

The Life and Times of Samuel the Prophet

Christopher Knapp

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Introduction

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SAMUEL! What memories rise up at the mention of this name-redolent with all that is lovely and dear to the Christian's heart—a name honoured of God, and coupled in His Word with that of Moses and Aaron, and David (Ps. 99:6; Jer. 15:1; Heb. 11:32). We love Samuel because he loved and honoured God. Jehovah had said by the man of God immediately preceding Samuel, "Them that honor Me I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30), and this word was fulfilled to a marked degree in the career of Samuel, into whose instructive life we are about to look. This will appear in detail as we proceed in our study.

Suffice it to remark here, that through all the changes of times and government in Israel during his long life, from the rule of the judges, including his own, to that of the kingdom under the unhappy Saul, he was held constantly in honor, even in his retirement from public life in Ramah; and at his death he was universally mourned, and honoured with a national burial (I Sam. 25:1).

Samuel has been called "The Israelitish Aristides," but the comparison reflects honor on the Athenian rather than on the Hebrew. He was the first of the "successional prophets" (Acts 13:20; 3:24) though Moses, and even Abraham, were prophets before him (Ps. 105:15; Deut. 18:18).

His name, heard, or asked, of God, is strikingly indicative of one of the chief characteristics of his godly

life of intercessory prayer, in which he sometimes, like his great Antitype, continued all night (1 Sam. 15:11; Luke 6:12). He ever: stood inflexibly firm for the word of God, as witness his prompt execution of Agag; and from his lips have come down to us the words spoken on that occasion, which have meant so much to the people of God ever since: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). Yet we find that he was not devoid of tenderness; his mourning for the rejected Saul betokens a heart of more than ordinary sensitiveness (1 Sam. 16:1).

Samuel is one of the very few blameless characters of Biblical history; for we must not conclude from the complaint of the people (ever ready to exaggerate, when seeking an excuse for a course in which their conscience is uneasy), that Samuel had really failed in reference to his sons, or refused to remove them, had it been in his power to do so. It is possible that he was not as exacting of them in connection with the exercise of their judgeship as he should have been, though there is no certain evidence of this. They were his natural and legitimate successors, and were perhaps the best that Could be had at the time. No, we love to think of him as Samuel the Blameless, and honor him, not only for the exalted position he occupied, and for his work's sake, but for his personal excellences as well.

With these few words of introduction, we proceed to the happy task of a more minute examination of his life, his Character and his times.

Chapter 1: His Parentage

1 Sam. 1:1-8

THE life and times of Samuel are replete with wholesome lessons for the people of God in all ages, but especially instructive for us in these days of ever-increasing declension and departure from God. Such were the days in which Samuel was born, when the judges ruled, and "there was no king in Israel;" when there was scarcely a "magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in anything" that they did; "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" - much as the times in which our lot is cast, when lawlessness prevails even in the circle of the professing church. It is no more with most, "What saith the Scriptures?" "What does God say in His Word?" but "What saith science?"

"What saith the world's leaders?" or "What saith the great men of renown in the church, the "higher critics," the professors of theology in the seminaries?" or, flower still, "What saith my own natural intelligence, my own heart?" which God says is "deceitful... and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17: 9). Every man would be a law unto himself, and the "law of the Lord" is either treated with utter neglect, or audaciously set aside as out of date, applying only to a bygone age, having no authority whatever over the conscience in these days of twentieth century enlightenment and advance along all lines, particularly in the denial of the rights of God and His Word over the conscience and conduct of man.

Such too were the days of Samuel's infancy and early life. Yet, in the midst of all the decline and spiritual

darkness, how beautiful and refreshing it is to see here and there a family in which godliness prevailed and the claims of the God of Israel were recognized. Such was the family in which Samuel was born. His father, a Levite, though disengaged from active service, manifested his piety by regularly attending the yearly feasts at the tabernacle in Shiloh. Let us read the beautiful account.

"Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph,* an Ephrathite: and he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other was Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there " (1 Sam. 1: 1-3).

* The author is aware that some expositors make Zuph to be the "Ephrathite," but in C. H. M.'s Introduction to "The Life and Times of David," he applies the designation to Elkanah, which application we prefer.

This godly Israelite was a descendant of the rebellious Korah. (See 1 Chron. 6: 27, 34, 37). It is that Korah who, for his "gainsaying" in the wilderness, was destroyed with all his company.

"Notwithstanding," we read, "the children of Korah died not" (Num. 26:11). "A debtor to mercy alone," he had good cause to worship. Others might go up to sacrifice, merely, but Elkanah both worshiped and sacrificed. It was no formal or meaningless ceremony with him, for he knew that to Jehovah's distinguishing grace he owed not

only the blessings of his life, but his very existence as a descendant of one of the spared children of Korah.

It is the knowledge, and acknowledgment of grace, that produces worship and obedience in the believer's life.

The law of commandments never produces a loving, willing obedience in the soul; it is the salvation - bringing grace of God that teaches us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2: 11, 12). Elkanah's dwelling was at Ramathaim-zophim* of mount Ephraim, but was originally of Ephratah (as "Ephrathite" signifies), near to Bethlehem - Judah.

* Ramathaim means the double Ramah (as upper and lower, or old and new); and the LXX reads the name, Aramathaim, which would identify it with the Arimathea of the New Testament, and the "rich" and "honorable counsellor," Joseph (Matt. 27: 57). There is a subtle association in names, not always easily accounted for:

"For mind is apt and quick to wed ideas and names together, Nor stoppeth its perception to be curious of priorities;

And there is little in the sound, as some have vainly fancied."

Yet the diligent inquirer will find blessing, if not a direct answer to his inquiry, in some way that is sure to be of value to his soul. The appended "Zophim" distinguishes it from another Ramah (of Benjamin), further to the south. Ramah means the elevated spot; and Zophim, the watchers - a combination of ideas forcibly suggestive of the attitude of soul becoming the children of God everywhere and at all times.

While walking on our "high places" of privilege we need to be ever on our guard against the enemy, and "watch unto prayer." (See Eph. 2: 6; 6: 18; and Heb. 2:1; 3:19.)

The times were troubles and unsettled; famine, too, at times prevailed. But if it was under the pressure of circumstances that he left the home of his ancestors, he did not, like the family of Elimelech (who were also Ephrathites, see Ruth 1:1,2), seek relief in the idolatrous land of Moab, but ascended toward Shiloh, nearer to the tabernacle of his God. He seems to have acted on the principle enunciated in that well known, though little heeded, saying of our Lord, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;" and, according to promise, "all things" were added unto him. Thus, instead of suffering loss and affliction under God's displeasure, as did Elimelech and his sons, he prospered both in his soul and in his circumstances, as is indicated by his generous offering of three bullocks at the presentation of Samuel to the service of the Lord. John, the beloved apostle wished the hospitable Gaius health and prosperity, even as his soul prospered (3 Jon. 3).

The first is of little value without the last; and under the Mosaic economy, they were generally inseparable from a godly walk. It was a dispensation of blessings in "basket and store," associated with "the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush" (the burning bush, see Acts 7: 30); they were "the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and the precious things put forth by the moon, and the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills, and the precious things of the earth and fullness thereof " (Dent. 33: 14-16). Not always was this the case, however, as the 73rd psalm shows. And in this dispensation we know that the Christian's

blessings are "in the heavenly places not here upon earth (Eph. I: 3).

Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. It was a divided family, and to quote the quaint observation of Matthew Henry, "the divisions of it carried with it both guilt and grief." So we read "When the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: but unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.

And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepiest thou? And why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (Vers. 4-8).

The custom among the Israelites of sometimes taking a second wife was not always based on motives of the lower nature; in many cases it was the desire for children, denied to the first wife. This was the probable reason for Elkanah's double marriage.

But "from the beginning it was not so " (Matt. 19:5-8). The institution of marriage originally contemplated but a single companion for man; and plural marriages appear never to have worked well in practice, as witness the humiliating discord in Abraham's family over the inferior Hagar; in Jacob's, the bitter jealousies between the two sisters, Rachel and Leah. Here, too, it breeds strife and vexation of spirit shameful to behold. What otherwise might have presented an ideal Hebrew home is marred

by the bitter provokings of the elate Peninnah, and the consequent sorrow of her barren rival.

But it is ever thus; departure from God's order as revealed either in creation, or in His house, brings its sure and painful results. Therefore it behoves the children of God to walk closely by His Word, and so save themselves sorrow and disappointment.

This unwarranted provocation of Hannah by her unworthy associate must have continued for years, according to verse seven. What the poor, childless wife suffered from the tongue of her adversary during those years of "hope deferred," only one in a like position could understand; and it is beautiful to see her unresentful submission to the persecution of Peninnah, the proud, if not happy mother of children. There is no hint of anger on the part of Hannah; she did not "render railing for railing," but poured out the tale of her grief in the ears of the God of Israel. He heard her complaint, and answered, after her weary years of waiting, beyond all her probable expectation, as we shall see.

Before passing on to this, we must not neglect to notice another praiseworthy trait in the character of Hannah - she refused to eat of the sacrificial feast. "She wept and did not eat." In this abstinence she displays her knowledge of and obedience to the law of the Lord, which, it appears, did not permit of the sacrifices being eaten in mourning. (See Lev 10:19; Deut. 26:14; Hos. 9:4.)

How lovely this subjection of soul! and what vessel more fit could be found in all Israel to give to the nation its long - needed deliverer? Like the godly Mary, of whom she was the figure, she was truly "the handmaid of the

Lord," in all things obedient to His word, and submissive to His will. She conformed to the meaning of her name, to bend, both under the continued reproaches of her cruel adversary, and to Jehovah's will.

"So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy handmaid, and remember me, and forget not thy handmaid, but wilt give unto thy handmaid a man child, then will I give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken ? Put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thy handmaid for a daughter Of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him. And she said, let thy handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad" (v. 9-18).

It was a tender word from Elkanah to his weeping wife, when he said, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons? "

intending to console her in her sorrow; and Hannah, doubtless, appreciated fully the love and sympathy that prompted them, but would not be put off by this from still desiring earnestly from the Lord the only gift that could satisfy the longings of her aching heart - a man child. He evidently did not share her yearnings for a son; he seemed satisfied with children by Peninnah, and Hannah prayed and bore her grief alone. Hers was not a natural longing, merely; she did not cry impatiently like Rachel, " Give me children, or else I die! " (Gen. 30:1) It was not offspring simply that she desired, nor did she, like the "beautiful and well-favoured" Rachel, reproach her husband for her lack of fruitfulness; she poured out her complaint to God, and asked, not for a child, merely, but "a man-child."

And why a man-child? Was it merely a partiality for boys? No; a higher motive moved her - God's glory and the good of His erring people she seems to have had in view. She knew well the condition of Israel; and the doings of the sons of Eli, in highest position, told the sad and undeniable tale of "Fallen! fallen!" and her earnest desire goes up to God for a son who might grow up under the blessing of Jehovah to be a deliverer in Israel.

This, too, seems to be the probable reason why she felt specially moved in prayer while at Shiloh. The sights about the tabernacle doors stirred her devoted heart mightily the debauchery of the daughters of Belial, the shameless licentiousness and rapacity of Hophni and Phinehas, told a repulsive tale of wickedness, and that before the sanctuary! Sin was flaunted in the very face of Israel's God; "men abhorred the offering of the Lord," and by their transgressions the people were encouraged to lawlessness! Eli himself, who should above all others

have understood, and been low in the dust before God for this shameful condition of things, seemed little exercised, and as a "good and easy man," sat tranquilly at the temple entrance not to watch and correct his corrupt sons, but to observe, misinterpret, and rebuke the conduct of a saintly woman at prayer! Oh, where was the nation?

Where their highest priest and judge when such a condition could prevail, and none, seemingly, but "a woman of sorrowful spirit" to lay it to heart, and sigh and weep and pray for better things? "She spake in her heart," but Eli only marked her mouth; he judged after the "outward appearance," and adjudged she had been drunken!

It is not the only occasion that those moved by the Spirit have been adjudged as drunken with wine; it was repeated at Pentecost twelve hundred years later. The "spiritual man" is ever accounted "mad" by those who know nothing of the power of God moving the soul.

"How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee," the old man harshly Calls to her. Observe her meek reply: "No, my lord," she says, "I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit... I have poured out my soul before the Lord... out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto." She addresses him with all the respect due to his age and office; she does not retort by reminding him of the delinquencies of his sons, and telling him that he had better look to his own house before hastily accusing and condemning others. No, nothing of this; true to her name, she bends again, and tells in the ears of the aged priest the tale of her grief, if not its cause. Her deserved reward is an answer of

peace; and she does not despise the blessing of one who had but a moment before charged her falsely. He was at the time God's highest representative on earth, and she took his benediction as the voice of God to her soul (little as he may have understood it himself (see John 11:51), and went on her way rejoicing." So the woman went on her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." Blessed conclusion to a day of sorrow, and presage of brighter days to come.

Chapter 2: His Birth

(1 Sam. 1:19-28)

THE night of Hannah's mourning is ended, the word had gone forth, "The God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him," and though as yet without sign or token, she rested in the spoken word. It could be said of her, as was said of her New Testament antitype: "Blessed is she that believeth: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord " (Luke 1 45). So we read:

"And they rose up in the morning early, and worshiped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house, to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

"And the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then will I bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide forever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good - tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word. So the woman abode and gave her son suck until she weaned him.

"And 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 unto the house of the

Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also have I lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there."

Like Sarah, the wife of Elkanah "through faith received strength to conceive seed," and the happy mother at last held in her arms "the son of her vows." Elkanah himself, though of less energy of faith than his wife, says, "The Lord establish His word;" it would indicate that he shared with his wife, in some measure, at least, an expectation of blessing coming to Israel through the child of Hannah's prevailing prayer. The words imply the hope of some special mission to be committed to Samuel, and in common with his noble wife, some expectation that better days would come to God's people through the birth of this son.

The glad and grateful mother embodies in her son's name God's great goodness to her in answer to her petition for a son. She calls him Samuel - heard, or asked, of God. And the name was not only intended to be commemorative of the fact that God hears and answers the earnest prayer of the righteous, but seems as a prophecy of the place that prayer was to have in the afterlife of this God - given child. (See 1 Sam. 7:5; 8:6; 12:19, 23; 15:11).

And, dear fellow believer, shall not these examples of prayer, both of this mother and her son, stir us up in the same ? We excuse ourselves by lack of time, a busy age,

so many things requiring attention, so many duties and obligations resting upon us; how shall we find the time to pray as Scripture exhorts us to do ? If we were people of leisure, or dwelling in solitude, we might be men and women of prayer, too. So we think, and so most suppose. But it is not so; we can pray best right in the circumstances where God has placed us; there we see and feel and realize the world's, and the church's, and our own individual need, as we could not know them in some secluded monastery or hermitage. It is the sense of need and what we have to meet with in daily life that drives unto the Lord, or draws us to the mercy-seat.

As for the necessary time to pray, what time is better employed than in prayer? And it does not always mean to be on our knees, or in our Closets, or in the prayer-meeting. Hannah prayed, though "only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; "yet what saint prayed more earnestly or really? "I have poured out my soul before the Lord," she says. It is prayer such as this that brings down blessing from above, rather than the stated, formal prayers, read or said on regular occasions. May God give us more Hannah's for supplication, and more Samuels for intercession. Some of God's servants, like Elijah the Tishbite, come into view suddenly and unannounced, and like stars of first magnitude continue in our field of vision for a considerable time; others, like Samson and John the Baptist, have their coming fore-announced, like those heavenly luminaries whose appearance have been foretold; they come into view gradually, by easy stages, as it were. So with Samuel; we may say, his birth and infancy augur something more than common. He is in some things a type of that great

Deliverer, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose early life was in quiet retirement until presented to Israel.

Hannah's words to Eli on the presentation of her child are in marked keeping with her lovely disposition of meekness and unresentment. She does not say, I am the woman you so rashly misjudged at the tabernacle entrance, and this is the child for which I was praying when you charged me with drunkenness. No, there is nothing of this. Her triumph is in God, as one that knows Him as the bountiful Giver of all good. "I am the woman," she says, "that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him."

Christian reader, how much like Hannah are we in forgetting wrongs received at the hands of others? How prone we all are to resent and remember an insult or a misinterpretation of our actions by others - we who offend so much, and have need to be ourselves forgiven wrongs done to others, which we have forgotten, perhaps. May we earnestly seek and cultivate a like spirit of non-resentment, and forget injuries, even when the insult was unmerited, as it was with her. Alas, how often we do wrong, and then indignantly resent and hardly forgive those whose duty it maybe to rebuke or correct us. May we learn more of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart," and then shall we indeed "find rest unto our souls."

"Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord," she adds: "as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." "Lent," should be, rather, "given." She did not selfishly cling to him, nor make a scene at her parting with the loved and lovable" son of her vows" (Prov. 31: 2). She gives him up

freely, gladly, for was it not for this very purpose that she waited long and prayed earnestly? She was not of those who vow and afterwards repent (Eccl. 5:4,5). Like David, of the following generation, she vowed "unto the mighty God of Jacob," and would perform it promptly.

Three years of age is said to have been the time of weaning with Hebrews; if this was Samuel's age when left with Eli, it exhibits to a marked degree the devotion of Hannah to the interests of Jehovah and His worship, to leave her child at the tabernacle so young. But "all things are possible to him that believeth," and faith rises above nature; she gave him gladly, and doubtless with assurance that the Lord had need of him, and would use him to the honor of His great and glorious name in Israel.

"And he worshiped the Lord there," we read. If this refers to Samuel, it would argue that he was considerably more than three years old. The Revised Version says in a footnote, that several ancient authorities read they for he, which, if correct, would present the beautiful picture of the company - Eli, Hannah, her husband, and others - all together in worshipful praise of the God of Israel for this gift of His love to the nation.

It takes us in thought to that lovely scene in the temple more than a thousand years later, when another group of godly souls, who also "looked for redemption in Israel," gathered round an Infant, to hold in their arms the Redeemer Himself, when aged Simeon adoringly said, "Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29).

Chapter 3: His Mother's Song

(1 Sam. 2:1-10)

"And Hannah prayed;" so begins our chapter. She prayed; but it was not the prayer of petition now, but of praise, of thanksgiving - a celebration of the divine perfections and glorious attributes of Jehovah the God of Israel. The petition had been, in the mercy of God, granted, and now it is worship welling up in her happy heart. She has, for the time being, nothing more to desire: to see her child installed in the Tabernacle, started in his life - time service to the Lord, was the very culmination of joy to her, and the fulfillment of her fondest aspirations. Again she pours out her soul before the Lord, not as a suppliant now, but fully satisfied, her desire fully met.

"In that day ye shall ask Me nothing," Christ said on one occasion to His disciples. When with Him, our blessed and glorious Redeemer above, we shall be fully and forever satisfied, and have need of nothing. We shall have no need, as now to "watch and pray," nor ask for anything; neither shall we cry as now, "Come, Lord Jesus." Faith shall give place to sight. Hope's desire will then be fulfilled. Love alone shall abide, calling forth our adoring praises, world without end! Amen. That which is in part shall be done away when that which is perfect is Come. The 72nd psalm ends with this (to some) singular expression, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." He had been celebrating in song the glories of Messiah's millennial reign upon earth and its blessedness. He has sung of the might, the majesty and riches of Him whom "Solomon in all his glory" was the

type; and when the paeon is ended, with his harp's last note he exclaims, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended" -his hopes are fully realized, and the happy Israelite asks no more. But the Christian's anticipations are higher, and beyond anything of earth he has the "better hope" of Hebrews 7:19; and only in "that day" of heavenly bliss and immediate association with Christ will his desires be fully realized and his prayers forever ended.

But we return to Hannah and her song. When she poured out her petition in sorrow, " only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." She prayed" in secret "to Him who" heareth in secret," and He had rewarded her "openly;" but this prayer becomes a song of joyful praise, for she has indeed glorious things to tell of Him who is "fearful in praises." Her song begins with the Celebration of the glorious perfections of Jehovah. Only a brief word, by way of introduction, does she speak of herself at all. "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord," she says. Out of her heart's abundance of gratitude to God her mouth speaks His praise." Out of the heart are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight," prayed the Psalmist when celebrating the power and perfections of God as displayed in Creation and in His Word (Ps. 19:14). He did not merely wish that his words might be acceptable in his Redeemer's sight, but that the thoughts of his heart might be pleasing to Him as well. And if our heart be not right, surely all else is wrong. It is the source once flows either bitter or sweet water, bearing blessing or a curse in the world.

"My heart rejoiceth in the Lord," she sings. Her joy was not so much in the gift (Samuel) as in God the Giver.

Her's was not a merely natural joy, but the joy of the Lord, a joy of the Spirit. How often we are more occupied with the thing given than with Him who graciously gave it. Not so with Hannah here; much as she might and did rejoice over the child of her vows and prayers, she rises above the level of nature to Jehovah Himself. All else is, for the time being, forgotten, and like the disciples on the holy mount, when "they saw no man save Jesus only," she speaks only of Him, not once mentioning the child whose birth gave occasion to it all. Jehovah filled her enraptured soul.

"My horn is exalted in the Lord," is her second word. In 1 Chron. 25:5 we read, "All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn." They were, together with the sons of Asaph and Jeduthun, the temple-court musicians; and the part of the sons of Heman was to lift up the horn, to sound aloud the praises of the God of Israel. So here Hannah declares her horn exalted in the Lord; she sounds not the trumpet to her own praise, as did the Pharisees of a more favoured day, but lifts it in Celebration of the infinite perfections of Him who alone is worthy.

And then she says, "My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies." It is Israel's and God's enemies she has in view, not Peninnah. Speaking for all Israel, she looks on in faith to the time when the enemies of her people, the Philistines in particular, probably, would be subdued and become subject, as under the rule of David. Filled with the spirit of prophecy, she sees beyond "the long, dark night" of Israel's departure from God and consequent humiliation, even to the day of "great David's greater Son," as the Close of her song makes manifest. This deliverance of Israel from her enemies was yet for many

days to come, but faith sees it as done already, and Hannah fore-rejoices in its accomplishment. She speaks something after the manner of Paul in Romans 8: 30, "Whom He justified, them He also glorified." So sure of accomplishment is the purpose of God that he can speak of the believer as already glorified. Yet some would have it that the believer may still fall away and be lost. But those whom God justifies (by faith) them He "also glorifies!"

Having spoken of her joy and triumph, her song proper now begins. She makes no more mention of herself; it is all Jehovah, in His Character and wondrous ways. She speaks His name nine times in her song of ten verses. She seems wholly lost in Him, and scarcely alludes to herself or circumstances, or that particular mercy (the gift of Samuel) that had prompted her anthem of praise. In their praises and thanksgivings to God, believers may be too much occupied with what concerns themselves - their necessities and circumstances. This is not the highest form of worship; it is not what occupies Hannah here; she rises above her own blessings; she is absorbed in the varied and majestic attributes of the Divine Being. She alludes to His holiness, His omniscience, His sovereignty, His omnipotence, His faithfulness, and His justice.

His holiness is first: "There is none holy as the Lord," she says. Holiness has first place in this cluster of glories. It is, we may say, one of the essential attributes of Deity; and without it, who could adore or even reverence Him? Yet it is the very trait of His nature to which men are most averse, and which they are most likely to overlook. He has therefore reminded us over and over again in His Word that He is holy. In this

attribute of His being He is incomparable. The seraphim veil themselves as they cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). "There is none beside Thee; neither is there any rock like our God," she sings. - Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness?" sang Moses at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:11). "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness," said the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (Ps. 30:4). Yes, this very unpopular doctrine of the perfect holiness of God is the very truth that the Spirit of Christ in David calls upon His saints to give thanks for. Thirty times in the Old Testament is Jehovah called "the Holy One of Israel."

Hannah next alludes to God's omniscience; "Talk no more exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth; for Jehovah is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." Being omniscient He is unerring in His estimate of men; and not merely does He take knowledge of their doings, but weighs their thoughts in the balances of the sanctuary. He reads the heart and weighs motives, rather than outward acts. "Judge not according to appearance," says our Lord, the appointed judge of all (Jon 7:24). And in 1 Cor. 4:5, His servant Paul forcibly reminds us that He will in "that day," the day of the revelation of the thoughts of many hearts, make manifest motives - He will weigh purposes as well as actions. O reader, let this solemnize our hearts and make us less careful of what men may think or judge, and cause us to be anxious only to please but One. There is no more beautiful description anywhere of God's omniscience (and His omnipresence, too) than that given by David in the 139th Psalm. It is little

wonder that he, a man like unto ourselves, should in deepest humility say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me."

Hannah dilates on God's sovereignty, and then she enumerates the sudden changes, the felicities and vicissitudes of life: the seemingly invincible mighty suffer defeat, and those that stumble in weakness as if about to fall, rise suddenly to strength and victory." The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength." The men of the world, in their self-sufficiency, say with Napoleon, that "God is on the side of the heaviest battalions;" but no; when it is agreeable to His purpose, "the lame take the prey" (Isa. 33:23). In men's circumstances of life also the sovereignty of God is seen; "They that were full have hired themselves out for bread; and they that were hungry ceased [to be so]" - not always because they are improvident or wasteful; nor do others, once hungry, cease to lack merely because of their superior industry or frugality. These are often but secondary causes, and behind all is the purpose of the supreme Ruler of the universe, without whom not one insignificant sparrow falls dead to the ground. It is not "luck," or "fortune," good or ill, nor are these mutations in the circumstances of men to be ascribed solely to themselves, their wisdom or their folly, or chance or opportunity. "I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home empty," said the sorrowful Naomi. She acknowledged the sovereignty of God in her altered circumstances; and Scripture abounds with illustrations of this bed-rock truth. God is sovereign, controlling the ups and downs of life.

This is further enlarged upon in what immediately follows: "So that the barren hath borne seven; and she

that hath many children is waxed feeble." Once flourishing and influential families become minished, even to extinction sometimes, while others increase to a multitude. It is He, the Lord, that "maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children" (Ps. 113:9). This will be demonstrated in Israel in the coming day of her promised increase. (See Isa. 54:1-6). "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward " (Ps. 127:3). Would that this word were pondered more in this age of increasingly small families.

This thought is closely connected with the question of life and death: "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." Not only is our coming into the world completely under God's control, but when born, our life is in His hand -, death, too, is amenable to His will. This is the sobering declaration of the prophet Daniel before the impious king Belshazzar: "The God in whose hand thy breath is." He is "the sovereign Lord of life and death." He killeth; death is His black-winged messenger. It is He who "turneth man to destruction, and says, Return, ye Children of men" (Ps. 90:3), and who in "the last day" will cause His voice to be heard by all that sleep in the grave. He "maketh alive," and "bringeth up" from the grave. Resurrection is the sovereign act of His power.

Riches, too, and poverty, are alike at His disposal: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; He bringeth low, and lifteth up." He gives the one or the other as suits His purpose. The knowledge of this should keep the rich humble, and make the poor content. Beloved fellow-believer, let us, as Scripture admonishes us, "be content with such things as we have," for our God, who has

revealed Himself to us in grace, has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill," again says Hannah, "to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." We have illustrations of this in Scripture all the way from Joseph to Lazarus. The former was raised up from the condition of a slave to rule over Egypt; and the latter, a beggar on earth, was taken to "Abraham's bosom" in paradise.

Hannah next ascribes to God almighty power "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them." This is a poetic figure of speech, though none the less forceful for that. Who but He whose "strength is infinite" could suspend and sustain this globe in its circuits as if it had no more weight than "the small dust of the balance?" as it is beautifully expressed in Job 26; 27, "He hangeth the earth upon nothing." In His wisdom, grace, and power; He is able to keep us without falling: "He will keep the feet of His saints," she confidently says 'O Child of God, weak, failing, and needing much mercy, rejoice in this which our Saviour has said': "They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand " (Jon. 10:28). And may the certainty of this make you, not more careless in your walk, but the more careful not to grieve such love; for if He keep the feet of His saints, His eye is upon them to see every mis-step they make, and observes when they wander into forbidden paths.

His justice is the next attribute noticed: "The wicked shall be silent in darkness, for by strength shall no man prevail." The judgment of the sinner is sure, though God

bear long with him in his rebellion and unbelief. "Where is the God of judgment?" men ask today, as they unbelievably asked of old (Mal. 2:17). We answer, He is bearing long with man's impenitence, but His Word declares He "will by no means clear the guilty!" His righteousness is one of His many glories; even the gospel of His grace declares it (Rom. 1:17). "It is," as another has aptly expressed it, "the rectitude of His nature His infinite agreement with Himself, and the equity of His government and judgment in the administration of both." Puny man would thwart the execution of His judgments; but though they join hands to resist the purposes of God, though they bind themselves with an oath, as it were, to keep the earth for themselves in their pride, at the exclusion of God's Christ, its rightful Heir, "by strength shall no man prevail." "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished" (Prov. 11:21). "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them."

This is the grand finale of Hannah's oratorio: "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His anointed." This is not Saul, nor even David, but He whom David in Spirit called "LORD." This "King" to whom Jehovah gives "strength" is He who "was crucified through weakness." Now, all power on earth and in heaven is in His hand, and in the Coming day of His kingdom and power, the horn of His royalty will be exalted above the kings of the earth, as it is written in the 2nd Psalm.

So the song closes with that one only Name, which strikes an answering chord in every loyal heart, both

Jewish and Christian - "His Anointed!" It is Hannah's, as it is God's last word to man. "What think ye of Christ?" This is the test. Reader; what is He to you ?

It is remarkable that both the expressions, "The Lord of hosts," and the "Anointed" (Christ's title) frequently found further on in Scripture, are used first by Hannah, the once barren and sorrowful woman (see chaps. 1:11; 2:10). Such are God's ways. He uses the things that are weak; and the things that are despised, to proclaim His praise, that no flesh may glory in His presence.

Hannah's song, though a true magnificent, and perfectly suited to the age and circumstances in which it was uttered, does not rise to the height of Mary's. Hannah begins: "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord," Mary says; "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." The heart is connected more with earth and the body; the soul and spirit have closer links with heaven and eternity. But this makes the song of Hannah none the less perfect or profitable to us; this very difference proves to our minds how very perfect it is, and wholly in keeping with its time and place.

We shall now pass on from poetry to history, none the less profitable for being more prosaic.

Chapter 4: His Childhood

(1 Sam. 2:12-26.)

The expression, "And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house," following immediately on the conclusion of Hannah's song, would indicate that it was uttered in the presence of the priest Eli and others at Shiloh. This pious couple having returned to their home, we then read, "And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest. Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord;"

and the rest of the chapter is a continuation of the beautiful conduct of Samuel set side by side with the wilful wickedness of the sons of Eli. It is like a mosaic set in white and black, with the black largely predominating - a black of deepest dye, with here and there a tiny patch of pure white. It is largely the human history, alas, and the history of Israel in particular. The evil of men in the mass is everywhere seen, while only here and there shines some noted exceptions; but the exceptions, as here in the child Samuel, shine only the brighter in contrast. And it is only the distinguishing grace of God that makes any to differ, for, by nature, "there is no difference." So the record given here is not that we should glorify Samuel, but his God, and the grace that provided and set apart for Himself this chosen vessel of His testimony, and His instrument for the accomplishment of His designs towards His people.

So we have in the passage before us the record of the dark doings of Hophni and Phinehas, with here and there a word as to the lovely behaviour of the Child of Hannah.

Let us examine the account in detail.

"The Child did minister unto the Lord before Eli."

Note the expression: it is not said that he ministered unto Eli before the Lord, but the reverse - he ministered unto the Lord in the presence of Eli. Though himself but a child, he ministered to the Lord - a little Levite indeed, serving Jehovah as best his infant years permitted, caring for the things about "the tent of testimony," the holy vessels and utensils, all of which were intended to express God's glory under various figures. (See Ps. 29: 9, marg.) Little Samuel was not there merely in the capacity of servitor to Eli, but in training for his life-work; and while in training, he was serving diligently; his young mind developing, and his intelligence in holy things enlarging, under the Spirit's influence, for he was, according to his mother's vow, a Nazarite from his birth, and for life. No razor came upon his head, no wine or strong drink touched his lips, nor was he even to eat any fruit of the vine. The symbols of natural joys and dignity were denied him, that his heart might be the more occupied with Him to whom he had been dedicated.

He must learn that "with Him is the fountain of life," and the wellspring of joys that neither cloy in life nor end with death. Happy child! and happy all who have found in Christ the fount of all their satisfaction and the sweet solace of their every sorrow.

"But the sons of Eli," we read, "were sons of Belial."

What a reflection on the name of him who at that time was both high priest and supreme judge in Israel! His sons, the "sons of Belial!" Could anything be worse-children of "worthlessness and corruption!" Truly we see

here emphasized the truth of the adage, "The corruption of the best is the worst of corruption." Though priests of the Lord, they descended to depths of evil. Instead of magnifying their office, they degraded it, till "men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

"The priest's custom with the people was that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hands; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh, unto all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now; and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the Offering of the Lord."

Their sin was of a three-fold character: sacrilege, greed, and uncleanness; for How great was their sin! For with their profanation of the sacrifices of the people, they added shameless gluttony, though God had made ample provision for their maintenance: "For the wave breast and the heave shoulder have I taken of the Children of Israel from off the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them unto Aaron the priest and unto his sons by a statute forever from among the children of Israel" (Lev. 7:34). But no, this was not enough; they must have more; and if not given willingly by the poor, brow-beaten people of God, they would take it by force.

They lived luxuriously among a people of primitive habits; they kept servants, and "made themselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of God's people." They became "as fed horses," and the Crime of unbridled lust laid at their door, in ver. 22, is but the natural consequence of such sensuous living. Stopping at nothing to gratify their carnal appetites, they robbed both God and His people in their shameless greed. And the people, to their honor be it said, though they submitted to being themselves deprived of that which was theirs of the sacrifices by right, objected when the priest's servant took the fat, which, according to Lev. 3:3-5, 16, was to be wholly burnt upon the altar, "an offering made by fire, a sweet savor unto the Lord." "Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" (Isa. 7:13) might have been asked of the house of Aaron here, as it was asked of the house of David centuries later.

It is a dark, humiliating picture. "They knew not the Lord" is written of these profane men, who occupied the office of priests, but whose hearts were far from God. It was said of Samuel, later, that he "did not yet know the Lord" (chap. 3:9), But that was a very different thing. He was in the way of knowing Him" whom to know is life eternal; "but these sons of Eli had hardened themselves past remedy, and there remained for them but the just judgment of God. Alas for them, and for all like them today who make a gain of godliness and profane their office to fill their bellies and indulge their lusts.

Following the account of the shameful practices of Eli's sons, we have recorded, in refreshing relief, the lovely conduct of the child of Hannah:

"But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod."

It shows by contrast the difference between the rejected priests and the child chosen to be the prophet of the Lord. That "but" Comes in at this juncture as a star shining out of the night of Shiloh's low estate, and the degradation of its priesthood.

Young as he was, the linen ephod marked this child for service about the holy things of God. Had the sons of Eli ordinary discernment, they might have read in this garment the displacement of themselves by the more worthy successor in training before them. The "little coat," too, brought him year by year by his devout mother was not the ordinary garment worn by children of his age and station, but rather a robe, a garment also worn by the high priest with the ephod. All this bore its own testimony to the gracious purpose of God, to all who had eyes to see and hearts to understand. Yes, better days were coming for the nation, though the time was not yet, and further chastening were to be experienced before a time of recovery and revival came, some twenty years later.

"And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord. And they went unto their own home. And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord."

Here we see the grateful Eli pronouncing blessing on the parents of his young assistant. His heart was no doubt touched with the constancy and devotion of the child to the interests of Jehovah, and as a token of his

appreciation he would give his parents an old man's blessing - a favour never to be despised. The benediction was medially through the lips of Eli, but behind it was the Lord Himself. Hannah lost nothing by offering her firstborn on the altar of service to Jehovah; He repaid her in kind fivefold. It was after Abraham offered Isaac his son, his only son, "upon the altar on the heights of Moriah that God promised him children as the stars of heaven and as the sand upon the seashore for multitude (Gen. 22:16-18). He will be no man's debtor, for He who commands His saints to "owe no man anything," will certainly Himself give the example.

"And the child Samuel grew before the Lord." The devoted Hannah might have feared the acquaintance and the corrupting influence of Hophni and Phinehas about the tabernacle at Shiloh, but God preserved Samuel to be an holy vessel, "sanctified and meet for the Master's use." He is able to keep His own, and guard the interests of His cause, whether His instruments live banished and alone, as John in Patmos, or among the evil influences of the court of Nero. (See Phil. 4:22.). Circumstances are nothing to God, and it is not our surroundings that should give colour to our testimony or affect our condition of soul. His sustaining grace and power are able to keep us in holy triumph over evil.

Our chapter on Samuel's childhood ends with Eli's mild chiding of his ungodly sons.

"Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my

sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them."

The outraged people had probably brought their Complaints to Eli, and the too indulgent father mildly reproves them for their scandalous conduct, calling it simply "evil dealings," and referring to the scandal of their disgraceful doings as "no good report." Oh, how easy and natural it is to be lenient with ourselves and our own children - who are, after all, but our second selves - while all too ready to censure others severely, as Eli, who rudely rebuked poor, praying Hannah, and softly admonished his profligate sons! True, he warns them of the danger of incurring the just displeasure of an insulted God, but in such an indirect and forceless way as to carry with it no conviction, and consequently no reformation "They hearkened not to their father."

But "the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men." How delightful it is to observe the development of this lovely flower of the Lord's planting! May we, too, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5: His Predecessor

(1 Sam. 2:27-36.)

"And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, 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? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice, and at mine offering which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?"

WE have before remarked that Samuel has been called the first of the successional prophets which the grace of God raised up and maintained throughout the monarchies and among the remnant after their return from the captivity in Babylon. The priesthood was ordained to maintain the nation indirect communication with God. Having broken down completely in the days of Eli, men of God, called seers, or prophets, were raised up to bring God's messages to the people and plead with them on God's behalf. This was pre-eminently the mission of Samuel. Previous to his call, "there was no open vision" - no public manifestation of God's presence in their midst.

That there were men of God, or occasional prophets, previously, we cannot doubt. "The angel of the Lord" who came from Gilgal to Bochim, and reproved the nation for their disobedience, may have been a prophet,

for in the marginal reading the word "angel" is messenger (Judges 2:1). The messenger here sent to Eli is called "a man of God." This honorable title is not bestowed indiscriminately on all the servants of God. Moses is called "the man of God" five times; David, three times. Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, with a few other prophets, are thus designated; and in the New Testament it is applied to Timothy, showing that we also may covet this title, or the character that merits it. There never was a greater need than now for such men, and we can say, as Moses said to Joshua, Concerning the prophesying of Eldad and Medad in the Camp, "Would God all the Lord's people were men of God!"

This man of God comes to Eli unannounced. Of his name and origin we know nothing. Three others like him were sent, each with God's message, to a king: the "man of God out of Judah" was sent to apostate Jeroboam; another was sent to the weak and wicked Ahab; and still another, to the militarist Amaziah. Their words only have come down to us. God would not have us occupied with His messengers, but with their message. They shall be known in due time, and receive the due reward of their service. Let us be satisfied, beloved fellow-servants of Christ, to labour unnoticed and unknown, content to deliver our message, bear our testimony, and leave the rest to Him and to "that day." There are many in the sacred Chronicles whose record we might envy, but whose names we do not know. In Hebrews 11, what a wonderful catalogue of unnamed worthies is given, whose deeds are inscribed in God's "Hall of Fame Enduring." The secret name on the white stone of Christ's approval is the thing to be desired above all else." To him that overcometh... will I give a white stone,

and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it" (Rev. 2:17).

The man of God comes to Eli with the message: "Thus saith Jehovah," he begins. He needs no apology for the message he bears. He is relieved of all responsibility in the matter; it was his to deliver the communication regardless of any consequences to himself. Men might call him brutally abrupt, lacking in tact and consideration of the effects of the terrible words on the venerable priest. But he was to deliver God's word, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth," but in the words which God had given him to say. And those today whose business it is to reason with sinful and lost men "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," must not tone down God's truth, nor shun to declare to a sinful world what lies before it. The sweet tale of the gospel of our precious Saviour dying for ruined and guilty man, of pardon for rebels and salvation for the lost, this is indeed the burden of their testimony, and is to be always duly emphasized; but they have also to bring God's warnings to the wicked, and tell of judgment for the impenitent, of hell for the Christ-rejecter, and of the fire that never shall be quenched. To declare the whole counsel of God is the solemn responsibility laid upon the man of God. Let the example of these men of God of old embolden every servant of Christ to bear faithful testimony to a dreaming world that more and more demands of the ministers of Christ that they prophesy "smooth things" to them.

The terse message of the man of God to Eli has three distinct parts. He first reverts to the past, dwells for a moment on the present, and then foretells the future. The past sets forth the privileges of Eli's priestly

ancestry; the present establishes the fact of the utter failure of his branch of this favoured house; and the future proclaims the sure and sweeping judgment about to fall upon it.

He first reviews the origin of the priestly family.

Speaking as the mouthpiece of Jehovah, he says "Did I plainly appear to 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? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering?"

Eli is reminded of the high honor put upon the house of his fathers: the great I AM appeared to Aaron while in the land of bondage and without any revealed reason, but His sovereign choice, selected him for the honorable post of high priest to Israel. It was for no distinguishing merit on Aaron's part, but of God's freest grace, and this privilege was entailed on his posterity for ever. He gave them ample and generous provision also for their maintenance" - all the offerings made by fire of the Children of Israel." These distinguishing favours should have incited them to faithfulness in the discharge of their official obligations, and prompted them to hearty obedience to all His will. This is ever God's way with His own, and often with sinners too. He reminds them of His past dealings in grace and favour towards them. The review of His "goodness" is designed to "lead them to repentance;" if this fails of its desired effect, the goodness bestowed becomes but an aggravation of the guilt, and cannot but bring down heavier judgment. It is a most solemn and serious thing to trifle with, or abuse,

the grace of God, as many have learned to their sorrow and eternal loss.

Having prepared the way by recalling to Eli's mind the high and holy privileges conferred on him and his house, the prophet proceeds to charge home on his conscience his failure and sin: "Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering... and honorest thy sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?"

There are three points in the indictment they "kicked," or rebelled, as if God's sacrifices were a thing of contempt, or the regulations concerning it onerous; he honoured his worthless sons above the great and glorious Jehovah, God of Israel; and they "made themselves fat" with the very best brought by Israel to His altar. It is a grave and awful charge to bring against such a man as Eli! Oh, how it must have cut him to the heart as he stood dumb before the accuser, in mute acknowledgment of the charge. Think of it, he honoured his wicked sons above Jehovah! Could sin be greater or guilt more grave? Those that allow and countenance their children in any evil way, and do not use their authority to restrain and punish them, do in effect honor them more than God, being more tender of their reputation than of His glory, and more desirous to honor them than to honor Him.

This was the deep fault of the too indulgent father, though himself innocent of the disorders about the Tabernacle. Being both high priest and chief magistrate over the land, he was invested with full powers both to depose and punish them, but failed utterly to do it. How much failure there is of this, alas, amongst Christian

parents to-day. There are good men, who are fathers, who seem to have neither eyes nor ears for the shortcomings of their children, and disastrous results follow. Some grow up unbelievers, if not profligates; and instead of becoming an honor and ornament to God and their parents, they bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. God said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." He did not, like Eli, weakly expostulate, or in easy tone admonish, but he commanded. We like the word; it has the ring of discipline, and savors of authority and order; and this is the very thing Eli failed most to do, and had, consequently, to hear from the lips of the man of God the doom pronounced against his family: "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me forever: but now Jehovah saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

The priesthood was promised to the house of Aaron forever (Ex. 29:9). "The priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute; "but it was in a way conditional, that they "walk before" Jehovah; this they ceased to do, and were consequently " put as polluted from the priesthood." This eventually became true of the whole house of Aaron (see Mal. 2:1-9), and it became displaced by that Priest "after the order of Melchizedek, who abides continually." He could say in faithfulness, as no descendant of Levi ever could say, "As for Me, Thou upholdest Me in mine integrity, and settest Me before thy face forever" (Ps. 41:12). Our willing hearts delight to have it so. Our God has laid help upon One that is mighty: "the government shall be upon His shoulder,"

"and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and He shall be a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6: 13). God speed the day of His appearing!

Them that honor Me, I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." Here is a most weighty principle, seen in all God's governmental ways; and it was to be illustrated in a solemn way upon the house of Eli. They had daringly despised Him of whom it is written, that "He is mighty, and despiseth not any" (Job 36:5); and for their insolence flaunting itself in the face of the Almighty, they must suffer the severest punishment which the Jewish mind can conceive: "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 thy house; and thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation... and all the increase of thy house shall die in the flower of their age." This came to pass in the very beginning of the glorious reign of Solomon. Abiathar, the last official representative of the house of Eli, and his son Jonathan, took part with the ambitious Adonijah, in collusion with the veteran warrior Joab, in conspiracy against Solomon, for which he was deposed and disgraced (see 1 Ki. 2:26, 27), and from that day the priestly office returned to the house of Eleazar, in the person of Zadok. After sharing the afflictions of David in his rejection, and bearing with him the burdens of a not untroubled reign, he slipped at the last, and lost the place of honor just as Solomon's reign was about to begin.

"And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day shall they die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful

priest, that shall do according to that which is in my heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. And it shall come to pass that every one that is left in thy house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, in one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread" (vers. 34-36).

Abject poverty and humiliating beggary was to be the lot of Eli's descendants. It is a picture fearful to contemplate, and it must have struck Eli with horror. But his sons had reveled in luxury and power, and it was meet that their offspring should grovel in disgrace and penury. They had lived luxuriously at Jehovah's expense, robbing Him of that which was His due, and their children should come to beg a piece of silver (the word is said to signify the smallest coin), and a morsel of bread.

How painful all this is! Had Eli honored God above his sons, and dealt with them accordingly, he would have escaped this sorrow and humiliation. But thus it is in the equitable government of God. He "is a consuming fire," and a jealous God, and woe to those that set aside His word.

Now, here again, a bright light is shining out of the gathering gloom: God was to raise up for Himself a "faithful priest," His "Anointed." This evidently looks beyond either David or Zadok; it is God's glorious King-Priest, who on earth ever did that which was according to God's heart and mind. So, in wrath, God ever remembers mercy; but it is mercy which can only be ministered through the merits and mediation of His

"merciful and faithful High Priest." Blessed surety and pledge of eternal blessing for all who by grace believe.

Chapter 6: His Call

(1 Sam. 3)

WE have here, at the commencement of our present chapter, another lovely note on Samuel's childhood - a fleck of gold in the dark picture - the lovely conduct of Hannah's child set over against the evil of the sons of Levi.

"And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli."

While others lose their place, and their functions cease, this little candle of the Lord's own kindling brightens and shines in the otherwise gloomy night of Israel's condition. God never has, and never will, leave Himself without a witness in the world. He who could even of the very stones raise up children to Abraham, never fails to keep a lamp of testimony to His faithfulness and truth.

"And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision."

A spiritual famine prevailed; not a famine of bread, as in the days of the Ephrathite Elimelech, but of the word of God." Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live;" so spake Jehovah to His people in the days of His servant Moses, and again to us in a latter day through His Son, the "Teacher come from God." And in the days that came between He spake in a similar strain by His holy prophet: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to

sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos 8:11, 12).

"No open vision" means there was no public revelation of God's will concerning His people; no open manifestation of His mind, either by dreams or prophet, or by Urim and Thummim. To quote the sober words of Matthew Henry: "There were none that were publicly known to have visions. Perhaps the impiety and impurity that prevailed in the Tabernacle, and no doubt corrupted the whole nation, so provoked God that as a token of His displeasure He withdrew the Spirit of prophecy, till the decree had gone forth for the raising up of a more faithful priest; and then, as an earnest of that, this faithful prophet was raised up."

Yes, the raising up of the faithful prophet was the pledge of the "faithful priest," even of Him who was to combine in Himself the office of Prophet, Priest and King - the "Anointed One," the "Faithful and the True."

"And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wag dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep, that the Lord called Samuel."

In this night-scene we have a picture of the moral condition of the nation at the time of the calling of Samuel. Eli the priest was "laid down in his place" - a symbol of spiritual sloth; and his eyes, that should have watched vigilantly for the interests of his God and the welfare of His people Israel, were "waxed dim, that he could not see." His dimness of vision was but a figure of

that lack of moral discernment that characterized him at the time. The lamp of God still burned, but its light was waning, as if about to go out and leave the place in darkness, as the wording of the passage would imply. "All in dead supineness slept" - sad picture of the times in Samuel's early days.

The Tabernacle is called Temple here, or house of the Lord, in token of the coming establishment in truth, with "better promises," and under a "better covenant," of "the sure mercies of David," made good in Christ, in whom all the promises of God are "yea and amen!" The Tabernacle was intended chiefly for the wilderness, while the temple was a permanent structure, designed for the nation when settled and at rest in the land of promise.*

*The Tabernacle answers especially to the Church's present circumstances as pilgrims and strangers in the world; the Temple answers to Israel established upon earth with glory under the reign of Christ, as son of David - the true Solomon. [ED].

It was full two hundred years since the last scripture reference to the ark was made. It was on the sad and humiliating occasion of Israel's civil war, when all Israel went against offending Benjamin, because of the horrible crime of the men of Gibeah against the Levite's concubine (Judges 20). It was a time memorable in the annals of the nation - a "black-letter day," recalled for its lesson of man's deep moral depravity by the prophet Hosea 600 years after: - They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah! " (Hos. 9:9; 10:9).

From that dark day of lust, and terrible vengeance and slaughter, to the time of Samuel here, the "ark of God's testimony" is not once mentioned. It is as if God hid Himself after that deed of darkness done by the people called after His name, until His people might return to Himself. Now, under Samuel, it comes once more into prominence, for the light of God's testimony was about to revive, and His presence once more acknowledged in their midst.

"And Samuel was laid down;" to sleep is supplied, and would perhaps better be left out. Is it that, instead of sleeping as a healthy boy naturally would, he may have been in prayer, or watching lest the sacred lamp, which should never cease to burn, should go out, and leave all in darkness?

It was a night long to be remembered by young Samuel. If, as we read in Esther 6:1, "On that night the king could not sleep " (because the watchful God of Israel withheld slumber from the monarch in order that His people might be preserved), it is likely that, in the interests in His people's welfare, the Holy Spirit acting in the child's heart kept him awake and ready to hear and respond to that call which he was so faithfully to fulfil in the coming years. May we too watch unto prayer, standing as it were on our watchtower, to hear what God the Lord will say to us (see Heb. 2:1).

Three times the Lord calls Samuel. If he did not at first recognize the Voice, he was at least prompt in answering, and ran to Eli, whom he supposed had summoned him. Willing child! He was faithful in that which was least, and God would entrust him with greater things - a needed lesson for us all, especially to

those newly come to the faith of Christ. Be content, dear young Christian, to serve in little things; then, if He sees fit, and needs require, thy God can promote thee to more important ministry.

Though three times mistaken, Jehovah did not lose patience with His little servant. Oh that we might learn of Him in this, as in all things else, and "have patience one with another," and especially with those whom we may consider slow of apprehension.

At Samuel's third coming, Eli "perceived that the Lord had called the child." What an indirect, yet forceful rebuke to the privileged high priest through whom God had promised to reveal Himself in behalf of His people. What thoughts would fill his mind, in that God had passed him by, the ancient, the elder (to whom years should have "taught wisdom, and length of days knowledge"), and address Himself to a mere child. "Go, lie down," he says; "and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth." "If He call thee;" was it that the rejected priest almost hoped that it was not really the voice of God? or that He might not call again? for Eli, no doubt, feared the worst. Obediently Samuel lays himself down once more, to listen, doubtless with beating heart, to hear the Voice yet once again.

"So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth."

Again the Lord speaks to His chosen messenger, and the fourth time calls, "Samuel, Samuel!" This time repeating the name twice.

For some reason Samuel does not answer exactly according to Eli's instructions; he omits the name "Jehovah." He may have felt unfit to take upon his lips that sacred, awful Name. Whatever the cause, we may be sure it was not disobedience to Eli.

Reverence is a trait lamentably lacking in this day of shallow smartness. There is plenty of polish and politeness, such as it is, but the ancient and estimable quality of veneration is sadly lacking.

It is in keeping with the times, the "last days," spoken of in 2 Tim. 3:1-7.

Reverence is everywhere enjoined in Scripture. Children are commanded to honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-3). Wives are charged that they reverence their husbands (Eph. 5:33); and as to old age, it is commanded, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am Jehovah" (Lev. 19:32). Reverence to rulers is also required, as it is written, "Render therefore to all their dues... fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Rom. 13:7).

Reverence towards God and the holy things connected with His name is especially to be observed. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him" (Ps. 89:7). "Holy and reverend is His name," it is written again (Ps. 111:9). "Thou shalt reverence my sanctuary" is twice commanded in His Holy Word (Lev. 19:30; 26:2). The growing disregard of reverence for things sacred is lamentable, and is an indication of the last days in which our lot is cast. Even professing Christians speak of God as if He were such an one as themselves (Ps. 50:21). It is a common occurrence in the big modern evangelistic

campaigns to hear God addressed in prayer as if the person praying were on very intimate terms with God, the Most High, and could approach Him as familiarly as if He were little more than themselves - in a way they would not presume to address the chief magistrate of their land. This is a very grave symptom indeed, and instead of conveying to our minds the impression that they are very intimately acquainted with God, it causes us to fear that they may not know Him at all, or that they are praying to a god of their own imagination sort of mental deity. It is noticeable that such persons almost invariably speak of, and address, the Son of God as "Jesus "His personal name. His title, "Christ," is little used, and " Lord Jesus Christ " still less.

But, some one may say, is He not called Jesus in the Bible, and is not this His proper name? True, but it no more warrants us to speak to Him thus than to address the king of England as "George," or our president as "Woodrow," though intimate friends may thus address them in private. What we contend for is reverence toward our adorable Lord - not to lay down a rule, but exhort to due reverence. We are not aware of a single instance in Scripture where His disciples, or any one else, ever addressed the Lord as "Jesus." He is spoken of as "Jesus," but that is quite another thing. "The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" has ordained that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11). This is the lesson we would draw from the omission of Jehovah's sacred name in the response of Samuel at His midnight call - the most important lesson of reverence toward God and His holy name.

But let us go on to the message received by him on that memorable night:

"And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every One that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things that I have spoken concerning his house when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and lie restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity Of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever" (ver. 11-14).

The Lord had probably a twofold purpose in speaking to Samuel here. One was to reveal Himself to the chosen instrument of His communications to His people in future - an introductory lesson as a prophet of Jehovah. The time had come for God to break silence with the nation. How long that silence had continued we know not; for how many years there had been "no open vision," we cannot tell; it had been long; perhaps for a generation, or more. But God now will visit His people in mercy, and His voice is once more heard. His "miracles and His signs" are about to be seen again in the land, and His mighty acts of power put forth in their behalf as in the days of old.

It is the dawn of brighter and better days for the nation of His choice, the "people of His pasture," through whom "the Seed of the woman," the promised Redeemer was destined to come.

The second reason in communicating His word to Samuel was that God might confirm His word to Eli, in

reference to his guilt concerning his sons, as it had been told him through the man of God. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established," it was written in the law; and Jehovah would establish His word with the delinquent priest, and assure him that what He had before spoken should surely come to pass. Eli might wish to think as little of it as possible, but God would thus remind him of His word. God makes us to reap the fruit of our doings by the smitings of conscience, as well as by the afflictions brought upon the body. God knows when and how to "visit for these things," done against His name or people.

Reader, let us lay well to heart this solemn lesson, and fear before Him - fear to sin, fear to dishonour His name, or bring reproach on His cause. Let us not trifle with His grace, for it is written, "The Lord shall judge His people" (Heb. 10:30). As children of God, "we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 1:30-35).

And now as to the message. God spoke of the judgment of Eli's house for the iniquity of which he was not ignorant - the villainy of his sons, and his own failure to restrain them: "the iniquity which he knoweth," and which caused the people to "abhor the offering of the Lord;" his sons had "made themselves vile, and he restrained them not!"

It was for devotedness to the Lord's honor, and their faithfulness in avenging it, even upon their brethren, that the priesthood was confirmed to the house of Levi, as recorded in Ex. 35:25-29 and Deut. 33:8-10, and Eli surely must have known this well. Alas, are there not many Elis among the people of God today? - failing to

command their households, indulgent and weak toward offending children, to their sorrow and loss in the end.

The message closes with one of the most solemn sentences against a man or his posterity: "I have therefore sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering for ever." For there were offences which could not be purged with sacrifice. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses," says Heb. 10:28; and these priests did in a way despise God's holy ordinances, which they knew.

It is to be noted that God does not command Samuel to make known to Eli what had been told him. Ever thoughtful of our limitations, our God does not lay upon us greater burdens than are necessary. It would have been a heavy burden if the sensitive child had been compelled to communicate to the aged priest the "heavy tidings" told him during the night. An easier way is open to him; Eli himself asks him under oath to tell him all. "And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." Poor Eli! We cannot but feel deeply for the aged man under such a stroke; yet how much better it would have been to fall on his face in repentance, crying day and night with prayer to God, or at once take measures to have his sons put from the priesthood, than say, almost as a fatalist, "Let Him do what seemeth Him good."

The remaining portion of the chapter tells of Samuel being recognized as a prophet raised up of the Lord, by all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba. God caused His voice of prophecy again to be heard, and He "appeared again

in Shiloh." He allowed none of Samuel's words "to fall to the ground," which would be another testimony to Eli that what God had spoken through him concerning the coming judgment of his house was sure, though for reasons of His own He might for a few years delay the stroke. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil " (Eccl. 8:11); and this was doubtless true of the sons of Eli.

Chapter 7: His Early Ministry

(1 Sam. 4)

THE expression with which our chapter opens, "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel," seems to indicate that it was not so much the prophetic word as the more ordinary ministry of the Levite, in exhortation and instruction, "teaching Jacob Jehovah's judgments, and Israel His law" (Deut. 33:10). It is called "the word of Samuel," probably to distinguish between it and that ministry which was peculiar to him as a prophet of the Lord. In the days of the kings, Jehoshaphat sent out Levites to teach in all Judah: "And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people" (2 Chron. 17:8). So also in the days of king Hezekiah, the Levites "taught the good knowledge of the Lord " (2 Chron. 30:22).

And here the word ministered by this devoted young Levite comes to all Israel. He probably went about in circuit, from place to place, exhorting the people to obedience to Jehovah's law, seeking to encourage and win them back in allegiance to Him. He could not be expected to come into prominence about the Tabernacle as yet, owing to his youth and the presence there of Eli and his sons. God's punishment had not yet been meted out to them, while they were, doubtless, filling up the full measure of their iniquity; and Samuel would not be idle, but going about among the people, ministering to them in the humble capacity of an itinerant Levite.

We can well understand how Samuel's presence at Shiloh, about the Tabernacle, might become unwelcome

to Hophni and Phinehas as he approached years of maturity; and God may have used it to send His servant out among the tribes, and thus "make the wrath of man to praise Him." This would give Samuel a thorough acquaintance with the people, and win their confidence, and so obtain that influence with them that in later years God turned to such good account. From a child, opening the doors and serving in various ways about the Tabernacle, his occupation as a teaching Levite would, in turn, prepare him and give him the necessary experience to serve his God and His people in the higher position of chief magistrate and prophet - at times even as a sacrificing priest.

It is a beautiful example of the New Testament principle of a steward in the temporal affairs of the assembly, "using the office of a deacon well, and thereby purchasing to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13). In the New Testament itself we see it illustrated in the case of both Philip and Stephen, who were at first chosen to "serve tables," and later developed into men of gift and greater usefulness; the former becoming known as "Philip the evangelist," and the other an able teacher and the first Christian martyr (see Acts 6:5; 7:59; 21:8). And if it be true that we must learn to obey before we are qualified to rule, it is equally true that we must have been willing to serve in little things before we can be expected to be called to serve in greater. For example, if we have never been interested in the care of the meeting-room, we can never expect to be given any important place in the government of God's house, the Church of God. If, while young, we disdain, or are too indolent or indifferent, to teach in the Sunday-school,

how shall we ever, when older, become useful in teaching the assembly?

"Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men " (1 Sam. 4:1. 2).

This is the first mention made of the Philistines since the capture and death of Samson some twenty years before, if the ordinary chronology given in our Bibles be accepted as correct (Judges 16: 30). The sudden destruction of so many of their number on that occasion, including, as it doubtless did, many of their leading lords and chiefs, would have a subduing effect upon their spirits, and we hear no more of them until their mention in the chapter before us.

It would appear that it was Israel who provoked the battle; there was likely a sort of armed truce between them, and here, without one word of command from God, and no apparent provocation on the part of the Philistines, they go forth against them to battle. They took the offensive without either divine direction or support, and were made to smart for it.

The Philistines were not of the nations of Canaan devoted to destruction. Away back in the book of Genesis we see both Abraham and Isaac on friendly terms with them (Gen. chaps. 20 and 26).

We learn from Ex. 13:17 that God "led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt." It was

only the "borders" of their land that they were commanded under Joshua to conquer (Josh. 13:3). Shamgar, later, slew six hundred of them with an ox goad, "and he also delivered Israel " (Judges 3:31). Then, further on, we read of Israel worshiping the gods of the Philistines, for which Jehovah sold them into their hands (Judges 10:6, 7). Their last end is utter destruction, and their pride cut off (Amos 1:7, 8; Zeph. 9:5; Zech. 9:5). Typically, to quote from the "New and Concise Dictionary" of Morrish, "They represent the pretension and intrusion of man in the flesh into that which belongs to God. Nazariteship in Samson is God's way of deliverance, but the Nazarite utterly failed, and in the days of Eli the Israelites were conquered by them, and they were enabled to enter into his dominions; and in a battle Saul and his sons lost their lives. It was by David, God's king, that the Philistines were really conquered, and under Solomon we find they were tributary."

Here we see Israel worsted in their self-chosen battle with them. Israel was smitten before the Philistines. No power but that of God can stand before them. He is not with Israel here, and they consequently suffer defeat. Like Samson, they are powerless in contending with them. We read nothing of their seeking God's direction or assistance before the battle; they did not have Samuel with them to pray for and encourage them, and their reliance was wholly in the arm of flesh, which, with the people of God, always fails. "Woe unto them, for they have fled from Me... they have transgressed against Me." "Yea, woe also to them when I depart from them" (Hos. 7:13; 9:12).

This is ever true; it was true of Samson; "the Lord was departed from him," and his strength was gone. He now

fell into the hands of the Philistines, whom he had never before feared, and died in bondage to them. So here Israel, without the Lord, are easily defeated by them; they are punished severely for their temerity. But instead of turning to God, as did Joshua after the defeat before Ai (Josh. 7: 6-8), they bethink themselves of the ark, hoping it would save them, and they could thereby retrieve their loss and wipe out the disgrace.

"So the people sent to Shiloh that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God " (ver. 4).

Leaderless and repulsed, they turn to that which was but a symbol to save them. True, it was the symbol of God's presence: "The ark was, by institution, the visible token of God's presence;" but of what worth was this when not accompanied by the actual presence of God Himself? Alas, they had grievously offended Him by their sins; and what help could be expected from "it" when brought out under the charge of the already condemned sons of the rejected Eli?

The Israelites evidently placed their confidence in the ark through a misunderstanding, or a wrong application, of Moses' words at the going forth of the children of Israel in their wilderness journeys: "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel " (Num. 10:35, 36). It is easy for man's depraved heart to appeal to scripture examples to justify unauthorized

practices, when those scriptures are taken out of their connection, and thus misapplied. After they had been established in the land, there was no authority whatever to remove the ark from its settled resting-place; it was in fact forbidden (see Deut. 12:5, 11, etc.). God's presence, symbolized by the ark, was not to come to them, but they were to go to it!

"And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us! Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods... that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness... 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 thirteen thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain " (vers. 7-11).

The Philistines fought," we read. Israel's defeat appears to have been sudden, and they seem to have succumbed before their enemies without scarcely striking a blow. Oh, how shameful their defeat; and, when appraised of it, the godly in Israel must have felt like crying like Joshua before Ai, "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!" And had the elders after the first smiting of the four thousand, become exercised before the Lord, as was the warrior Joshua, and cried to God earnestly to know the cause, they might have been spared the second and worse defeat. But no, they only say, after the preliminary skirmish has ended disastrously, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? "It was little more than a pious expression, and was not followed

by searching of heart, else they might have discovered the cause, as did Joshua; and having learned the reason of their defeat, with true penitence and prayer they might have retrieved the defeat with complete and glorious victory. "Ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to Flight!" was the promise given them by God at the outset of their history as a nation. Later the same promise is repeated with greatly augmented force: "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight!" Joshua, in his farewell address, recalls the animating promise, "One man of you shall chase a thousand " (Lev. 26:8; Deut. 32:30; Josh. 23:10).

But, be it noted, all these promises were conditional; they were dependent upon the faithful discharge of Israel's responsibilities. The first was, "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them." The second was like unto it: "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this!" (the keeping of the commandments of God); and the third is of like import, "But cleave unto the Lord your God" (see context of above scripture references). But Israel had sadly failed in all this; they were therefore shorn of their strength and smitten before their enemies. The only remedy left them was the confession of their backslidings and a wholehearted return to God. But no, this would have required "great searching's of heart." It was humiliating, and would have taken too much time, they probably would have reasoned. They were anxious to make good their initial losses, and it was much easier to say, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, that it may save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

The result, as we already know, was a far worse and irretrievable defeat.

There is no true power for the believer apart from obedience to God's word, just as there is no true joy or peace apart from subjection, nor abiding rest without submission to the Divine will as revealed in Scripture. There were great shootings in the camp when the ark arrived, just as in a later day, when Israel was again in conflict with the Philistines, and David came in, "They shouted for the battle"(1 Sam. 17:20). But in neither case was it "the voice of them that shout for mastery," nor the "shout of a king" in their midst but the expression of a vain and fatal confidence; in both cases there was more shouting than real or effective fighting. It was much easier to shout than it was to fight; just as to-day, it is easier to grow enthusiastic under the influence of big meetings and stirring addresses with exhilarating music, than it is to live devotedly to God, in separation from the world, crucifying the flesh, and courageously overcoming the devil.

The Philistines (like unbelieving Israel) look at the symbol of Jehovah's presence instead of to Jehovah Himself - whom they did not know. It was only the fear of superstition, and they soon rally from it, saying, "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines... quit yourselves like men, and fight." The margin reads, "Be men."

"Be strong! Be men!" is all the men of the world can say for each other's encouragement; but, relying on the Lord, the man of faith says with the apostle, " When I am weak, then am I strong." "Ye walk as men," was the same apostle's rebuke to the worldly Corinthians who

gloried of prominence in the world. "Every inch a man" is the complimentary commendation of the world as to one it approves. Men of "blue blood" (or men of "red blood," as it is now) are the pride and confidence of the natural man; but God has said, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jer. 17:5).

Thus, poor misguided Israel, having departed from their God, fly before the victorious Philistines, and return "every man to his tent" in humiliation and sorrow, for there was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen."

"And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim that he could not see. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army.

And he said, What is there done, my son? And the messenger answered and said, Israelis fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And 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" (vers. 12-18).

Poor Eli! Be it said to his praise, however, that he trembled for the ark of God; "and it was when he heard that it was taken that his heart ceased to beat, and he fell, to rise no more, while the messenger seemed least concerned about the fate of the ark, as his mentioning it last would indicate; but to the aged priest it was the most tragic event of this dark and fatal day. "Precious in Jehovah's eyes is the death of His saints;" and, however weak, Eli was one of them, surely. The report of the ark being taken was too much for him. This eclipsed all the other sorrows of that terrible day for him.

God, who loves to keep the remembrance of all that is good, has put on record the few significant words of the wife of Phinehas who, when she heard that the ark of God was taken," calls the child to which she then gives birth, "Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel." First in her thoughts is the ark of God; then her father-in-law, the aged Eli; and last, her unworthy husband, slain by the Philistines. The shock of that evil day was too great for her also who, with her dying breath gives utterance to what was rending her heart, "The glory is departed from Israel," for the ark, Israel's glory, was now in the enemy's hands. "Ichabod," the glory gone, would be a solemn reminder of that unhappy break in the priestly family, and that insults to Israel's God justly entail terrible consequences.

Eli was of the line of Ithamar, the youngest son of Aaron, and in consequence came in last in the order of priestly privilege. Their responsibilities in connection with the

tabernacle were almost wholly of the Levite character (see Ex. 28:1; 38:21).

On the death of Nadab and Abihu because of their offering strange fire before the Lord, the high-priesthood fell to Eleazar, the third in order of age. How the office came to be transferred to the house of Ithamar, the fourth son of Aaron, Scripture does not inform us. God has reasons in all things, some of them being hidden from us for the present, as those unexplained transposing of the earth's crust, sometimes met with, which have proved so puzzling to geologists. How, or when the strata became superimposed, they are unable to say; they only know that they were. In some upheaval of the dim past they became inverted out of their regular order, but in what manner, or in what geologic age the cataclysm occurred is a mystery to man.

The house of Eli continued its priestly functions through the reigns of Saul and David, up to the accession of Solomon. The terrible slaughter of the Lord's priests, eightyfive in number, by Doeg the Edomite, at the command of Saul, was a part of the judgment pronounced upon Eli's family (1 Sam. 22). Only one, Abiathar, escaped and fled to David, with whom he ministered as priest during the time of his rejection. He followed him in his wanderings, and was continued in office through David's reign; but, for his part in the conspiracy of Adonijah, he was banished by Solomon to the priestly town of Anathoth, where he presumably died in disgrace. "So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; that he might fulfil the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh " (1 Ki. 2:27). He was the fourth high priest from

Eli, and the last of the line of Ithamar to fill this office of dignity and honor.

It was nearly a century after God's judgment upon the family was pronounced; but though not executed speedily, it was nevertheless accomplished as God had said.

Chapter 8: His Twenty-Year Silence

(1 Sam. 5 and 6).

"And the ark of God was taken." Four times over do we read these momentous words in the chapter preceding, so important was the event in the mind of the Spirit of God, by whom every word of Scripture is inspired. Nor are we left in any doubt as to why this dire catastrophe was permitted to happen in Israel: "For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men: and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hands" (Ps. 78:58-61).

The moral condition of Israel at the time of the taking of the ark is thus revealed to us. We might suppose, from the account given in Samuel, that it was for the sins of Eli alone that the loss of the ark occurred; but not so, there was a national cause as well. It was not the prowess or valour of the Philistines, as they might vainly suppose, but God Himself who deliberately and intentionally "delivered His strength into captivity." The inspired penman in the its book of Samuel tells us nothing of "high places" and "graven images," but God, by the hand of the psalmist, has it recorded that it was for their idolatry that "He was wroth and greatly abhorred Israel" not only because of the wickedness of their priests. "Like people, like priest," is almost invariably true. In His just government, God usually

allows people to have what they persistently seek after, which does not in any degree lessen their guilt.

What a calamity to Israel was the loss of the ark from their midst! In the verses immediately following those quoted above, from the 78th psalm, we hear of the calamitous consequences of its departure from the land: "He gave his people also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation" (ver. 62-64). So must it ever be: what we sow, we reap, whether as a nation, or as individuals, for "God is not mocked!" Solemn, yet blessed thought; for what would soon become of the world if God withdrew from it His moral government, or ceased to discipline His people?

From that hour Shiloh lost the prestige among the tribes which it had enjoyed since the days of Joshua - a period of more than three hundred years (see Josh. 18:1; 19:51). "He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim; but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved" (Ps. 78:67, 68). Shiloh then became the standing memorial of the nation's sin at that time, and was so referred to by the prophet Jeremiah five hundred years after: "But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel... and I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim " (Jer. 7:12, 15).

Ephraim was given the place of firstborn by Jacob over his brother Manasseh - the place of privilege; but the

failure of the tribe caused the place of God's sanctuary to be removed from the territory of Ephraim where it had been, and it became finally settled in the inheritance of Judah, at Jerusalem. "Our Lord sprang out of Judah," and we have here illustrated the truth found everywhere in Scripture, namely, that when the first man fails, and everything entrusted to him falls into ruin, God comes in and introduces Christ, "the second Man," under whose headship and in whose hands everything is unalterably secured: "For all the promises of God in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us " (2 Cor. 1:20).

"And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon " (chap. 5:1, 2).

The holy ark of the covenant of Jehovah is dragged from the "stone of help" (Ebenezer) to the shrine of the unclean Dagon! They would probably show it some superstitious reverence; for, though the nations never changed their gods, as did foolish Israel, they were not averse to multiplying them. They may have looked upon the two cherubim, with their extended wings overshadowing the mercy seat of the ark, as dual deities, for they say in the previous chapter, "Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness." They seem to mix the mighty acts which God had done in Egypt with those in the wilderness.

To us who have New Testament light, "an idol is nothing in the world; "but to these worshipers of Dagon, all idols

represented a divinity good or evil. But the God of heaven and earth will brook no rival, "nor is there any beside Him;" and He has decreed that "to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord." This important truth is illustrated here among the Philistines; they set the ark by their Dagon, apparently in token of his triumph over "these mighty gods of the Hebrews." In the morning they find "Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord." There lay Dagon, the mute witness of his impotence. His devoted worshipers, set him up again, only to find him in the morning fallen again upon his face before the ark, with the loss of both his head (which speaks of intelligence) and his hands (which speak of action and of deeds) - there he lay helpless, a dumb idol as he was, that can neither see nor hear, nor know.

Head and hands gone, what will he do now? Strange indeed that his devotees should after this regard or respect him any more; but, as Bishop Hall long ago remarked, "It is just with God that those who lack grace shall lack wit too; and it is the work of superstition to turn men into the stocks and stones they worship."

Having thus executed judgment on the dumb god of the Philistines, as He had before done on those of Egypt, God smites the men of Ashdod, as He also smote the Egyptians with all manner of plagues.

"But the hand of the Lord 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" (vers. 6, 7).

Knowledge brings responsibility, and light entails the obligation to walk by the light; the truth known, and not followed, will but the more increase the weight of judgment to be meted to those that refuse it - awful consideration for those living in a land of Bibles, like our own -, and especially for those of our young people who grow up where the truth is so clearly taught, yet fail to receive the love of it that they might be saved. "Many stripes" must surely be their portion who thus know their Lord's will, but do it not so well acquainted with the letter of truth, yet fail or refuse to receive it and subject themselves to it!

Seeing these tokens of God's wrath and power with them, the men of Ashdod resolve to rid themselves of the presence of that which distressed them. A conference of their lords is then called, and they decide to transfer its place of abode to Gath. But here too God's hand is heavy upon them. They were smitten "with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts." God "is no respecter of persons; "and at the great white throne both "small and great" must stand before Him to be judged every man according to his works.

"They carried it about," it is said; in procession, probably, making a display and sport of it, as they had formerly done with poor Samson when a captive and blind. But here they have to do with Samson's God, and pay dearly for the insult offered Him who is able to vindicate Himself. "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And He smote His enemies in the hinder parts: He put them to a perpetual reproach " (Ps. 78:65, 66).

From Gath the ark is sent to Ekron, but the Ekronites, warned by the experience of their neighbors, protest loudly against its residence with them; and there, too, God's wrath was felt and His power manifested against them; "for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there... and the cry of the city went up to heaven." Another general assembly was called, and it was resolved to send the ark away, and back to the place whence it came. They were as eager now to rid themselves of it as they were anxious before to obtain possession of it.

"And the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the Lord? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place " (chap. 6:1, 2).

It was their "lords," before; now it is the "priests and the diviners," "church and state," as men say. So it was with Christ, of whom the ark was a striking and instructive type; the world's politics and its religion were combined against Him, to rid the earth of His presence. "Get Thee out, and depart hence, for Herod will kill Thee," was the officious Pharisees' advice to Him on one occasion (Luke 13:31. At another time the Gadarenes "began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts" (Mk. 5:17).

Lords and priests, in combination, as here among the Philistines, want to get rid of Him; want Him out of the world His very hands had made! "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and. Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together" (Acts 4:27); and it was " the Chief priests and elders" who

"persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus" (Matt. 27:20). Yes, the world, political and religious, cast their vote against Him, though He had done naught but good in their midst: and He is no more wanted now than at that time. Let those redeemed by His precious blood remember this, and "come out from among them, and be separate."

It being finally settled that the ark should not remain with them, the next question was, how to rid themselves of it; and what method of its deportation and the means of its conveyance:

"And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return Him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you. Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to Him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords. Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure He will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land (chap. 6:3-5).

"Ye shall make images," they say. Oh, how the idolatrous heart of man does love an image something to see, some tangible object, something to be sensed! This has ever been the sin to which man is most prone, and it is therefore strongly prohibited in the very first commandment (see also 1 John 5:22).

So they make to themselves images, five golden emerods and five golden mice - both things unclean - the emerods, unclean in themselves, like a running sore; and the mice, unclean ceremonially (see Lev. 11:29; Isa. 66:17). Thus, in their blindness, instead of propitiating, they were offering insult to the Holy One of Israel with their unclean offering. Therefore it is, "peradventure He will lighten his hand from off you. "

It was near the time of harvest, and the mice had evidently wrought havoc with the ripening grain. Some translate "field" instead of "country" of the Philistines, as if they had, out of fear of its too near presence, allowed the ark to remain in the open fields. "Then shall ye be healed," they say, smarting under their chastisement, and were taught to entertain a wholesome respect for the captive "ark of the God of Israel." "The botch of Egypt, and emerods, and the scab, and the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed," were, according to Deut. 28:27, marks of the curse of an offended God. And it was healing that the Philistines were most concerned about remedy, not for their diseased souls, but for their suffering bodies. And how many today are all eagerness to obtain healing for the body, while utterly indifferent to God's remedy for the sin sick soul. How greedily men and women swallow the lie of Christian Science, because it promises healing for their bodily ills, altogether regardless of its deadly anti-Christian doctrines for the soul.

There is, thank God, no limit to His power to heal the body; but Christ's great commandment to us is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." That is the only scriptural way to seek healing for the body, and all

things else of a temporal nature. "First things first" should mean to every one, the soul's interests before all else; for He who came from heaven, and died upon the cross to save us, said: For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? "To induce this "mighty God of the Hebrews" to relieve them of their plagues, they think to appease Him with a present, a trespass offering, as Jacob thought to appease the wrath of his brother Esau. But it is "the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul;" "And without shedding of blood is no remission;" "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things; as silver and gold," writes Peter, "but with the precious blood of Christ." "The heathen, in his blindness," however, does not, or will not know this. And he is not alone in this blindness, for is not "enlightened" Christendom largely involved in the same blindness? - trusting in gifts of gold and bloodless sacrifices to appease offended justice, instead of the atonement by the precious blood once shed on Calvary?

The Philistine priests and diviners had good knowledge of what Jehovah had done in Egypt some 350 years before, for they say to their people, "wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts, when He (Jehovah) had wrought wonderfully among them - did they not let the people go? "Then they give advice how to proceed.

"Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them and take the ark of the Lord, 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" (chap. 6:7-9).

It was a most severe test; nothing but the power of God could cause the cows, contrary to nature, to go as they did straight on to Bethshemesh, the nearest Israelitish town, some nine or ten miles distant. Everything was against the ark's getting safely out of the land; the cattle were unaccustomed to the yoke; they knew not the road to Beth-shemesh; no driver nor overseer had they to guide them; they had the strongest instinct of animals - love for offspring - to turn them back; and what is common to domestic animals, an inclination for home. Yet they "took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went," showing thus that they were impelled by the unseen, irresistible power of their Creator. "And the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh." Thus, "those that thought to triumph over the ark, were made to go like menial servants after it," as Matthew Henry remarks. Yes, "in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, He was above them!"

How like this was to the departure of Israel out of Egypt. The Egyptians, at first so eager to retain them, were at last, after their chastisement, as anxious to get rid of them. "When he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether." "They were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry" (Ex. 11:1; 12:39). And, like the ark here, they came not out of the land of their bondage empty, but loaded with gifts of gold and jewels from their erstwhile captors. They came out with a high

hand, too, with Pharaoh and all his host as a retinue of honor (though they meant it not so); and like the Philistines, they, too, stopped at the border of their land, the Red Sea, where they met their righteous doom (see also Ps. 105:37, 38) - The several references in the text to God's dealings with the Egyptians lead us to look for some analogy with the events recorded here.

"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."

Did they rejoice as Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, "and was glad?" (John 8:56). How few souls in Israel seem to have lamented the absence of the ark from the land, yet it should have been, and was to every devout Israelite, the object most sacred and cherished in the tabernacle; for it was, compared with all the rest, as the kernel to the shell, and as the heart to the body. It was that around which all the other parts were grouped. Within it were kept the two tables of the law, beautiful figure of Christ who could say as none other could. "Thy law is within my heart." See with what affection David speaks or sings of this emblem of Jehovah's presence among them. He was not indifferent to it, as the former generation of his people appear to have been, for he says, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Ps. 132:3-5).

Oh, that the ark's blest antitype, our Lord Jesus Christ, might have a like place in our thoughts and heart - affections, and that we might say with the "sweet

psalmist of Israel, " " I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength" (Ps. 18:1).

"And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone; and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the Lord. And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord, 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 the Lord" (vers. 14, 15).

Beth-shemesh was a priestly city (Josh. 21:16), and though they who offered the sacrifices here are called Levites, they were probably priests of the Levites, either of the waning line of Ithamar or the ascendant branch of Eleazar. According to the strict letter of the law, the animal offered in sacrifice for the burnt offering was to be a male, but here the rule is waived; the circumstances were unusual, as in the days of Hezekiah, when "many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon everyone." He is a discerner of the heart, and even in the stern days of the law He had compassion.

The men of Bethshemesh were busily, and worthily, occupied in harvesting their grain when the ark appeared, just as the shepherds of Bethlehem were faithfully guarding their flocks by night when apprised by the rejoicing angels of the birth of the infant Saviour. "The devil visits idle men with his temptations; God visits industrious men with His favours," we quote again

from Matthew Henry. Gideon was busy threshing wheat when the angel of the Lord appeared to him. "I being in the way, the Lord led me," says the trusty servant of Abraham. And when the Lord shall come again, it matters little whether we are found on our knees in prayer, or studying our Bibles, or at meeting, preaching, or at our ordinary employments, harvesting wheat or threshing it, tending sheep or minding children; if we are "in the way" of His commandments, honestly and industriously occupied in the work given us by Him to do, we may at His appearing, like the Beth-shemites when they saw the ark, rejoice to see it.

Three times "the great stone" on which the ark rested is mentioned (vers. 14, 15, 18). In the final reference it is called "the great stone of Abel." This has no allusion to Abel the first martyr; the word "Abel," as used here, means a meadow. To quote from the Biblical and Theological Dictionary, "This word signifies mourning, and hence wet, moisture;" and wherever Christ is received in the heart there is bound to be freshness of soul; the dew of heaven will rest upon us-, "there shall be showers of blessing," and our souls will have pasture. The stone of "Abel" was a "great stone," like the foundation of God which standeth sure. His purposes of grace, through Christ, are founded on "a rock that stands forever," and all the powers of hell shall not prevail against it.

But God "smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even He smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men;* and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter " (ver. 19).

* There is some confusion in the Hebrew MSS. here. The Numerical Bible has "seventy men."

How like poor, foolish, meddling man! He must pry into most holy things with unholy hands; while the things he is encouraged to investigate and inquire into, he neglects." Search the Scriptures" is the command of God to him; but in this, alas, he has no interest. God says to him, "Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth?" (Prov. 22:20); but for this "certainty" man cares but little, while for the uncertainties of "occult science" and curious profitless speculations, he displays great taste. The desire for a forbidden thing was a large element in our first parents' transgression. There are "secret things" which belong unto the Lord our God (Deut. 29:29). but there is abundance that He has revealed, and of this, alas, we all know too little. The divinely appointed place of the ark was within the holy of holies, behind the veil, where none but God's high priest might enter, and he once a year, and "not without blood" and a cloud of incense. God intended to teach them the most profound reverence for this symbol of His holy presence. The sin of the men of Beth-shemesh, therefore, was indeed very great-all the more inexcusable as, being priests or Levites, they should have known the veneration with which the ark should have been regarded: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge " (Mal. 2:7). Above all others they should have known the sacredness of that into which they irreverently pried. How easily God's best gifts may become a curse, if abused! He who had so wonderfully, of His unmerited grace, blessed Israel,

smote them because "they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit" (Isa. 63:10).

"And the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter." They lamented their punishment rather than their sin which made the punishment necessary. So the murderer Cain complained that his punishment was greater than could be borne - without one word of regret or sorrow expressed concerning the greatness of his unnatural crime. The Beth-shemites, like the Philistines before them, are now desirous to be quit of that very object they had a short while before welcomed with such gladness. "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" they exclaim in consternation. He was too "holy" for them; and instead of rejoicing and profiting by such a check on evil in their priestly town, they are only concerned to have the ark removed. Sinful man chafes under God's restraints upon evil. The day is fast approaching when he will throw off all restraints, and say, "Let us break their bands asunder, and Cast away their cords from us."

"And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord; come ye down, and fetch it up to you" (ver. 21).

Kirjath-jearim was a strong city belonging to Judah, and lay in the direct route to Shiloh; but God, for the sins of the priests and the people there, had rejected it forever as the "place of His rest." In Judah His ark was to remain, until brought with "circumstances of pomp and splendour" by David to its settled resting-place in Jerusalem, "the mount Zion which He loved."

Chapter 9: His Ministry Resumed

(1 Sam. 7)

We left the ark, in our last chapter, in "the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite," with the men of Beth-shemesh calling upon the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim to come down and fetch the ark up to them. Having suffered for their temerity, they fly off now to an opposite extreme; they will not so much as touch it, but beseech the men of Kirjath-jearim to come and relieve them of it.

"And the men of Kirjath jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord " (ver. 1).

Why they called on this particular city to come and take the ark off their hands, we are not told. Perhaps they were their nearest neighbours on the way to Shiloh, or those whom they supposed would be most willing to take the burden off their hands. Being all of them Levites, or of the house of Aaron, they were quite the proper persons to bear the ark; but they are afraid, and seem unwilling to do even this. Man is prone to extremes, and especially is this seen in the religious side of his nature. The children of Israel in the wilderness at first refused, in unbelieving fear, to go up to possess the land; and then, when commanded by God to turn back and renew their desert wanderings, they presumptuously insist on going up, even in the face of the stern warnings of Moses, and were smitten before the Amalekites (Num. 14). Peter at first refused emphatically to permit the Lord to wash his feet; then, on a word from the Master, turns round and says, "Lord,

not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Elijah, at one hour on mount Carmel, was fearless before a multitude of the prophets of Baal; the next, he lies discouraged beneath a juniper bush, fleeing from the woman Jezebel. One only has been perfect, perfectly balanced in all things; He was typified in the smooth, fine flour of the meal offering - the "fairest among ten thousand," and the "altogether lovely."

They "fetched up the ark." It is always "up" when we walk with God; it is "down to Jericho," "down to Egypt," but always "up to Jerusalem," the city of the great King, "up to Shiloh," up to glory, always; and always "down to hell!"

In Kirjath-jearim the ark finds shelter in the house of Abinadab-probably a godly man, and glad of the opportunity to care for the only remaining token of Jehovah's presence in the land; and his son Eleazar was sanctified, i.e., set apart, to keep it. This is the last we hear of the ark, excepting once, incidentally (1 Sam 14:18), until it was removed by David to its more abiding home at Jerusalem, full forty years later.

The men of Kirjath-jearim must have known full well of the chastisement that had been inflicted on the Beth-shemites for their presumption, but this does not deter them from responding promptly to the call to remove the ark to their own city, further up the road toward "Mount Zion which Jehovah loved." Thus too the truth of Christ is to some "a savor of death unto death," while to others, under the blessing of God, it becomes "a savor of life unto life." If some will not have Christ, others, thank God, make room for Him, as it was with the ark. The inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim probably reasoned, and

rightly, that because it had brought judgment on the Philistines and the Beth-shemites, it was no reason why under circumspect guardianship, the ark should not become a blessing to them, as it doubtless was. Some, we know, hesitate to partake of the Lord's supper because of the solemn penalty if eaten "unworthily;" but if really the Lord's, they should not fear to partake of the holy emblems, but have a care not to partake of them unworthily - in an unworthy manner, as it really means. "Provoke Me not... and I will do you no hurt," God said to His fearful, foolish people, by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:6).

And now, after so long a time, we meet with Samuel again "And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (vers. 2, 3).

For twenty years we hear nothing of Samuel. "The time was long," for it was a time of departure from God and oppression by the Philistines. Yet we may be sure that Samuel was not idle all that time. It is not God's purpose to write biographies of men, but rather to record the working out of His purposes towards mankind in general, and His people in particular. This He can do without any particular creature's co-operation. He could maintain the honor of His name during the decades of Samuel's silence, both among the Philistines and with Israel, as we have seen. It is only when it accords with

His purpose that His servant is again brought upon the scene; so independent is our God of the services of even the best of men.

But while this is true, we may be perfectly sure that Samuel was not spending his time in idleness or in mournful, sullen silence towards poor fallen Israel. We cannot doubt that he was fully and faithfully occupied, praying for them, and labouring industriously with them, instructing and exhorting them to better things at suited opportunities, or when occasion offered.

He felt deeply, no doubt, the backslidden condition of the nation, and would mourn over it, while watching for the symptoms of repentance on their part, or a call from God to more public ministry with them as His spokesman and prophet. These seasons of apparent inactivity are not by any means lost time with God's servants, but frequently in His ordering are a preparation for further and more effective service. So it seems to have been with Samuel. God now brings him again to our view.

"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel;" he calls them to repentance; he feels the time for action has come; he does not fail to bring home upon their consciences their wicked idolatry. "Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroath from among you," he says. And the faithful ministry is blessed. "Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroath, and served the Lord only." Their reformation is now begun, and after the weary twenty years' drought, there is "a sound of abundance of rain." "The strange gods and Ashtaroath," Samuel says. Ashtaroath was the principal deity worshiped by the Phoenicians and Sidonians. She is

frequently mentioned in connection with Baal (see Judges 2:13-, 10:6; 1 Sam. 12:10), and was probably considered his consort. She is supposed to be identical with the Venus of the Greeks. "Her worship", the Biblical and Theological Dictionary says, "became at length the most impure and revolting that can be imagined, and was celebrated in shady groves, proverbial for scenes of debauchery." She was a "strange god" to Israel, as all the others, but is singled out by Samuel as being, most likely, the divinity with which they were specially infatuated. This shows Israel's condition at this time, when they could take as the object of their special worship a deity of such a character. After the disastrous defeat of Saul and his armies on Mount Gilboa, the Philistines hung the armour of Saul as a trophy in the temple of this very goddess (1 Sam. 31:10). Thus does God visit upon His people punishment of a kind most suited to remind them of the very cause of their departure from Him.

And do we not see today among the children of God the selfsame thing? Individuals have some sin, or forbidden object, for which they have a special weakness; some "idol" to which they are particularly prone. Special attention must be given to this. It must be put away, or it will eventually bring to grief and shame; for the punishment is frequently in kind with the form of transgression that occasioned it.

Scripture affords many illustrations of this. Jacob, who deceived his father, when the old man could not see, was in turn deceived in the darkness by the crafty father of Leah. His sons sold their brother Joseph into Egypt, and into Egypt they themselves had to come, and there their own hearts were made to feel anguish before Joseph, as

they had seen him in anguish when being sold by them to the Midianite slavetraders. Abimelech slew his seventy brethren on one stone, and was himself slain by having a piece of a millstone cast upon his head. Saul spared Agag, the Amalekite, and an Amalekite struck the final blow that took away his life. David wrongs the wife of Uriah, and slays her husband with the sword, and he lives to see his son Amnon violate his sister Tamar, and Amnon killed in revenge by her brother Absalom. In the place where the dogs licked the blood of the murdered Naboth, the dogs licked the blood of Ahab, his murderer. As we sow we reap and this general principle of God's government we see exemplified in the case of Israel with Ashtaroth.

"All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord," we read, but this was not enough; action is required, and to this the prophet calls them. He commands that they put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth. Repentance strikes at the darling sin always, and spares it not. Oh, that the children of God today might put away their Ashtaroths - these darling indulgences that bring them to shame, as this goddess of beauty did with infatuated Israel.

"Serve the Lord only," is Samuel's command. They had not, in the days of their declension, wholly abandoned the worship of Jehovah, but divided honours with Him and the gods of the nations about them - an insult to Jehovah's honor, which there could scarcely be a greater. He will not accept a divided heart from them that worship Him, or call themselves by His name. In longsuffering mercy He bears patiently with it, while calling them to repentance, that He might spare them the merited stroke the sin demands. The people now

being brought to a better mind and heart toward God, Samuel convokes a national assembly at Mizpeh.

"And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh " (vers. 5, 6).

Here with fasting and confession of sin, they put themselves in the way of thorough restoration and blessing. Their act of pouring water on the ground was an acknowledgment of their utter weakness and unworthiness (see 2 Sam. 14:14). It is when the people of God so bemean themselves in His presence that He is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think. But while one shred of self-confidence remains, they are unprepared to receive the fullness of blessing He has ever in readiness to bestow upon them. It is a very humbling lesson, but it is one of the very first that needs to be learned if we expect recovery and consequent victory, such as Israel here received from God. "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person." "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." "When I am weak, then am I strong." He listens to hear the penitential confession of sin, and looks for contrition of heart; this He will accept, and grant His manifested presence, as He did here at historic Mizpeh.

Samuel both prayed for and judged Israel there; he made earnest intercession to God for them, and at the

same time instructed them in the statutes and judgments of Jehovah. Prayer is put before ministry; this is the divine order: "We will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). And if prayer have not preponderance over ministry, the latter cannot be expected to produce lasting results. May we all who in any way serve the Lord Christ, learn from both Samuel and the apostles this most important lesson.

It is a lovely sight, this scene at Mizpeh. Samuel opens the meeting with prayer, and closes it with ministering God's word - as judging here implies (see Ezek. 20:4-22), while the people fast, with confession of sin, and symbolically pour out water before the Lord - no mere ceremony, but they "poured it out before the Lord."

This very thing (Israel assembled in confession to God) which must have made glad the heart of God, rouses and stirs to action the enemy. So we read:

"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 " (ver. 7).

While Israel served "strange gods and Ashtaroth," the Philistines left them unmolested; but as soon as their reformation begins, all is changed, and led by their lords they come up against them. Satan could not look quietly on a scene like this, nor would he stand idly by and permit such a condition of things to continue without a determined effort to break it up. It is only "when the strong man armed keepeth his palace that his goods are in peace; "but let his domain be invaded, or his house broken into, and the peace of his goods, disturbed by the

action of the truth on hearts, immediately his roar will be heard and his hand will be felt-war will follow. But better far have war than peace in such conditions of soul as Israel's, serving strange gods and Ashtaroth, for twenty years.

Israel fears the Philistines; their faith as yet was weak, and they ask Samuel to pray for them, saying, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." They appear to realize the truth of what the apostle James writes to the remnant of their nation more than a thousand years later, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Samuel does not upbraid them for their fears, nor chide them for their lack of faith. He knows their weakness, and acts the noble part of a nursing father with them.

"And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him" (ver. 9).

The sucking lamb is beautifully typical of Christ, the innocent, tender Lamb of God; and Samuel was heard, not for his piety merely as was Christ when here on earth (see Heb. 5:7, marg.), but in virtue of the sacrifice he offered. It was a burnt offering-Christ, wholly acceptable to God. The burnt offering, when not specifically prescribed, was brought for a man's acceptance. The expression, "of his own voluntary will" in Lev. 1:3, is better translated, "He shall offer it for his acceptance." Samuel offers it on behalf of "all Israel." A sucking lamb was in keeping with their state. God did

not despise their feebleness of faith, but graciously and tenderly stoops to their level.

"And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord 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 went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car" (vers. 10, 11).

God heard His prophet from "the secret place of thunder," and gave an overwhelming victory to His people. Israel had but to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." When they enter the scene of action, it is but to pursue an already beaten foe; after which, in security and peace, they enjoy the fruits of victory. The Philistines might think themselves assured of an easy conquest, as they had found it in this very place twenty years before; they might have thought the prophet engaged in prayer and offering sacrifice was but a repetition of the sons of Eli bringing the ark into the camp: but no, a better day has come. Samuel is not Hophni and Phinehas, nor is Israel's superstitious dependence on the ark for safety now. The faith of the man of God is in the sacrifice presented to Jehovah for the acceptance of His people and their deliverance from their enemies. The Philistines, thoroughly subdued, came no more into the coasts of Israel in all the days of Samuel. It is a delightful picture of holy triumph.

We see a flaw, however, just here at the close of this record of Israel's recovery: "There was peace between Israel and the Amorites." Eight hundred years before this God had said to Abraham, "The iniquity of the

Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16); but now they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and God had devoted them to destruction. God had given this land to Israel, and Israel was to make no league nor seek peace with them (see Ex. 23:34; 34:12; Deut. 7:2; Judges 2:2). Peace between Israel and the Amorites could only be effected and maintained by compromise and disobedience to God's express command. This was Israel's mistake. They might seek to excuse themselves by saying the lapse of time had made a difference, and the Amorites were no longer what they used to be; but the excuse could not stand before God's plain command: "They shall not dwell in thy land;" "Thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them." There was no mistaking this. His order to Saul to utterly slay the Amalekites (against whom He had sworn that He would have war "from generation to generation") proved that time could not alter the word that had gone from His mouth. No, Israel's works were "not found perfect before God," hence their rejection of Samuel in later years, and their desire for a king like to the nations about them. There is no surer road to learn the way of the wicked than to contract leagues with them. "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Israel's victory was an event well worth commemorating, and Samuel wisely raised his "Eben-ezer" "at the spot. The monument became doubly significant from the fact that it "was beside Ebenezer" that they had met such a crushing defeat twenty years before. Samuel, in erecting his memorial stone (the stone of help), was like Paul before Agrippa, where he

says in boldest confidence, "Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue unto this day." He is our rock, our "stone of help," our EBENEZER!

"And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the Lord" (vers. 15-17).

The chapter ends here, but not the story. Well had it been for Israel and the peace of Samuel's closing days if his life's history had ended as here - a loving pastor among a happy, contented people, visiting and "judging" them industriously, while jealousy watching for their souls' welfare and the glory of Jehovah their God.

It is a scene lovely to behold. Samuel as a father with his children, chiding and correcting them when necessary, guiding, encouraging and instructing them, and holy peace and harmony reigning throughout the land, "from Dan to Beersheba." But such pleasant pictures are always more or less ideal, and their full reality rarely, if ever, seen; the hateful flesh is present in all, and always ready at a moment's notice to assert itself. Satan, too, is always and everywhere active, and on the alert to take advantage of the very first opportunity, to come in and mar and spoil the fairest scene in the garden of God. And here Israel, "foolish people and unwise," are not content, alas; and in the chapter following we shall see them "given to change," and a dark, threatening cloud begins to cover the pleasant landscape. Fain would we bid farewell to Samuel at this point; but it is not to be,

for God has further lessons for us in the life of this choice servant of God.

Before passing on, let us note that at Ramah, Samuel's dwelling, "there he built an altar unto the Lord." He was not so much absorbed in service, as so many appear to be today, as to neglect personal fellowship with God and worship. Service surely has its important place, but unless it be the outcome of communion with God, it soon becomes an activity of the flesh restless, easily peeved, unduly elated by success, or discouraged for a lack of it. May every servant of Christ have his "altar" connected with his labour and service to God and His people.

Chapter 10: His Rejection

(1 Sam. 8)

We have now to review the deeply affecting story of the rejection of Samuel by the people who, under God, were so greatly indebted to him. To him they owed their present political independence and deliverance from the yoke of the uncircumcised - we might almost say, the very continuance of their existence as a nation. Samuel has been called "the second founder of the nation," and he was indeed a very father to his country. He had served them many years, and well, and under his wise, paternal administration, Israel had come to be, if not a powerful people, at least, an orderly and peaceable one. They were well governed, and no doubt, prosperous. It was when "Jeshurun waxed fat" that he "kicked," and when "grown thick," he "rebelled against Jehovah" (Deut. 32:15).

Samuel was not as one who, by some unexpected turn of fortune, had come suddenly into power; he was not the favoured creature of some revolution; he had been with them from a child, and "all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord," for their guidance and blessing (chap. 3:20). He had grown up before them, and his integrity and worth were known to all. On the death of Eli and his sons, we do not read of Samuel hurriedly seating himself in the saddle, as if eager to assume authority; no, he came into power slowly, and by no effort of his own, but by the exigencies of the hour. For twenty whole years after the fall of Eli's house he is content to remain in comparative obscurity, at the age

when men are naturally most ambitious. Their rejection therefore of this one of the best of men, and most just administrator, was the more inexcusable. But such was Israel, and such is man in general everywhere, for the nation was but an example in miniature of the human race from Adam down to the last great day of Gog and Magog. The moral of the event is deeply instructive and humiliating, and we are led, in reviewing it, to exclaim with the psalmist, "Lord, what is man! "

"And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah they were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (vers. 1-5).

Samuel was old, they say; they could not say that he was too old to any longer serve them, or to correct the abuses of which they complained.

It is computed that he was not above sixty at the time - a really ripe age for the position he occupied, with all the varied and valuable experience his threescore years had brought him. He manifests ability to serve and act with vigour years after this - as witness his fearless reproof of Saul for his folly, and his hewing Agag to pieces. There is no sign of senility or decay even to the very end of his eventful life.

No, it was but a poor, miserable excuse, and instead of agreeing with the saying that "a poor excuse is better

than none," we are inclined to declare that a poor excuse is really worse than none - especially such as Israel's elders here make before their honored Chief Justice. It were better to declare frankly that it was not with the administration itself that they were dissatisfied, but with the form of it. It would have been better to confess that they preferred being under a monarchy, as were the heathen nations around them, than have all their national matters referred to God through His prophet. Had they honestly done so at once, they would not have "added insult to injury" against Samuel. They might have spared their aged benefactor the humiliation of being compelled to vindicate himself before them, as he was forced later to do. They made his sons the ostensible cause of their discontent, while they must have known that bribery of courts was as common as could be in the Gentile kingdoms about them.

Samuel's sons, Joel and Abiah, must have been as mere novices in the practice of "graft." A kingly form of government was no remedy or safeguard against judicial bribery! Beersheba, too, lay at the extreme south of the land, in a quarter but thinly populated, where but the smallest proportion of the inhabitants could be affected by their bribery. Men are not so solicitous for the welfare of their neighbours as to concern themselves very deeply about the miscarriage of justice in some remote corner of the state. Yet we read, "All the elders gathered themselves together" - "elders," note, the "fathers of the nation" - form themselves into a delegation to present to their chief magistrate the nation's supposed grievances; it tells a sad tale of disaffection and rebellion against the rule of God!

Truly, the word is faithful: "Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment! " (Job 32:9). Not only are "childhood and youth" vanity, with young manhood, but old age and gray hairs too. God must teach wisdom to all; and apart from this, "Man at his best estate is altogether vanity."

"But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord." It displeased him; not so much that he had been insulted personally (for a man of his spirit and piety could well bear with that), but because he saw in it rebellion against God, and knew the certain consequences that must come of it. He had, however, a sure resource - a refuge with which he was long familiar, and which had never failed him - he prayed." This was his comfort and consolation. His prayer is not given us, but the record of God's answer is:

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works that 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 " (vers. 7, 8).

He first of all sets the mind of Samuel at rest with the assurance that it was not for anything remiss in him that the people clamoured for a change, but it was He, Jehovah Himself, that they were dissatisfied with. Samuel's God has a gracious consideration for the sensitive, righteous soul of His servant.

The most upright of men will often suspect themselves; the most upright in heart are the more likely to question their own conduct and motives, and Samuel would be assured by this word from God that it was for no misconduct of his that the people were determined on the overthrow of his administration. "They have not rejected thee but Me," He says.

Doubtless they felt the restraints of God's holy law irksome, and as they had before gone after the gods of the nations because of the licence allowed in their worship, so now they desire a king "like the nations," that they might have "larger freedom," as they thought not for the practice of holiness, but for the gratification of their national vanity and political glory "a place in the sun," as it would be expressed today.

God rehearses before Samuel their conduct since their departure from Egypt. Rebellion was no new thing with them, nor was it the first time that they had manifested impudence before their superiors, as witness their behaviour before Moses and Aaron on more than one occasion.

It is a real pleasure to note that Samuel makes no complaint against the people, either to themselves, or before God. He stands, in this, in greater elevation of soul than his later successor, Elijah, who "made intercession against Israel," saying, " Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

Samuel's conduct in this is very beautiful, and well worthy of our imitation. The comparison does not make us think the less of Elijah, God forbid! but more of Samuel. No, it was not the spirit of Samuel to lodge

complaints, or prefer charges against the people he so greatly loved, whose welfare he had so ardently desired, and for whom he had so patiently laboured. No, it is God who lays bare Israel's evil ways; it is the "Judge of all" who makes the indictment; and He says to Samuel, "Now, therefore, hearken unto their voice howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

This word from God would surely be a relief to His distressed servant Samuel, for the responsibility of replying to the demand of the insistent elders was thus lifted from his shoulders. His position was a trying one; for if he flatly refused to grant them their request for a king, it might appear to them that he was unwilling to resign his authority, or he wished for his sons to succeed him in office; and if he had acceded to their demand, he might become an accessory to their sin, as did Aaron with this stiff-necked people, when they said, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us," and like him, bring wrath upon himself and them for yielding to their sinful desire.

"The voice of the people" is the expression used by God; it has a familiar sound to our ears in these days of world-democracy. It is the "voice of the people" today that must be heard, and heeded. It is the "People's Party" in politics and in religion; it is the "People's Church;" yes, and "The voice of the people is the voice of God" we are confidently told. God does not tell us so, however, but rather the contrary; and where is His voice heard amidst all the clamour and Babel - confusion caused "by the voice of the people?" "Today it is one thing, and tomorrow something else. Faith says "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me

to hear it " (Cant. 8:13). All around is confusion, as at Ephesus, where "some cried one thing, and some another, for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32). And again, "They were instant with loud voices, requiring that lie might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed " (Luke 23:23). So much for the much-lauded "voice of the people! "How very opposite to "the voice of God! "

Samuel, however, is told to hearken to their voice. They were thoroughly set in their determination to have a king in spite of anything God might have to say about it, so He let them have their way. It was as with the quails in the wilderness, "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:15; 78:29). "As sometimes He crosses us in love, so at the other time He gratifies us in wrath," Matthew Henry remarks.

"And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you," etc. (vers. 10-18).

Samuel gives them in detail a description of the king that should rule them. It was not God's ideal of what a king should be, but the manner of the king of their choice that would be given them as a punishment for their wilful rejection of God's rule through Samuel. He would be a despot, fierce, cruel, a "raiser of taxes," a binder of burdens heavy and "grievous to be borne" upon the backs of the oppressed people. Without faith in God, he would be a pronounced militarist," taking the choicest of their young men to fill the ranks of his standing army, and require a tenth of all they produced

for the support of all this pomp and empty show; for instead of using his hosts in defeating and driving out of the land the invading Philistines, they were occupied more in hunting David, the man of God's choice, "as one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains," or as David himself sarcastically puts it, "The king of Israel is come out to seek a flea!" (1 Sam. 26:20). Dignified and important occupation, indeed, for "the king of Israel!"

"He will take, he will take," Samuel says repeatedly - six times in seven verses. And what did he give them in return? "He will give," Samuel says, not to them, but "to his officers and to his servants." To them it was given to pay and to yield up to his kingly requirements their "goodliest young men" and their "daughters;" the boys to be slaughtered by the uncircumcised Philistines through Saul's mismanagement, and "Zion's fair daughters" to slave it in his kitchens as "confectionaries, and cooks, and bakers." Yes, self-willed and misguided people they should find their king's yoke galling, and onerous in the extreme. "And," he concludes, if ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day." But all this has no effect upon the infatuated people, the warning is lost upon them, and they remain obdurate to the end.

"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; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles " (vers. 19, 20).

They began with a request: "Make us a king;" and they finish by expressing their determination: "Nay, but we

will have a king! That our king may fight our battles!" - as if a king with his crown in their midst would guarantee them victory! "O foolish people, and unwise;" - had they forgotten their great triumph over the Philistine hosts, when "the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon them and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel?" Was "the Lord of hosts" no longer sufficient for them? Ah, Him they could not see, but a king, decked in purple and gold lace and riding in a chariot, would be to them "a great sight to see to."

In the preceding chapter we are told "the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel" - His prophet among them. Did they think a king could do better for them? They later get their king, and it could then be said of them, as it was said to Asa, for his unbelief in God, "From henceforth thou shalt have wars" (2 Chron. 16:9). "I will be thy king," God said to Israel, centuries later: "where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath" (Hos. 13:10, 11).

It has been remarked that no judge of Israel was ever slain in battle; but the first king, king of their choice, died in ignominious defeat at the hands of the Philistines, who in the days of Samuel's administration dared not invade the land. Alas for Israel - "an increase of sinful men!" - to choose a man before God; and alas for the world, that they prefer the devil as their "prince" and "god," to Him who is both "Son of God" and "King of nations."

God, in the law, had made provision for a king with Israel (see Deut. 17:14-20). Had they waited in faith, on the decease of Samuel God might have raised them up a king of His own providing, "a man after His own heart," David, a pattern prince, and type of Him who is both "King of Israel," and "Prince of peace." But no, they could not wait, they would not be advised, and so God gave them their desire.

But "sudden resolves and hasty desires make work for sore and leisurely repentance."

"And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king " (vers. 21, 22).

He listens to their defiant words, and then, like the man of prayer that he was, he tells them into the ears of God. Like the good king Hezekiah, who, when he had received from the messenger the written words of the Assyrian, went into the house of God, and there spread the letter before Him, so Samuel here pours out before Jehovah all the words of the obstinate people. He does not, like Moses, call them "rebels" (Num. 20:10), but meekly holds his peace. And when Jehovah tells him for the third time to hearken to their voice, he, without a word of reproach, quietly dismisses the assembly.

Now Israel's days of peace and tranquillity are over, for many a long and sorrowful time, twenty years at least - some say forty. Well would it have been for them had they continued content with their simple, almost patriarchal, form of government. Their sudden swing-off into absolutism must have been a severe shock to them, no doubt, and greatly upset their mistaken notions of the

advantages of monarchical rule. God "gave them up to their own hearts' lust," and for many sad and weary years they were made to smart for their obstinate folly and rebellion. They had to learn by bitter and painful experience the difference between God's beneficent rule and the service to a king. (See 2 Chron. 12:8.) The nation's brief experience of kingship under Abimelech should have taught them wisdom in the matter; so, too, Jotham's parable (Judges 9); but it is the same old, sad story - the incurable perversity of man's heart and averseness to God, until renewed by grace. Even then we hear a grieved apostle exclaim, - O foolish Galatians!" And again, "O ye Corinthians... ye are straitened in your own bowels!" Yes, "Lord, what is man!" To us who know the blessed Saviour, let there be but One, "the Man Christ Jesus." Amen and amen!

Chapter 11: His Successor

(1 Sam. 9)

We have in the chapter before us the person chosen to succeed Samuel as first magistrate in the land and ruler of God's people Israel. Naturally we should be eager to see what kind of man he was in order to be able to judge what sort of bargain they had made by their exchange.

We notice, first, his natural or external advantages, or those that could be readily discerned by those who judged after the flesh, by the "outward appearance." These were not inconsiderable; he was "of the tribe of Benjamin;" the apostle Paul speaks of it twice, as a thing to his natural advantage, that he was a descendant of this tribe (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

"Little Benjamin " (the diminutive of endearment rather than of numbers), in the blessing of Psalm 68:27, is mentioned first, before the three important tribes of Judah, Zebulon and Naphtali, and in Psalm 80:2, Benjamin is mentioned with Ephraim and Manasseh as those that followed the "Shepherd of Israel," as symbolized in the ark. They were descended from Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife. Benjamin (son of my right hand) was a type of Christ exalted to the right hand of God in glory; and his place, in the blessing of Moses, is one of special nearness and protection.

He is there called "the beloved of the Lord" (Deut. 33:12). They were a tribe not lacking in valour, as witness their determined and heroic, though mistaken, defence of their brethren in guilty Gibeah (Judg. 20:15-21). Their inheritance was small - only about 14

miles in breadth by 28 in length, in its widest parts; but what it lacked in size it made up in dignity, for it contained not only "the city of the Great King," Jerusalem, but also such notable places as Bethel, Mizpeh, and Ramah, the dwelling - place of Samuel.

Then his father was a "mighty man of power," or wealth, as Boaz (Ruth 2:1). The tribe, having been reduced (Judg. 20:47), each remaining individual would have much more land to his share than those of other tribes. So Kish, his father, was probably a large landed - proprietor. This added wealth to his distinction, a valuable asset before the eyes of men.

Another advantage he had in the eyes of his countrymen was his great stature; he stood head and shoulders above his fellows. The world is apt to look for "big" things, and found it in Saul. He had youth also to his advantage - he was "a young man." The complaint of the people against Samuel (the only one they made, really) was his age. "Behold, thou art old," they say. They shall have no ground for complaint here in Saul, for he was young and carried with him all the vigour and sprightliness of youth.

They could with admiring eyes behold in their chosen king all the energy and dash of young manhood. His person too was one of every excellence after the flesh; he was "a choice young man... there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" - "Every inch a king!" the enthusiastic multitudes would admiringly exclaim, as they beheld him. They thought, no doubt, that they could be justly proud of him.

When God was about to choose "a man after His own heart" to be king over Israel, He said to Samuel, "Look not on his Countenance, or on the height of his stature... for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;" for, as He said long centuries after, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." No, indeed, else Saul would never have been rejected, or David chosen; neither would He have selected a nation of slaves to become the depository of His truth on the earth, or the tribe of Judah, with its four Gentile women in the genealogy, to bring forth Messiah; nor unlettered fishermen to herald Him among His own and to the nations.

Coupled with the advantages enumerated above, Saul was possessed with commendable traits of character, as witness his hiding "among the stuff" (if it was not a feigned humility). He was magnanimous, too, for in the day of his initial triumph, when some were crying for the blood of those that had at first refused him, he said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

The above-mentioned advantages and distinctions caused short-sighted Israel probably to look upon Saul as qualified for kingship. But let us look beneath the surface, and with the hints afforded us at the very outset of his career, let us seek to analyse his moral character. It is not so easily read, perhaps, but the lineaments of the portrait are sketched by a master hand; and though the lines may be finer, they present the true character of the man in a manner unmistakable, if we but have eyes anointed to read what is given.

Saul is first introduced to us as the seeker of his father's asses, which, after all, he finds not. It seems to associate him with the unclean - with the natural man, which God's word puts alongside with the ass. (See Job 11:12, with Exodus 13:13.) For stalwart Saul, the son of Kish, a wealthy Benjamite, his hunt after the asses seems an unworthy occupation, as well as fruitless. In contrast, we see David, a youth of humble demeanour, yet a mighty defender of his father's sheep committed to his care, rescuing them from the lion's mouth and the paw of the bear.

Even in this seemingly unbecoming employment, Saul has no success; he labours in vain, for others found the objects of his pursuit. It was the same with his perverse hunt after David, though he pursued him "as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains," and had an army, and spies, and the nation's resources at his command. Saul seems to have lacked in fortitude and the persevering qualities required in a leader. Wearied with his tramping, and apparently with little zeal for his father's interests, he proposes to his servant that they retrace their steps and went their way homeward.

In initiative, too, Saul is deficient; for it is his servant, not he, who suggests that they apply to the man of God for information concerning the whereabouts of the lost animals. "And he (the servant) said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass now let us go thither; peradventure he can show us our way that we should go." Incidentally, we notice here how Samuel was "had in reputation," even by the "farm-hands," as we call them now. "A man of God and honorable," is a very good character to be given to any

servant of the Lord. They, above all others, should give "none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully," but rather so to conduct themselves as to be in a preeminent sense, "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

That Saul was wanting in the quality of leadership is evident, else his father's servant would not have taken upon himself to say to his masters son, "Now let us go thither" thus leading rather than being led by Saul. He lacked dignity too, otherwise a mere servant would never have tendered his advice unasked. Contrast this with the respect and reverence with which David's band of followers always treated him; and the higher reverence with which the Lord was ever held by His disciples (2 Sam. 12:18, 19; Luke 9:45, etc.) Neither was Saul possessed with generosity - without which no one becomes a successful leader of men." There is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we?" he says. Was the son of opulent Kish without money on a journey? It is his servant again who comes to the front, and says, "Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver. That will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way." Saul was not even acquainted with the man of God, for soon after, when face to face with Samuel himself, he does not know him, as we read; "Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer."

This is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that Gibeah of Saul was not above twenty miles from Samuel's headquarters at Ramah.

It argues how very little interest Saul took at that time in public affairs, or in the welfare of Israel, in which every godly Hebrew would be profoundly interested. Saul seems devoid of patriotism, without which no man is fit to govern. But most serious of all, Saul was not possessed of piety. This may be gathered from his unacquaintance with the prophet. Had he been concerned in spiritual matters, surely he would have known something of the man of God who went about in circuit, who was well known even among the servant-class. The prophet had never been entertained in the house of Kish, as he travelled his rounds about the country, judging and instructing the children of Israel in the knowledge of Jehovah. He did not keep open house, nor have a "prophet's chamber," where he might lodge the man of God in his itinerations. Disregard for sacred things seems to have been a family trait. "Is Saul among the prophets!" indicates that his want of interest in matters spiritual was notorious.

This lack of piety was the fatal defect in Saul's character, and accounts in large measure for what follows in his melancholy history as king of Israel. He had little or no concern for God and His people; he minded earthly things, and not those which pertain to eternity. Even the maid-servants of the city, the common "drawers of water," shame him in this, for they are able to give him minute and explicit directions where and how to find the prophet.

"And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here? And they answered them, and said, He is. Behold, he is before you; make haste now, for he came to-day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of

the people to-day in the high place As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice: and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him" (vers. 11-13).

Let us pause a little here. What a lesson can these maidens teach us all. They, though in humble and laborious employment, are well acquainted with God's servant. They know all about the coming sacrificial feast; the time of its commencement; the customs in connection with its celebration; when the prophet was expected to arrive, etc. Yes, ye lowly children of toil, ye know the ways of Jehovah better than those given to sensual leisure, gaiety, frivolity, and fashion. The holy things of God are subjects that occupy your thoughts and hearts; therefore your mouth speaks of your happy hearts' abundance. So these maidens, in their lowly service, can show the way to Samuel and the house of God. Oh that, like them, we may be occupied in "drawing water" from the wells of salvation, filled with the things of the Spirit, ready and able to point others to the Saviour, to show the way to heaven as readily and clearly as did these Hebrew maidens the way to Samuel and the sacrifice.

Having looked at the under-side of the tapes try and portrait of Saul, we know better what manner of man he was. Knowing this, we can better understand him, while we see him secretly chosen and anointed by Samuel before his public manifestation to Israel.

"Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came," etc. Samuel had before this rehearsed all the words of the people" in the ears of the Lord," and now the Lord speaks in the ear of this man of prayer, His servant Samuel. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and He "will show them," not only "His covenant," but also His purposes, His plans, His will in that which concerns us, or in that which is necessary or good for us to know. It is the men of prayer that He makes His partners in the working out of His purposes of grace on earth; they rehearse in His ears their thoughts and feelings, their hopes and fears, and He will in turn make them His confidants, so to speak, as here with Samuel. Oh, that we, all of us, believers in Christ, might imitate Samuel in his communing with his God, and so be favoured as he was with the revelation of His mind concerning ourselves and His people.

God now says to Samuel:

"Tomorrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines, for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto Me " (ver. 16).

God still calls them "My people," though the mass of them were "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart." And though He had told them in the plainest terms, through Samuel, that when groaning under the oppression of their self-chosen king they would cry out in their distress, He would not hear them (8:18), yet here He says, "Their cry is come unto Me." The first was in government, and they most bitterly reap what they

had wilfully sown: this is in grace, and He looks upon His people's misery, and purposes to deliver them. Their sufferings under His government were caused by a scourge from within - from Saul their king; their groanings that called forth the compassion of His grace came from without - from the uncircumcised Philistines, and He is quick to hear and ready to relieve. Behold, Christian reader, is this an example of the working out of His grace and government, "the goodness and severity of God," always evenly balanced in Scripture. Let us take heart, and be encouraged by the grace, and be warned and put on our guard by the government.

When Saul and Samuel meet, God says to Samuel, "Behold the man whom I spake to thee of I This same shall reign over my people!" "Behold the man!" Pilate said of Christ, long after this -not of a man of failure and a disappointment to His people, but of Him that "was born King of the Jews," to whom no failure could attach, and of whose "kingdom there shall be no end." The Roman governor spoke the words in derision, but God in His Word everywhere points Him out with infinite delight and satisfaction. But Saul, the picture of man in his best estate, stands in contrast to Jehovah's true Servant, of whom it is written, "Behold my Servant, whom I uphold; mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon Him (was He not put upon Saul too?); He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles... a bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail or be discouraged (margin, broken, as was Saul), till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law" (Isa. 42:1-4). And again - "Behold the Man whose name is The

Branch, even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory (as Saul through his selfwill and pride could not do), and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and He shall be a priest upon his throne - and the counsel of peace shall be between them both "the Branch and Jehovah (Zech. 6:12-13).

And yet again "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass' (Zech. 9:9) And to the sinner, the weary and the heavy laden, be he Jew or Gentile, His gracious gospel call is "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Well indeed and meet it is that God should thus introduce to us His beloved Son in the glorious character He bore in His humiliation, with this exclamation, BEHOLD!

From an expression used by Samuel to Saul, it seems intimated that the people had been casting about in their rinds (as they very naturally would do), for some suitable candidate for the coming regal honor. They may have had this same "goodly and choice young man" of Benjamin in their eye; for Samuel says, "And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee; and on thy father's house?" For Him who came in lowly guise and loving grace they were not ready when He came; nor even for His type and figure; David. Many a weary year and centuries of anguish and wandering have passed over Israel's head since they cried out, "Away with Him! Let Him be crucified! We have no king but Caesar;" and Caesar they have had ever since. How many times, alas; it has been Caesar at his worst, and with a vengeance.

But their day is coming; their repentance not far off; we can see the "fig tree" putting forth her leaves, and we know that Israel, and earth's, Summer time is near, and we cry in gladness for them and the nations, "Alleluia, for the Lord cometh, and He cometh to reign"!

There is a hint that Saul was not without some knowledge of this, and that there were the kindlings of ambition already in his breast; for Samuel says to him, "I will tell thee all that is in thy heart." Was it aspirations for the crown and kingdom? While it was God's choice in the setting apart of Saul (for He could read Saul's and the nation's thoughts), He gave them a "king in His anger," whom He afterwards "took away in His wrath." So He who makes "the wrath of man to praise Him," uses the folly and sin of Israel to further His purposes and plans to bring in at the last that other and abiding King, of whom David was but the imperfect shadow. "This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working!" (Isa. 28:29). "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty ones? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders ? " (Ex. 15:11).

It is beside our purpose to review all that transpired between Saul and Samuel at the feast. Everything went on according to custom. Saul, as the guest of honor, was seated "in the chiefest place, among them that were bidden." The special portion, set aside for him by Samuel from the day before (when God had spoken in his ear concerning Saul) was put before him; it was the shoulder, which speaks of power, not the breast, which speaks of the affections. Saul wielded power, but love for God and affection for His people was lacking. Saul could but disappoint and distress them. For what is power

without love but tyranny and despotism? After the feast Samuel holds long and secret converse with Saul. What passed between them we are not told; but wise counsel is given and admonition imparted at their parting the next day, when Samuel tells Saul to bid the servant pass on, and says, "But stand thou still a while, that I may show thee the word of God."

In the chapter following we shall see the prophet formally and publicly installing Saul in power over the people, power which most men covet, but which Samuel (if consulting his own comfort) would doubtless be but too glad to resign.

Chapter 12: His Resignation

(1 Sam. 10 and 11)

"Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance? " (ver. 1).

It is beautiful to see here how fully and freely Samuel resigns his authority to Saul. There is no restraint, but heartily and ungrudgingly he pours the anointing oil upon his head. Without reserve he performs the rite that marks Saul out as supreme head of the nation. This is very lovely, and exhibits the prophet as a man of remarkably generous spirit, devoid of jealousy, without ambition for himself or his sons, desiring only that Jehovah's will might be done in him and the nation.

Would that we all did imitate him in this, as the apostle exhorts, "In honor preferring one another;" and again, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's [profit]" (Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 10:24). How we lack in that love, that "seeketh not her own." "Jealousy is cruel as the grave," and "envy is as rottenness to the bones," but joy in another's profit, the promotion of our neighbour, this is a spirit all too rare in this selfish world. May it be cultivated diligently by the believer who desires to be more like his blessed Master, who was "meek and lowly in heart," or even as His forerunner John, who unregretfully said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Samuel anoints Saul, "and kissed him." This was another lovely act of Samuel's. It was not done before the

multitude, as if for effect, or as a mere conventional ceremony. No, being done in privacy, it shows what spirit he was of, that he should thus be the first, and without show, to confess his allegiance to the king, his king thenceforth. It was the pledge to Saul, and before God, of his fealty and whole good pleasure in Jehovah's choice, in the exaltation of this man of Benjamin, his neighbour.

There was no real necessity for it here, as there might be later at his public coronation at Mizpeh (see Ps. 2:12). Very beautiful indeed is this trait of self-renunciation in Samuel seen constantly throughout his lifetime, from his earliest infancy, when he forfeited a mother's tender care and the sweet companionships of home, for the care and awesome solitude of the tabernacle at Shiloh; and later, when for twenty years he is hidden from the public eye though demonstrated as a prophet of Jehovah. Here, and further on in his devoted life, he does the same, as we shall see. It is a characteristic of his self-renunciation which we cannot cease to admire; yet it is not he but the grace of God that was in him, to whom be glory for evermore! Amen.

Three things are pointed out to Saul by Samuel, in explanation of the meaning of the ceremony just performed. He reminds him of the nature of the government to which he is called. He was anointed to be "captain," a commander, which bespeaks honor and power; but a commander in war, which bespeaks care and toil and danger. As to the origin, he says, "The Lord hath anointed thee." By Him he was to rule, and therefore must rule for Him, in dependence on Him, and with an eye to His glory.

As to the end of it, it was over God's inheritance, to take care of that, protect it, and order its affairs, as a steward, set over His estate, to manage it for His service, and give an account of it to Him.

This done, Samuel tells Saul what should befall him ere reaching his home in Gibeah. All coming out true, just as the man of God had said, would convince the newly appointed captain that Samuel was indeed a prophet of the Lord which, because of his previous utter ignorance, he might have doubted - and his appointment therefore valid. Consequently, Saul must have felt that his responsibility was great, not to be lightly thought of, nor negligently discharged. We quote from another, "The first place Samuel directed him to was a sepulchre, the sepulchre of one of his ancestors, for there Rachel had died in travail with Benjamin; there he must read a lecture of his own mortality, and now that he had the crown in his eye, must think of his grave, in which all his honor would be laid in the dust."

Other details of the happenings on the journey home we pass over in silence, as our purpose is to write of Samuel rather than Saul which others have done in detail and to fullest profit.

Samuel's closing word to Saul is one of utmost importance, and for failing to heed it he was rejected by the Lord, who had chosen him at the outset of his career "And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do" (chap. 10:8).

This was not at his final installation into power (see chap. 11:14), but later, at the gathering together of the Philistines against him, as we shall presently see. Samuel next convokes an assembly of the tribes at Mizpeh:

"And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh, and said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: and ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands" (chap. 10, 17-19).

Samuel here reminds them of Gods gracious dealings with them in the past (when they were without a king), from the time of their going forth out of Egypt to the present. "Who Himself saved you." he says, so emphasizing the fact that it was God alone, without the aid of any arm of flesh, who had so far delivered them from the power of their enemies; and he vigorously charges home upon their consciences their sin in now refusing the rule of the mighty Jehovah, of whose power and wisdom there was no limit, and whose ear had been ever open to their cry. He had never failed them - but they were determined on the change, and God will let them have it even as they wished.

Then lots are cast, and Saul is taken: "And when they sought him he could not be found." They inquired of the Lord if the man should yet come thither, and the Lord

answers, "He has hid himself among the stuff." Why this inquiry, "If the man should yet come thither?" Are the people beginning to have some misgivings? Is it beginning to dawn upon them that the change would not be for the better but for the worse? Were the recently uttered words of Samuel disturbing their consciences? But it is too late. They have deliberately, in the face of protest and warning from Samuel, made their choice, and must abide the issue. Israel would not go up to possess the land, when encouraged, aye, commanded by God to do so; and when they repented their decision, He told them, No; they must turn back to wander forty weary years in the wilderness, until the carcasses of the guilty had fallen in the desert (Num. 14). Esau changed his mind, after having sold his birthright, but "afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing; he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 10). Judas, too, after his betrayal of the Lord, "repented himself, but only to go to his own place," in hopeless and everlasting misery. And here, with foolish Israel, the die is cast, the irrevocable choice is made.

"He hath hid himself among the stuff," was the undignified position of the man upon whom the prophet had poured the anointing oil: It betrays the smallness of Saul's soul; the act savors more of mock humility, or childish affectation, than real heart-felt lowliness before God. But they bring him forth, and as he stands before the people, a splendid specimen of humanity, "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward," Samuel says to the assembled multitude, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and

said, GOD SAVE THE KING" He towers like a giant above them, and as they behold with admiring eyes his great stature, they are content. The misgivings they might for the moment have entertained, vanish immediately on sight of him, and they shout aloud their approbation and delight, "Let the king live."

Poor mistaken people, without faith, they judged by the sight of their eyes. They are satisfied with the "height of his stature," without another qualification to recommend him for the position they expected him to fill. He had never subdued a single Philistine, a lion, or a bear, like David. His stature was all they asked, while God the Invisible, and Samuel His modest prophet, they rejected. Alas, this is man! "Not this Man but Barabbas - now Barabbas was a robber." "No king but Caesar," they cry. Tiberius, who then reigned, was a most profligate man, and his government was despotic and cruel. "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name; him ye will receive " (John 5:43) They would not have the "Man of Sorrows," "the Man of Calvary"; and God will in a day not far distant, let them have "the man of sin;" the Antichrist.

"Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house" (chap. 10:25).

Here we can do no better than quote the comment of Matthew Henry: "Samuel settles the original contract between them, and leaves it upon record. He had before told them the manner of the king, how he would abuse his power (chap. 8:11). now he tells them the manner of the kingdom, or rather the law or constitution of it; what

power the prince might challenge and the utmost of the property he might claim. Let them rightly understand one another at first, and let the agreement remain in black and white, which will tend to preserve a good understanding between them ever after - The learned bishop Patrick thinks he now repeated and registered what he had told them (chap. 8:11) of the arbitrary power their kings would assume, that it might be hereafter a witness against them that they had drawn the Calamity upon themselves, for they were warned what it would come to, yet they would have a king."

Samuel then dissolves the convention, and Saul returns to Gibeah. Why he did not at once take the reins of government into his hands is not clear. There were dissentients to the choice, men who "despised him," and "brought him no presents." "How shall this man save us?" they asked, in derision. They probably knew him better than his more distant people, and had little confidence in his qualities of leadership, or of his abilities to save them from the hand of their oppressors; and their numbers may have been considerable. But Saul hides any resentment he may have felt at this nonrecognition of him as their king and captain, and the siege of JabeshGilead by Nahash the Ammonite furnished him the opportunity to ingratiate himself fully into the confidence of the nation. "Nothing succeeds like success," is a popular saying, and Saul was given this in full measure. The invading Ammonites are defeated and put to utter rout, and Jabesh-Gilead is saved.

"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. And Saul said, There shall not a man be

put to death this day: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel" (chap. 11:12, 13).

This word of clemency from Saul sounds fair, and augured well for the future mildness of his reign. Yet we note that the people addressed themselves to Samuel, not to Saul; they still recognized him as their lawful judge, doubtless, and Samuel proposes that they go to Gilgal, "and renew the kingdom there." This expression, "and renew the kingdom," suggests, as we have before intimated, that there had been some hitch, or halt in the establishment of Saul in power.

The fitting opportunity had arrived to formally and finally install Saul in his office.

"AND all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly" (chap. 11:15).

Peace offerings were the sacrifices offered here. "This is distinct from both the burnt offering and the meat offering, though founded upon them. Its object was not to show how a sinner might get peace, nor to make atonement; it was rather the outcome of having been blessed - the response of the heart to that blessing." It typified communion, and the offerer and his friends could eat of it together. It was the offering most used by the nation, especially on occasions of joy or thanksgiving, as here.

So Saul is, at last, enthroned in authority; the sceptre has been placed in his hands by the people, which was to be used so soon and heavily upon them. Now he is king indeed, and Samuel hands over to him the

government that had for so many years rested on his own willing shoulders. The "bloodless revolution" is effected. What follows we shall shortly see.