anything seem too good for the Lord? "They slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy

soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto Jehovah. For this child I prayed; and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of him Therefore also I have lent him to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to Jehovah. And he worshipped Jehovah there." His faithful goodness draws out praise.

Next comes a fresh outpouring of her heart, but indeed in that prayer a wonderful stream of confidence and exultation in Jehovah (1 Samuel 2). And this, I think, we shall find has the closest connection with the great object of the Holy Ghost in the book. "My heart rejoiceth in Jehovah, mine horn is exalted in Jehovah: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as Jehovah: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for Jehovah is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength." No doubt this flowed out of her own experience. She knew what it was out of weakness to be made strong. What the intervention of divine power was she knew in her own soul; but the Spirit of God never stops at experience. It is as truly an error on the one side to suppose that He does not produce experience, as on the other that his own experience can be the just measure for the saint. He who does not know what experience is can scarcely be conceived to have a real knowledge of God; but he that stops short of God's object is in danger of being either clouded or self-satisfied. The fruit of faith becomes, precious as it may be in itself, where it is rested in, a snare to the believer. Yet offered up to God, how sweet

in every little service and suffering for Christ's name sake, though one would refuse absolutely any resting-place before God, or any object but Christ! What is it then which keeps the soul firm, and fast, and free? Nothing but Christ, who is also the proper object of the Holy Ghost, and not that measure of reproduction of Him in the soul which we call experience. This principle you will find throughout scripture. There cannot but be a connection with the circumstances and the necessities of our souls, for God takes care that we shall be blessed; but He never stops short there, or with any short of Christ Himself.

Hence the Spirit of God is clearly launching out here into a much greater than Samuel, and into consequences far deeper than the blessing of Hannah's soul, though it need scarcely be said that for this very reason what was immediate was so much the better secured. The bright vision of a Christ and of His kingdom as superseding the failure of man had thus a vital link with what she then had passed through. Hannah was much more rightly guided than Eli. The Holy Spirit deigns, in the wondrous love of God, to incorporate a poor simple woman's experience in Israel about a child that was born to her with His own glorious counsels in Christ as to Israel and all the earth. And does it not give dignity to the believer to know that a little cup of trial we have here may be thus filled with the grace of Christ Himself? "They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven: and she that hath many children is waxed feeble." "The barren hath borne." Hannah has her own circumstances before her; but the language even here goes out beyond her experience. Literally indeed she did

not bear seven; but we see how far the Spirit of God can linger over the actual one whose birth awakens all the rest to faith. The “seven” means clearly divine completeness, which we never can have on this side of Christ. “Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. Jehovah maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah’s, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

It is clear to the spiritual mind that the Spirit of God is going a long way beyond the child of Hannah here. Samuel was to be among priests; he was not destined for the throne. But had he been, there is a strength and height of purpose here which far transcends an ordinary sovereign. In fact nothing but Christ can meet what is here in the mind of the Spirit of God. “He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.” Hannah had learnt her lesson from God; but the lesson was yet to be taught in a still more impressive and ample manner, never to be forgotten. “The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them.” It is clear that this looks onward to a greater day, even to the day of Jehovah Himself.

“Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.” Only Christ can meet what is required by all the words.

Further, we have here the key to the books we are entering on: they are the introduction of the king. It is not the priest now, but the king according to the counsels of God. Just as heretofore the high priest was the great centre of the whole Levitical system, so henceforth must be the king. But we shall find why morally it was that the Holy Spirit brings in the king here. We have only a little preparation for it; but there is much more to be brought out yet. It is comparatively late in the book that we find the true king even in type; but here the Spirit of God shows us that such a personage was before the mind of God, whatever might be the guilt of the people about one after their own eyes and in their self will.

After this another scene opens to view. It is not now Eli in his feebleness; but his sons in their ungodly course and dissolute profanation of Jehovah’s name. Eli feared the Lord; but he certainly knew not that calm sense of the presence of God which enables one to judge accordingly. This has been plainly be-fore us in the first chapter. What about his sons? They were sons of Belial; they knew not Jehovah. So was it now in Israel, the chosen people of God. And those who had been set for the very purpose of presenting God to the people, and the people to God, were now the sons of Belial.

I will not dwell on the melancholy picture which the Spirit of God here appends in proof of it; on the intense selfishness of these men, who made the offering of

Jehovah to be despised; on their still worse iniquity before Jehovah, which led the people not only to despise but to abhor His offering. But the Holy Ghost, along with this appalling picture of the wickedness of the priesthood in Israel, now shows us Samuel ministering before Jehovah, a child girded with a linen ephod, and the parents blessed too. So Hannah, if she had not what she spoke of prophetically — seven sons — at any rate has three sons, and two daughters besides. Fulness, perfection, will never be short of Christ.

But “Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel” in their iniquity with but feeble remonstrance, which was in vain. “But the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah, and also with men.” And now comes a testimony; for God never judges without a warning. “And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?” It was so. Eli was the representative as the high priest in Israel. “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me?” Can it be Eli? It was really so. For God does not judge by appearance. Why was his effort so feeble to maintain the honour of God in his children? Why did his remonstrance fail so decidedly? The occasion was serious, the sin flagrant, and Eli knew it well. Alas I he humoured his sons.

A solemn thing to say this of a saint, as Eli was: — “Thou honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people. Wherefore the Lord Jehovah of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now Jehovah saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.”

Now mark the words which let us into the plan of God. “And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind;” for Eli did not belong to the branch of the priesthood with which the Lord had made an everlasting covenant. It may be remembered that, of the two surviving sons of Aaron, one of them was singled out for an everlasting priesthood; but, as usual in the ways of God, flesh seemed to prevail against spirit, and the one that had not the promise of the everlasting covenant takes advantage of the other that had it. The line of Phinehas sank into abeyance for a season. His brother came forward with various successors. Now that Eli and his sons made the offering of Jehovah to be offensive,

the sentence of Jehovah comes into effect: the branch of Phinehas returns to the place that God had determined and given him hundreds of years before.

There are few things more instructive in scripture, and peculiar to it, than the way in which, on the one hand, moral evil is allowed to work out its way, and on the other a promise is given, as here, because of zeal for His name, before the moral iniquity came in which brings down God's judgment on the guilty. Then He accomplishes His promise at the same time that He judges the iniquity of those that had taken the place of a blessing which did not belong to them. This will be found to be the case often in the revealed dealings of God. If His own word cannot but be verified by His grace, at the same time Satan is not inactive till Christ reigns and judges his efforts and those of every instrument which may arise to oppose His will. Thus the two things are accomplished by the Lord in His own perfect wisdom and goodness.

But there is much more than this which we would do well to note here. "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind." We know that God had counselled it entirely apart from all this sad and humiliating history long before: "I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever." Now this is exceedingly striking. We have seen (verse 10) the anointed brought in for the first time, who was clearly the king. Now we have the further intimation that the faithful priest is to walk before God's anointed. In the early books of the law such language as this would have been perfectly unintelligible. The reason is plain. In the law "the anointed one" always means the high priest.

Now, for the first time in God's dealing with Israel, "his anointed," or "the anointed," is not the high priest, but a greater personage before whom the high priest is to walk.

In short the high priest is no longer the immediate link of connection with God, but falls into a secondary place there being another "Anointed" greater than he. Who can that be? It is the King, in full purpose the Messiah the Lord Jesus in relation to Israel. This Anointed One therefore comes more and more into prominence as not only the people but the priesthood sink into the sad but just place of moral censure and of divine judgment, not yet executed but pronounced. And thus, beloved friends it always is, and we must never be satisfied with finding simply judgments in scripture. I believe this is the reason why the study of prophecy is frequently so unprofitable. Surely no believer would say that prophecy in itself, if taken up and pursued in the Holy Ghost, ought to be or could be aught but edifying. Why is it then that the study of prophecy is so often a thing which rather dries up the springs of Christian affection, while it gives scope for mind, intellect, fancy, and imagination? The reason is simple. First it is severed from its moral roots, and scripture on the contrary never gives prophecy except as God's dealing with the ways of man morally. But the greatest of all reasons why it ceases to be profitable is this, that it is severed not only from what is moral but from the grand divine object, Christ Himself.

On the other hand, when taken as God gives it, prophecy has a blessed place, though not the highest one in scripture. Take the very case before us. The New Testament, as we know, particularly speaks of prophecy

as beginning with Samuel. It is not meant that no prophecy had been given before Samuel, for clearly there was; nor yet either that the fullest outburst of the Spirit of prophecy was in Samuel's days, for it was considerably later. Still scripture does particularly signalize Samuel in this respect. Acts 3 is a proof of this, where the apostle Peter introduces his name in this very connection. He says there that all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken have likewise foretold of these days. Why "from Samuel "? What was the great propriety, and wherein lay, as already hinted, the moral reason why the Spirit of God connects it with this place of Samuel? The people had failed completely long before. The priests were now just as manifest a failure. What was to be done then, if the people of Israel and if the priests had alike failed? and what failure could he more complete than that which this chapter has just now shown and pronounced on? What remained to be done? There is none holy as Jehovah; He is One who never fails. But how does He act? Samuel and the prophets that follow after are just the very epoch when the announcement of His Anointed as king is first caused to dawn upon Israel. It is here that the king is spoken of, not now indistinctly, not merely under the name of Shiloh, nor under the figure of a lion, and so on. Now comes forward the purpose of the anointed King, with a faithful priest walking before Him for ever.

As we proceed in the book, the immense importance of this very truth will be shown; but it is enough to remark in the first instance its connection with Samuel, and the reason why the Spirit makes him to be a commencing epoch of prophecy. He was really a Levite, as such

having to do with the service of God in the temple; still that he was called to a higher task is plain from “Samuel and the prophets that follow after him.” Here was the great crisis, when the priesthood was manifestly the means of increasing the iniquity of the people, instead of being a stay in the downward progress of Israel. Thereupon God brings in something different and better, pointing to the anointed King — the Anointed in another and a higher sense, before whom the priest must take a subordinate place. This is the remarkable introduction to the book.

In the next chapter (1 Samuel 3), on which we must not think of saying many words now, Samuel is put forward and shown to be marked out for a most serious place as the herald of the change in progress. He was to be the intermediate link in preparing the way. If the king was coming, there is a forerunner. Before the advent of Messiah, John the Baptist prepared the way. So in this book Samuel stands in a similar relation to the king. In these days “the word of Jehovah was precious.” There was no open vision. “Eli’s eyes were waxed dim, and he could not see” — in more senses than one how true! “Ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of Jehovah where the ark of God was, Samuel was laid down to sleep. And Jehovah called Samuel.” He called him again and again, so that Eli instructs the youth whose voice it was, perceiving that it was Jehovah. And then comes the appalling sentence which that child was caused to hear, and which as surely was executed at no distant date.

The chapter next following (1 Samuel 4) lets us see how God brought forward His servant as the vessel of His mind. “And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to do battle, and

pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek." Thus was the battle arranged when the people, finding that they were smitten before the Philistines, think of the ark of Jehovah's covenant and throne, not as the emblem of His presence, but as a charm to rescue them in the face of their enemies. There was thus a superstitious hope in the ark of Jehovah, but no faith in Israel It was no better than an amulet; and they were no better than heathens in their employment of it. Where was the reverence for God that became His people? Where was the sense of the blessedness of His presence? They thought of themselves; they dreaded the Philistines. The ark would surely prove a defence for Israel. This is what they had now sunk down so low as to make their one and only thought. And, my brethren, have we not to beware of the same thing? The less we suspect ourselves, the greater our danger. There are few things more natural to the heart when in danger than making use of the Lord, not believingly, but selfishly. This in the worst form the children of Israel were now blinded by the enemy to do.

On the other hand, faith, where real, ever thinks of the glory of God morally, whatever may be its own appropriation of blessing in the hour of need. But it would not dream of sacrificing the honour of God. Here Israel, in the hope of shielding themselves, exposed to the enemy the most intimate and holy and glorious sign of the presence of God in the sanctuary. They never contemplated that the God of Israel might give over His ark to the Philistines, judging their selfish unbelief, and would there singlehanded undertake for His own name and praise. What the godly soul does, just because he has faith, is to spread the difficulty before God, and, in

the certainty that He will hear and appear on his behalf, waits that he may learn the needed lesson of God's end in the trial, as well as to be shown His way how each danger and difficulty is to be met, and every foe overcome. This did not enter into the minds of the elders of Israel. They thought of the ark simply according to their own wishes and a thoroughly carnal judgment, Their sole anxiety was to deliver themselves from the Philistine, the then imminent danger. It does not seem to have entered their thought to consult His will; still less was there the smallest trace of humiliation. They did not even ask God why He had allowed the Philistines to threaten or attack them. Their first thought was self; their last resource, when pressed at this time, was the ark of the covenant of Jehovah but this only valued as a means of security against the Philistines. What plainer proof of their utter degeneracy from God!

"So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God." They received it with insensate shouts of triumph. "And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of Jehovah was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid." It was precisely the same superstitious fear, the opposite of faith, that produced panic in the Philistines, and short-lived confidence in the Israelites. In both it was total ignorance and unbelief. (Compare Rom. 1:18)

Accordingly God acts in a way altogether unexpected by either. The reasoning of the Israelites assumed that God

would never permit any harm to happen to that ark before which Jordan had fled away, least of all for uncircumcised hands to capture it. Why not then get behind the ark, and thus be safe? God will surely interfere for those who have His ark. How little they knew His mind! for what they counted an impossibility was precisely what He intended. The throne of His presence in Israel was to go into captivity. Why keep up the sign of His glory in the midst of those who could stake it against the Philistines? What were Hophni and Phinehas, who accompanied it, but the gravest misrepresenters of the true God in Israel? And what the state of the people? Like priest, like people. The time was fast approaching when God must put humiliation on Israel. How could He chasten them more effectually than by depriving them of that sign of His presence, in which they had trusted, without a thought of His will or of His glory? Instead of walking in faith, which purifies the heart and works by love; instead of the conscience justifying God, it was a purely selfish superstition; the more guilty because found in the people expressly separated to the true God from such vanities. It was inevitable therefore that their open sin should bring as open a rebuke from Jehovah.

“And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.” Thus the word of Jehovah was accomplished; and poor Eli sits on the wayside watching, and his heart trembled for the ark of God. One cannot estimate very highly the spiritual apprehension of the high priest; yet was it enough for

him to know that God would be no party to His own dishonour, and least of all at the hands of His own people. The Philistines might be wrong in fearing that the mere bringing down the ark into the field would settle the fight; but the Israelites were a hundredfold more guilty who flattered themselves that the ark so brought must prove their deliverance. “And when Eli heard the noise of the crying,” and was hastily told, not only of the fleeing of the people and of the death of his sons, but of the ark, “it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.”

The heart of Eli, after all, beat rightly towards God. There was truth in the inward parts, though during his life it had been sadly overlaid by not a little that was of nature. But his death lays bare the real feeling of his soul Godward. And so too his daughter-in-law, when she heard that the ark of God was taken, and that her father and husband were dead, came prematurely into travail. “And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast borne a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.” How precious to find, even in that dark and feeble day, that grace did not cease to produce a witness for God, though sorrow might fittingly accompany it!

All this prepares the way for the King. It is now, one may observe, not only the sentence executed on the priesthood after proof of their guilt, but the compromise of that central seat of Jehovah which the priesthood surrounded; for what could priesthood do without the ark? What was the high priest to minister before the sign of God's presence, if it had somehow vanished from Israel?

But next we have another great truth dawning through the clouds. It will show how little reason there is to fear for the honour of God: He will not fail to take care of it, and so much the more where He only remains. Supposing it be the fact that the faults of His people have let slip His honour in any way, it is no longer a question of their fidelity. What then? Are we to doubt the resources of God? We may count with assurance on His faithfulness, assured that He will appear when there is no one else to appear for Him. This He did now with the enemy. He had permitted that the Philistines then should overcome the Israelites, whose state and ways were wholly evil.

And now another side of the question begins to open. The Philistines having taken the ark were no longer troubled with fears, but self-confident and boastful. (1 Samuel 5)

"And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of Jehovah." But they would try another time. It might have been an accident.

“And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of Jehovah.” Now the blow was far more complete. “And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.” God is always sufficient for His own honour. “Therefore neither the priests of Dagon,” as we are told, “nor any that come into Dagon’s house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.” Thus it became a standing mark of the victory of the God of Israel over Dagon.

Nor was this all that was wrought. “But the hand of Jehovah was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof. And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.” And so they carry about the ark from one place to another. And then the hand of Jehovah is stretched out in every place among the enemies of Jehovah, and we are told, “he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts. Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.” What could be a more illustrious testimony to the living power as well as to the truth of the God of Israel than this very fact? Granted that Israel ought to be in the dust; granted that they were incapable of striking a blow; granted that they were smitten most heavily when they most dishonoured

the ark of Jehovah. But God watched over His own ark, which Israel's sin had so wantonly betrayed and lost; and the fact was that so marked a destruction went forth that all the lords of the Philistines could not but feel their utter weakness in the presence of the God of Israel. "And the cry of the city," we are told, "went up to heaven."

Thus the captured ark of Jehovah was there long enough to bring judgment upon the various lands and cities of the enemy. (1 Samuel 6) "And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of Jehovah? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place;" and so they devised according to their own thoughts. It is a very notable and instructive fact, that God meets men in their state, though He refuses to meet His own people, save according to His word. How good, yet how holy, is He! This I consider an important truth in having to do with the men of the world. Had the Israelites devised for the ark of Jehovah a plan after their own thoughts which slighted the word of God, He would have surely judged it instead of healing; but when these poor heathen, who had not the lively oracles, merely did according to that which they had, He showed his pitiful mercy. Jehovah is not indifferent to the needy and distressed among men; He despises not any. Doubtless those that have the, word of God among them, as men have all around us here, stand in a different position. Still the principle is true, as a general one, that where souls are outside the positive knowledge of the truth of God, the tender mercy of God meets them in conscience with astonishing compassion. But conscience will not do where there is the knowledge of the word of

God, however important it may be in its own sphere where there is nothing else.

These Philistines then propose a new cart and “kine, on which there hath come no yoke,” as a test of the Lord. “Take the ark of Jehovah,” say their advisers, “and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return Him for a trespass-offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us.” And the Lord deigned to meet them on their own test. Surely this was very gracious; and shows what a God we have to do with, not only for ourselves, but even for those that know Him less. “And the men did so: and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home:” that is, that the cry of the calves and the natural instincts of the dam might lead it to go forth towards its young. Instead of that, the kine leave their young, go in a totally opposite direction, and take a course that they had never taken before, contrary to all the instincts of their nature in the brute creation. “And they laid the ark of Jehovah upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh.”

Thus God met the thought of the heart where there was but the working of conscience, without the light of revealed truth, not the knowledge of God, but the

instinctive feeling of His hand, in order that there might be a voice in their conscience. If they hardened themselves against it, or forgot it, so much the worse would it be for them. “And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they crave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt-offering unto Jehovah. And the Levites took down the ark of Jehovah, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto Jehovah And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.”

But this is not all. It appears further that “he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of Jehovah.” Why this? There was no smiting the Philistines because they had looked in. They had meddled with the ark, and they had given their offerings according to their own mind, and not according to His word; but because the men of Beth-shemesh looked, “he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because Jehovah had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.” These are the ways of God with His own people. Oh, let us never forget it, beloved brethren! There was no such slaughter even for the Philistines. “Jehovah shall judge his people,” and the fact that He judges is a proof, not that they are not His people, nor that He does not love them, but that He resents irreverence. Let us not read it unimproved. The grace of God always produces one of

two effects — a spirit of worship where the heart bows, or a habit of irreverence where grace is trifled with. The familiarity of His love either makes us nothing before Him, and Himself everything, or it emboldens the natural heart to a kind of levity and self-confidence, which I think of all things to be among the greatest hindrances to the truth of God, and this sometimes as far as it can work in those that know Him. We have to be jealous of ourselves as to this. Even real Christians may not be unconscious of it; but you may depend upon it that, instead of our being those that least of all need to watch against it, it is the very knowledge of His grace, the very familiarity with His truth, unless there be the real and sustained enjoyment of His presence, that will always expose us to this; for there can be no real sense of His presence unless there be along with it self-judgment and watchfulness. Failure in this is no proof at all that a soul wants the knowledge of His grace and truth, but it betrays our low state. Rather it is the effect of grace known when our nature has been feebly judged. On the other hand, never can we be kept in constant judgment of self, but in communion with Him and His grace.

The men of Beth-shemesh furnish no doubt a very extreme case. There was a certain sort of joy of heart when they saw the returning ark of God. Was not this right? It was assuredly not wrong; but then there ought to have been another and a humbling feeling when they saw it come from the Philistines. If God’s part was full of mercy, what had theirs been toward Him and even it? And ought there not to have been lowly prostration before the God of Israel? This would have cut off all thought of prying into it. Was the ark desecrated

because Israel had been faithless? Justly did that one look into the ark of God cost Israel more than all the swords of the Philistines. “And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Jehovah God? and to whom shall he go up from us?” But if this panic was but natural, it was not the cry of faith. They ought to have judged themselves instead of thus giving way to a feeling of alarm before the solemn judgment of God. Nor is it thus that evil is really corrected. Where there has been levity and disrespect to God, not a reactionary distance can be the true remedy (if possible worse than the disease), but a better knowledge of the grace and truth of God. This, if received by faith, will correct it, not by courting a spirit of bondage, but by employing the certainty of grace to apply the truth to ourselves. Distance and uncertainty are man’s way; but God brings home His word in the Spirit to judge nature so much the more because of the fulness of His grace and the clearness of the truth. Thus judging self goes along with grace.

The next chapter (1 Samuel 7) tells us of the men of Kirjath-jearim who fetch up the ark. Then Samuel reappears. “And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto Jehovah with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you.” There is the secret. They were in a condition that made them light, because along with a certain natural joy at the return of the Lord, there was that which always interferes with His own honour. So says he, “Prepare ye hearts unto Jehovah, and serve him only.” And Samuel gathers them together and says, “And I will pray for you unto Jehovah. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out

before Jehovah." This is very instructive. It is not, I suppose, that one can find a prescription of God for this solemn act in all the five books of Moses — if any of us were asked why it was that the people of God gathered together and poured out water before Jehovah, one might hesitate to say. Are we, therefore, to judge that the act was wrong? Not so. In a broken state of things, whilst holding fast the grand central truths and duties attaching to our relationships, the mere return to that which was originally formed is by no means the truest way of meeting the difficulties which sin brings in.

On the other hand, we are never free (need one say so?) to take up human inventions; and certainly the act in question was not such an invention. But I repeat that the remedy for a ruined state of things in the church of God, just as here in Israel, does not consist in going back to each form which existed at the beginning. One looks first and foremost for brokenness of spirit — for the sense of where we have all got to — in the dishonour done to God; then we begin to see more clearly our place of obedience in all that remains. But without the judgment of self and of the church's state in the presence of God nothing can be right; whereas, if this be wrought in us, His grace will surely show us from His word what suits such a state of confusion and weakness. Yet it affords a door to dark and self-willed souls, who adhere to words and appearances, actually flattering themselves as if they alone are right, and censuring most these who are most truly obedient.

Supposing for instance, at the present time, the church of God awakened to feel its long-continued departure from God, what would be the first and natural resource? Why to set up twelve apostles, and to yearn after

tongues and miracles, if not to imitate the circumstances of the Pentecostal Church in the community afterwards. But what would be the spiritual judgment suited to the present state of the church? Setting up apostles? No such presumptuous dream, but to sit down ourselves in dust and ashes before God, taking on us the shame and sorrow of the church reduced to ruin by the sin of those whom God had so deeply favoured.

Such a taking the sense of ruin upon his soul before him seems to have been expressed in what Samuel did. The pouring out of water before Jehovah was an act, in my judgment, most suitable and appropriate. It was not an effort to patch up appearances, but rather the confession of utter weakness before God. Such at any rate we all know is the force of the figure applied in the very next Book of Samuel: — “As water spilt on the ground.” It was appropriating the truth of their own condition before God. But was there any lack of confidence in His grace? The very contrary. “And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against Jehovah. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.” At once Satan bestirs himself and rouses the Philistines; he if not they could not bear to hear of any souls, least of all of the people, gathering thus before Jehovah in confession of their sins. It is possible that the Philistines might think Israel’s object in gathering was political — a mere mustering for battle, and an effort for independence. But Satan knew better its import, and could not rest; and of this I am sure, that had they, his Philistine instruments, known the meaning of such an act as that which broke Israel down before God, this would have been something

far more terrible for the enemy of Israel than any gathering for martial purposes. There is nothing so alarming to Satan as the people of God humbling themselves in real prayer and confession, where there is also a believing use of His word. Whatever the difficulty or the distress, there never can be a reason for distrusting God. It is the point of honour that we owe the Lord that, whatever we have to own about ourselves, we should never doubt Him; whatever failure we may confess, at any rate let our first confession and our constant confidence be Jesus our Lord, “God over all, blessed for ever.”

“And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto Jehovah our God for us.” This, to my mind, is beautiful. They had begun neither with sin-offering nor with burnt-offering. They had already taken the place of penitence before God as to their sin; they had solemnly owned their ruin in the water poured out; and Samuel prayed as they confessed. They were entitled to look to the Lord with assurance that He would appear on their behalf. There is the sign of acceptance now, as we read that “Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto Jehovah: and Samuel cried unto Jehovah for Israel; and Jehovah heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel.” Ah, how little the foe knew what was preparing for them! Did they dare to interrupt Israel when that sweet savour was rising up to God for them?

It was no longer a question between Israel and the Philistines, but between Jehovah and the Philistines. “And Jehovah thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.” And the men of Israel had the easy task of pursuing. “The children of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us. So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath.” And it is repeated, “Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.”

But the next chapter (1 Samuel 8) brings out the failure, not of Eli’s sons, but of Samuel’s. The intermediate person, however blessed, fails to meet the depth of need. The seer is not Christ; the herald is not His master. The sons of Samuel then perverted judgment, and took bribes; and the children of Israel say, “Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Thus, you see, two currents are flowing on. But let us mark that God divulges His plan before man as the enemy seems to bring it in. So in the Book of Job, it is not Satan that begins the action, but God. It is He that has Himself a purpose of good for Job. Satan no doubt tries to spite Him, as he has plan after plan of mischief; but God is before Satan in good — a very comforting thought for our souls. As God is before Satan, He will certainly be

after him. The good that God has then is the first thought, and the good that He at the beginning has at heart will be accomplished, even though it may be late, if not last. Thus good is before evil, and abides when the evil is gone. We may see similarly here. Who was it that raised the hope of a king? Who was it that saw fit, if not to pronounce death on the priests, as on the people before, at any rate to set them aside from the place they once had to make room for a better thing, the true secret of Israel's blessing, as will be shown another day? It was God. But here may be found the under-current; not a blow from the Philistines, but an effort to undermine Israel by Satan's craft.

Thus the thought of a king was not from man, but from God; yet the desire for one like the nations was rebellion against God on man's part. The purposed king would be a rich blessing from God, and it was His purpose to give them a king before their wicked heart desired it to get rid of Himself. It was an evil in man to be judged; it was grace in God to purpose as He surely will also accomplish it. Both are true; but man's mind often sets one against the other, instead of believing both. Here we have man's heart. They desire a king. Samuel feels it deeply, not because it was against himself so much as it was against God, and so he tells them the thing displeased him. "And Samuel prayed." Oh that we might in this take pattern by so true a servant of the Lord! that when things displease us, we might pray, and not fret or fume or scold! It is not that Samuel did not feel Israel's state; but he prayed to Jehovah. "And Jehovah said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee" (what a God of patience so to speak and act!), "but

they have rejected me." Yet was he to hearken. How God moves in love above all man's evil, and accomplishes His own blessed plans! "They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly."

There was no doubt about the evil involved. Still, if their lie would only bring out the faithfulness of God, what can do but love? "And Samuel told all the words of Jehovah unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king" (they are warned): "He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectioneries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards." This is man's king, and such an one can scarcely be any more. It is impossible in the nature of things that it could be materially different. We shall find on another occasion the perfect contrast of God's king in every particular. But now it is simply a question of their responsibilities, though Samuel warns them fully.

It was in vain. "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the

nations." Their heart was getting farther and farther away from God. Every word they uttered, though they little suspected it, condemned themselves the more. It was self-will active against God, and more, in deliberate renunciation of their own highest privilege. "And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of Jehovah. And Jehovah said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city."

1 Samuel 9 - 15.

We have already seen that the desire and deliberate decision of the people for a king was a direct blow at the government of God in Israel; but the time was come to permit the will of the people to have its way. On the one hand God, though not without the prophet's expostulation, would let them learn what the king of their choice must come to. On the other hand I have already shown fully that, even before the desire of the people for a king was expressed, God had manifested His purpose to bless by an Anointed One before whom the priest should walk. He meant to give them a king. His love is always before the hatred of the enemy. Man shows out no doubt what he is in his desire to get rid of God; but Jehovah has His own plans, and gives us the great comfort of knowing that, although the execution of them may be contingent on man's sinful failure and ruin, His purpose and end of blessing man is ever before His own mind. These counsels of God are of course altogether independent of man. They may take into account fully the means of the creature's blessing, and they must; for He is the only wise God, who needs no

after thoughts to correct or supplement His first design; and it is in man that God glorifies Himself most. But at the same time, for that very reason, God blesses man most when He lifts man out of his thoughts into His own counsels.

Now, in looking at this chapter, nothing can be more striking than the manner in which God causes everything to further His own end. Man had expressed his guilty will. A trial is about to be made. God after due warning does not put difficulties in the way, but helps in every conceivable manner, that the trial of man's chosen king should have every advantage. Can anything of this sort be a more wholesome lesson for us, my brethren, let me observe, than this very principle on God's part? How often, when disapproving of a measure, are we not apt to try and counteract it in every possible way? We are unwise thus to press our wishes or judgments; and we show further how little faith we have in God's own will about it; for, if simply confident in His will, we may rest assured that He knows best how to reduce others to subjection, and carry out all to His glory. I am not supposing it to be a question of our own duty, but where others are in question. Possibly too we may ourselves be mistaken through one cause or another. But even granting that we have the certainty that we are not, we may but provoke the more where it belongs to others to act, and too keen an opposition might precipitate what we most desire to see averted. But it is best in any case to cultivate calm confidence in God. And if others will push a wrong measure, let it be allowed all opportunity, and its true character will only the sooner and the more plainly be shown out. On every ground therefore, as those having faith in God, and desiring not our own will,

our wisdom is that we should commit things much more simply to God than we are apt to do.

This seems to me beautifully manifested in the Lord's guidance of Israel during the circumstances which led to Saul's coming to the throne of Israel. No one could have anticipated that the search after his father's lost asses would put him in connection, not merely with the prophet Samuel, but with the throne of Israel. Yet so it was. In the journeyings of Saul and his servant they come to the land of Zuph, in which was the city where Samuel dwelt. Consulting him, Saul's anxiety as to his errand is set at rest, and he is himself informed that all the desire of Israel is on him. The details of the servant's counsel, the young maidens' direction, the seer, the secret chamber, etc., are wonderfully graphic. Suffice it to say that the company were invited to dine, and the reserved shoulder set before the chief guest of the day. Before their return home, Samuel gets Saul alone, and finally anoints him captain of Jehovah's inheritance. Beforehand God communicates His mind to His servant. On the one side He orders circumstances that Saul should come forward; on the other, He singles out the very person that men of that day most of all delighted in. He was precisely such a man as nature would desire for a king. If the whole people had been, in modern language, polled, was not Saul the man that would have commanded at any rate the great majority? On His part, then, there was no opposition or hindrance from the time that the prophetic remonstrance was refused. Israel was allowed in every possible way to have his own will. On the other hand too, what can be more affecting than Samuel's part? He had protested against it. Now there is precisely where, if we are not very watchful, we

may throw obstructions. Samuel might have thrown obstructions in the way. Not so, the Lord had spoken in his ear. This was quite enough. And here was the person come. It was unquestionably a supplanting of Samuel's own place in Israel as well as of Jehovah's; but all now is left quietly with God, who will have the people's choice fairly tested. The trial is to proceed. God has settled that they are to have a king like others; and when He does, you will notice, not only here but everywhere else, that everything is put favourably, so that there should be a complete experiment of man's king before Him, without the smallest pretence, for example, for Israel to say that there were disadvantages which hindered the due trial of their king. Quite the contrary; the mouth of Israel was stopped. Saul therefore is brought before the prophet, and anointed without delay.

To another thing it may be well to call attention. At first Saul appears to shine. Wherever was a better sample of man's king at the beginning? He speaks modestly; he seems to have no ambition whatsoever, as far as people could discern. We have every proper feeling on his part for his father; we see further that there was no lack of affection or desire on the part of his father towards him. Thus all looked favourable; for when a man is called to public office, it may be of interest and importance that we should know what he is at home; and this accordingly was fairly given. We see clearly that on both sides there was family affection and interest: whether from Saul or from his father Kish, the people need not suffer from ill report on such a score. All this augured well for the future prospects of Israel to the eyes of men.

Again, not only was there this working in providence, but God was pleased to give tokens for the purpose of

helping Saul. If there had been an ear to hear, if there had been any measure of spiritual perception, there were special signs put in his way. These are brought before us in the beginning of 1 Samuel 10. Thus, before these, two men announce the recovery of the object of their search; and this by Rachel's sepulchre, a spot of singular interest to Saul: at least it ought certainly to have been so. (Ver. 2.) It was the place, as is well known, where the foundation of his family had been laid. His father was sorrowing for Saul, not for his property, which indeed was found. But Saul had no eyes to see, nor had he ears to hear according to God.

Again three men, as we are told in verses 3, 4, were to meet him as he went to the oak of Tabor, and they were on their way up to God at Bethel. That is, they were brought before the place, not of Rachel's sepulchre only, but of God at Bethel. One man was carrying three kids, and so on; and these saluted him, and gave him loaves of bread. Did he not thence gather a proof that God was at work in Israel? that the famous scene where God had pledged the accomplishment of His purpose to their father Jacob was not forgotten? A remnant was there; a sufficient, yea, ample testimony; not merely two but three men. There was a more than adequate testimony to the reality of faith in Israel still.

Along with this, no doubt, the state of Israel, terrified by Philistine masters, was truly deplorable; but what of that if faith wrought? Circumstances should never frighten the believer. The question then was whether God was the God of Israel? and as far as His people were concerned whether they had faith in Him? Now this we may see here — the three men going up to God to Bethel before the token of the condition, the practical

condition, of Israel at this time; for this was a fresh point. “After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy.” (Ver. 5.) What an encouragement to one who could hear according to God! The worst of times to faith only the more calls us to make melody to Him. There was no lack of the testimony of joy and praise in these prophets, and yet God would have His people fairly to confess the circumstances. There is no good to be had by blinding ourselves to the actual condition whether it be of the church now or of Israel then. It is always right, wise, and lowly to own the truth.

So it is with our souls, and in all our Christian experiences. There is many a man that tries not to think of all that he has been. Many a person when first converted to. God essays to look only at what is bright, joyous, and encouraging. His eye quickly finds out all the comforting passages of the word of God. He slips over what tries and searches the heart. It is all quite intelligible, but is it really wise? It is not the mode in which the Spirit of God works to form the saint. Not that there is not abundant comfort in all the ways and word of God from first to last; but be assured, my brethren, that the best wisdom is when grace strengthens us to look at the truth, and the whole truth, whether about God or man, at the church, or our own souls; and hence it is that many a person who, if I may so say, staves off the full view of what he himself is when brought to God, has to repeat the lesson another day under more painful

circumstances. Far better to face at the very starting-point what we are, as well as what God is in His nature, counsels, relationships, and will; else perhaps, when we have been following the Lord for five or ten years, we may need to be broken on the wheel for some grievous unfaithfulness, and this mainly owing to the folly of refusing to look at the full reality of what we were from the very beginning.

Now, it is evident that God's character as represented by us is far more affected by our having to go through a perhaps painful and humiliating process some years after starting on our course, than by our learning what we are when the full flow of divine grace confirms our souls as we learn of the Lord Jesus. Thus only can we well afford to judge all that we are naturally.

This too was expressly a sign to Saul. The first sign was personal, connected as it was with Rachel's sepulchre, a place of death to the mother, but where Benjamin was born, the head of Saul's own tribe, and the type of Messiah in His mighty victories for His people on the earth. He was not that son of Jacob who was separate from his brethren and exalted in another sphere, but the son of his father's right hand, who represents the Lord Jesus when He rises up to put down all adversaries in His kingdom by and by; for such is the particular blessing that was vouchsafed when the Spirit of God by Jacob pronounced the blessing of Benjamin. The second sign should have intimated the reality to faith of a more than sufficient witness that as surely as three men were going up to Bethel, God could not fail, be the state of Israel what it might. Then followed the sign of that present state. The promises attached to Bethel were far from being as yet fulfilled. If he hears of "the hill of

God," there "is the garrison of the Philistines." Undoubtedly, then, the actual condition of Israel and their land when man desired a king was as low as could well be. Had there only been faith to enter into these signs, taking them from God, there would surely have been the more blessed an opportunity for the working and triumph of God, who never fails to answer to living faith; but this was exactly what Saul had not. There was no lack of a fair show in the flesh. Saul looked at first most amiable to father, to servants, to everybody in short, as we find. In all this there was the brightest natural promise for man's king; but was this all? There was another and higher privilege too, one may notice in passing: God was even pleased to invest him with the power of the Spirit of God — externally, of course. "And the Spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." Does it not all show us that God was giving every possible succour and every conceivable advantage to man's king entering on this new phase in the history of His people? This I conceive to be the unquestionable lesson of these two chapters: a wiser and more needed one under the circumstances who could devise?

Then we have the accomplishment of these words; but there is more than that. Saul comes to his home, where they are anxiously seeking to learn all that had passed with the prophet. "And Saul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you. And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not." Thus all as yet looks lowly and promising, as far as Saul is concerned. Flesh may go very far in the

imitation of what is of God, but very soon circumstances occur which show that it is wholly on the surface.

“Samuel called the people together unto Jehovah, to Mizpeh;” and then he sets before them the case. They had asked for a king. “Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken.” This also was a very notable circumstance. For here God puts the choice of Saul to another test, in every possible way therefore stopping men’s complaints; for it might have been said, “Ah! the people were not allowed to choose after all; neither was there a fair leaving the thing to the Lord. It was all arranged between Samuel and Saul.” Not so. The prophet arranged nothing: it was God undoubtedly that acted; but this does not in the smallest degree set aside the fact that He was simply meeting the wish of man. Thus here the lot was in opposition to and setting aside of His own government of Israel — the well-known plan according to the law put in force, as we know, about the division of the land, and to be used again when the land is again redistributed. This was meanwhile now employed for the king, and with the very same result. It was impossible thus to impeach the conduct of Samuel; and if on one side there could be no doubt that man was allowed the freest possible choice, it is remarkable on the other that God was helping man in every way so that his choice should be fairly carried out.

Accordingly then “Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom Jehovah hath chosen, that there is none like

him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king." "But the children of Belial," it is added, "said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace." This is another remarkable feature in the case; for it might have been supposed now, inasmuch as the choice of the king was, as far as the people was concerned, a sin against God, that this relieved the godly from allegiance. Not in the smallest degree! It might have been men of Belial first of all who joined with the rest in wishing for a king; but when the king was chosen, anointed, and solemnly invested, it was the men of Belial who refused to show him respect. We shall find, not only that Samuel paid Saul allegiance in the fullest way, but even David, the true anointed of Jehovah, though he was not chosen for the people and from the people according to their choice, as God could do and did with a perfect knowledge of all their thoughts and motives; yet he, the king that God chose according to His own heart, as long as Saul lived, cheerfully abode his subject and servant.

1 Samuel 11.

Again, not only does Saul show singular moderation at the beginning of his reign, holding his peace in presence of these men of Belial that opposed him, but, further, when the Ammonite comes up and encamps against Jabesh-gilead, Saul was not wanting to the occasion. "And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee." And so there is very soon a blow struck at Israel. But then you must remember the dealing with the Ammonite was not the object that was before God, either by man's king or

God's king. The Philistine was not the Ammonite. Indeed under the law the Ammonite was expressly to be exempted from destruction, and spared. This did not mean that if the Ammonites attacked the people of God, they were to be left unpunished; but it did not come into the direct plan of God to subject the Ammonites to the yoke of Israel.

And the Ammonite here strikes Israel. "Give us seven days' respite," say the elders of Jabesh, "that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee. Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept." Saul is moved, and the Spirit of God comes upon him. "His anger was kindled greatly. And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of Jehovah fell on the people, and they came put with one consent." The result was a mighty victory, and indeed a rout so complete that, as we are told, no two of the Ammonites were left together; and the people in consequence were now filled with indignation at the disrespect that had been before shown to the king. "And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death." Saul again shines remarkably. "And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." All therefore was in favour of the king. It might have seemed now that Samuel's fears were vain — that the choice of the king was most happy.

Here was one that knew how to use victory over the enemy with moderation, just as much as he had shown patience before it with the unruly in Israel.

But 1 Samuel 12 may prepare us for something very different.

First come Samuel's words to Israel. "And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grey-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day." He challenges them as to his own integrity, and the people confess it without hesitation. "And he said unto them, Jehovah is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. And Samuel said unto the people, It is Jehovah that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still that I may reason with you."

Thus having stood completely and formally acquitted of everything that could trouble the conscience of a single upright soul in Israel, he appeals to them in the name of Jehovah. He reminds them how deliverers had been raised up; but he adds, "Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired' and, behold, Jehovah hath set a king over you. If ye will fear Jehovah, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of Jehovah, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following Jehovah your God: but if ye will not obey the voice of Jehovah, but rebel against the

commandment of Jehovah, then shall the hand of Jehovah be against you, as it was against your fathers. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which Jehovah will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call unto Jehovah, and he shall send thunder and rain."

It need scarcely be explained, that if at Samuel's call Jehovah sent at once what was entirely out of season, proof would thereby be given of the manifest answer of God in their midst. His ears are open to the righteous. "So Samuel called unto Jehovah, and Jehovah sent thunder and rain." But what was all this to attest? "That ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of Jehovah, in asking you a king." The prophet's judgment (and this formed according to God) was the same as ever. He nevertheless might have seemed to help on, and in a certain sense had really helped on, the appointment of the king as no man in Israel beside himself had done. For who among those who listened to his words in general could have gathered from Samuel's conduct, and from his spirit, that his heart did not go thoroughly along with it? If some would misjudge the man of God in this, my conviction is that his conduct was lowly, and guided by God so that he should not slip where it was hard to avoid it. For one may have to act in a state of things which sin has brought about; and in such a complication one may easily mistake the mind of God if not content with simply doing one's own duty. The judgment may be clear as to what belongs to God, which others have compromised. On the other hand suppose a duty to be incumbent on ourselves of another kind. In such a case we should have it so settled in our own souls

as to be able to go forward calm and unmoved, discharging our duty whatever it be even in spite of the strongest conviction of what the actual state of things will all come to. This was the case with Samuel.

There was in Israel a total want of the confidence which a good conscience enjoys; for at this point we find that all the people now cry to Samuel, and say, “Pray for thy servants.” But though they may be in a measure convinced of their folly, the choice had been made, and the trial must proceed. “Pray for thy servants unto Jehovah thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following Jehovah, but serve Jehovah with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For Jehovah will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake.” The same principle holds good under all circumstances. When people have put themselves wrong, and come to see they have done so, it is not always possible to reverse it. But God is an invariable resource, and will not fail those who truly humble themselves. It becomes a question of doing His will where we are. The consequences of what was evil to have done may continue even when the person is brought to judge the evil thing; and God may hold one to its humiliating effects when one has confessed and renounced the evil itself. It is not only possible, but absolutely needful, to have done with the evil, though there may abide as a fresh trial certain outward results that flow from it. And then the true resource is not the seeking to get back to the position in which we were before the evil was done,

but acknowledging the evil thoroughly, humbling ourselves in the sight of God, and looking to Him to see what His will is now concerning us. Evidently this supposes faith, which was precisely the want, and this not merely of Saul but also of the children of Israel. So says the prophet: “Only fear Jehovah, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.” How true these words proved in the result is known to every reader of the Bible.

Then comes the first distinct crisis in Saul’s history. (1 Samuel 13) “Saul reigned one year.” It was not long. “and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Beth-el, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent. And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba.” In Jonathan was faith. It was not merely a chastisement inflicted on the offending Ammonite which the Lord would surely execute for His own name’s sake; but the Philistines were a more formidable enemy, though God meant to purge them in due time out of the land. What business had they there? The garrison of the Philistines then was smitten in Geba; “and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew a trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.” What a summons from the king! Why call them Hebrews? Was this all that Saul had to say? Where was God in it? Entirely forgotten! It is exactly such language, as a Gentile would use. Was Saul sunk to this? Had he never heard of Jehovah, the God of Israel? Had he never

weighed His promises to the fathers, His counsels for their children, the chosen people, poor as they might be? They were Hebrews, no doubt; but what had God made and called them? They were descended from Abraham the Hebrew, the one that had crossed over; but when he had crossed over at the call of God, were they only Hebrews still? In the eye of the world this might be all; but was Saul reduced to the feelings of one who looked upon God's people according to the unbelief and scorn or indifference of the heathen? Did Saul regard them merely as his people?

This is what unbelief always did, and does now. "Our people" — "Our church!" Such phraseology betrays the fatal vice of connecting things with ourselves instead of with God; and I do not know a more misleading thought, nor one that shows how thoroughly the heart is gone from the living God. Most perhaps never had the real sense of what is meant by being born of God, still less of being bought with a price; so that one is not one's own, but His. Not to feel this when pointed out would prove how the poison insinuates itself and vitiates all judgment. It is not possible to treat a Christian rightly unless we bear in mind that he is a child of God; nor can one feet speak, or act toward the church aright unless it is believed to be the church of God. I may act freely with what is my own, and may naturally resent an infringement of its rights; but I must take care what I do to that which is not mine nor yours, but God's. This has been forgotten where men speak of their church. So with the people of Israel here. If they were merely regarded as Saul's people, the Hebrews, or something of this nature, it is evident that all must go wrong, for the

starting-point was false: God was left out, and Israel's relationship to Him.

This then was the first proclamation of king Saul: "Let the Hebrews hear." "And all Israel" — for not as the king proclaimed does the Spirit of God speak, but according to their distinctive name from God — "And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines." Thus Saul got all the credit; yet it was entirely through Jonathan's faith; but the Lord would detract nothing from the king, unworthy as he might be. "And that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines." It was all right. God does not intend that His people should be other than this in the eye of those who hate them. They may respect or dread a people, which is natural enough; but the thing that the world cannot endure is the claim of God. If you are only hoping to find for yourselves a portion from God, the world would little mind it, because they are not without fears, yet at any rate hope that He may have mercy; but the thing that offends the world is when you calmly and humbly — and you cannot be too humble about it — but withal firmly, hold to it that God Himself has called and blessed you; not only that you hope to have Him, but that God has you now, and you belong to Him now, and live here for His will and purposes and glory, even while you are going through the world. Now Saul had not the sense of this in his soul; and this was the unbelief which no doubt unconsciously expressed itself in his calling the Hebrews to hear.

"And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and

pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead." I can conceive some worldly scholar at once saying, "Now, there you are wrong, as the later verse makes it quite evident that the two words, Hebrew and Israel, are interchanged, and substantially all the same, and only a difference of phraseology." It is true that first, no doubt, he says "Hebrews;" then we hear of Israel; but now we come back to "Hebrews" again. I am not sorry to caution you against all reasoning of the sort. Why is it then that, while the Spirit of God is so careful to call them not Hebrews but Israel, these men are not called Israel but Hebrews in verse 7?

The reason is not hard to explain, nor without its importance. "And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead." They had left the ground of God; they had forfeited that precious name. They might possess it really; but they had abandoned the ground of faith; and the consequence is that the Holy Spirit shows His own sense of the wrong that was done to Jehovah. At critical time when the enemy was intruding in force into the land, and got into a place that menaced all there, some of the Israelites left God's land, and got into an utterly false position. Thus on both sides a great dishonour was done to the Lord. There were Philistines that had possessed themselves of God's land, more or less, and there were Israelites who had left it. Which was the more sorrowful it might be hard to say. "As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people

followed him trembling. And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal." This is another remarkable lesson for our souls. Always must patience have its perfect work; but this was what Saul could not afford. He had hoped, no doubt, that Samuel would come in good time. He waited and waited, and it seemed as if it was all but complete; but there was precisely the point of trial where he broke down. The time was not yet run out, and the flesh can never wait it out. It seemed all but expired, and the king would wait no more; for the first man never does become perfect. He may make a fair show, but perfection there is not thus. Not only does the law make nothing perfect, but the flesh never attains it either. Thus "he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him."

No doubt therefore it seemed to the king necessary that there should be no more scattering for the people. Necessary? There is nothing necessary except the will of God. The people might have been scattered ever so fast but God was able to gather them back again. God's word was plain. Saul knew it perfectly well, but he had no faith in Him. At last then, fairly tired out and frightened at the people leaving him, says Saul, "Bring hither a burnt-offering to me, and peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the

Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto Jehovah: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering." It is no uncommon thing to hear good reasons for a bad thing. The course he took sounded fair. The grand fault of it was that God was not in the matter. It was Saul's policy and this because of Saul's fears. Faith always looks to God, and does His will. Little did Saul know the fatal consequence of his unbelief. The prophet lets him hear "Samuel said to Saul" — and this was a severe word for the prophet to say to the king of Israel — "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would Jehovah have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: Jehovah hath sought him a man after his own heart, and Jehovah hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which Jehovah commanded thee." But mark this. The same Jehovah that showed His own sovereignty, as if independent of circumstances in choosing Saul before the lot was cast, and anointing him, even that same Jehovah would not express His choice of another man until Saul had fairly exposed his unfitness for the kingdom over His people. So "Samuel arose, and get him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred men. And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin."

Then the end of the chapter shows the interior condition of the people. It was wretched now after the king had

been reigning for some time, but quite sufficient for faith to have proved its efficiency. It is said that they had not even an instrument for self-defence. If they wanted to sharpen a mattock, they had to go down to the Philistines for the purpose. Saul had wrought no deliverance. “So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the passage of Michmash.”

And this brings in another scene. We have the failure of flesh, not yet perhaps complete, but sentenced, and the end shown. The Lord will make still more manifest the unfitness of the king, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. The first witness has spoken clearly enough, but we shall have more witnesses still. Meanwhile it is a most comforting thing that the Lord does not heap together His testimonies to evil without giving us some little of joy and comfort for faith to refresh itself upon. Thus between the twofold witness of the failure of king Saul we have the beautiful activity of faith in his son Jonathan. Man might not have looked for such an exhibition then or there; but God neither sees things nor acts according to our thoughts.

“Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines’ garrison, that is on the other side.” (1 Samuel 14:1) This was certainly bold; “but he told not his father.” No, if Saul had his own nature which led him to keep silence, Jonathan had faith. There was One to whom he did tell;

but it was not to his father. All the history shows his dutifulness even to the close of his life; but this only the more enhances his silence on such an occasion as this. Jonathan was as estranged in spirit from his father as he crave to him in nature. Probably without staying to account to himself for his silence, he was not led to say a word to him of that which lay on his heart for Israel. “And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men.” The secret of God is not with the king nor with the priest. The people knew not that Jonathan was gone any more than either.

“And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines’ garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side.” The Spirit of God notices for our instruction the immense difficulties in the way. “And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised.” It was only so that he looked upon them. He did not call them even Philistines, but “these uncircumcised.” This was right. His eyes saw them as God saw them; for him it was no question of their strength or weakness, but they had not the sign of the good-for-nothingness of the flesh. There was no circumcision, no form even outward of relationship with God. Hence he says, “Let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that Jehovah will work for us: for there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few.” Genuine faith speaks with simplicity, and God uses it to. act on the souls of others as here on the armourbearer. “And his armourbearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart:

turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart. Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them." There is thus not only the courage of faith, but there is also the counting on God. "If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go Up unto them. But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for Jehovah hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us. And both of them discovered themselves" — the very last thing that nature would have led them to do.

"And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves." The language in which the Philistines spoke of Israel was the same as that which Saul had employed before, and as God used for those who basely left their true ground through fear. "And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armourbearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.. And Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, Come up after me: for Jehovah hath delivered them into the hand of Israel?' — not of Jonathan, but "into the hand of Israel." Here we see not only faith, but the largeness and unselfishness of faith. It is a man whose heart was set on God's blessing His people; and this was the right thing. "And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armourbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armourbearer slew after him. And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armourbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow. And there was

trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people."

Thus it was not merely that strength was given by God to these two faithful men, but there was a mighty work of God independently of them or of any which goes along with it, and this is a thing that we can count on. Do you think such faith in men or power of God in answer to it is done with, beloved brethren? Not in the least. The God who then employed Jonathan and his armourbearer to mow down the Philistines in their garrison has quite as grave a task to accomplish now. Accordingly He is at work in the hearts of the people; He prepares in one way or another. He either gives the conviction that strikes terror into the heart of the adversary, even when he looks ever so bold, or He works savingly according to the circumstances of the case. So here there was trembling in the host over the field. It was not merely a question of man's fear. This certainly would not have made the field itself tremble. "And the earth quaked," as we are told; "so it was a very great trembling."

"And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another. Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armourbearer were not there. And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel. And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand. And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and

they came to the battle." After all, the priest and the ark gave the king no sufficient light. He could not get satisfaction as to the cause of the mysterious trembling. It was very evident that the light of God did not shine there; so he betook himself to another resource. As we find afterwards, lots were cast.

But first of all observe that it is said, "Moreover the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time." Here again how wonderfully accurate is the scripture? The secret of it is quite plain. These men were with the Philistines. What business had Israelites there? We could understand the Philistines coming in among them, but it was an act of treachery or guilty weakness when the Israelites went with the Philistines. Their enemies might be sent as an infliction, and allowed to come into their midst to their sore trouble; but what could possibly justify Israelites going in among the Philistines? And if they did so, did they not deserve a better name than that of Hebrews? Thus the Spirit of God calls them. And what makes it more striking is, that in verse 28 it is said, "Even they also turned to be with the Israelites." The Spirit of God evidently treats them as most unworthy, yet "even they also turned to be with the Israelites." It is not now with "the Hebrews," but with "the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan." "Likewise all the men of Israel," which similarly is most striking. — "Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle." Mark the difference. God is so righteously measured in all His ways that the men that had gone thoroughly wrong were called the "Hebrews." As long as they played a false part, they had forfeited the name at

least if not the relationship of Israel. But if these had no longer the recognition of that blessed name, the people who had merely yielded to terror regained it when they resumed the ways which became the sons of Israel. No doubt they had been unworthy in the past; nevertheless now they are called by the name of divine honour.

Again we read (ver. 24) that “the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man.” How sorrowful in such a day of blessing and victory to see the king thus spoiling it! Here we see what the king did. The only part he contributed was to afflict and vex and hinder the people of Israel, and most of all him who deserved best of all. Such is the effect where unbelief meddles in the day that faith reaps good things from God. “Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies.” There is not a word about the Lord’s grace. His feeling is, “That I may be avenged on mine enemies.” This was what Saul’s heart was set upon. Where was his old modesty now? Thus acted the man that seemed of old the humblest person in all Israel. Now that he had been but a little while in power an thought of God was gone. The people were no longer even in outward name connected by him with God; and when grace had wrought outside him to work this great deliverance, it was merely Saul being avenged on Saul’s enemies. Where was God then in his thoughts? He was in none of them, we may boldly say.

And this very thing gave occasion to a most instructive incident recorded in the rest of the chapter. Jonathan was in the secret of the Lord, but he was not privy to the oath with which Saul had bound the people. As Saul

knew not what was between God and his own son, so Jonathan was a stranger outside to his father's adjuration, and hence unwillingly transgressed. "Jonathan heard not," as it is said, "when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint." With all his love and respect to his father, Jonathan could not but feel the deep injury that was done. "Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found?"

The true reason for the introduction of this remarkable incident seems to have been to show how Jonathan was found thus completely at issue with his father. Now Jonathan is the object of the Spirit of God in the passage. He was indeed a man filled with the Spirit of Christ, acting in the power of faith, delivering Israel as the great instrument of God, the vessel of faith at that moment in Israel. Yet here we have a solemn fact. In the chapter before, Saul stood convicted and abashed before the prophet. Here he receives a holy rebuke of his own son, who alone was in the secret of the Lord — rebuked therefore as himself the wrongdoer who put a saviour of Israel under sentence of death on the very day that he had saved them. I am not speaking, of course, of any actual expostulation at that time directed to his father:

this would not have been becoming; but the circumstances of the case wrung it out of the reluctant heart of the son. Clearly therefore the people's choice of a king was only a distress to the choicest among the people, to the faithful son of Saul himself.

In what follows we find the heart of Saul, and what it was even to his own son. We know what it cost the people. The people flew upon the spoil, and in consequence of the restriction he had made were guilty of a real sin; namely, eating the blood contrary to the law of Jehovah. "They told Saul, saying, Behold, the people sin against Jehovah." It was the natural consequence of his own misguided oath. It began with a curse on Jonathan, and it ended with dragging the people into a sin against Jehovah. "And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone unto me this day. And Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people, and say unto them, Bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay them here, and eat; and sin not against Jehovah in eating with the blood." When this was done he "built an altar unto Jehovah." The same — the Holy Ghost significantly adds — "the same was the first altar that he built unto Jehovah." Was it not a long time before he set about it? Was it not a very sorrowful thing too, that the king should have built an altar on the day when he was the occasion not merely of bringing his own son, the most blessed of Jehovah, under the sentence of death, but of the people sinning against one of the most fundamental principles of God's law? There was nothing more sacred in all its system than that man was not to eat of blood.

Another day was coming when, in consequence of the Lord Jesus changing everything by His grace that went

down into death, to this very thing should men be called, as life to their souls. “Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you;” but this was when He came to save. When it was a question of the law and the first man, blood must not be touched on peril of death. When grace gives the Son, and God’s righteousness is established by His death, it is ruin and the proof of no life if we drink not of His blood.

Saul then, after he had done this mischief, busies himself to find out how the sin had been committed. “Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God. And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel?” But there was no answer from God. Saul therefore, knowing thence that a positive hindrance stood in the way, only thinks of himself and seeks to ascertain who was the guilty soul. And God, being righteous, even though it was a wrong thing so to have brought in an oath which obstructed the effects of the victory, did not refuse to make manifest the person that had sinned against the oath “And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. For, as Jehovah liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die.” Little knew he what his rash vow had brought on his son.

The consequence was that the lot fell on Jonathan. “Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die. And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan. And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath

wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid; as Jehovah liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day." This witness was true. But clearly the authority of the king was broken, and God's name was not to be profaned, even unwittingly. Though he wist it not, yet was Jonathan guilty. Saul had in the most solemn manner pledged his word for the death, even if it had been of Jonathan his son on the one hand, and it was perfectly certain on the other that the lot fell on Jonathan his son. But it was only the more manifest on that day that the king of their choice was not only a useless incubus, but a distress to Israel and a dishonour to Jehovah. He had openly disgraced the law and Jehovah's champion, his own son, not to speak of the people.

Lastly his ruin comes out in the plainest manner in the next chapter. (1 Samuel 15) "Samuel also said unto Saul, Jehovah sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel." He would have a fresh trial There was a new opportunity. If peradventure he might remove the stain and the sentence, the Lord would give him another trial. So says Samuel, "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley." And so the Amalekites came down; the people were defeated; the king Agag was taken; the mass of them were utterly

destroyed by the edge of the sword. “But Saul and the people!” — how strikingly the Holy Spirit here associates them — “Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.” The flesh profiteth nothing However tried by God, it fails. God’s word was plain, His will decided; but the king and the people were alike disobedient.

“Then came the word of Jehovah unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments.” How could he lead the people? How could he that was thus rebellious at every fresh trial — how could he that had compromised the victory of Israel when another had not failed to win it — how could such a man be a shepherd of God’s people? “And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto Jehovah all night” — a beautiful feature in the prophet. He felt it all, knew it all, but still it grieved his heart. “And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of Jehovah: I have performed the commandment of Jehovah.” And what did the grieved heart of Samuel reply? “And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God; and the rest we have

utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what Jehovah hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and Jehovah anointed thee king over Israel? And Jehovah sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of Jehovah, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of Jehovah?"

All the excuses of Saul were vain, or worse. As Adam did with Eve, so the king put forward the people to shelter himself. For what was he raised up if it was not to lead the people? Was it not for the king to repress lawlessness, and not they to entangle him in disobedience? On his own showing, what was he for if it were not to command them in the name of Jehovah? Was it come to this, that the people commanded him? There could be only one effect of such a confession. His kingship was gone. The truth however was, "Like people, like king."

"And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed." For Saul keeps up his hypocritical pretence. "And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of Jehovah, and have gone the way which Jehovah sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is

better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." Let us weigh it well, my brethren: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft," and we know what that was even in Saul's eyes. "And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou....." No indefiniteness is found now, no mixing him up with the people. The guilty king is convicted and singled out for the fresh sentence from the Lord. "Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also "ejected thee from being king."

Mark what follows: "And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned." It is not always a good sign when a man is quick to confess his sin. Have you not seen it in your children? It is matter of common observation that the child who is always ready to confess his wrong never feels much about it. It is not that the opposite of this is not a fault, or that it is a happy thing to find a child stubborn; but one likes to see a little exercise of conscience; to know that a child weighs the fact and considers his conduct and motives, bowing to what his parent says: then it may be after a sorrow that does not come out to us very articulately. The heart gains confidence, and the conscience too casts off its burden, and tells out its wrong. But the quick and hasty owning, "I have sinned," is always suspicious; and is what may be found in even worse than Saul. Judas said just the same thing. The readiness to own wrong, in general terms at least, may be even where there is a seared conscience, the state being utterly bad. Even of old a principle was taught which made its worthlessness manifest.

This appears to me to have been a great point in that remarkable institution of the law — the ordinance for

dealing with defilement. The water of separation was never sprinkled on an Israelite at the beginning of the term. The man must abide under the sense of his defilement until the third day. When he had fairly and fully felt his case before God, when there was an ample witness on. the third day, then and not before was he sprinkled. It was repeated on the seventh day, and the whole process was complete according to the law. The seventh day's sprinkling would have been of no use without that of the third. But there was no such thing as sprinkling on the first day.

The reverse of what is taught by this we find in Saul. He thought to do the whole, if one may so say, on the first day. He sought to disencumber himself of all the burden of his failure by the most rapid confession. But no: such a confession is good for nothing. "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah." What' a man who had been just boasting about his doing some great thing? and that the beasts were kept to sacrifice to Jehovah? Clearly there was no good conscience there. "I have sinned," said he when he was convicted, and not before. "For I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." What a king! "Because I feared the people." He did not fear Jehovah. Without this there is nothing right. "Because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship Jehovah. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, and Jehovah hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent." Alas!

Saul's sorrow was no more godly than Esau's. Both felt for themselves, as both afterwards hated the man of God's choice. What could the importunity of either bring out but the sentence of their loss? So we see that here the act of the king only furnishes another opportunity for Samuel to warn the guilty king: "And Samuel said unto him, Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship Jehovah thy God." It was too late. But what a thought at such a time! "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the people." To have felt and confessed his dishonour of the Lord and misleading of the people would have been a far different attitude. Of this he did not think. Samuel turned again after Saul; Saul worshipped the Lord; but it was to no purpose. At any rate Agag was brought forward, from the delay thinking, from what we can gather from the account, that mercy was in store for him. Surely the prophet would have no less compassion than the king for a forlorn captive! "And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Jehovah in Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and Jehovah repented that he had made Saul king over Israel."

But this is the moral close of Saul's history; and we have had sufficient for the present as to man's king. We shall next have the opening of the history of a better man, his "neighbour." It may be profitable to compare the two in their mutual relations, when we are shown God's king reigning over Israel after that man's king had passed away. But there is another and an extremely solemn truth which runs side by side: the awful truth that the exhibition of righteousness and grace in one who serves God in faith always provokes and exasperates to the last degree of wickedness and hatred him who, while professing to serve the true God, is really serving his own belly. No amiability, no nearness of natural relationship, no struggles of conscience can ever deliver from this downward career to ruin into which Satan precipitates him who, not being born of God, finds himself in such circumstances in collision with a man of faith who walks with the manifest power and favour of God resting on him. There is but one way of escape — that repentance unto life which is the portion of the soul that rests only on Christ before God, and can afford therefore to renounce self, judging it as only and always evil, so that the life one henceforth lives may be Christ and not self, though it be there to be ever treated as vile. "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Saul knew nothing of the principle of this, as David did. Whatever righteousness he aimed at was exclusively by the law, which, as it frustrates the grace of God, so it ends in disappointment and death. All such have this of

the Lord's hand — they lie down in sorrow, as we shall soon see to have been the actual close of king Saul.

Samuel here shows us out the mind of God both in the slaying of Agag, and in mourning for Saul. It was according to His law to spare not the deadly enemies of Israel. Had He not sworn to war with Amalek from generation to generation? Samuel had not forgotten this, if Saul had. On the other hand, the tenderness that mourned after the king, guilty as he was, is a fine trait of that affection which is only strengthened by the faith of God's solemn judgment.

1 Samuel 16 - 20.

Now that we have heard the prophet's judgment of king Saul, there follows next the choice of Jehovah. The chapter gives us in a very striking manner the manifest sentence of death on all the thoughts of man. Then can lessons be more solemnly instructive than the contrast between Saul, universally admired and chosen because of outward appearance, and David, who even by his own father was entirely forgotten, and this when the question was raised by the prophet? He was of no account in the eyes of a single member of the family; yet this was the man destined to the throne. And indeed we have not to put our own construction on the incident; for God Himself has given us His. It is expressly and in this connection said, "Man looketh at the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh at the heart."

Thus the true king was now anointed; but it pleased God that the manner of his ascending the throne should be as peculiar as the choice. There never was such another since the world began, always excepting the One who in all things has the pre-eminence. Who ever trod such a

pathway to the throne? Some, no doubt, have gone through trials severe enough; others have known what it was to suffer in their measure from enemies within till they reigned, from foes without afterwards. I do not speak now of those only whom God was pleased to select at various times for the special purpose of reigning over Israel; but even among men, as is known, it is no such uncommon circumstance. The like has happened at various times, and in almost all countries; but there was more than this with David. It is not merely that he who had rendered the greatest services to the king and the people was set aside and persecuted unrelentingly without any just cause; but the truth is that God ordered it so that he who had been chosen by the prophet at His own bidding, and already had the anointing of Jehovah, should be sustained for a considerable period for the express purpose of bringing out those most worthy qualities which were the fruit of His grace, tried as he was after a fiery sort, and put to the proof before all Israel, not so much in great feats as in dependence on the manifest intervention of Jehovah's care and wisdom and goodness.

There was another way we have to notice in which David was tried, and I believe still more difficult to the spiritual judgment, and of greater price with God — that delicacy of consideration in which his heart was formed in the presence of his worst foe in one who was still the king of Israel, whom he of all men respected most, not even excepting Jonathan; for as there was more love in David's heart than in Jonathan's, so, I doubt not, he had even a keener sense of allegiance, and a deeper consideration of what was due to the king; and yet all the while Saul was a doomed man, and, as we have seen,

before David was called he had been proved and found wanting. It will be made evident, as indeed scripture furnishes ample proofs, that, after the call of David and his designation to the throne on God's part, Saul did not remain the same man as before. We shall find that he comes under the power of Satan from the moment that God had set apart David to Himself. We must not confound as a rule or principle the fact of man's corrupt nature on the one side with Satan's power on the other. They are distinct. At the same time, what is of man corrupted always paves the way for Satan to enter in. Here, nevertheless, we may see the working of the principle plainly enough. We shall find also that it is not only that Satan enters from this point, but that he acquires increasing power over Saul. Just as God on the one hand brings out His servant David, and shows his fitness for the great and honourable task to which he was called, making him to be very specially before Himself, and in the eyes of those who love Him, to be the witness of Christ as sufferer as well as king; so on the other hand Saul falls more and more deeply under the power of the adversary. This then we shall look at a little in the present lecture.

In the very first chapter where the point of change is brought before us we read — "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him." It is plain therefore that there is pointed out to us the awful counterpart when the Spirit of Jehovah departs, and an evil spirit troubles the one in the presence of divine

blessing and favour resting on the other. The same thing may be in principle always true; but it will be verified in Christendom on a gigantic scale, and the time is fast hastening for that catastrophe. For the flesh having long despised the testimony of God and the grace of the Holy Ghost, there will be a marked change when the power of Satan will be let loose from such restraint as now hinders. (2 Thess. 2) And indeed it must always be so. For it is impossible that Satan could work in his full energy till the full power of good had first come, and next, we may add, is gone.

Accordingly the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we know, was the signal for an immense step in the manifestation of the power of the devil. He is never called “the prince of the world,” or “the god of this world,” till after the advent of our Lord. And so I have no doubt at all that the truth of the gospel and call of the church of God have furnished an occasion for Satan, not for such displays of demon activity as confronted Him who is the power of God, but to bring out that which is for the present his masterpiece in spiritual deceit and poisonous error. The reign of ordinance and tradition, the antichurch, owes its idea to the church of God, but of course corrupted so as to dishonour God and destroy man; as again, when the Lord is about to bring in the first-begotten into the world, Satan, knowing right well what is coming, will try to anticipate in Antichrist, and so carry the world into his final delusions.

There is an incident before us in the end of the chapter much to be weighed, and I think highly instructive. David, although he had not yet exhibited a single sign before man of that to which he was separated by God from the midst of his brethren, is nevertheless put

forward for a remarkable service. Saul, as we are now told, was troubled with an evil spirit. “And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and Jehovah is with him. Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep.” This is the first circumstance which brings the anointed of Jehovah into the company of Saul. It appears to have been but the most passing acquaintance that was formed with the king.

But the Lord takes care not long after, as we learn in the next chapter (1 Samuel 17), that a far more urgent need, not merely personal but connected with the whole people, and in opposition to the power that the enemy put forward at this very time, should bring David publicly and permanently on Israel’s behalf into the king’s court.

Was not this a very suggestive fact? It was a part of the dealing of God that David’s circumstances should entirely change; but, you will observe, this he did not seek himself. It is not by the will of the one chiefly concerned that the Lord brings to pass His plans. See how He wrought in Joseph’s case. Yet we know that Joseph at thirty years of age became prime minister of Egypt. Now I ask any man, what could have brought about such an issue so well? Granting all the ability with which God had invested Rachel’s son, granting all the wisdom and faith and integrity to be appreciated as they were shown in his conduct and ways, if his whole life

had been bent on becoming the greatest man in Egypt (even supposing now for God's glory, and to seek the good of his brethren), could it have been done otherwise as well, or even as rapidly as God did it? This ought to be a great comfort, and not least surely to those who do not seek great things. Where the eye is bent simply on doing the will of God, which is the only thing of price in this world, how happy it is to leave everything with God! So we find in David's history. Had David sought to be a courtier, he could scarcely have gained it; but without one thought on his part, the Lord in a simple and suited way brings him to the presence of the king. This is the first move.

But there is another thing that I should remark upon for a moment, before we pass on to the great and signal circumstances of 1 Samuel 17. Saul very quickly lost all thought, all memory, of David. He no doubt profited by him, but he soon forgot him. This is the more remarkable because in the end of 1 Samuel 17, as we shall see, the king is all bewildered, and makes inquiry of those around who the stripling is. I shall notice it there, only calling attention to the fact that on this occasion, when David came to Saul and stood before him, he loved him greatly; but his affection was evanescent: we shall see why ere long.

But if God was moving in the scene, the enemy was too, and this in particular by those whom Saul had been raised up to put down. For if king of Israel, he was responsible to be the servant of God; but he was not. He was the creature of man's choice, however God might move sovereignly above all. Morally speaking, Saul accomplished in nothing the end for which he was chosen; he only showed the futility and fruitlessness of

man. Sentenced now, though not yet gone, he gives occasion for the mighty and gracious power of God to form His chosen one to accomplish His work. “Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them. And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam; and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.” Here was his ruin — “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.” He left God out.

For this was just the question that was coming to speedy and solemn issue; whether God indeed had a people on earth in Israel, whether the name of Jehovah bound up with that of Israel is a truth or a falsehood, a living power or a sham. The Philistine took the side of nature, founded on appearances. And indeed there was little to show that Israel were the people of God. Their condition deplorable, their degradation all but complete, the Philistine could find abundant reasons to believe it was all the merest assumption. What could their past deliverance from Egypt and passage through the desert, not to speak of the conquest of Canaan, be but the lying legends of their priests? There might have been great men and circumstances to favour them in times past; but as to that spiritless race of slaves being the people of God in any practical sense, it was folly to think of it. It is thus that unbelief usually reasons from appearances.

On the other hand there was nothing more melancholy to one judging by faith than to see how little Israel took their stand on God — how they too had forgotten even the mercy that had been vouchsafed not so long before by Jonathan. I grant you there was a vast difference between the circumstances of that day and of this. It was a great deliverance wrought in faith; but no Goliath had then appeared to challenge all Israel and defy Jehovah.

Now that David is about to be brought to the front on God’s part, Satan stirs up the enemy. “When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid. Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul. And the three

eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul. But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem." He was again in the plain path of humble daily duty. No road is really so good as this, and none where God's honour will be more found when His time comes. It was there that God anointed him for the throne; it was thence that God called him to the court of Saul; and it was now from the same tending of his father's flock that God wrought so as to bring him into the great field of action where the question had to be decided between the Philistines and the living God.

David, then, sent by his father on a simple errand of duty, was to be in the grace of God the instrument of His victory: "And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days." What astonishing patience on God's part! Every day, of course, increased the self-confidence of the uncircumcised champion. Every day added to the dismay of Israel. There was one heart at least that knew no such unworthy fear; but what shame and grief! "And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and

he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army. And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren. And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them."

And once more "all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid." Indeed it is evident from the description that the terror of Israel was visibly increasing. "And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel. And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him." David could scarcely understand it. He is amazed that there should be such a reward held out in what to him was such a simple business The reason of David's calm confidence is evident. It was not that David measured himself against Goliath, but that he perceived it to be a question between God and the Philistine. This therefore was what filled him with astonishment, as he beheld the abject terror of the men of Israel, and as he talked to them and heard all again and again; for he

required to be really assured that they were serious in such statements. His elder brother overheard, and, as one can understand in such a case, his anger was kindled against David. He may have had some suspicion probably before this, although time enough had elapsed since Samuel had anointed David with oil for the circumstance to make but comparatively little impression upon the minds of others; for Samuel's words were few. There was not much said on that occasion. The act itself was most important and significant; but the meaning of it was little explained. Nevertheless there is always in those who think of themselves a disposition to take offence at others; and even the nearest relationship will not hinder this, but rather give opportunities for it. Eliab therefore, full of displeasure at David, asked him, "Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." Indeed he was there present for much more; he was come down to fight the battle; but Eliab did not know this any more than the lowly faith of David's heart. "And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause? And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner."

And thus the fact of one man walking in quiet and simple confidence in the Lord gradually forced itself on the host of the Israelites, so that news came to the king of that one soul whose heart of faith was undaunted by the Philistine. "And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for

him. And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him." David is not content merely with being above fears personally, but would cheer every one with that reliance on Jehovah which gave him assurance; he wants to fill them with the same simplicity of looking to God which was no new thing to his own soul. "Thy servant," said he, "will go and fight with this Philistine."

The king is astonished; he too looked to appearances: David knew in whom he believed. He had proved it good already. "And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." This was humility, because there was self-forgetfulness. It was a genuine thing, and not a mere desire after it, because God was present to the spirit of David. And unless there be these two things, beloved brethren, depend on it that we deceive ourselves in this weighty matter. There is nothing that really ensures such simplicity in acting for the Lord as that lowliness of mind which is the fruit of faith. This, I need scarcely repeat, is precisely what breathes in David's words. He counted on the fidelity of God to Israel spite of all circumstances.

But, further too, it is very notable that the Spirit of God has not said one word about these facts before, as also it

would appear that David himself never spoke about them even in his family. The time was come now. He mentions them not so much to show why he himself looked for victory, as why Saul should have confidence. It might well remove the difficulties of king Saul, who was inclined to think as a Gentile, with no more faith than a Philistine. The answer was simply an unstudied and divinely-suggested testimony to the king when the right moment was come. It was God that had been the strength of David's heart and hand. Was He not just the same now as ever? This was the way in which David reasoned; and he was right. God gave him wisdom.

But moreover he declares, "Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." There is not a thought of himself in the matter. He is God's object of care, for so faith always reasons; he is His object of interest, and so much the more as his only desire was the glory of Jehovah. "And Saul said unto David, Go, and Jehovah be with thee." He was struck by the young man's answer. "And Saul armed David with his armour;" but this was of no use. David essayed to go, but soon found out that the pieces of armour were but hindrances, and in no way a help to him. "And David put them off him." He had not proved them, as he told him. "And he tool: his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he ha], even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand." They were the well-proved weapons of his warfare; they were the weapons in which he had often looked up to Jehovah in the course of his ordinary work day by day.

“And he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.” David’s answer was most worthy of one who knew what and who Jehovah is to His people. “Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will Jehovah deliver thee into mine hand;” for faith has no difficulties, and sees clearly in the hour of danger according to God — I may say, the end from the beginning. “And I will smite thee,” says he, “and take thine head from thee;” a word most punctually and quickly fulfilled. “And I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines” — for his faith rises higher still — “I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God,” not with David only, but “in Israel.”

There was faith; and there was along with it too, not only the strength, but the self-forgetfulness, of faith. He saw and held fast the bond between God and Israel. There is a larger and higher faith in this than that which sees no more than a bond between God and me, though it is freely granted that it is no use to talk about faith in

God's feeling toward Israel until I know what He is to myself. The wrongness is in stopping here. We must begin with it, however, and in fact may well distrust the language of a so-called faith that tries to leap into great doings all at once. It is not so that the Lord leads; but the truth is that David was no such raw soldier of faith. He was a young man, but a greater veteran in the path and conflict of faith than any man in the armies of Israel. There was not a man there that knew so much of God or of the power that opposes God and His people, not even Jonathan, although Jonathan had been already tried, and although he had won too in the battles of the Lord. Yet even Jonathan himself had never yet acquired that simple confidence; but David had. David, I say, had proved what the Lord was in the hour of difficulty and danger repeatedly; and he proved it also most distinctly when all other hearts failed through fear. Confidently could he add, "And all this assembly shall know that Jehovah saveth not with sword and spear." And this he counts on. It was not only all the earth in general, but his confidence and his delight was that God would bless His people by it. "And all this assembly shall know that Jehovah saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah's, and he will give you into our hands."

"And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted." There was far more alacrity on his part than proud on the Philistine's. "And he ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone" (God loves to accomplish great results by the simplest means), "and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So

David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines." They won the victory according to the faith of David.

Then comes the further triumph of David when he takes the head of the Philistine and brings it to Jerusalem. "And when Saul saw David" (he saw David go forth against the Philistine indeed even before), "he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling is. And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

This has often perplexed worldly scholars, who find great difficulty in adjusting the passage with the previous chapter. And at first sight it sounds exceedingly strange that David should have been already employed to soothe the king when under the affliction of an evil spirit from Jehovah, and Saul should have to make such an inquiry. David had indeed formerly and not long before ministered to his necessities; but his disordered state might well confuse his memory; and a great captain might be excused for never giving a look or

thought to a minstrel boy brought in for such an occasion to play on the harp to the king. And my opinion is that, so far from this being a just tumbling-block, so far from its being legitimate to dislocate the fact previously named from the place where it stood, as some learned persons have suggested, there is to my mind no small beauty in the incidents being recorded exactly as they are. Indeed it would be false to take out these latter verses of 1 Samuel 17, and insert them at the end of 1 Samuel 16, or even to transpose the end of 1 Samuel 16 to the end of 1 Samuel 17 as has been proposed.

The truth is that one may be employed by God to minister relief to him who is carried away by the power of the enemy, without the least communion of spirit; and such a servant may be soon forgotten: as man says, “out of sight, out of mind.” There is no real knowledge of the person who walks with God on their part who are far from Him. There could not but be a sense of the relief ministered and enjoyed. Saul perfectly well knew at the time when he was soothed by David’s playing on the harp that so it was; but David, although he was then loved of Saul, left no impression whatever on his spirit. There never was a real bond between them. Saul loved David in the sense of valuing the one who relieved him, and felt gratitude for it at the time; but there was no real basis of sympathy between the king and David.

Hence it is that when David, as we read here, now comes forward in the service of Jehovah, he is a stranger to king Saul, whatever he may have been in the service of the king. He may have been known passingly, but now that he comes forward in the service of Jehovah, he is an unknown stranger to the king. It is familiar to us how perfectly true this was of Jesus. We know how the Lord

Jesus ministered to the men of this world; how they partook of His bountiful provision for their wants, were relieved in their bodily distresses, and delivered from the frightful power that Satan exercised over them by evil spirits. The Lord Jesus proved the supremacy of divine grace moving in and out among the multitudes that were thus healed; but they were of the world, and He was in the world who made it, yet the world knew Him not. Was it not on account of the self-same principle? though no doubt there was a mighty difference in the depth of the case: but the principle was the same on which the world knew not Jesus, and Saul knew not David.

There was one, however, who from that day learnt to know him, and this was Jonathan; and what was it then that made the difference? Why was it that Saul, who had such far more abundant reason to remember David, should have so quickly forgotten him? How comes it, on the other hand, that Jonathan's soul was at once knit to David? The reason was the faith of Jonathan, which wrought by love consequently in his heart, and thus left him free to appreciate the excellent fruit of the grace of God in David. Nothing was lost that day on Jonathan, whose soul was knit with David's when he ceased speaking to Saul. How much there was in David that stamped him as a man after God's own heart, and made him an object of the deepest interest and affection to Jonathan! Had it not been for this divine link, David must have seemed, for Jonathan's interests, a dangerous rival and interloper. Granted that this too was precisely the reason for which we shall find Saul allowed a feeling to arise in his heart which at length gained complete mastery over him. But this very fact shows Jonathan's

delightful spirit the more, and the disinterestedness which grace produces. For it is plain that the more Jonathan's soul realized, not only the qualities of his friend, but the destinies to which God had assigned him, David grew day by day in the love of Jonathan's heart. The Spirit of God dwells for our instruction on this attractive tale. How differently fared an incomparably greater than David! Deserted when He most needed sympathy, yet Himself cherishing the most gracious appreciation of those whom He had watched over with unfailing love! Yet He says, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations."

1 Samuel 18.

"And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house." This gave opportunity for Jonathan to know more of him; and very soon indeed the Spirit of God records an act which marks precisely both what was so lovely in Jonathan, and what was so suitable to David. "Then Jonathan and David," it is said, "made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." This then was the corresponding fruit of the divine Spirit in Jonathan. Those are greatly mistaken who suppose that it was merely a question of personal affection. This there was; but Jonathan was a man of faith, and there is no affection for character, power, or

permanence such as that which has faith for its animating principle.

Further, we learn that “David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely.” He had shown himself to be a man whom Jehovah had girded with strength in a most remarkable manner; but I think that the gracious and prudent wisdom of David, as for instance with Saul, is even more astonishing. The prowess with which Jehovah had clothed his arm was but a passing thing, comparatively speaking; at any rate, the calls for it were only now and then. The dependence on God on which it depended, one cannot doubt, was ingrained in his habitual character; so that it was only occasional, the transient expression on what was in fact always true of David. But his going in and out from the king, the prudent, delicate, truly refined, and admirable part of David at the court of Saul, is a most instructive lesson for our souls. “David went out” then, “whithersoever Saul sent him.” He had been called to be a servant in a new place altogether. He had not had the smallest experience of the court, excepting his forgotten service with the harp in early days. But this makes little difference to the Spirit of God.

It is well to remember that our habits and our natures make a vast difference for the temptations of Satan but very little indeed to the Spirit of God. Thus when we go wrong, when we fall into a bad state, Satan always suits himself to our characters and ordinary ways, and thus acts on our nature in short, as well as on what may have been formed by a long course of conduct. There it is that Satan shows what he must particularly take into account, because he is a creature after all. On the other hand the Holy Spirit, we must always remember, is God;

and, whatever people may say of the force of character and habit, it is to my mind a divine truth of still greater moment to remember that the Holy Ghost is supreme. It is not the fact that He merely takes up a character or habits in order to give them another direction, and thus fit them for the service of the Lord. He loves to impart a fresh character; He can give altogether new qualities. It is granted freely that the old tendencies are there still; but they are there, not to be yielded to, but to be mortified, to be watched against, to be treated as a part of that flesh of man on which the oil cannot be poured; still less can it be presented to the Lord.

In short, we ought most particularly to look for in a saint of God, and we ought especially to be jealous as to ourselves, that the very traits we may have shown naturally in this or that direction be still most sedulously watched against when we are children of God. It would be perfectly hopeless if there were not the Spirit of God; but for our comfort, as well as admonition, let us remember that God has already given us a new and divine nature, which nature, as it is Christ in whom we live, has the Holy Ghost to work in and by it.

David by grace was enabled to walk in this wisdom. He had none of the habits of a court. This made only the better opportunity for the Spirit of God! The reason is simple. What is the spring of a believer’s lowliness, of his obedience, of his generous kindness, of his unflinching courage? It is not at all a question of what the man was of old in the flesh, but of what God makes Christ Himself to him by faith. All else, depend on it, my brethren, however esteemed among men, is good for nothing in the sight of God; and this shows us that for us the absolute necessity of our spiritual being, if indeed

there is to be well-being, is dependence on God. Otherwise we merely manifest what we are, instead of being witnesses of Christ “David” then “went out whithersoever Saul sent him.” This was his duty now. He had been before where his father sent him, and there Jehovah had blessed him and put honour on him. Now he was in a new position; but it was the place, not that he chose, but that God had given him in a sphere that he had never sought. He therefore “went out,” as it is said, “whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth.”

The sense of the great service that David had wrought faded quickly away from Saul’s spirit. And why? Because his object, his idol, was himself, and David’s name that day interfered with it. “Saul had slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands.” The women, having more particularly sensitive spirits, according to their nature, seized and uttered the simple truth. It was not that they tailed to honour the king, but certainly they paid honour to the one to whom honour was due. They felt who was the instrument of the mighty deliverance in Israel. This roused the jealous susceptibility of the king, “and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed

but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Yes, and it was an evil eye, nor did Satan fail to take advantage of what the occasion furnished. "And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand." But mark, the old remedy that soothed the king, music, had lost its effect now. When the evil spirit first came upon him, it yielded to the sweet sounds of David's harp and hand. It was no longer so. The progress of evil in presence of the good it hates is apt to be rapid and deep. "And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice." The king not merely disliked David, but was afraid of him, "because Jehovah was with him, and was departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people."

But God took care that every step that Saul took to humble David, or to show his own ill-feeling, or even worse, should be only a means in God's hands to fit David the more for the kingdom. "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and Jehovah was with him." Jehovah was with him in the house of Saul and preserved him; Jehovah was with him out of the king's house, and there he approved himself before the people as his servant, the better because he was Jehovah's servant. "Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them. And Saul said to David, Behold my elder

daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight Jehovah's battles." This was a mere pretence. "For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him." It only furnished David opportunity for fresh victories. "And David said unto Saul, Who am I?" — for he was unaffectedly humble — still God wrought on his behalf in fresh ways. "Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" But there was no truth nor conscience toward God in Saul any more than care for David or regard for the plighted promise of a king. "But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife. And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."

In order to ensnare David to his destruction, the king demanded a fresh price for his other daughter's hand. "Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law in the one of the twain. And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king's son-in-law.

And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?" Not a word about the previous wrong that had been done him — not a syllable about Merab given to Adriel — or of the king's having failed in his

royal word during the hour of peril, so solemnly pledged in the valley of Elah, or personally renewed later still for fresh services.

The fact was that David looking to God was far more jealous of the king's honour than the king himself; and so it always is and should be wherever there is faith. As long as God sustains even that which is altogether unworthy of Himself or His people, faith bears with it, and pays frankly all worthy respect. This is not folly, my brethren; nor is it cringing; though it be far from this generation. It is faith. And Saul's servants therefore told him how David had spoken; "and Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry." He wanted the death of a hundred Philistines. "But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law." His simple mind still crave to the king's honour. The word so often broken in his own case provoked no sneer. He feared God and the king; and if the king really so thought of David, he valued it. Such was the feeling of his generous heart. "And the days were not expired. Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men" — double the number the king had demanded; "and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife."

What was the effect upon Saul's spirit? "And Saul saw and knew that Jehovah was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him. And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually." The king was impervious to good and

implacable to David. How came this to pass? Satan held him fast. The very things that even nature would have respected and valued were turned by the enemy only to feed his hatred and his malice continually. Such is the power, such the way, of Satan. And this is the solemn lesson of the history, of which we shall find there is a counterpart in the second Book of Samuel, where we shall have to see it in another form. In short we have here not merely what was of man, but what was of the devil; and this only since the great witness of Christ was come. You cannot have the antichrist without Christ. If there is a witness of Christ in David, there is also a growing embodiment of the qualities of the antichrist, yet to be energized by the devil, and then partially prefigured in king Saul.

"Then the princes of the Philistines went forth: and it came to pass, after they went forth, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by. And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David." Thus we see how the design, the hidden snare, the carefully laid plans to overthrow David, all come to nought. First there was corruption, then violence — equally vain. Saul was now bold enough to speak to Jonathan and all "that they should kill David." The liar and murderer was at his accustomed work. "But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David." Is it not refreshing, in so melancholy a picture as this of king Saul, to observe how that the Holy Ghost who wrought all that was then of God, and afterwards sketched for us the history, has shown us also that God does not leave Himself without witness of His grace? He who withdraws the veil from the most secret iniquity of Saul

lets us see the devotedness of Jonathan. He tells the tale of what God works in love, Satan in murderous hatred and pride.

Jonathan then only the more cleaves to David because of the enmity of his father; and these things will be both true in Israel; for Jonathan sets before us rather the godly remnant of the Jews, not those called out of the earth to heavenly things. What we have in all these chapters is Christ, but Christ in connection with the kingdom; and we must leave room for the kingdom just as much as for the church. Of course we have a very especial interest in the body of Christ, the church of God. It is perfectly intelligible therefore, that the fulness of our sympathies should flow in this channel, not merely because we are concerned directly, but because the richest displays of Christ's glory and the deepest grace and wisdom of God are found in it. But, my brethren, it is never a proof of the great power of the Holy Ghost where we only find our joy in our own things. It is manifestly a better sign where things are valued because they concern the glory of Christ, rather than because they are ours. And I am sure that you will not find that the delight in all which gives glory to Christ, and which manifests the ways of God in respect to Him, could in any degree really impair relish for and delight in the ways of God with His church, or the counsels of glory He has for us. It is a healthful and God-glorifying hold of scripture, as centering round Christ for heaven and earth which is most for the glory of God by and in us. What we want is to have Christ Himself more before us, and not merely therefore what belongs to us in personal privilege at any time.

The truth is, we are so blessed, we are so fully and richly endowed in Christ, that we ought to be able in the measure of our faith to enter unjealously and without distraction into everything that glorifies the Lord Jesus. This consequently should be our standard. Whatever glorifies Him — this is enough for us; for in truth, although the kingdom be a lower level, still we have on the one hand a most important connection, inasmuch as we are to reign with Christ, as surely as we have on the other hand a more special place of blessedness as united to Christ. Both are true of us; and the apostle Paul preached both, each in due season, as we should also. Thus in the Acts of the Apostles it is easy to see indeed rather more of his preaching the kingdom. In the Epistles naturally, where the church was addressed, we have its own special portion very particularly brought out. But still they were both there; and it is a great mistake to suppose that we gain any better appreciation of the church of God by neglecting any other truth. More particularly this becomes more urgently momentous as the coming of the Lord draws near. On the contrary, this distinction will be better understood where we are willing just to follow the current of the Spirit of God throughout all His word; and we need this, let me say, beloved brethren, as much as any. It has helped on the ruin of the church of God to treat a small part of the truth as if it were the whole. The grand and best means of deliverance is, when we have received Christ, and seen that He is the secret of blessing, to cultivate occupation not merely with the church but with Christ. Then it is that the church, the kingdom, and every part of the dealings of God, stand out in the fullest light before our souls.

In reading these Books of Samuel then, we must bear in mind what has been already remarked — that the main connection is with the kingdom, and not properly speaking the church. Indeed this is a far more general principle; for it is so throughout the Old Testament. But in these later historical books it is emphatically the king. Doubtless Christ Himself is set out, but it is He in relation to the kingdom. There may be typical illustrations now and then which go beyond that, but scarcely more.

1 Samuel 19.

Jonathan then, Saul's son, shows us, it seems to me, those in whom the Spirit of Christ will work in the midst of Israel, whereas Saul shadows for us that part of Israel which goes more and more into the depths of dark evil because of the non-appreciation of Christ, and consequently falls thoroughly at last under the power of the devil. "But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee." There was a loving heart that sought to render this needed service to David, even though his father himself were in question, manifest alas! in murderous malice.

"And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-

ward very good: for he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and Jehovah wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As Jehovah liveth, he shall not be slain." It is not therefore that we do not find relentings of heart in Saul (for indeed we do from time to time); but he was no longer in any way master of his movements; he was only a slave of Satan, little as he realized it himself.

And now we shall have to trace how every effort to escape from the slavery of the devil but proves how much he is the stronger of the two, and that flesh in the highest place only the more certainly and speedily brings under the power of the enemy. Hence, in spite of his oath, and Jonathan's acting upon it, "Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past. And there was war again: and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him. And the evil spirit from Jehovah was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand. And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night."

So we find subsequently, not now in Jonathan's case, but through Michal, that there was deliverance yet more for David; and when it was told Saul, he "sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If

thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain. So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped. And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said? He is sick. And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him. And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster. And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?"

1 Samuel 20.

"So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth. And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah. And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu: and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they be at Naioth in Ramah. And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah."

He is none the better for it. The power of the Spirit of God only makes a man's case the more desperate, if he be not born of God. Who are the most awful instances in the New Testament recorded by the Holy Ghost? Not the people that never had the Spirit, but those that had. There are men who find a great difficulty in Hebrews 6. It seems astonishing that Christians who have understanding of the ways of God can find anything peculiar there. There is such a thing as the possession of every Christian privilege in power, not life, ending in apostasy. It is a universal principle. We find it here in the Old Testament; it is not otherwise in the New. Only those can be thoroughly wicked, after this sort (and it is the worst), who have borne Christ's name, and abandoned Him with contempt and blasphemy. Only those can fall into the deepest gulfs of the devil's power over the soul who had once the power of God's Spirit working in them.

But then, be it well observed, it is not said that those of whom Heb. vi. speaks were ever born of God. This is often forgotten. People do not distinguish between the quickening of the Spirit and His various operations of power. Where is there such a thing in the scriptures as one who is quickened by the Spirit thus hopelessly falling into the power of the enemy? Freely is it acknowledged that the power of the Spirit looks a vast deal more for a time than the quickening of the Spirit. That power, as indeed in itself its working is most precious, enables one to have great intelligence in scripture, and imparts not only intelligence but energy even to use it for others; yet there is one thing that power in itself does not give — to turn the eye of the inner man on self to judge it thoroughly before God, or

consequently to lay hold of Christ in the depth of the soul's need. There it is not power that is wanted but repentance and faith. What the sinner really needs is to be made nothing of, and this is always the case when one is quickened. Then, in real sense of need, Christ becomes the object, and self is judged. But in this case you will never find persons who fall in the same way under the power of Satan. But there may be only what I call the external power of the Spirit, without any dealing with the conscience before God. One has never in this case been brought to God — never really felt what sin is; and without this there is no new life.

It is one thing to talk about the sins of other people; but really to feel one's own, to come with the sense of one's own guilt and nothingness before God, is another matter altogether. This goes with quickening, and in such a case accordingly the way in which the truth shows it has really entered is by repentance towards God, as well as by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the description of Heb. 6 there is not a word about it. The persons there described are enlightened perhaps to the highest. They have received the powers of the world to come. They have tasted the good word of God. They have had the heavenly gift — Christ on high — before them. All this may be: the sweetness of truth, God's wisdom in it, the harmony of His ways, and all that. It is quite possible: nature is equal to all. In point of fact flesh is rather exalted by it; and man may think a little better of himself in consequence of it, though all the while talking of the old man being buried, and himself risen with Christ. The mind may be charmed with all these wonders. Surely the truth of God is incomparably grander for the intellect of man than human speculation or fables. Does not the

history of Jesus something infinitely better, even for the mind, than the bitter selfishness of Juno and the disgusting crimes of Jupiter, of which beings no sensible heathen could even think in the light of the gospel without seeing their abominable stupidity as well as wickedness? On the contrary, in the Lord Jesus there is that which even to the natural mind and conscience has the highest moral sublimity in it.

Hence it is that any one who can pretend to be well read in the history of human thought must know that there have been the most determined enemies of the Lord Jesus, who nevertheless professed great respect for and admiration of Him. They would kiss Him just as lovingly as Judas; they would give a witness to Him no less than Pilate. Alas! the flesh is enmity against God; it violates law, it rejects or corrupts grace. There is no reality before God. There is no entrance of the word into the conscience till one is quickened; there is no meeting God about our own sinfulness; and without this, and believing how Christ meets that need, there is no faith in God's love any more than love towards God. Hence, as God is not trusted for eternal life, so there is nothing in man to trust. The affections may be touched, but affections are apt to pass away and change. Mind more particularly may be exercised; but what is the good of that where it is a question of sin with God? It is not eternal life; but the reception of Christ in an awakened conscience is inseparable from the possession of that new nature. When conscience is pierced and wretched, and the name of Christ penetrates the heart, then indeed it is another thing. Now in such cases we never hear of them falling into a state where they cannot "renew themselves unto repentance." Rather is it a

description of those who have outwardly received the truth, and consequently become objects for the power of the Spirit of God to work in or work by; for all this is quite possible without renewal. Such persons may, as I believe they do, fall thoroughly under the power of the devil. It was so of old as in Balaam, and in Heb. 6. we see it in New Testament times and form.

Here we have it in Saul. He is brought before us as prophesying among the prophets. It was therefore a power entirely superior to his own working by him. Was he the better for that? Much worse. We may notice that after this his progress in evil is appalling. “And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity?” for David did not trust this. David did not think himself safer because Saul had been prophesying. “What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so.” So fondly thought Jonathan; for he was not aware what would be the result of the power that had been upon Saul where there was not the smallest conscience toward God. “And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee;” and accordingly a new test was proposed and carried out.

The result is, that “Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let Jehovah even require it at the hand of David’s enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul. Then Jonathan said to David, Tomorrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. And when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to thee, and no hurt; as Jehovah liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way: for Jehovah hath sent thee away. And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, Jehovah be between thee and me for ever.”

“So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat. And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul’s side, and David’s place was empty. Nevertheless Saul spake not anything that day: for he thought, Something had befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean. And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David’s place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor today? And Jonathan answered Saul David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem: and he said, Let

me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there: and now, if I have found favour in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table."

We see the wonderful dignity of scripture, beloved friends, and the wisdom of it too. That is, scripture does not comment upon these tales which are often mixed — much that was not true with what was true. I grant you unbelief can use this against the word of God. But unbelief is ever superficial, and its malicious haste to condemn is short-sighted. It is not open adversaries that are to be dreaded most, but professed friends who apologise for the scriptures. Where there is not confidence in the truth, they naturally try to excuse what they do not understand, and are somewhat ashamed of in their ignorance. But the calmness of truth can tell out things exactly as they are without the smallest apology for anything. It is an unhappy sign, and always a weakness in those who, whatever happens, are ready to palliate themselves. On the other hand, where there is an habitual looking to the Lord, there is a facility in leaving things more simply in His hands. Why should we trouble about them? When challenged, no doubt it may be all well to explain but it is a far happier proof of faith where the heart can leave God to vindicate.

In this case then "Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan;" for now the evil heart of unbelief that was departing so rapidly from the living God burst out in rage against his own son, and against him because of his love for David. Thus Jonathan shares the vengeance that Saul felt towards one who had by God's sovereign

disposal supplanted him in the kingdom. Certainly it was a fine fruit of faith which shows itself in the son where the father's want of it was becoming more and more apparent. "And he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman." Ah, it would have been a good thing if he had only felt that he was the son of a perverse rebellious man.' but this was the last thing that could now enter his heart. "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom."

There was thus the instinct that dreaded what was coming; for unbelief has its instincts just as truly as faith; and as faith knows the good that is coming before it comes, so unbelief has the sense that these good things are slipping away from its grasp for ever. Now the unseen is revealed, the future as the present. "Thou in thy lifetime hadst thy good things." How wretched the prospect that was before Saul in his miserable contest with God. "Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die. And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger." It was not for himself, but for David. He saw clearly the murderous hatred of his father that nothing could turn aside. And he "ate no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David." How admirable! "He was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame. And it

came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him. And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, Is not the arrow beyond thee? And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master. But the lad knew not anything: only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city. And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of Jehovah, saying, Jehovah be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city." It was not easy, but faith working by love finds how to conciliate what one owes a guilty father or any other with what is due to God's witness in any crisis. And this Jonathan shows here. How disinterested too is faith; for Jonathan well knew that David's rise was fatal to the house of Saul. But he knew that this was of God; and that it is vain, if it were not wicked, to fight against Him.

I shall hope in another lecture to finish this portion of the deeply interesting, and I trust profitable, history. Assuredly it is our own fault, our own unbelief, if we do not gather from God for our souls. May our God Himself

give His children to make it their own! This is what one most of all desires, that we may have each his heart drawn out by scripture to Him of whom it speaks to us. All that can be pretended to in so cursory a sketch is to act as a kind of finger-post, and indicate according to one's measure the points of special blessing in the precious word of God as they rise before the eye.

1 Samuel 21 - 31.

We enter now on a portion of David's history sensibly different from what we have already had, which closed with the efforts of Jonathan to restore matters and to attach Saul to him at least openly. Jonathan himself was convinced that this was vain; and as he went unto the city, David more and more is found in the desert, in the place of the pilgrim and the stranger, yea, of the outcast — increasingly the object of the jealousy and hatred of king Saul. This it is that leads him into a path where his history becomes more definitely typical. Here above all the Spirit of Christ has the work of foreshadowing the life of our Lord Jesus as rejected of men; and now were occasions given too for those wonderful compositions, the Psalms, or for very many of them at least, in which that Spirit anticipates the feelings, ways, and earthly glory of Christ.

The present occasion, however, calls for an observation often applicable to circumstances which called out those outpourings of the heart in trial. Who can rightly glory in man? None who understands but what can see the vast gap between David and Christ; and this we may the more remark (though it may be quite as particularly on more than one occasion), as this is the opening scene. We shall find it almost to the last. If God was going to

put forth His power, and to establish David at the head of Israel, He would make it most evident both to David and every one else who has an ear to hear that it was of His pure grace. Man deserved it not in any sort. The time was not yet come for one whose ways were the expression of God Himself — whose ways brought glory to the Father at every step. David was beloved, and great were the things in store for him; yet he was but a man, and a sinful man. Grace might make him a type, but he was only a type.

So on this striking occasion, where grace asserts itself in a decisive manner (and the Lord Jesus Himself refers to it, and draws out the analogy between the position of David and Himself when growingly rejected in Israel), it is impossible to overlook that David is introduced to us with a story in his mouth which was far from true. But the priest was struck by the circumstances with a great anxiety; for he too had little understanding of the mind of God. He was troubled about David. He suspected that something was wrong. But God moves above all clouds; and this is the only just ground of confidence.

Thus, whether we look at David or consider the priest, there was no ground for boasting. Nevertheless, in these very circumstances there was that which Christ turns to everlasting profit. Very likely we might have passed by this story without edification; we might have seen in it nothing to guide our souls in a dark day. But Jesus is the light, and in His light alone can we see light; and so He for us draws out of the precious word of God this astonishing fact (for truly it is so), that the rejection of the beloved of God in the midst of God’s own people profanes what was most hallowed. How could anything needed by David be viewed any longer as holy in the

eyes of God where I)avid was rejected, the anointed of Jehovah?

Therefore had priests' bread become for his wants nothing more than common bread. Did he want? From that store must he be supplied as much as from any other. Ceremonial restrictions of the law are all well enough where things go truly according to the law; but what of Him who is the central object to which all its ordinances turn, if He be cast out for God's sake, and He and His be thus in want? Would God sustain those forms against the man of his own heart? Impossible! And therefore the priest gives him the hallowed bread; for there was no bread there except the show-bread taken from before Jehovah to be the food of the priests.

But here, as everywhere, how ineffably superior is the Lord Jesus, holy, harmless, and undefiled! We do find in His history that the restrictions of the law and its regulations lose their force as He passes on rejected to the cross. It is beautifully brought out in the case of the Samaritan leper; not that strictly speaking he could be supposed to be under the law as a Jew was, but that his case made plain the supremacy of the person of the Lord,Jesus and of the power of God that wrought by Him. It was proved then as against all such demands, whereas a Jew must wait till the cross proved it for him. The Samaritan, ignorant as he was, was the more open to learn the glory of the Lord Jesus; and he learnt it first of all, as we all must if we learn it aright, by his abject need supplied in divine grace. We ought to begin there. We are mere theorists if we do not, and it is dangerous for the soul where the conscience awakened to its wants before God is not the hinge of first approach to God. But then ought we to remain always there, always at the

door? Certainly not. A door is to enter in by, and it is both impossible and wrong to limit the God of all grace to the supply of our first wants as sinners even though essential for the soul. Let those supplies too be ever so rich and blessed there is God Himself to know in Christ and to enjoy. This was what, substantially at least, the Lord Jesus was showing, the faith that came back to Him instead of going on to the priests. Thus, while He left those that were under the law in their place for the moment, He did assert in principle, where it could be and in answer to faith, that very grace which was afterwards to shine perfectly when the cross had made it a righteous thing for all.

After this another scene opens; for David, having now received the bread once hallowed for himself and his company, asks for more — for all that he wanted. He could be bold in this; for all that he wanted was for God's glory. The sword of Goliath was not so much in view of any personal consideration. He had brought neither weapons nor munitions of war. The priest's answer was, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here." A strange place, perhaps we might think, to find it; but not so in truth. As David said, "There is none like that: give it me." It was the emblem of a great day for Israel, a great defeat for the Philistine; but it was the sword which death supplied in order to victory. Was it the power or skill of David that was in the truest sense the means of victory? Was it not his faith that overcame, as it alone overcomes the world now? To conquer thus, the weapon taken out of death must be wielded by the Spirit in the power of life in Christ. It is useless otherwise, as Goliath proved.

But a day of honour may be followed at once by one of shame, and none is exempt from the need of dependence on God or His guidance. How humiliating to see David fleeing “that day” for fear of Saul to Achish the king of Gath! Even the memorial of God’s early use of him, here recalled by the lips of the Philistines, awakens not trust in Him, but the more terror of Achish. “And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?” But grace knows how to turn to its own account the low estate of the believer; as we may learn in what follows.

For in the next chapter (1 Samuel 22) we see David become the attractive centre to all that could value what was of God and discern what grace was doing in Israel. Was it merely this? Was he not also for those that were in debt and wretchedness, who could find no comfort, nor even eye to pity elsewhere? The same Christ our Lord gathers both to Himself, and let us bless Him for it. We are often apt to have narrower thoughts of the Lord than suit Him, my brethren; but Christ is none the less high and glorious because He can afford to look on the least and call the lowest, and thus form them after Himself. It was so even in its measure here; and in truth there is scarce anything that more brings out the infinite value of the Lord Jesus than that He is not crowning what is good apart from Him, nor looking to discover its germs. All that is excellent, all that is of God, will surely

range itself round the Lord Jesus; but then He Himself creates, He forms, not finds merely. It is He who gives, and can give out of His own fulness. And in its little measure we see that this was true of David; for out of this group, so despicable in man's eyes, what did not that man of God fashion? and this too more truly because it was in the path of rejection and scorn.

Here then we find David, as we are told, in the cave of Adullam; "and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him." But not they only. These might be supposed to have a claim; they certainly had a relationship already; but there were others there who gathered to him because as yet they had none, having lost all. "And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him." It is a poor thing to be a contented optimist where the things we are sanctioning are contrary to God. And those are not to be envied who, being in evil case condemned by the word of God, boast because they are not given to change. Happier, far happier, they who prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. There were souls who groaned in Israel. But were they discontented when they surrounded David? I grant you most entirely it was a paltry-looking set to gather, and in the obscurest of places; but what was David to them? and what did he make them? All the world felt and bore witness in the day of his and their glory, after they had been fashioned in the day of trial and sorrow and reproach by the mighty action of the same grace that shone in David.

But even now, as we are afterwards told, it was not merely this: the prophet Gad is there, and again, as we

know, the priest. More particularly was it marked when the hand of Saul was lifted up to destroy through an evident instrument of Satan. For the king condescended nay, was blinded by the power of Satan, to employ his herdsman Doeg, an Edomite, against the priests of Jehovah! A sad story is his declension. Hear the taunts of the king, his affected contempt for the son of Jesse. If he who had the power feared David in earlier days, his deadly persecution attested the importance attached to him now. Words of wrath and scorn do not tell out save to the intelligent how he really regarded him in his heart. Where was self-judgment for the sin which had forfeited the kingdom? Where was the sense of the honour God had put upon him, and of his own misuse of it? Only the rankling of deadly enmity burns within, which now breaks out, not against the man whom most of all he desired to destroy, but against those that had shown him kindness, priests of Jehovah though they were. But it has for its effect, that this holy point of connection and means of sustaining relationship with Jehovah is now found with David. “And one of the sons of Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David.” Doeg at Saul’s command had smitten Nob, the city of the priests, with the edge of the sword, men and women, children and sucklings. The man who spared the Amalekites thus mercilessly destroyed the priests of the Lord. The priest and the prophet were now with God’s destined king.

The next chapter (1 Samuel 23) lets us see some fresh features of David’s distressed and dangerous condition, and what and how God was acting there. “Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshing-floors.” Surely it had

been more natural that they had told king Saul. It was what one might call his business; it was due to him who was raised up and responsible to be the protector of Israel as well as their leader in the battles of Jehovah against the Philistines. But no! heart and conscience told Israel that there was no hope in the king. The outcast man he pursued was the one to whom all hearts turned and thoughts tended. It was to David, himself hunted for the very life, that they looked for whatever protection God might give them against the enemy. And another feature here remark. It is not only that God was morally preparing the people for David, but further David himself is being trained in a deepening dependence on God. “David enquired of Jehovah, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And Jehovah said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.” David then clearly is not the mere favourite, as he had been the champion, of the people, but the one that God hears, answers, and uses to His own praise. Saul is ignored in what ought specially to have been his work. “And David’s men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?” David enquires again, “And Jehovah answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand.” Obediently he went, fought the Philistines, “brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter.” “So,” as the Spirit of God sums it up, “David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.” Next we find it recorded that, when Abiathar the son of Abimelech fled to David to Keilah, he came down with (not “an,” but the) ephod in his hand: on the death of his fellows he succeeded to the highest place.

Saul, utterly infatuated and without divine guidance, regards David's position at Keilah, shut up among those he could influence, as God's intervention to deliver his enemy into 09 hand. So often is malice thus thoroughly blinded; and God permits when will thus works that circumstances should appear to favour it, only to give another and a fuller proof how far opposed to His will is all such vindictive rancour. "And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars. And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him." Again therefore he has recourse to Jehovah. "Bring hither the ephod," says he to the priest. "Then said David, O Jehovah God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Jehovah God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And Jehovah said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And Jehovah said, They will deliver thee up." God prompts the question He only can answer. David might naturally distrust the men of Keilah. Whatever led him so to enquire, it was of God to preserve him from the imminent snare then surrounding him. For the meek will He guide in judgment, and to the meek will He teach His way. But we may remark that the intercourse, the familiarity (if one may so venture to call it), of Jehovah with David, and of David with Jehovah, is extremely striking in this incident. He was long a man of faith; but he pleads his suit in a way beyond anything we have had before. He is the evident type of one that

walked in perfect dependence on God. “Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbare to go forth.” Subsequently he is found in the wilderness of Ziph “And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.”

And here we read of a deeply touching account of love to David in Saul’s own house at this crisis. Alas! it was the last meeting between David and Jonathan; for there follows the sorrowful disclosure that Jonathan’s faith proves unequal to the trial, the bitter consequences of which he reaps in due time. Nevertheless, as there was a real affection, so one is far from insinuating that there was not real faith; but things were come now to a pass so critical that even for safety, not to speak of the honour of God or the love of man, there must be a clean and an effectual breach of the outward order that stands up, the no longer secret but open and determined enemy of God’s purposes. And so it constantly is. God at first deals tenderly and pitifully with men who are ignorantly wrong. He gives many an opportunity to exercise faith before sin is risen to such a pitch as this; but, that point reached, we must either turn the corner or go back, if not perish. Whether this was not solemnly shown in the future of Jonathan, I must leave to yourselves to consider. Nevertheless, whatever be our judgment as to this, the tender love of Jonathan to David on this last occasion is most affecting, and the mingling too of what was truly of God with what showed the weakness of the earthen vessel. “And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.” “Fear not,” said he: “for the hand of Saul my

father shall not find thee." In this certainly he was right; he spoke almost as a prophet of Jehovah. "Thou shalt be king over Israel." Right again. "And I shall be next unto thee." Not so, Jonathan! He was wrong there. Jonathan never lived to be anything to David. This was to be their last interview. But he adds, "And that also Saul my father knoweth." Thus, I think, the mixture of what was true and what was mistaken precisely marks the mingled condition of Jonathan's soul at this very point. It was not faith in its purity with singleness of object and character. Faith there was; but there was wrong anticipation, as there was unbelief. And so he soon proved. Nevertheless, "they two made a covenant before Jehovah: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house."

Now we may turn briefly to a sorrowful piece of treachery, pleasant to the king then, whatever he might have felt once. "Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand. And Saul said, Blessed be ye of Jehovah; for ye have compassion on me. Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah." The unhappy king blesses these men for their readiness

to betray David; but it was all in vain. They took their measures with skill. “They arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon. Saul also and his men went to seek him.” It seemed as if it was impossible to escape, especially when David came down and abode in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard the exact position, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. “And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them.” At the very crisis, when it seemed all over with David, a messenger comes to Saul saying, “Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.” God is always superior to the difficulty. Saul is obliged to return, and David was delivered.

But the unhappy king, in no way ashamed of himself, or heeding the lesson of the Lord, as soon as possible returns to the pursuit of his dutiful son-in-law and faithful subject, David. This one object characterizes his life henceforth. The more evident indeed that God had interposed to deliver, the greater his desire to seize and slay him whom his evil mind conjures into an enemy; and so he takes three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, when he hears of David being in the wilderness of Engedi, and goes in quest of him there. (1 Samuel 24)

But a very different issue soon appears. The tables are turned in God’s providence, and Saul falls manifestly into the power of David; but, oh, how different was his feeling and use of the opportunity! so plain was it that even Saul himself has the springs of his natural affection

touched, and owns how much more true David was to the king than the king to himself. “And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that Jehovah had delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eyes spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is Jehovah’s anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. Jehovah judge between me and thee, and Jehovah avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.” The consequence was that “Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast showed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when Jehovah had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not.” And then he calls on David to swear; for it was no question now of David begging an oath from Saul to spare him, but of Saul manifestly wrong, and yet afraid of his vengeance whom he sought to slay. “Swear now therefore unto me by Jehovah, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father’s house. And David sware unto Saul.” What a sight of king and subject, and what a victory, my brethren, for faith and grace! The flesh which fights against God owns its defeat virtually, and this in the very hour in which it had

sought destruction for the object of its dislike. It dreads the judgment, but that judgment comes not from the grace it ignores and hates, but from the retributive government of God. “And Saul went home; but David and his men get them up unto the hold.”

1 Samuel 25.

But here again we have in brief words another change. It is not now a question of Jonathan; but Samuel dies; and this surely was an event of no small consequence, little as he may have been named for a long time. We are approaching the end when it is no question of prophecy, but still we are not yet arrived at it. The power of God does not interfere; but the end approaches, when the witness of it is gone.

Before that, however, a new character of faith is found or formed in a new witness, and this too where it could have been least expected — not in a man who was to pass:away, but in a woman — not in Jonathan, but in Abigail, who abides and is blessed indeed. A very striking difference too in the character of her faith will be apparent to any one who reads the chapter with simplicity, and before the Lord.

David goes to a man of estate called Nabal, seeking there in his distress some refreshment for his young men, and David sent ten young men with a respectful message to these Israelites. “And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them,. all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men, and they

will show thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased." This no doubt was a great trial to David. It requires, I need not say, much grace to ask a favour, especially of such a man as Nabal; but, even little known as he might be — and David well knew what some men were in Israel — it was no small humiliation for the anointed of Jehovah. But Nabal appreciated nothing of God, and hated every thought of grace, as the natural man does; and hence answers with the utmost rudeness, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be? So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings." David was deeply irritated, and "said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff."

But the Lord had a better path and counsels for His servant. For "one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: they

were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him." The pathway of faith sometimes looks suspicious, and what Abigail did might have seemed to one who looked from outside to be a matter censurable enough whether one thinks of David or of her husband; but Abigail saw the will and glory of God, and where faith sees what He is doing, all questions are settled. Whatever it might seem, whatever it might cost, her mind was made up: and God vindicated her, and judged Nabal. "Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal."

"And it was so, as she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her; and she met them." Condign punishment was hanging in the balance, for all were ready to rush on Nabal and his household. "Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness." "So," he says, "and more also do God unto the enemies of David," if he left any male of them alive by the morning light. "And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine

handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing Jehovah hath withholder thee from coming to shed blood." What a fine witness to the power of the Spirit of grace, where the execution of judgment was so richly deserved! She had the instinctive spiritual conviction that it was best in the hands of Him who would deal solemnly with her guilty husband.

It is good not to avenge ourselves. "Seeing Jehovah hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal." There is no indecision here, and without claiming for her a prophetic spirit, we can see — and she is not the only one too — that God not only hearkens and hears, but suggests too, when He sees fit, and verifies perhaps far beyond anything that she herself anticipated. And it is as true now as ever it was, my brethren; for the path of faith is not wholly deserted yet, and the living God has those that He guides and forms still, and yet more manifestly according to His no longer promised but revealed Son, the Lord Jesus. "And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for Jehovah will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of Jehovah, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy

days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul."

All is judged to faith; and nothing can be more striking than this. Do you suppose that Abigail in her ordinary life had lacked love for her husband? I am far from conceiving so injurious a thought of one whose moral judgment in word and deed expresses itself with such delicacy and truth. Do you suppose that Abigail had hitherto lacked respect for king Saul? Far from it; but now, whether it was husband or king, if they set themselves in direct antagonism to God, what were they? One was but "a man," the other "a son of Belial." Yet I am sure that in her own sphere she had still been dutiful to them both in their just claims. But it was a question now that had arrived at the point where one must be thoroughly decided either for or against the Lord. Here she could not hesitate for a moment. She was right; "and it shall come to pass," says she in the power of the Spirit, "the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with Jehovah thy God." She sees him taken up by God intimately and for ever: this alone explains and justifies her conduct. "And the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when Jehovah shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be no grief unto thee."

How sweet to see in the dark and cloudy day a matron of Israel whom faith gives to discern clearly and to feel such jealousy, not merely for the unstained honour of the future king of Israel, but also for his soul to be kept simply and to the end of the trial from that which was

contrary to the grace of the Lord. “That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when Jehovah shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid.” Faith even here, while tried, is not without a present answer from God where we can bear it. “And David said to Abigail, Blessed be Jehovah God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me.” It was a singular thing for David to find a faith that surpassed his own; and yet who can doubt that in this at least there was no such faith seen in Israel as Abigail’s that day? “And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. For in very deed, as Jehovah God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light a single soul. So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.”

The rest of the chapter sets out the judgment that immediately befell Nabal; and there is no judgment so solemn as when a man falls into the hand of the living God. David thereon takes Abigail to be his wife.

In the next chapter (1 Samuel 26) we have Saul again, still unrepentant, still bent on his bloody mission. He seems once more to be on the point of catching David; but in truth “David sends out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed “before Saul knew aught for certain as to David; “and David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched.” How striking the quiet

confidence of faith — the sense of security from God which gave the hunted man courage to draw near his pursuer. “And David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him.” That very night, as we are told, David and Abishai came while Saul was sleeping within the trench. Then his companion says to David, “God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day.” No one knew better that David was always indisposed to deal with Saul. Who did not know the grace that filled his heart just recently? “Now therefore let me smite him,” says he, “I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against Jehovah’s anointed, and be guiltless?” It is clear therefore that David has grown in the sense of the grace of God. Not only he will not do the deed himself, but he will not allow it in another of his company.

“But David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul’s bolster; and they get them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them. Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of an hill afar off; a great space being between them: and David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner? Then Abner answered and said, Who art thou that criest to the king?” He taunts them with the wretched watch they had set that night. “And David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy

lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. This thing is not good that thou hast done. As Jehovah liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, Jehovah's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster." Saul was once more touched, and says, "Is this thy voice, my son David?"

But David does not merely acknowledge now; he remonstrates. "Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand? Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If Jehovah have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before Jehovah; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of Jehovah, saying, Go, serve other gods. Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of Jehovah: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains." Saul confessed his sin, but there was no conscience towards God. And David answered and said, "Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. Jehovah render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for Jehovah delivered thee into my hand today, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against Jehovah's anointed. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of Jehovah, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation." He has no confidence in Saul, though he may say as his present feeling, "Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail"

Nevertheless what is man to be accounted of? what David? All flesh is grass, and its glory as the flower of grass. For this triumph over self, this victory of grace, is followed by one of the most painful passages in David's life. Wearied at last of his continual exposure to the king's malice, he says in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," and this exactly when, as it would appear, the danger was over. Alas! what are we? Christ is for us the wisdom and the power of God. "There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Can it be David who thus feels and speaks? The man of faith deserts the ground of God, and deliberately seeks a shelter in the country of the enemy. David arises, passing over to the enemy he had so often conquered. "And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife. And it was told Saul that David was feed to Gath: and he sought no more again for him." Can one wonder that so evil a step led to others? that David carries on a course of deception of the most painful and pitiable kind, especially in a servant of Jehovah once so true and simple and transparent as he? (1 Samuel 27)

But soon the Philistines gather their armies to fight with Israel, and then is shown the tender mercy of God in repairing or at least overruling at this stage the mischief of His servant. "And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men. And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do;" and so it remained for the present. As far as arrangement was concerned,

David was to fight with the Philistines against Israel! (1 Samuel 28) God only is faithful. And hence another phase opens to us; for truly things were at the lowest ebb of the tide in Israel morally: David arming himself against God's people among the Philistines; and Saul, not only forsaken of God as he had forsaken Him, but himself now abandoning the one point of an Israelite's integrity which he had hitherto maintained, whatever else broke down; for he really had up to this, as far as the history makes known, been unswerving in his hatred of all seeking divination or allowance of witchcraft in Israel. But there is no good thing in the flesh, and the one thing that seemed good in the king as completely fails now, as he had failed already on every other ground on which he had been tried by God.

"Now Samuel was dead," as we are here reminded (in verse 3), "and Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land." He now saw the host of the Philistines mustering, and his heart trembles. Where was the champion of Israel? and why? Had he himself nothing to do with enfeebling the kingdom? Unable to learn of Jehovah, Saul says to his servants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her." Accordingly the servants tell him of one at Endor. "And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment." Every shred of honesty and truth was manifestly gone. "And he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee. And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of

the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" She was afraid that he might be an informer on her to the king!

"And Saul sware to her by Jehovah, saying, As Jehovah liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing. Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." What is the connection? Why should she augur from the sight of Samuel that this must be Saul? We have no reason to believe that Samuel said it was Saul, but she drew unhesitatingly the inference that Saul it must be. And why? Because it was not the familiar spirit she expected, but Samuel whom God alone could send. Why so if not for the king? She only looked for the spirit that she was used to — the demon in New Testament language which personated whosoever was named. When she saw that it was the true Samuel who came, she could not but feel the reality of the case, and gathered, as I suppose from this, that the present was altogether out of her own and Satan's line of falsehood to delude man. It was God Himself who took all up. Hence it was that Saul, in his desperation, wishing to consult a witch and her familiar spirit, was caught in his own trap, and heard his doom from the departed prophet.

Thus I have little doubt that it was the keen inference of a woman who was accustomed, it is true, to the power of Satan, but who on the failure of that power at once felt in her way, as Balaam similarly once before in his, the truth of things before God. And suppose you, my brethren, that there is no such reality as the power of

evil working in unseen ways, and by demons with and in man? You are mistaken. Only there is no reason for a believer who walks with God, and far from all tampering or meddling or curiosity, to be in the smallest degree alarmed as to such a transaction as we find here. The fact that it was not a mere evil spirit that appeared, but the real spirit of Samuel, she owns by this very circumstance to be altogether unusual. This it was that occasioned the greatest possible surprise to her soul. It is not in the power of the devil to bring up the spirits either of the lost or of the blest. Only God can do it; and He, I need scarcely say, never does so except under circumstances known to be adequate before Him for stepping entirely out of His ordinary ways. Such an occasion was the present; but we must not lightly imagine conjunctures of the kind.

And how then? Can there be no such thing as the appearance of this or that person after death? Not so infrequently as men think in these wise lands. Only it may be well to add what they are in my judgment. The real spirits of the departed just or unjust? Neither one nor other, but demons or evil spirits which pretend to be either, if God permit, and it suits the enemy’s purpose in deceiving. This seems to me a matter of; simple faith in what God has written for us to learn. I hold that it is as clearly revealed as possible that evil spirits may so work if it please God to allow it, and may deceive many. I cannot doubt that this has never been absent from the earth, that all the alleged oracles of old were connected with and flowed from the power of evil spirits, that the same thing disguised under other names has wrought more particularly in dark lands, and that even now it

may be at work from time to time, of course disguised so as the better to deceive even in the very centre of light.

But there is all the difference possible between this and what was seen here. Here, I repeat, it was not an evil spirit, it was the spirit of Samuel; and only God has the control of the dead. Those that are lost are kept, as we know, in safe custody. They are not allowed to leave. They are what are called “the spirits in prison,” as we know from 1 Peter 3. This shows us the condition in which the lost are. There they are kept waiting for the day of judgment. No power of Satan can bring them now out of that prison. They are under the power of God.

Still less can Satan govern the movements of the blest. These are never said to be in prison, or anything of the sort. There is no ground at all to suppose that the righteous are or can be in prison in any sense since their justification by the grace of God. A part of their blessedness even in this world where Satan reigns consists of their being brought out of bondage of one kind or another; and certainly those that are with Christ are in Paradise, which is in no sense a prison or place of custody. If Satan cannot rule the wicked dead, if he has no power beyond this life, if death closes all, still less can he touch the saints, or cause them to appear at his will, or convey any such power to man.

I allow myself to make these general remarks because they may tend to suggest, as I trust, the simple truth as to this subject, and may hinder the young more particularly, and indeed others who may not have fully considered the matter, from being a prey to the thoughts of men. Our wisdom here, as everywhere, is to be wise

unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil; to believe, not to imagine.

In this case then God was intervening contrary to the witch's thoughts. She had only to do with an evil personage called a "familiar spirit" — the one that attached itself to her iniquitous life as a witch. She expected this evil spirit to pretend to be Samuel; but when she found it was not her familiar but the real person — the spirit of him that was gone, she judged at once, and rightly, that it must be God who was interfering for the king. Therefore her great alarm, and her conviction that he who consulted her could be no other than Saul. She right well knew that for good or ill the king was the great person in Israel. Thenceforward, as we said, not the priest, but the king was the new and principal link with God. Once indeed it had been in grace, typically at least while the law subsisted; now it was in government. And he who took the "mad prophet" by surprise, and compelled him to foretell good and glorious things of Israel, now surprised both the king and the witch by sending Samuel to announce the speedy and shameful end of the king of man's choice. Nor need we wonder at the one more than the other; least of all at God sending Samuel now to Saul in his exceptional position and relationship, and under circumstances so critical both to the people and to the king of Israel.

"And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground

and bowed himself." Samuel, now recognised, speaks to Saul. "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams." Terrible but true confession! "Therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do." He was at his wit's end, powerless before man, and forsaken by Jehovah. Oh, what an end of the first and favoured king of Israel! "Then said Samuel Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing Jehovah is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And Jehovah hath done to him, as he spake by me: for Jehovah hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: because thou obeyedst not the voice of Jehovah, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath Jehovah done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." That is, they should have departed this life. "And Jehovah also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines. Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him." The very witch has to comfort him as best she can.

The next chapter (1 Samuel 29) follows up the more public course of things which had been interrupted by the melancholy episode of the forlorn, and one may say apostate, king Saul. Here the Philistines are seen mustering in thousands, while the Israelites pitch by a fountain in Jezreel. Now it becomes a question of David. What was he about? "And the lords of the Philistines

passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish. Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?" But God overruled the matter, and solved the difficulty into which David's unbelief had plunged him. Nor was it a dilemma only, but indeed a horrible sin. What must have been the result to his own spirit, had it not been completely cut short by that grace which held him in by bit and bridle, and, one might almost say, expelled him by the spears of the Philistines. In deep distrust and jealousy they say to Achish, "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle. he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" Powerless before his princes, Achish could only beg David to go in peace, that he might not to his own peril displease the Philistine lords past all power of healing. David sinks to the degradation of entreaty, indeed with somewhat of upbraiding in his tone addressed to Achish, because they did not allow him to go forth against Israel and the king he had so often spared. But Achish stands firm. "So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel."

Deeply interesting as 1 Samuel 30 is, at present I must content myself with but few words of comment. It is a scene happily familiar to most Christian readers, a turning-point in the dealings of God with the soul of David, who had slipped far from him. How could it suffice His heart to overrule and keep David back? He loved him too well to leave him as he was. The Amalekites become the instruments of discipline by making a raid on Ziklag, carrying off the wives of David and his men, their sons and their daughters, and everything belonging to them. “So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David’s two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in Jehovah his God.”

The man of faith turns to Him whom he had so deeply dishonoured. It was the point of recovery, when deserted and on the point of destruction by his own men, after all else was lost and in Amalek’s hands. The last lesson of needed chastening had fallen on his heart. The blow of the Amalekites did not effect it; but that David’s men who loved him and whom he so loved should be on the point of stoning him, broke up the great deep, and the mighty pent-up waters flowed, not in judgment, but in grace. His soul was restored. He encouraged himself in Jehovah his God. What would have been despair to a

man of the world wrought repentance not to be repented of in David, and turned him simply and completely to the Lord. It was the leper white all over now pronounced clean.

“And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech’s son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod.” Can he not now enquire of Jehovah? It was long since he had done so. He had been far from God. “And David enquired at Jehovah, saying, shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?” And if David encourages himself in Jehovah, Jehovah surely encourages David. “Pursue,” says he; “for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.” This he does by the help of an Egyptian servant who had been left behind sick. The Amalekites were discovered; David and his men pounced on them; and every one of those that they loved, as well as all they possessed, were recovered safe and sound, with a great deal more.

But further, the exceeding grace of God gave occasion to two things it is well to note here: the breaking out of hateful selfishness on the part of those who had no appreciation of the Lord (for the presence and activity of grace always bring out the evil of the heart where there is no faith); on the other hand, the single-eyed devotedness of one that no longer sought his own things shone once more with undiminished brightness. David was truly and fully restored. Grace had thus achieved not merely a great victory for David, but a greater victory in him.

In the spirit of love the chapter closes with the loving remembrances of David to the elders of Judah and his friends.

But the last chapter (1 Samuel 31) unveils a far different sight: the lamentable signs of the Philistines' victory over Saul and his sons, who fell down smitten on mount Gilboa. "And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together." How truly had the prophet warned, how punctually was every word verified! Thus fell Saul and his house. The circumstances of the enemy's triumph need not he dwelt on, nor the comely act of the men of Jabesh who recovered the bodies of Saul and his sons exposed on the walls of Beth-shan, burnt them, buried their bones, and gave themselves to a fast for seven days. All this is doubtless familiar to most.

We shall see in the next book the commencement of an entirely new line of things for David, who reigns gradually rising to full and undisputed sway over all Israel, and there passing according to the ways of God through another kind of trial. In all this the wisdom of the Lord is apparent — the failure of man unquestionably, but the grace of God triumphant everywhere.